# CHAPTER EIGHT: The Gay Archipelago

## TRANSLATING SELFHOOD

In the proceeding chapters I have investigated how the gay and lesbi subject positions—licensed by no tradition, marketed by no corporation, and supported by no official—are taken up on the margins of society by thousands, if not millions, of Indonesians. I have emphasized how the national, not ethnolocalized, character of these subject positions has important consequences for gay and lesbi lives and also indicates how an anthropology of similitude can contribute to understanding intersections of globalization and postcoloniality. The concepts "gay" and "lesbi" are certainly shaped by globalizing processes, but the nation is the spatial scale and cultural-political-economic form through which gay and lesbi are experienced as social facts.

As noted earlier, this does not mean that gay and lesbi are not shaped by other spatial scales (ethnolocalized, global, regional) with regard to other aspects of their lives, nor does it mean that ethnolocalized (or globalized) gay and lesbi subject positions could not appear in the future. It means that to date and from their inception, these subject positions are lived "archipelago style." For two reasons neither I nor those interlocutors with whom I have spoken about the subject believe ethnolocalized gay or lesbi subject positions will emerge in the immediate future. First, the cultural dimensions of current moves toward regional autonomy have been predominantly expressed in a heteronormative language of revitalizing tradition that excludes concepts like gay and lesbi. Second, since subject positions are shaped by the historical circumstances during which they first took form, and since the gay and lesbi subject positions were formed during the New Order era, it seems likely they will retain national spatial scales for some time.

What we find in Indonesia is a gay archipelago and a lesbi archipelago: noncontiguous fields of social relations stretching across a national stage, and a predominant sense that one’s gay-ness or lesbi-ness is one island in an archipelagic self. The relationship between nationalism and difference is thus more complex than the clear black lines of modern maps suggest (Gupta 1992).

I have also emphasized the importance of mass media to the consolidation of gay and lesbi subjectivities. Fragmentary mentionings of Western

homosexuality frequently appear as the means by which gay and lesbi Indonesians come to know of themselves as such. Gay and lesbi subjectivities emerge as a kind of reading practice of the West. This impact of mass mediated coverage of Western homosexuality is particularly interesting because the resulting subjectivities are national, not transnational per se. This is why I find the notion of "dubbing culture" useful: it indexes forms of language reterritorialization that trouble dominant definitions of translation. Being gay and Indonesian is like hearing Tom Cruise "speak Indonesian" through the magic of dubbing. It is self-evidently inauthentic—out of cultural joint—yet socially efficacious. Somehow, you the Indonesian listener can understand what Tom Cruise is "saying"; somehow, gay and lesbi Indonesians "belong." The process of transforming messages from "outside" Indonesia is not unique to gay and lesbi Indonesians; youth culture, for instance, environmental movements, or Islamic and Christian communities of various kinds do this too. But what makes the case of gay and lesbi Indonesians special is the lack of institutional or corporate powers that intentionally contribute to the translocation. Misunderstandings that a "Gay International" contributes significantly to subjectivities like gay and lesbi reflect the assumption that such organized forces are necessary for "globalization" (Massad 2002). The phenomenon of "dubbing culture" indicates this not need be the case.

Feminist and postcolonial analyses have highlighted how Western understandings of translation posit a "strong generative" original and "weaker and derivative" product that encodes hierarchies of male-female or colonizer-colonized (Simon 1996:1; see also Niranjana 1992:1). Some of these analyses employ an idea of "translational culture" for how "newness enters the world" (Bhabha 1994:212; see also Chakrabarty 2000:17; Spivak 2000). This is a view of translation as metaphor, but also a literal "mode of translation" that through "localization" creates unforeseen possibilities (Rafael 1988:xviii, 15). These analyses often understand translation to be the production of completed texts: "in creating coherent and transparent texts and subjects, translation participates—across a range of discourses—in the fixing of colonized cultures" (Niranjana 1992:3). But if, as Niranjana notes, translation is interpellation, then what happens in dubbing? With this translational form, no coherent or transparent text or subject appears: the original and its "translation" are held together, side by side, without any unification or even the hope for such unification.

If "translational culture" can be construed in terms of les belles infidèles, the unfaithful woman, then "dubbing culture" is queer. Dubbing appears nonprocreative; it places two things alongside each other without clearly giving birth to something new. A power relation exists: few Indonesian films, for instance, get dubbed into English, and most Westerners

do not lip-synch Indonesian popular music. It is not a free-for-all where anything gets put together with anything. But neither is it a rigid system where Western domination determines postcolonial reality. The lifeworlds of gay and lesbi Indonesians indicate a more contingent inequality—queering translational theories of culture, indicating how unexpected selfhoods can be dubbed from hegemonies that might otherwise appear total, and globalizations that might otherwise appear seamless and beyond question.

The two greatest conceptual barriers to understanding gay and lesbi subjectivities are the rush to "tradition" as an explanatory principle, and the assumption that culture is by default local. These barriers are rooted in a theory of knowledge predicated on difference. The "archipelago style" of gay and lesbi life forces a consideration of how grids of similitude and difference are bound up with processes of globalization, and so must be included in the act of social analysis. Doing so reveals how gay and lesbi Indonesians do not fit the "Gay Planet" trope of immanent similitude or the "McGay" trope of unbridgeable difference. They cannot symbolize globalization’s triumph, nor can they fill a queer "savage slot" that seeks an Other to "constitute the West as we know it" (Trouillot 1991:18). They chart a third, archipelagic path between similitude and difference, one that resists conflating difference with distance: others may be near at hand while one may share a bond of similitude with those on "islands" far away. Never have I heard a gay or lesbi Indonesian say they were Western or wished to become Western; nor have I heard a gay or lesbi Indonesian say they were completely distinct from gay and lesbian Westerners. The question is by what rubrics these Indonesians experience mediations of similitude and difference. I suggest that the answer lies in reconfigurations of national and global discourses productively glossed as "dubbing."

A kind of dubbing culture has always been central to the Indonesian national project. Key to the transformation of the "Dutch East Indies" to "Indonesia" was the transformation of "Malay" into "Indonesian." By the beginning of the twentieth century, Malay had become not just the language of trade and administration, but a means by which information from outside the Indies entered the archipelago: it "began to bring to the Indies the literatures and the events of the world and of one’s neighbors…. Somewhat abruptly, via the medium of the lingua franca, most places in the world began to be felt in the Indies" (Siegel 1997:18–19). It is in the latter national context that the gay and lesbi subject positions, with their entailment of global connectivity, have taken form. Whereas warias understand their subjectivity as national (Boellstorff 2004b), gay and lesbi Indonesians think the transnational through the national: the waria subject position took form through a colonial "Malay archipelago" while the gay and lesbi subject positions took form through a postcolonial national archipelago.

**TABLE 8–1. Apparent isomorphisms.**

| **Sexuality** | **ETPs (bissu, warok)** | **waria** | **gay** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Spatial scale | local | national | global |
| Temporality | indigenous (way back then) | modern (then | postmodern (now and future) |
| Political economy | precolonial | colonial | postcolonial |
| Language | Javanese, Balinese, Makassarese, etc. | Malay | Indonesian |

Given the waria subject position’s origin in this colonial encounter, and the gay (and lesbi) subject position’s origin in the postcolonial state, one can draw a parallel between language ideology and regimes of sexual subjectivity: "waria" is to "gay" as "Malay" is to "Indonesian." It might appear that a developmental path exists (table 8–1).

What such a developmentalist interpretation misses is how gay (and lesbi) Indonesians see themselves in national, not global, terms. Its neat narrative of displacement elides how, for instance, the waria subject position does not appear to be in the process of being replaced by the gay subject position. Through the notion of "dubbing culture," I hope to have set forth an ethnographically grounded theoretical framework for considering how, recalling Bhabha, newness enters an apparently already globalized world through conjunctural processes that are shaped by power relations but not just the "translation" of them. Dubbing neither seeks nor rejects the authentic; it lies alongside the authentic, opening up new possibilities for reconfiguration. It is not "meta" but "para"; it operates not through claiming causal hierarchy, but through a cultural logic of juxtaposition.

## TRAVELING ARCHIPELAGOES

Because so few gay and lesbi Indonesians travel outside Indonesia, and as a result the globalizing forces that make the gay and lesbi subject positions possible are reconfigured through national discourse, I have emphasized neither other non-Western queer subject positions nor international travel. I have worked to construct an ethnographic corpus and theoretical architecture that reflect gay and lesbi lifeworlds, even while drawing upon

Western intellectual debates. Yet this book has been inspired by, and can be placed in the context of, a growing literature on persons outside the West who use terms "derived" from "gay" and "lesbian."1

A few gay men and lesbi women are able to travel to the West—because they are from a wealthy family and go for education, pleasure, or to visit relatives; because they are working-class and obtain work on a cruise ship or elsewhere; or because they have a Western partner who brings them to the West for a visit or longer-term residence. My gay and lesbi interlocutors who were able to visit the West speak of confounded expectations. Some return to Indonesia telling stories of amazing social acceptance and community: bars, discos, feminist groups, saunas, bookstores. Udin, a gay man in Surabaya who had lived for a few months in Melbourne, recalled these differences in terms of social acceptance, using terms common to state rhetoric like wawasan and gotong royong (Bowen 1986), and the archipelagic idea of a distributed set of places:

The most striking difference was really the social acceptance [penerimaan masyarakat]…. I realize that it’s not the case that in all Western nations, America or Australia, their people can accept them as if it’s nothing, no, it’s not like that, but there are certain locations where the general public already knows "this is the place [tempat] so we can expect that," yes? … People’s perspective [wawasan] is wider…. Here, maybe because were accustomed to mutual aid [gotong royong], people ask about all our affairs, "What what what? Where are you going? Where have you come from?" … So, it probably just depends on culture.

However, many of my gay and lesbi interlocutors who had traveled outside Indonesia returned feeling that the West is a worse place to live. Made, from Bali, had a lover who brought him to see the lover’s Western Australian hometown:

Before, I used to think that gay life in the West was easy: open and free. I thought gay people didn’t pay attention to gossip from society or anything. And that the government acknowledged their existence, and so on. But it turned out that my thinking was completely wrong, and I had to turn it around 180 degrees. For instance, I got invited to Western Australia. Well, it turned out that gays there were very closed, especially in the small town where my lover worked. There were no other openly gay people there, and because my lover is a teacher, he had to be closed too. So I thought, "Well, apparently it’s just the same as here in Bali!" It was a learning experience for me, homework for me; I realized that I had to explain to my friends back in Bali that gay life in the West was like that.

Nira, a lesbi woman originally from northern Sumatra, had lived in Bali for many years and met Western lesbians:

My most recent relationship lasted five years. It was with an American woman: she went to Amherst and is from a wealthy family. We lived together here in Bali for five years, and she took me to America with her once: we were there for a little over a year, on the East Coast. I liked Provincetown and North Carolina. But I didn’t really like America. All we did was sit around with her friends, talking in their houses over coffee, their voices so loud and the TV blaring all the time. I didn’t like it; I was bored! It’s hard to get me to leave Indonesia; I’m very proud of Indonesia, a fanatic for Indonesia you could say.

Some gay and lesbi Indonesians who never leave Indonesia are able to meet gay and lesbian Westerners, but this can be difficult, since few Indonesians speak English, and Western tourists tend not to spend long periods of time in the urban centers where the gay and lesbi worlds are most extensive. When it does happen it is often at sites like shopping malls, where it is sometimes possible to meet a Western tourist or expatriate by "playing eyes." It is usually gay expatriate Westerners (and the occasional gay Western anthropologist), not gay tourists, who sometimes go to tempat ngebers. The concentration of tourists in Bali makes it a special case; gay Indonesians sometimes go to Bali for the purpose of trying to meet a gay Westerner, regardless of language barriers. Because of their more limited mobility, socializing between lesbi women and Western lesbians tends to be limited to upper-class urban contexts or the tourist industry in Bali. For Ita in northern Bali, contacts with Western lesbians were a never-ending source of fascination:

I meet lots of Western lesbi women here at the restaurant. I can tell by the way they look, or they ask: "I see you have a ring. How long have you been married?" I just tell them, "I’m not married; this is from my girlfriend." They’re usually very nice to me. Some of them have had problems with their families too; I even met one, from Sweden I think, who’d been thrown out of her family because she was lesbi. Isn’t it funny that there are no other words for lesbi women, how lesbi women have the same name the world over. I’ve met tourists from everywhere, from Italy, from Switzerland, and no matter where they’re from, they look it up in their dictionaries and it’s always the same: lesbian.

While travel outside Indonesia is a rare theme in the lives of gay and lesbi Indonesians, internal migration and travel (in search of work, to visit relatives, or for pleasure) is much more common, as it is for Indonesians generally. For many gay and lesbi Indonesians, travel within the nation provides an opportunity to encounter and reflect upon a sense that being gay or lesbi is national. When gay and lesbi Indonesians move from one part of Indonesia to another, they expect to find gay men and lesbi women there, and particularly for the case of gay men moving to cities, suspect where they may be found. For instance, Udin had traveled not only from

Surabaya to Melbourne, but to another island in the early 1990s, to one of the early gay and lesbi Congresses. The trip confirmed his sense that being gay was part of a national style, and his reflections on the experience were once again peppered with terms common to state rhetoric like wawasan and menyatukan (unify):

UDIN: When I got there I saw lots of people who had lots of perspective [banyak wawasan], had a high level of perspective [wawasan yang tinggi] … people who had concepts and knowledge, yet some of them were unwilling [malu] to be called "gay" [in public].

TB: So when you met these people from across Indonesia, did you think they were similar or different to you?

UDIN: In principle they were the same [sama] … there were a few differences I guess, but they were in a personal style [secara pribadi], not in terms of group style [secara kelompok]…. All the same [sama semua] … we get the influences of the West … and, what’s the word for it, unify [menyatukan] them, and in the end develop openness within the gay community.

## THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF BELONGING

The Indonesian nation-state is predicated on heterosexuality, on the normal, and thus on the denial of queerness. By taking gay and lesbi subjectivities seriously, we "queer" the Indonesian nation-state, illuminating the foundational moment of sexual exclusion that naturalizes itself as the traditional and authentic.

The question of belonging is central to the experience of being gay or lesbi. These concepts are self-evidently not from tradition, family, or ethnolocality; yet they are experienced as both intimate aspects of selfhood and national phenomena. The most enduring Western stereotype regarding homosexuality and transgenderism in Indonesia (and Southeast Asia more generally) is that these regions are "tolerant." Although it is true that there have been—and in some cases, still are—socially recognized roles for male-to-female transgenders as well as widespread acceptance of secretive homosexual behavior, transgenderism and homosexuality are hardly valorized in contemporary Indonesian society. Although homosexuality and transgenderism usually escape official comment, if directly asked, most religious and state authorities swiftly condemn transgenderism and homosexuality as sinful and incompatible with "Indonesian tradition."

It proves helpful to develop a distinction between heterosexism (the belief that heterosexuality is superior to other sexualities) and homophobia (a psychologized fear or hatred of nonnormative sexualities). While

heterosexism and homophobia often co-occur, this need not always be the case, and in Indonesia historically heterosexism has not implied homophobia. This lack of "gay-bashing" has often led non-Indonesians to misrecognize "Indonesian culture" as "tolerant" of homosexuality. Since the late 1990s there have been a few cases of unprecedented violence toward gay men when they stake a claim to the public sphere. While such "political homophobia" is disturbing (Boellstorff 2004d), it remains exceptional, and for most gay and lesbi Indonesians their oppression takes the form of a lack of recognition (which for some includes a pressure to marry "heterosexually" when they do not wish to do so). For instance, when gay men speak of wishing to be "accepted by society," they usually hope not that the social pressure to marry would disappear, but that they would not be the target of shaming gossip and could carry out their same-gender affairs in the gay world undisturbed.

Gay and lesbi Indonesians are aware they do not fit into dominant cultural norms; even if they marry "heterosexually," their "desire for the same" is not recognized as authentic. But when these Indonesians speak of wishing to be accepted by society in everyday conversation or more formal contexts like zines, "Balinese culture" or "tradition" is not the entity from which they seek acceptance. Nor is it Westerners or other Southeast Asians. Rather, it is a public culture conceived as national. Yet rarely is this a desire for recognition as understood by Western queer rights movements, and rarely does it take the form of a political movement. Since gay and lesbi Indonesians rework Western concepts of homosexuality through the lens of state discourse, their existence begs the question of politics and belonging.

In "The Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor notes that the contemporary "demand for recognition" in the West presupposes a notion of authenticity: "We might speak of an individualized identity, one that is particular to me, and that I discover in myself" (1994:28). This is the confessional discourse of a selfhood that begins "in myself," gaining authenticity through exteriorization and recognition. The Western metaphor of "coming out" draws upon this confessional discourse. In the West, many treat politicization as the final realization of "coming out" and thus the ultimate form of homosexuality (notwithstanding grudging acknowledgment of "men who have sex with men," lesbian continua, and other figures of the incompletely recognized sexual minority). Politicization is interpreted as doing for the community what "coming out" does for the individual: assert a claim to rights, achieve a continuity between domains of life, secure an ongoing sense of self. By the late 1980s this conception of politicization was appearing in guises like Adam’s frequently cited "five elements of modern homosexuality," which included "Exclusive homosexuality, now possible for both partners, has become

an alternative path to conventional family norms" (1987:6)—not an element to which all gay and lesbi Indonesians would subscribe. This view of politicization as coming-out-writ-large is common in Western analyses of "global homosexualities":

In over fifty countries around the globe, persons with homoerotic inclinations are "coming out" publicly, organizing movements for recognition and human rights, and, by doing so, challenging the authority of the traditional family, religious doctrine, and state power. (Likosky 1992:xv)

There are impressive parallels in the names of organizations: many countries have known "gay liberation fronts," "revolutionary leagues," and so on, indicating that movements follow more or less comparable paths, pass through the same phases, and draw names from other social and political movements with which there is some resemblance in terms of ideology, goals, or methods of resistance. (Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel 1999:369–370)

However, the amount of recognizably activist activities undertaken by gay and lesbi Indonesians has been irregular and quite peripheral to the gay and lesbi worlds. The first gay organization, Lambda Indonesia, announced its existence to the world in March 1981. The first nationwide congress of gay organizations took place in Kaliurang (near Yogyakarta) from December 10 to 12, 1993, and further congresses were held in 1995 and 1997, each with around fifty participants.2 Yet in the mid-1990s the total amount of activism among gay men seems to have decreased: long before the post-Soeharto rise of political Islam, gay men involved in organizations complained how most gay men were interested only in entertainment events. Beginning about 2002 there has been an increasing amount of activist work among gay men (appearing on television, for instance, or participating in national conferences), but such activities remain exceptional.3

Lesbi women have also engaged in organizational work since the 1980s, though their greater confinement to the domestic sphere and general exclusion from HIV prevention funding have made this work difficult. In Bali and Makassar, for instance, tombois have worked to build a greater sense of community. In the early 2000s a lesbi group in Jakarta inaugurated a website and listserv that generated sustained discussion and several events in the city. A tomboi group formed in Makassar in 2000 succeeded in obtaining funding from foreign donors for HIV prevention work among tombois. Lesbi women engaged in organizational work share with their gay counterparts a frustration with those uninterested in activism. In 1994 one woman expressed this frustration in a zine article entitled "GTM" (Gerakan Tutup Mulut or the "Closed Mouth Movement"):

It feels like of all peoples in the world, the people who like the Closed Mouth Movement more than anyone else are lesbians…. Indonesian lesbians are like red, newborn babies…. In truth we have already been born into the world, but in the same manner as a new-born baby, so we still have not done anything. Not yet a few words, much less speaking, only shrill crying! … Compared with lesbians in the West, who we can say have moved to adulthood, who can shout about their situation to demand attention, we are still far behind.4

The overall situation, then, is as follows: Indonesia has over two hundred million citizens, yet there are only a handful of gay or lesbi groups that could be glossed as "organizations" even in an informal sense; most of them exist for only two or three years before disbanding. Given that most such "organizations" have between two and ten active members, I estimate that from the 1980s to the early 2000s there were never more than one hundred gay and lesbi Indonesians at any one time who participated in activism in the Western sense of the term. Languages of politicization sometimes appear—as when, soon after the fall of Soeharto in 1998, letters to the zine GAYa Nusantara began calling for an "Indonesian Gay Party" or "Pink Triangle Party,"5 or when gay activists in the city of Yogyakarta have held rights protests covered by the local newspaper. However, such incidents remain relatively small and ephemeral islands in the gay and lesbi archipelagoes. Unilinear narratives of a global movement are troubled further by the fact that gay men and lesbian women in other Southeast Asian nations, notably the Philippines and Thailand, do engage in recognizably political activities—gay pride marches, protests directed at government bureaucracies, letters in the mass media, demands for legal reforms.6 Additionally, there is a long history of activism by ordinary Indonesians in spheres ranging from religion to the environment and women’s rights. How are we to explain the "failure" of Indonesian gay and lesbi politics, and what does this tell us about a gay and lesbi politics of recognition?

Taylor highlights how the Western politics of recognition depends on the belief that selfhood is at stake: "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor 1994:25).

One of the greatest paradoxes of the gay and lesbi subject positions is that while they have a national spatial scale and draw upon national discourses, their cultural logics do not seem to demand the link between meaningful selfhood and political recognition that Taylor identifies as so important in the West. Yet a desire to be accepted by society is a recurring theme in gay and lesbi narratives. It is part of the gaya or style of being

gay or lesbi, recalling Foucault’s notion of a "style of life" as "a mode of ethical elaboration" (Halperin 1995:72). There appears to be an implicit equation of societal acceptance and homosexual love: gay and lesbi Indonesians "desire the same" and desire that the nation love them. It is largely an unfulfillable desire, so that a separation from national society is assumed to be the inevitable consequence of being gay or lesbi, even though these are "national" ways of being (see Boellstorff 2004c).

It is significant that gay and lesbi Indonesians speak so often of a desire to be recognized by society (masyarakat) and so rarely of a desire to be recognized by the government (pemerintah): the link between gay and lesbi subjectivities and national discourse is not that of Western ideas of a "queer nation." As an "out" Western gay man, I would sometimes describe the idea of gay rights to my gay interlocutors, who often reacted with shock: why would someone want to be known as gay in all domains of one’s life? Why would you want to do that to your parents, to your spouse, children, and coworkers? What possible benefit would this bring? Do you get a raise at your job? To be "open" usually implies participating in the gay world, not to trouble the boundaries of that world by becoming more accepted in the normal world. The idea of activism makes an archipelagic life largely untenable. For example, Amin, a gay man in Surabaya, was taken aback when he learned that Dédé Oetomo openly shared a home with his male lover: "if two gay men live together, that’s too much." One gay man in Makassar saw activism as a kind of improper borrowing:

We don’t need to say—excuse me for saying this—like GAYa Nusantara, that we’re a "gay group" and stuff like that. In my own opinion, we don’t need to open ourselves [membuka diri] too much, unless society itself makes comments. We don’t need to proclaim ourselves [memproklamasi diri]. We have a tendency to imitate the West too much. Between us and the West there are great differences [beda sekali]…. In the West, I feel that the openness is great. For instance, in regard to parents. There, if the parents know that their child is gay, it’s no problem, because it’s regarded as their private affair. Here, it can’t be like that. Here, even if the parents know, they’ll do anything to get the child to marry, they’ll do anything so that the child will not become gay. So the biggest difference is social acceptance [penerimaan masyarkat]…. For instance, in the West, you can kiss your boyfriend in public, right? But here, that’s very opposed. Society will not like it.

When talking about the belief in much of the West that in Asia homosexuality is tolerated, another gay man replied:

In Indonesia, it’s the worst. Gays do not have any protection…. It’s true that you can have sex with anyone here. But it has to be done secretly…. Here in

Indonesia, if someone’s boss finds out they are gay, they can be fired for no reason…. If I imagine that happening to myself, I’d think: I have rights as a gay person; why am I fired from my job? I haven’t bothered anyone! It’s my personal business.

In both of these cases, reflections on the idea of activism lead to an emphasis on difference rather than similarity. When comparing Indonesia and the West, gay and lesbi Indonesians usually imagine recognition as the primary axis of difference. They tend not to think that gay and lesbian Westerners engage in different kinds of sexual acts, or lead radically different lives (for instance, they often assume that gay and lesbian Westerners mostly marry "heterosexually" as they do). Where they imagine difference is in the idea that gay and lesbian Westerners are more recognized by society: they can kiss in public, for instance. Increasingly, gay and lesbi Indonesians contemplate fragmentary news that there is something like "marriage" between gay men or lesbian women in the West—particularly since Holland, the former colonial power, became in 2001 the first nation to permit same-gender marriages. Given the importance of "heterosexual" marriage in gay and lesbi lives and its explicit conflation with proper citizenship in postcolonial Indonesia, this interest is understandable.

Yet the idea of recognition for same-gender relationships is dangerous as well as enticing, because of the clear threat it poses to a gay or lesbi world kept distinct from the normal world. In the West, claims to cultural citizenship are articulated through a language of the visible: identity allows the state and civil society to identify claimants to equality. For the Western queer subject, being "out" is a prerequisite to a progressive politics. But for many gay men and lesbi women, visibility would jeopardize important boundaries between islands of their archipelagic subjectivities.

Rather than label gay and lesbi Indonesians as self-hating or backward, the details of their own self-understandings might offer clues. Over and over again these Indonesians emphasize acts rather than statuses: the idea that one can become gay or lesbi through "addiction," or the idea that good deeds lead to acceptance. Alongside a politics of recognition, this suggests the possibility of an ethics of recognition. In chapter 2, I discussed how my understanding of subject positions draws from Foucault’s later work on modes of subjectivation and technologies of the self—"The most neglected side of Foucault’s work, and perhaps now the most important for anthropology" (Knauft 1996:164). Perhaps gay and lesbi Indonesians evince an ethics of recognition that construes belonging in terms of a "care for the self" rather than a concern with the image of self mirrored back by society.

Such a perspective might reveal acts of resistance that otherwise might not be seen as political—for instance, the entertainment events that gay men often organize. A more extended example: in northern Bali, Tuti and Ita, the lesbi couple who ran a restaurant, recalled how they met Esthi. This twenty-one-year-old woman had come from a village many miles inland to the tourist zone in search of work, but soon fell in love with Karlina, a lesbi friend of Tuti and Ita. Tuti managed to employ Esthi at her souvenir shop, and at the time I met them Esthi and Karlina had been lovers for over two years. News of Esthi’s relationship eventually made it back to her parents, who called her back to the village with the excuse that there was a Hindu family ceremony she needed to attend. When Esthi arrived she was confronted by her parents, and her mother threatened to commit suicide: "If you go back and then you hear later that I’ve killed myself, you’ll know it’s because of what you’ve done." Esthi’s parents also threatened to kick her out of the family, saying, "If you leave here and go back to Karlina, we will not consider you our child any more and you can never come back."

Esthi fled her village in a panic and returned to Karlina and her friends at the restaurant. Soon her father, together with several uncles and male cousins, came looking for her, but upon arriving they were greeted by Tuti and Tuti’s older sister, who had come to accept that Tuti was lesbi. Tuti and her sister sat down with Esthi’s father and "explained what it meant to be lesbi, that lesbi women weren’t bad people." Esthi’s father seemed to accept Tuti’s argument and returned with his relatives to the village to explain the situation to Esthi’s mother. A few days after this encounter, Tuti was still pleased with the outcome: "We don’t know what will happen, but we’re hoping Esthi’s mother will understand eventually. Part of the problem is that they live out in the village; they don’t get to see gay and lesbian tourists like people do here. So it’s just something with which they have no experience; that’s half the problem."

This example of Esthi and Karlina’s relationship illustrates how an ethics of recognition does not stand outside social context. In comments as applicable to Indonesia as the West, Taylor notes that "it is not surprising that in the culture of authenticity, relationships are seen as the key loci of self-discovery and self-affirmation. Love relationships are not just important because of the general emphasis in modern culture on the fulfillments of ordinary needs. They are also crucial because they are the crucibles of inwardly generated identity" (Taylor 1994:36). Recognition, authenticity, and sexuality are fused in this understanding of belonging—an understanding that, like the nation-state form itself, underlies the constitution of the Indonesian subject.



Figure 8–1. Outside Ngurah Rai airport, Bali. Courtesy of Jane H. Patten.

## POSTLUDE

Through "dubbing culture," gay and lesbi Indonesians come to sexual subjectivities that challenge common understandings of globalization. Whenever exiting the airport in Bali during my fieldwork, I would pass by the sign shown in figure 8–1. Like elsewhere in Asia, Indonesians have proven capable of relocalizing McDonald’s in a way that furthers its corporate goals, but also reworks "fast food" to new ends (J. Watson 1998). This sign would always remind me how, while many aspects of gay and lesbi Indonesians’ lives are unique, others reflect broad patterns of culture and globalization.

I have referred to the gay and lesbi subject positions as the greatest success stories of Soeharto’s New Order—the greatest examples of subject positions irreducible to ethnolocality—albeit success stories the state never intended to facilitate into being. In doing so, I draw from these subject positions the insight that a new Indonesia need not rest on obliterating or revitalizing the past, but realizing that the past is never as set in stone as it makes itself out to be. Gay and lesbi Indonesians show their fellow citizens that it is possible to imagine a new kind of national belonging where difference stands no longer as raw "diversity" to be ground into national "unity," but glittering islands of possibility in an archipelago of tolerance and justice.

Books seem to be worlds in themselves, but like any text they demand painful choices as to what will be included and what will be left out. As this book closes I am haunted by all I have left unsaid, all the islands of the gay archipelago not visited: stories that remain ensconced within my fieldnotes and my memory. Yet one story in particular comes to mind as I reflect on "dubbing culture" and the paths by which gay and lesbi Indonesians find meaning, community, and love. The paths by which gay and lesbi Indonesians insist they belong.

Setting: Makassar. Place: the vast athletic field where gay men play volleyball in the afternoons. Time: April 15, 1998, four o’clock. I remember.

I remember standing in the field; there are dark clouds to the east, but no one seems to mind. There are hundreds of people on the field, mostly young men. At the north end of the field several games of soccer are underway; to the south the basketball courts are a frenzy of motion and chatter. I am with about twenty-five gay men, an island of the gay world between soccer and basketball. The gay men are playing volleyball twelve at a time, six on each team. Everyone else sits and talks along the sidelines. One of the gay men misses a shot and lets out an ear-piercing shriek. A gay man sitting with me remarks, "Wherever we are, we’re visible." Visible and yet not visible, I think to myself: many of these gay men will go home to their wives and children. This is one of many islands of the gay archipelago; its lines of connection, binding together lives and loves, invisible to the normal world.

I remember how, many games later, the setting sun is shining red on the underbellies of the clouds and the evening call to prayer booms from the great mosque just down the road. It starts to rain and the athletic field is all motion to its edges. Several gay men get on a minibus with me; some of the many gay men who have taken care of me though my years in Indonesia, teaching me more than any book can say. I remember the streets of Makassar rushing by in the rain and the fading sun’s glow; the dash to the front door of my little house. We are inside and making tea and turning on the television: it’s "Word Quiz," a popular game show. I remark there’s a similar show in the United States, and they say "It’s like there are no new ideas here—we just use ideas from the West." But the statement carries no tone of chagrin; it is the way things are in this world, and obvious that "using" an idea means making it into one’s own style.

I remember that a couple of hours later the visitors have left and Irwan, one of the two gay men living with me, has come home from a conference on "Fighting AIDS from the Bugis and Makassarese Religious and Cultural Perspective," sponsored by the provincial Department of Health. As a member of a local AIDS organization he was invited to attend. I sit down to drink tea before dinner with him. Unlike most folks in town, these government officials know terms like homoseks and gay, and Irwan

is worried that tomorrow the conference will turn into a platform for saying that being gay is not compatible with being Indonesian—"Indonesian," he says, not "Bugis" or "Makassarese," even though that’s what the conference is ostensibly about. Irwan says he wants to give people at the conference a different perspective (wawasan).

I remember how, after a few moments, Irwan gave me, offhand, a definition of culture and belonging as simple and powerful as any I’ve ever heard. I remember how he looked down at his steaming tea and said: "Culture is something that is created by humans and then believed. There are people who have created ‘gay’ here in Indonesia and believe in what they have created. So gay is part of Indonesian culture."