

FALLING  
INTO THE  
**LESBI**  
WORLD

*Desire and Difference  
in Indonesia*

**Evelyn Blackwood**



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# Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Desires

*To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation.*

—JUDITH BUTLER

MY RESEARCH ASSOCIATE AND I dropped by the small apartment of a *lesbi* couple in Padang one afternoon. We had been chatting with them for a few minutes when suddenly Robi, the *tomboi* partner, said to h/er girlfriend Noni, “Sis, go make some tea for them!”<sup>1</sup> Noni jumped up, mumbling apologies, and went into the kitchen to prepare tea for us. This exchange caught my attention because there was nothing keeping Robi from making the tea h/erself; we were all just sitting and talking.<sup>2</sup> H/er insistence that h/er girlfriend fulfill the duty of tea-making therefore pointed eloquently and simply to the norms of masculinity that s/he maintains and the difference that defines this couple’s relationship.

This book seeks to understand how Robi, Noni, and the other *lesbi* I interviewed learn about and produce gender, how it becomes the cement of their relationship, and how ideologically defined categories of normative gender, of man and woman, are only starting blocks for the production of gendered and sexual selves. In the process of making sense of their lives, I explore the discourses that circulate in their lives, the practices they engage in, their social relations with kin and community, and their linguistic strategies, to contextualize the rich and complex subjectivities they express. I do not provide any simple answers regarding how they identify. In fact I refuse to situate them neatly in the social categories of men, women, lesbians, transgender, or masculine females. Rather in each chapter I offer a different perspective on the multiple and apparently contradictory ways in which they position themselves.

The subjects of this book are Indonesian *lesbi* who live primarily in the regional metropolis of Padang on the coast of West Sumatra. “*Lesbi*” is an Indone-

sian term derived from the English word “lesbian,” but as is discussed more fully later, it does not have precisely the same meaning as its cognate. “Lesbi” as well as “lesbian” have been used in Indonesia in two ways since the 1980s. Both popularly and among lesbi individuals the terms refer either to two women involved in a romantic relationship or to a couple in which one partner is masculine and the other feminine. The different perceptions of lesbi identity speak to some of the problems in using universal signifiers. The lesbi I interviewed in Padang position themselves under the term “lesbi,” but they prefer to use gender-marked terms for themselves. These terms include the Indonesian word “tomboi” (derived from the English word “tomboy”) or the slang terms *cowok* and *cewek*, meaning guy, for the masculine partner, and girl, for the feminine partner. While recognizing that any choices are fraught with difficulties, I follow their preference for gender-marked terms by using “tomboi” for the masculine partners and “girlfriend” or “femme” for the feminine partners. None of these terms signify a fixed identity, however, and will in fact be frequently revisited throughout the book as I examine the ways individuals claim, contest, rework, and blur the terms by which they define themselves.

Although I use terms, such as “tomboi” and “lesbi,” that are familiar across much of Indonesia, I am not making any claims that the lesbi I interviewed are necessarily representative of others in West Sumatra or Indonesia. As demonstrated in *Women’s Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia* (Saskia Wieringa, Blackwood, and Bhaiya 2007), butch lesbians, masculine females, and transgendered individuals throughout Southeast Asia and Asia more broadly express a range of masculinities informed by particular sociocultural and historical specificities as well as by global media and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movements and discourses. Several excellent studies in Southeast and East Asia document the nuances and complexities of masculinities among such female-bodied individuals, who identify variously as hunters, *toms*, tombois, TBs, and butches. The English-derived terms speak to the influence of global LGBT signifiers, but these masculinities are far from identical.

In South Sulawesi, Indonesia, three terms are used to refer to masculine females who desire women: “hunter,” meaning one who pursues a goal; *calalai*, meaning literally “false man” in the Bugis language of the area; and tomboi (Davies 2007a). Sharon Davies (2007a, 2007b) classifies these masculine females as a distinct gender because, according to those she interviewed, they are female-bodied, but they do not identify as women, nor do they aspire to be men. Megan Sinnott (2004, 2007) argues that *toms* in Thailand are transgendered females who strategically appropriate and manipulate cultural stereotypes of Thai masculinity and emergent sexualities to create a hybrid form of masculinity. Older

butches whom Saskia Wieringa (1999, 2007) studied in Jakarta, Indonesia, refer to themselves as men and see themselves as possessing a male soul in a female body. The versions of masculinity represented in these studies point to the complexities of each situation; they highlight the asymmetrical reception of global and national discourses, which produces not homogeneous national or international queer identities but a plethora of dynamic subjectivities that exceed any simple categorization.<sup>3</sup>

Through stories of lesbi in Padang I analyze the sexual and gendered practices in which tombois and their partners engage. I offer an in-depth focus on a small number of lesbi to ask by what processes and in what moments tombois and their girlfriends take up particular subject positions in childhood and adulthood. For tombois, I explore how female-bodied individuals come to identify in childhood as boys, how they deal with their emerging desires in adolescence, and how as adults they consolidate, negotiate, and manipulate their trans-identities in relation to family, community, and lovers. My analysis of childhood narratives provides insight into the cultural processes of gender acquisition for tombois. It demonstrates how children's practical knowledge of gender enables them to take up a particular culturally defined gender position, even one not marked for them. As adults, tombois lay claim to the social category "man," by which I mean the ideologically dominant conception of manhood that circulates through much of Indonesia. In speaking of themselves as men, tombois state that they not only dress and act like men, they physically embody masculinity as well. Yet their self-positioning as men is not uncomplicated. Despite articulating a sense of self that they consider to be nearly the same as other men's, tombois enact different versions of masculinity and femininity as they move through space, from the familiarity of domestic spaces inhabited by kin and neighbors to the anonymity and vulnerability of public spaces. Because of the complexity of tomboi subjectivities, this book reveals gender to be contingent and relational rather than bounded and consistent.

This book also presents compelling stories of the femmes, or girlfriends, who are romantically involved with tombois. Girlfriends identify themselves as normative women and face the same ideological constraints as other women living in this region of Indonesia. Moving between tomboi and men partners, they situate their desires as attraction to men. Together tombois and their girlfriends negotiate what it means to be partners in a gender-binary world. Rather than offering explicit resistance, both tombois and girlfriends enact the gender binary in ways that tend to maintain the differences and inequalities between men and women. By drawing on hegemonic ideologies of gender difference to make sense of their lives, both tombois and their girlfriends reproduce state and Islamic gender dis-

courses, even though their lack of perfect fit with those discourses positions them somewhat on the margins of social space. Ultimately their self-positionings challenge normative gender because they do not inhabit their subject positions exactly as they are represented in the dominant ideology. Thus tombois' and girlfriends' enactment of normative categories of gender offers insights into nondominant subjectivities and their relationship to hegemonic discourses.

Through the study of tombois I address in particular the broader question of transgender identities as represented in the literature by U.S. and European transgender scholars. Because tombois' gender expression exceeds or transgresses normative gender categories, they may be included in the category of transgender people, if "transgender" is defined broadly, following Susan Stryker, as "an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender binaries" (1994, 251, fn 2).<sup>4</sup> However, the word "transgender," which began to circulate as an adopted term in lesbi and *gay* activist communities in Indonesia only in the late 1990s, is not a term that tombois I interviewed use for themselves.<sup>5</sup> In an effort to demonstrate the complexities of transgendered selves, I use "transgender" in this book in a provisional manner to speak to both Indonesian and U.S. practices, while acknowledging that I am navigating widely different terrains. Further, I explore Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of *mestiza* consciousness and Judith Halberstam's (1998) concept of female masculinity to think about the relation between transgender identities and normative constructions of gender.

While providing rich, in-depth, and provocative stories and analyses of the particular experiences and meanings of tomboi and femme selves, I examine their gendered selves in light of national and transnational processes that flow through Padang and West Sumatra. I analyze this particular locale from a theoretical approach to transnational sexualities that takes into account the importance of global movements of queer identities and discourses. I explore the ways nationally and globally circulating queer discourses are received and reinterpreted by both tombois and femmes, making them part of and yet different from the global gay models of sexuality. Thus one of the central questions addressed in this book is how national and transnational discourses are reflected, reproduced, and altered in the narratives and practices of tombois and their girlfriends.

This book focuses on a specific locality in Indonesia and the discourses that circulate in that location. My emphasis on locality is not meant to suggest that forms of sexuality are produced in specific locations.<sup>6</sup> Rather, attention to a specific locality enables me to ascertain the particular circuits of queer knowledge these lesbi access and hence the micro processes by which gendered and sexual



**MAP 1.1.** Map of Indonesia. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

subjectivities are produced. Where much of the theorizing about queer globalization has focused on Internet-savvy, educated activists in major urban centers, I focus on the lives and experiences of working- and lower-middle-class individuals in a regional city to tell the story of a different sort of “queer.” Yet by following the circuits of queer knowledge that travel back and forth through the lesbi, gay, and *waria* communities and networks in Padang, I demonstrate that Padang’s tombois and femmes are part of the global gay ecumene.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, this book explores the consequences of asymmetrical flows of queer knowledge by examining interactions between lesbian activists in Jakarta and tombois in Padang. The friction produced as identitarian positions bump up against each other within and across lesbi communities in Indonesia demonstrates the unpredictability of encounters with global queer knowledge. For those in Padang, the circulation of queer knowledge, as reflected in their linguistic practices, helps to create an imagined space of “like-minded,” but not necessarily identical, lesbi individuals across and beyond Indonesia. For lesbi activists in Jakarta, access to international LGBT networks solidifies for them a lesbian



identity category of women-loving-women. Tombois' and girlfriends' complex positionings challenge those activist identity categories.

## Lesbi Lives: Tombois and Femmes

Conducting anthropological research on lesbi in Indonesia presents a number of challenges related to lesbi visibility and mobility as well as to cultural assumptions about female-bodied individuals.<sup>8</sup> I have already discussed some of the definitional issues, but here I reflect on the methodological challenges that I faced. During dissertation fieldwork on a rural agricultural community in West Sumatra in 1989–1990, I was fortunate to meet several lesbi from the small towns near my research site. Some had lived in the same town most of their lives, while others had migrated between Jakarta and their home towns in search of jobs.<sup>9</sup> When I returned to Indonesia in 2001 to conduct research on lesbians, I was told by lesbians in Jakarta that there were no lesbians in West Sumatra. Relying on a popular view that the region is devoutly Islamic, they assumed that the supposed conservatism of the region would make it impossible for lesbians to live there. Their impression of West Sumatra was, needless to say, erroneous, and yet it points to the level of invisibility and secrecy most lesbi maintain not only in West Sumatra but elsewhere in Indonesia. Consequently it was impossible for me to simply inquire where the lesbi were in Padang. Instead I worked with my research associate Sri, a Minangkabau woman and university professor, to contact a waria individual who had been interviewed by one of Sri's students. Like other waria, who dress and act in a manner like “women” and usually take men as lovers, s/he was fairly visible as a hairdresser and performer.<sup>10</sup> S/he agreed to ask h/er tomboi friends if they would talk to me, but it took nearly three weeks before I was able to meet h/er closest tomboi friend.

From that point it became easier to contact other lesbi. Despite my difference as an educated, middle-class white woman from the United States, our commonality as lesbians, however they or I imagined that commonality to be, seemed to allay their fears about my intentions. In contrast some of the tombois were at first reluctant to talk to my research associate, despite their shared Muslim faith, because they felt that she would not respect them. Most importantly, my interest in them and their stories provided a certain validation for their relationships and reinforced their connection to a larger LGBT community in a way that was not possible in their daily lives. In effect I was the material realization of a global queer connection that they perceived from afar—as well as the source of assorted gay pride “rainbow” paraphernalia that I gave as gifts.

Because tombois and their girlfriends are very careful about keeping their relationships secret, I conducted my research with extreme care to avoid exposing them. Most interviews were carried out in my hotel room in 2001 and in the house of my research associate in 2004 in order to provide the privacy that interviewees needed to talk freely about their life stories and relationships. When we went on excursions together or met in public places, their behavior was very guarded. They used code words in their conversations to keep bystanders un-awares. I learned quickly that uttering the word “lesbi” in public was sure to make them cringe and look around nervously. Both “lesbi” and “lesbian” are used in the Indonesian print media and are well-known to the general public, hence they avoided these terms in their own conversations. Physical contact between a lesbi couple was very minimal in public places, limited to a hand laid casually on a partner’s leg or to simply sitting in close proximity. Beyond the caution needed to maintain their privacy, I had to rely on the individuals I met to introduce me to other lesbi. Without these personal connections, I found it impossible to make contacts. Even then some individuals felt that participating in an extended way in my research project was simply too risky; they were fearful of their families’ reactions, should they find out they were lesbi.

Despite these limitations, and with the assistance of my research associate Sri during my field visits in 2001 and 2004, I met twenty-eight individuals who were either tombois (thirteen) or women involved with tombois (fifteen). Most of these individuals lived in Padang, or had lived there at some time in the past few years, although three were from other towns in the province. The bulk of my analysis is based on the sixteen individuals with whom I worked most closely, and whom I formally interviewed, including eight tombois and eight femmes. I also obtained demographic data for an additional six individuals.<sup>11</sup> Of the sixteen, I spent time with them in the spaces that they inhabited, including their work spaces as well as their social spaces. I collected detailed life histories and asked questions that addressed how they understood themselves and their world. Questions focused on their self-identity, their knowledge of and access to local, national, and global discourses on gender, sexuality, women and womanhood, and their sense of relationship to other lesbi, gay, and waria across Indonesia and beyond. In addition I draw on conversations with several lesbi whom I met in 1990, mentioned earlier, as well as meetings and informal discussions in 2001 and 2004 with members and leaders of activist lesbi organizations in Jakarta. This ethnographic approach has the advantage of revealing the narratives as well as the practices that produce gendered and sexual selves. As Anna Tsing points out in *Friction*, global connections can be understood only in the “sticky materiality of practical encounters” (2005, 1), that is, the everyday actions and practices that

are the stuff of ethnographic research. Though my time with them could never make me an insider, given our very different histories and life experiences, it offered insight into the everyday meanings of their lives.

My own process of learning what *lesbi* meant to *tombois* and *femmes* in West Sumatra began in 1990 with my relationship with Dayan, my *tomboi* lover. Despite my anthropological training and efforts to be aware of ethnocentric biases, I assumed before I met Dayan that individuals who used the label “*lesbi*,” which I thought was just a shortened form of the word “lesbian,” would have identities and desires in line with my own understanding of lesbians. I came out in the early 1970s in San Francisco, California, at a time when a lesbian bar culture and an activist lesbian feminist movement were flourishing. The lesbians I knew identified as “women-loving-women” and were generally androgynous in their appearance and fairly egalitarian in their relationships. The terms “*butch*” and “*femme*,” which referred to masculine and feminine roles, had circulated in lesbian communities in San Francisco and elsewhere in the United States prior to the 1970s, but by 1970 they were not seen as self-defining or necessary in the way they had been for an earlier generation in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Many of my early insights about *lesbi* came as a result of my relationship with Dayan. I did not expect *lesbi* to identify as men, nor did I expect to be considered a *femme*, but these expectations soon unraveled as Dayan’s masculine behavior and attitudes toward me made our differences apparent (see Blackwood 1995a). My failure to cook for Dayan or organize Dayan’s birthday party led to tensions in our relationship, as did my comment to Dayan that s/he was “pretty,” a descriptive term for a woman, but not for a man. These tensions slowly forced me to recognize that I was misreading Dayan’s gender identity. Gloria Wekker (1998) notes similarly that the most intense moments of learning as an ethnographer came, for her, when her notion of equal lesbian partners was confronted with the age-based power of older *mati* women in Suriname. Part of the incentive for conducting this study, then, was my desire to explore the complexities of the *lesbi* world in Indonesia and come to a better understanding of *tomboi* trans-identities within their particular historical and social contexts.

## Geography of Desire: The Regional Metropolis of Padang

The city of Padang, the primary location for this study, sits on the coast of West Sumatra in Indonesia. It is a sprawling metropolis with a population of over 700,000 people, according to the 2000 census figures (Badan Pusat Statistik 2000). It has been a major trading port in Southeast Asia for hundreds of years.<sup>13</sup>

Located near the equator, this tropical city is currently the provincial capital of West Sumatra and a province of the state of Indonesia. Most of its inhabitants identify as Minangkabau, an ethnic group that is both Islamic and matrilineal (see Blackwood 2000). Mosques and prayer houses (*surau*) can be found throughout the city of Padang. The evening call to prayer carried over ubiquitous loudspeakers finds young and old, women and men, putting on prayer shawls and heading to the nearest mosque.

Padang is well connected to Indonesian and global circuits. Two large shopping malls in the city boast an agglomeration of fashionable clothing and cosmetic shops, hair salons, fast-food restaurants, and electronics stores. Via a quick one-hour trip, daily flights from the small airport in Padang take passengers to Singapore for shopping forays and business meetings. Flights also depart hourly for major cities throughout Indonesia. The port in nearby Teluk Bayur handles both inter-island and export shipping for a range of commodities, the bulk of which is cement, palm oil, coal, and rubber. Ships travel to destinations predominantly in Asia, but also to Europe, Africa, and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> Large and small buses depart from Padang's central bus terminal to points throughout Sumatra and Java. Minangkabau themselves have been migrants and transnationals well before the term became fashionable in academia. Circular migration (*merantau*), the practice of migrating to (and returning from) locations both within and outside of Indonesia, including Medan, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong, is a valued part of adulthood for both Minangkabau men and women (see also Naim 1971).

Although Padang is metropolitan and globally connected, it occupies what I call an intermediate position as a metropolis. I base this assessment on its size relative to other cities in Indonesia and its status as a provincial capital and active trade center and port (see Rutz 1987). Jakarta is the largest city in Indonesia, with a population of well over 8 million, whereas Padang's 700,000 places it as the twelfth largest in Indonesia (World Gazetteer 2006).<sup>15</sup> Padang's position as a regional metropolis makes it an intriguing place to study global sexualities because, though it is not a global metropolis, neither can it be considered a "non-metropolitan" area. In queer studies the metropolitan locations of Europe and North America come to stand for the primary sites of gay culture and identity, while spaces and peoples outside these centers are bracketed together as nonmetropolitan (see Phillips et al. 2000). For instance, Alan Sinfield (2000, 21) posits a model of gay cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and Delhi, that interact with "traditional local, non-metropolitan models," thereby setting up a distinction between metropolitan sexualities and sexualities beyond the metropolis. In addition to obscuring the differences within and across nation-states, the term "nonmetro-

politan” keeps the gaze on the putative metropolitan “centers” of gay sexuality, making those centers the standard for other queer sexualities.

Picking up on the distinction between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan, Halberstam discusses the possibility of shared characteristics among nonmetropolitan or “local sexual economies” (2005, 38). In Halberstam’s (2005) study of Brandon Teena, she offers U.S. small town and rural populations as nonmetropolitan spaces. Although Sinfield rightly notes that “metropolitan gay and lesbian concepts should be regarded ... not as denoting the ultimate achievement of human sexuality, but as something we have been producing ... in determinate economic and social conditions (2000, 22),” it is not clear what constitutes “nonmetropolitan” spaces. Such spaces seem to be problematically associated with broadly defined “other” cultural spaces that are “different” than global queer metropolitan spaces and therefore stand in contrast to them.

Because in this kind of mapping Padang falls silently into the vast space of nonmetropolitan, I identify Padang as a regional metropolis to contest its supposed location on the margins of queer space “outside” metropolitan areas. Identifying Padang as metropolitan forces recognition of different scales of queer space beyond the binary of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan. It also shifts the focus away from gay metropolitan “centers,” and their model of queer subjectivity, toward the possibility of multiple queer models and subjects—crosscut by class, ethnicity, gender, and nation—in the global gay ecumene. By looking at Padang as a regional metropolis, new sets of questions become salient. Are there differences in global gay processes between large and intermediate metropolises? How can these differences be accounted for without resorting to oversimplified notions of local versus metropolitan or global? What is the relation of either of these spaces to localized queer practices and subjectivities? I suggest that a regional metropolis is neither a “local version” of the gay metropolis, nor part of a common “metropolitan” gay culture, but a locus in the circuit of global queer knowledge situated within particular sociocultural, regional, and historical contexts.

### Ethnicity and Indonesian Citizenship

As a regional metropolis, to what extent does Padang’s ethnic composition and identity produce localized practices that affect the contours of lesbi lives? The largest cities of Indonesia have very diverse populations that use the national language of Indonesian as the common language. However, Padang, like other provincial capitals, is dominated by its largest ethnic group, the Minangkabau.<sup>16</sup> The language of daily use in Padang, as in all of West Sumatra, is Minangkabau,

a Malay language with some similarities to Indonesian. Most people except the very elderly are also fluent in Indonesian, which is taught in the public schools. In addition, as the home of the Minangkabau, West Sumatra and Padang are identified by other Indonesians as the land of *adat matriarchaat* (literally, matriarchal customs), which refers to their practices of matrilineal descent and inheritance.<sup>17</sup> Minangkabau language use and the practice of matrilineal kinship encourage a sense of ethnic identity among the inhabitants of West Sumatra.

While identifying as Minangkabau, those living in Padang are less invested in the matrilineal practices of highland villages, which are considered the heartland of the Minangkabau region. Despite their ethnic identity, Padang residents, particularly those without land or nearby kin, are more typical of residents in regional metropolises throughout Indonesia. Rita Kipp (1993) describes kinship in urban Indonesia as a bilateral system that blurs the intricacies of clan affiliation and weakens distinctive elements of *adat* (customary practices, laws, and ideals). She suggests that wealth differences and interethnic marriages are part of the reason for a homogenization of cultural practices in metropolitan areas. State policies have also worked to disconnect ethnic identity from everyday life by refiguring *adat* as culture (*kebudayaan*). Ethnic identity, in the form of dress, songs, dances, and handicrafts, were recognized by Suharto's New Order state as expressions of "culture," which were literally paraded about to celebrate Indonesia's Independence Day or placed in museums for the edification of children and tourists.<sup>18</sup> An example of this change from *adat* to culture is found among the Batak people of North Sumatra. Spurred on by urban migration and state-sponsored "*adat* festivals," they have come to view wedding speeches as much an expression of Batak "art" as of *adat* (Rodgers 1979). Through state policies *adat* has come to be seen as something people *possess* rather than something that they *practice*, making it distinct from and in many cases irrelevant to everyday life in urban areas.

The processes of *adat* homogenization are apparent in Padang as well. Comparable to residents of other regional metropolises, many of Padang's residents have migrated to Padang from villages and provinces throughout West Sumatra. Married couples in Padang tend to be "mixed," that is, comprised of individuals from different towns and villages in West Sumatra or (to a much lesser degree) other islands. Since each Minangkabau village has its own version of *adat*, metaphorically referred to in the saying "different pond, different fish" (*Jain lubuk, lain ikan*), couples from different villages have to contend with and negotiate conflicting versions of *adat* at home as well as across communities in Padang. Further, residents born or schooled in Padang come to know Minangkabau *adat* at a very elementary level of knowledge, usually through lessons learned at school or from

parents and grandparents. The result is that Minangkabau *adat* in Padang has been formalized into a generic set of customs or codified rules that can be practiced by its diverse inhabitants without conflict (see Sanday 2002). The customary authority of the mother and her brother in kin affairs is acknowledged in Padang but not carefully observed by most families because they do not maintain ties with or are too distant from the extended networks of kin in which such relationships flourish. Consequently, the practice of *adat* in Padang tends to have less salience in people's daily lives than it does for those in highland villages.

For the lesbi in Padang who identify as Minangkabau, most confess to knowing little about *adat*, although they claim it as the source of their understanding about what it means to be a Minangkabau woman or man. Based on my interviewees' responses, Minangkabau *adat* in Padang consists of a mix of kinship and wedding practices that are most clearly associated with the tendency for families to live with maternal kin, the passage of land and/or houses from mothers to daughters, the wearing of appropriate costumes at weddings, and the observance of rules about whom one is allowed to marry. It is also associated with the authority of the *ninik-mamak*, a term that Padang people understand to refer to the mother's brothers (*mamak*), rather than the authority of the mother. In Padang mother's brothers are said to be concerned with the status and social propriety of their matrilineal kin, while kinswomen are said to be concerned primarily with the management of household affairs and wedding ceremonies.

*Adat* in Padang, then, is a mix of village and urban practices, crosscut by migrant influences and national processes. As I discuss in the next chapter, this version of *adat* consists of kinship, gender, and sexual norms that are infused and partially constituted by state and Islamic discourses about properly gendered Indonesian citizens. Consequently, the importance of *adat* and Minangkabau ethnic identity to those living in Padang is muted by the diversity and history of the city in which they live. Lesbi in Padang hold an ethnic identity as Minangkabau that reflects as much about contemporary discourses and practices circulating in Indonesia as it does about a specifically Minangkabau identity.

### Social Context of Lesbi Lives

Surrounding the business district of Padang are sprawling residential neighborhoods that reflect the differences in wealth among its residents. The lesbi individuals whom I met come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from quite poor to ordinary or average households, with two tipping toward well-to-do.<sup>19</sup> Of the twenty-two from whom I was able to obtain demographic data, about two-thirds (fifteen) come from roughly the same class location, an intermediate

strata, to use Kenneth Young's (1990) term, while about one-third (seven) were from the lower strata. People in West Sumatra typically refer to three classes of people, rich, ordinary folk, and poor folk (*kaya*, *biasa*, and *miskin*), designations that are associated primarily with levels of income.

These folk designations are usually referred to as upper, middle, and lower classes by Indonesian scholars and journalists. However, class designations for Indonesia have been the subject of on-going debate.<sup>20</sup> Terms such as "middle class" or "lower class" fit imprecisely with Indonesian social groupings, leaving some scholars to rely on them merely as handy reference points rather than empirical categories. As Richard Robison (1990) points out, the term "middle class" is used to cover such a wide spectrum of Indonesian society as to render it fairly useless. Furthermore, the language of class ignores the relevance of clan rank and affiliation to social status (see Blackwood 2000). Clan rank is closely attended to in rural areas of Indonesia, for it provides the structure of village and ceremonial life. In Minangkabau villages the rank of an individual's clan (*suku*), whether high-, middle-, or low-ranking, signifies their place within the community.<sup>21</sup> These clan rankings are less salient among multiethnic urban populations.

Political analysts seem to agree that an Indonesian middle class is not homogeneous; it is comprised of people with education, some wealth, and some power, which in Indonesia includes civil servants, professionals, white-collar workers and employers (Dick 1985), or an "urban technocrat/administrative/managerial class" (Robison 1982, 131). Young (1990) makes a useful intervention in this debate by pointing out that even rural communities have an intermediate strata of entrepreneurs, village elites, low-level state functionaries, merchants, shopkeepers, and independent farming households, but these disparate groups possess no coherent political outlook. Robison's own modification incorporates Young's analysis more generally into a "populist lower middle-class" of "clerks, teachers and lower-level civil servants which ... intersects with the petty bourgeoisie and, in the countryside, with the smaller landowning families" (Robison 1996, 88). His take on a "lower middle class" is useful to describe many of the individuals and their families in this study but at the same time demonstrates the difficulties of identifying a singular "middle" class. Although scholars have been unable to agree on what constitutes these classes, the terms have become common usage in the academic literature on Indonesia. As Kipp (1993) points out, class is very much a factor in Indonesian society. Class differences exist, but what constitutes a particular class continues to be fairly amorphous.

Designating arbitrary categories of class is at best problematic and thus one task I wish to avoid. Therefore, for my purposes in this study, class signifies primarily differences in income, education, and ownership of property, a character-



ization that falls in line with people's views in West Sumatra and elsewhere in Indonesia. It is not meant to signal the existence of real or definitive social categories along the lines of Western political analysis. Within Padang, the "middle class" (*kelas menengah*) can be said to include families whose members work as small business owners, lower-level state-employed civil servants (which includes teachers and nurses), salaried professionals, and small landowners (in line with Robison's "lower middle-class"), while those in the lower class (which shades imperceptibly from the middle class) work as petty market traders, food sellers (selling food from home, in the market, or from *kaki lima*, wheeled carts), and wage laborers (for instance, maids, construction workers, factory workers, and laborers on fishing trawlers). The status of the "middle class" in Padang speaks to its intermediate status as an urban area because its social classes do not have the same levels of wealth and power as those in the middle and upper classes in Jakarta.

Family income and occupations are relevant to understanding tombois and their girlfriends in Padang because, like most unmarried Indonesians, they live with their natal families or close relatives and in some cases work for the family business. For lesbi whom I met in Padang that belong to the intermediate stratum or "middle class," their natal families have modest incomes and limited property, including some land and/or houses and a little surplus for leisure activities or family ceremonies. In this group, fathers' occupations include civil service jobs—in the military, state bureaucracy, and education, including public school teaching and administration—as well as self-employment, such as petty shop owners; mothers' occupations include primarily teaching or managing the family business with their husbands. When I asked my interviewees about their mothers' occupations, many told me their mothers were housewives, meaning they do not work outside the house, although in some cases these women own rice fields that they supervise. Families in this stratum are typically extended rather than nuclear families; other family members, including married siblings and their families, live in the same household or nearby and contribute to the family income or work in the family business. For the lesbi in Padang whose families come from the lower stratum or working class, parents and other siblings work as wage laborers, such as clerks and factory workers, or in petty trade operating small stalls in the market; additionally some of their kinswomen provide income through the sale of cooked food.

Though most of the lesbi I met lived with their natal families, other arrangements were possible. Tombois, unlike their girlfriends, do not actually sleep at home every night but may stay with friends or at their girlfriends' houses. In 2001 two couples lived together; one couple occupied a room together at the tomboi's

family house, while the other couple rented their own house, but had additional kin living with them. Most tombois and girlfriends work to support themselves and provide money to their natal families, although four are without work and are supported by their families. All rely on their families for access to jobs, extra cash, and education. Whether they are living at home or not, their lifestyles reflect their family's class location. As I discuss later in the book, this class location is an important factor in the particular readings that tombois and their girlfriends make of gendered and sexual discourses in West Sumatra.

In terms of religious orientation all but one of the tombois and girlfriends are Muslim; the one non-Muslim is Christian. Those who identify as Muslim are not devout practitioners. Women in West Sumatra must cover their heads when they observe *salat*, the ritual prayers performed five times daily. Tombois are reluctant to ignore this religious dictate in public, so they tend not to observe religious practices or do so only in private, where the requirement can be ignored. In addition they do not feel comfortable praying with men on the men's side of the mosque, although one tomboi said s/he did so once on a dare, and no one took notice. Both tombois and femmes told me that according to Islam homosexuality is a sin, but they find their own accommodations between their religious beliefs and their desires.<sup>22</sup> Islam, like *adat*, is part of the world in which they live, its holy days shaping their calendar, but the practice of piety is not important to them.

Similar to their socioeconomic backgrounds, the education levels of the twenty-two tombois and girlfriends I profiled are quite varied, but their age range is less so. Six had completed some or all of middle school (Sekolah Menengah Pertama, SMP); thirteen had completed a high school education (Sekolah Menengah Atas, SMA); three had or were currently completing an undergraduate college degree (*stratum satu*, S1). In 2004 their ages ranged from late teens to forty years of age; the average age was twenty-eight.<sup>23</sup> The bias in age toward individuals in their twenties and early thirties is due to several factors. Because I used friendship networks to make new contacts, most of the individuals I eventually met were of a similar age cohort. In addition, older individuals were less accessible. Married women involved with tombois had an established family life or professional reputation to protect and were unwilling in general even to meet me. Older tombois were hesitant to discuss their lives with me for fear of exposing their girlfriends and themselves to unwanted scrutiny from neighbors and kin.

Only five of these lesbi were or had been married, four girlfriends and one tomboi. Marriage in Indonesia is seen as the marker of adulthood, something all parents want for their children. In a country where women of twenty-four to twenty-five years of age are said to be getting past the proper age for marriage,

the high percentage of nonmarrieds in this group speaks to the determination of tombois to remain unmarried and the willingness of femmes to delay marriage, a point I discuss more fully later in the book. The three women married at the time had husbands living with them, including a newly married woman who was living in her tomboi partner's house with her new husband.<sup>24</sup>

Although not all of the twenty-two lesbi I profiled were born and raised in Padang, twenty of them identified as ethnically Minangkabau, and all spoke the Minangkabau language. The translocality of the group is evident in their family histories. Some of their families had come to Padang from locales in West Sumatra and beyond over the past twenty-five years.<sup>25</sup> Those who migrated to Padang from other towns and highland areas in West Sumatra maintained ties with their home village and ancestral kin group. Marriage, death, and, above all, the holy month of Ramadan, were occasions to visit kin and renew ties. However, since migration is often prompted by poverty and/or the hope of bettering one's chances for success, many of these families probably came from the lower ranks of village households, with little or no claim to land, and thus feel little "pull" to return home or follow village practices. Other families had lived in Padang for several generations and owned land and houses there. The family of one Minangkabau lesbi lived in Jakarta from the time she was born and only returned to Padang after she was an adult. Three lesbi were offspring of marriages between Minangkabau women and non-Minangkabau men. These three identified as Minangkabau due to the matrilineal orientation of Minangkabau people. In sum these individuals reflected the diversity of class and educational levels found in a regional metropolis. They shared an urban sensibility that drew on ethnic as well as national and religious discourses in creating the contours of their lives.

## Global Gays and Transnational Sexualities

Equally important to understanding lesbi in Padang is their access to and reception of international lesbian and gay discourse. The topic of globalized queer identities has received considerable attention since the early 1990s from both feminist and queer theorists. Ken Plummer (1992) pointed out that same-sex experiences are increasingly fashioned through the interconnectedness of the world. He suggested that queer identity "moves in fits and starts along diverse paths to disparate becomings" (1992, 16), an astute recognition of the diversity and difference that marks the lives of people in same-sex relations. As a way to bridge global and local processes, he argued that lesbian and gay studies should pay close attention to the "international connectedness yet local uniqueness" of di-

verse practices (1992, 18). In contrast Dennis Altman (1996) initially spoke confidently about the “apparent globalization of postmodern, gay identities,” claiming that new “globalized” queer identities would replace older indigenous identities, resulting in a homogeneous global gay identity. In his later work (2001), he was more attentive to cultural specificities among same-sex communities, but at the same time suggested that globalization will “lead to a gradual convergence of sexual behavior across different societies” (2001, 38). Many scholars have rightly criticized Altman’s view of global gay identity for its reductionist view of globalization, its progressive narrative from “traditional” to “modern,” and its assumption that others would strive to emulate the Western gay model (see, for example, Binnie 2004; Rofel 1999).

Indeed, the term “local-global” sets up an imaginary hierarchy of relations that index traditional to local and modern to global. In relation to sexualities the term suggests the difference between traditional (and oppressed) sexualities and a Western-defined liberated gayness (Manalansan 1997). Feminist theorists Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) move beyond the limited and simplistic dichotomy of “local-global” by using the term “transnational.” This term points to the lines that crosscut binaries of local/global and traditional/modern; it suggests that the “global” and “local” thoroughly infiltrate each other. Carrying this definition to the discussion of sexualities, they define “transnational sexualities” as the way particular genders and sexualities are shaped by a large number of processes implicated in globalization, including capitalism, diasporic movements, political economies of state, and the disjunctive flow of meanings produced across these sites (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). From a queer theory perspective, Elizabeth Povinelli and George Chauncey encourage reconsideration of “the self-evident nature of the national, the local, and the intimate” in light of the relevance of transnational processes in the production of localized sexual subjectivities (1999, 442). They identify transnational as that which moves beyond and that which circulates in specific spaces through “speech, cyberspace, film, television, telephonic media” (1999, 445).<sup>26</sup>

Various theories are offered within queer globalization studies to situate the “local” in relation to the global world. Mark Johnson, Peter Jackson, and Gilbert Herdt (2000) offer the concept of “critical regionalities” as a way to address specific historical circumstances and imagined sexual communities. They argue that this concept “provides one means through which we can move beyond the essentialized field of the ‘local’ and the unspecified and unsituated field of the ‘global’ ” (2000, 373). Gayatri Gopinath’s theory of queer regions similarly situates the key economy of meaning between local and national/transnational. Drawing on work on black sexuality in the American South, she argues that regions, such as

Kerala in India, are always crosscut by global processes but in ways that differ from those in other regions or other national frames. Regional analyses then become a way of “destabilizing dominant national narratives, and of foregrounding ‘other’ narratives that tell an entirely different story of gender, sexuality, and nationalist subjectivity” (Gopinath 2007, 343).

Thomas Boellstorff’s (1999, 2005b) efforts to locate Indonesian gay and lesbi subjectivities at the translocal scale provide another way to surmount the “local” with its sense of fixity and self-containment. Importantly, Boellstorff’s “translocal” is not predicated on the movement of people, as most gay and lesbi Indonesians “live in the towns and even households where they grew up” (1999, 481). Yet his concept is emphatically not localized. According to Boellstorff, lesbi and gay meanings are not learned at the local level but are produced through “archipelagic” or national and transnational processes, creating a translocal gay community in which “someone thousands of miles away might be ‘closer’ than someone next door who is not *gay* or *lesbi*” (2005b, 34, italics in original). By defining translocal as disconnected from locality, however, he offers only a national scale for alternative subjectivities, overlooking the specificities of locales, places, and even regions in the circulation and production of gender and sexual subjectivities. His point is well taken that lesbi and gay subjectivities are not the product of traditional or fixed local identities, but, as I demonstrate in this book, differences in sexual subjectivities across Indonesia underscore the importance of attending to regional scales and particular locales in the circulation and reception of queer knowledge.

The concept of “locality” I use here draws on Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) notion of “ethnoscapes,” a term that points to the disjunctive flow of meanings across cultural spaces. Particular global, regional, and historical flows of meaning create specific discourses, knowledges, and ways of understanding, which in turn constitute particular locations. As Ulf Hannerz suggests, locales are enduring settings with certain routines, long-term relationships, and shared understandings, comprising a unique combination of influences that are neither territorial nor privileged sites of cultural process, but a place “where various people’s habitats of meaning intersect” (1996, 28). Attention to locale can also include and take into account inequities in global processes and inequalities of place that condition the reception of these meanings (Grewal and Kaplan 2001; Tsing 2004).

If we follow Tsing’s appealing metaphor of friction, which she defines as the effect of global encounters across difference, such encounters can occur at any place and are, as she argues, “congeries of local/global interaction” (2005, 3). Her analysis then tacks back to the messy intersections where cultures and subjectivities are produced at a point that is never purely local nor purely global. Although

“transnational” is often used to refer to movement, even diasporas, and imaginaries beyond national borders, I argue that transnational sexualities can be found in one locality as well as in the queer diasporas inhabited by migrant subjects. I use the term “transnational” to signify the way individuals in place (nonmigrants) are implicated and participate in processes that extend globally. To study sexuality transnationally, then, requires a mapping out of the different scales of meanings and practices, discourses, and economies, both historically and today, in particular locales as well as across nations and regions.

Other effects of a globalizing queer studies are the tendency to essentialize and universalize human experiences by assuming the relevance of Western categories to the lives of people elsewhere (see also Plummer 1992; Jolly and Manderson 1997).<sup>27</sup> Paola Bacchetta (2002) argues that the Western neocolonial version of queer discourse tends toward an “effacement” of sexualities that do not have the appearance of modern same-sex identity emblematic of the lesbian and gay liberation movement of Europe and North America. The traditional/modern dichotomy of Western thought perpetuates the assumption that individuals who do not reflect “modern” sexual identities are backward and in need of education to become fully liberated modern queers (Grewal and Kaplan 2001). Western queer discourse to a certain extent relies on this dichotomy to create a developmental teleology that situates other sexualities as premodern, that is, not yet lesbian or gay, while placing Western sexualities at the pinnacle of modern, autonomous sexuality (see also Manalansan 1997; Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Gopinath 2002).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, as Bacchetta (2002) notes, the “from-Stonewall-diffusion-fantasy” situates the origin and foundation of the modern queer movement at a particularly American moment in time. In this universalizing turn, Western queer discourses bypass the historicity and specificity of gendered and sexual subjects within and outside the “West,” relegating their stories to the margins of queer movements.

The effacement of ethnic, postcolonial, and non-Western sexualities is particularly disabling for lesbian and transgendered subjects, who are less visible in national and global gay (men’s) movements and narrowly defined in global lesbian-feminist organizing (Bacchetta 2002; King 2002). When gay men’s practices, spaces, desires, and subcultures are the focus of transnational sexualities, they achieve iconicity as the standard by which all queer sexualities are measured.<sup>29</sup> If lesbians are not already subsumed under the term “gay” through the flawed pairing of “gay-and-lesbian,” they are simply measured against gay men, their supposed counterparts, and found to be less visible or less public, while the processes that produce these gendered subjectivities are overlooked.<sup>30</sup> In contrast my study not only shifts the focus away from putative gay metropolitan centers

but away from a model of gay subjectivity based on Western white gay men's global practices. Of particular interest in this study are the normative domestic and public spaces that serve as sites of queer female subjectivity.<sup>31</sup>

Drawing on a queer feminist approach, this book differs from global queer studies by theorizing the processes of gendering in the production of globalized queer subjectivities. In Indonesia the consequences of gender discourses are apparent in the differences in lesbi and gay communities and practices—in styles of dating, in sexual expressions, in freedom of movement, and in sociopsychological issues related to self-esteem and identity. Open, public expression of sexual desire is more acceptable, even encouraged for men than for women. Men's search for sexual adventure is more widely tolerated and institutionalized, while women's efforts to gain access to birth control or to be sexually active before marriage are roundly rejected (Bennett 2005). Expectations of marriage and motherhood leave little room for other models or goals for women, whereas the same expectations of marriage and fatherhood for men prove less restrictive to their sexual expression.<sup>32</sup>

Although many representations of femininity circulate in Indonesia (Sears 1996), the dominant state ideology offers no options to females other than heterosexual marriage and motherhood. This expectation remains hegemonic at the same time that the discourses of modernity—the importance of education, careers, and middle-class status for women—create a space for them to develop careers and postpone marriage (Blackwood 1995b). Nevertheless, as Gopinath suggests, the dominance of heterosexual and patriarchal configurations leads to the “illegibility and unrepresentability of a non-heteronormative female subject” (2005, 16). At the same time images of gender transgressive males, such as *hijra* in India or *waria* in Indonesia, are fairly commonplace.<sup>33</sup> Focusing on queer diasporic texts, Gopinath's project excavates intimate desires between women that evade the label lesbian, thus expanding the domain of queer female subjectivities. While her work and others challenge assumptions about heteronormatively oriented women, I explore the way gender discourses produce female subjects (tombois) who become legible by exceeding or transgressing normative gender.

By applying a transnational queer feminist approach to global queer studies, I seek in this book to make visible gender-transgressive or masculine females as queer subjects of the global gay ecumene. The global translation of Western sexual cartography has resulted in the misrecognition and erasure of female subjects such as tombois, who enact a culturally contextualized masculinity, as well as other transgendered females whose subjectivities and desires are expressed through gender transgression and partnering with normatively feminine women.

Despite these erasures, masculine females, who express a range of queer masculinities, are imaginable and intelligible both historically and currently in many contexts globally.<sup>34</sup>

My work unsettles the categories of lesbian and transgender by refusing to situate female/queer masculinities in either camp, preferring to stay right along the border, which is not the space of a continuum but the space of collaboration and multiple allegiances. Anzaldúa's work, and those who have followed her, point to the synergy of multiple allegiances and multiple subjectivities through which ambiguities of ethnic and sexual identities or, in this case, of femininity and masculinity, are strategically maintained. In fact Anzaldúa's metaphor of borderlands, and subsequent theorizing by queers of color from a multiracial, multiethnic perspective, play an important part in understanding the subjectivities that tombois express, a point I develop in chapter 6.<sup>35</sup> This subjectivity, which I call contingent masculinity, is conditioned by circumstances, a process rather than an entity, a masculinity that acknowledges the culturally inscribed femaleness of tomboi bodies and the material effects of that embodiment.

## Gendering Queer Subjectivities

In writing a book about gendered and sexual subjectivities, I develop an approach to tomboi and femme selves that relies on a particular framing of self, subjectivity, and gender. I use the language of subjects and subjectivity, rather than identity, in order to address the processes by which tomboi and femme selves are produced and negotiated over time. Although Stuart Hall (1996) argues that identities are never unified but are fragmented and multiply constructed, the prevailing notion that a lesbian or gay "identity" meant one had a stable or unchanging sense of self, evidenced in the LGBT movement in the 1980s and 1990s in the United States, became problematic as the boundaries of those identities began to blur (Jagose 1997). The works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and others are central to rethinking the processes by which queer subjects are constituted, offering new insights as well as new difficulties in imagining everyday lives and their material consequences. While, as has already been noted, any term has its problems, I use "subject positions" to refer to culturally constructed and ideologically dominant social categories within which individuals are slotted. I use "subjectivity" in place of "identity" because it offers a more dynamic perspective on processes of selfhood. Sherry Ortner's definition of subjectivity is useful for this analysis. It is "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects" (Ortner 2006, 107). In addition I think of



subjectivity as the sense of self, that is, the way individuals perceive themselves in relation to the subject positions they occupy. More importantly, subjectivity points to a dynamic and transformative process of self-positioning as subjects take up, engage and rework socially constituted subject positions.<sup>36</sup>

In order to address how subjects take up particular gendered positions, I begin with a conceptual framing of self as agentive. The concept of agency is a contentious issue in poststructuralist theory, which asks whether subjects actively recognize and chose their subject position(s). Many feminists find useful the poststructuralist contention that individual actions are constructed within a social reality but raise concerns over the apparent inability of the subject to act with intentionality (Alcoff 1994). In an attempt to resolve this debate within poststructuralist theory, Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner find that “subjects,” however defined, “can no longer be seen as only the effect of subjection” (1994, 18). They argue that actors always carry around or have access to enough disparate knowledge so as to be in a critical position (Dirks et al. 1994), allowing room for the possibility of transformative action. I take the stance that individual subjects are historically and culturally constructed with particular kinds of knowledge and understanding and can act within that knowledge to take up particular subject positions; their agentive ability is not, however, that of the autonomous, rational Self acting from an innate consciousness.<sup>37</sup> Rather subjects experience and embody a range of discourses and practices that make sense to them, yet set the conditions for what is thinkable or imaginable.

One strategy I use to think about the relation between self and subjectivities is to focus on the bodily aspects of subjectivity, or body knowledge. This approach follows on social theorist Henrietta Moore’s statement that the “multiple nature of subjectivity is experienced physically” (1994, 81). To slightly paraphrase Moore, to move in different spaces is to know in your body what differences involve. Theorists such as Anzaldúa (1987) and bell hooks (1990) speak of the physical feelings evoked as one moves across communities or borders, feelings that signify one’s difference in a racially oppressive context. These feelings of difference are equally telling for tombois in contexts in which their transgressive gender practices create friction.

Body knowledge refers to physical sensations experienced in interactions with others that are perceived or interpreted as feelings of, for instance, safety, comfort, and pleasure or discomfort, unease, and anxiety. Tombois told me how certain interactions feel right, or awkward, or uncomfortable; they rely on these embodied feelings as markers and signposts of their masculinity. In relying on their bodies to confirm their masculinity, tombois substantiate “a theory in the flesh,” which is the term E. Patrick Johnson uses to describe knowledge that is

rooted in the body (2005, 135). Johnson envisions this knowledge as the basis for “quare” studies, a version of queer studies that “moves beyond simply theorizing subjectivity and agency as discursively mediated to theorizing how that mediation may propel material bodies into action” (2005, 135). This move to attend to bodies, whether racialized or transgendered, offers a more nuanced approach to the processes by which subjects mediate and manage multiple discourses and subject positions.

Another useful strategy I employ to understand the ways subjects experience and express their subject positions is to look at what I call practical enactment. Moore suggests that “the enactment of subject positions based on gender provides the conditions for the experience of gender” (1994, 56). She highlights here the importance of enactment in giving meaning to and constructing a particular experience of gender, a process that creates the feelings of rightness and belonging to a particular gendered subject position—for that moment and in that context but not necessarily always. This notion of enactment offers the possibility of strategic agency that does not necessarily require conscious thought because, as Moore suggests, “actions themselves can be a type of critical reflection that does not necessarily have to involve conscious, discursive strategizing” (1994, 77). Thus individuals can take up particular gender positions through a practical enactment of those positions and not necessarily through conscious choice. Moore’s thinking here draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) understanding of the relation between practice and structure, or “habitus” in Bourdieu’s terminology. Bourdieu states that practical sense is made of the world through the constant reinforcement given to particular practices. Here emphasizing the homogeneity of a particular habitus, Bourdieu is intent on demonstrating the intelligibility of ordinary everyday practices and the sense of reality that they create. For him, particular practices, constantly reinforced, create a practical sense of the world.

Because practical enactments and manipulations of gender knowledge have social consequences, however, I want to strengthen Bourdieu’s concept of “practical sense” by accounting for the power of normative social categories. Such categories have a certain power or efficacy that is gained when one adheres to the proper models, in this case, the models of man or woman as culturally defined. Bourdieu calls this efficacy the “sense of reality” found in mastery of a common code or dispositions (1990, 60). The force of these discursively produced social categories, if understood in Bourdieu’s sense of habitus, lies in the way people understand the world; it is “what causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted” (1990, 58). In this sense the power of normativity lies in its ability to “naturalize” particular social categories or subject positions and make them invisible because they are taken for

granted. This perception of normativity is somewhat different from Foucault's, in which the power of normativity resides in its material and social effects. Bourdieu moves us some distance toward understanding normalizing processes, but Foucault provides a sharper edge to make sense of processes and technologies of normalization *and* stigmatization in the proliferation of sexualities and, for my purposes in this book, gendered subjectivities.

Normative social categories may generate a practical sense of reality, but their material and social effects are critical to their power. Normative gender sets the conditions for the subject positions that people take up, yet in order to account for the appearance of non-normative genders I draw on Foucault's notion of power as productive. The social rewards, or in Foucault's terms, the pleasures associated with normativity, include family and community approval, social access and status, a self consistent with others, a future, a family, sentiments of cultural belonging, and a certain ability to act and make decisions that are valued and recognized by others. These pleasures move one toward the subject position culturally assigned to one's body, race, or class. Challenges to normative categories risk social disapproval and loss of material or social benefits, but at the same time they provide other social or material rewards. Those who take up alternative or subordinate subject positions may see themselves, and may even be seen by others, as brave, individualist, scandalous, provocative, or desirable, depending on the particular dispositions available. Even if negatively construed, the intelligibility of such positions and the space created for them imbues them with a certain meaning and power that offers other ways to social status, family, and cultural belonging. Thus non-normative subject positions are enabled by the same processes that produce normative ones, but within certain limits and dependent on certain conditions.

## Lesbi, Tomboi, Female Masculinity, Transgender, Queer: Meanings and Contexts

The history of colonization by the West, including its social scientists, has been the history of imposing categories and meanings on others. The terms I have chosen to use in this book reflect my desire to avoid conflating Western and Indonesian meanings while at the same time making connections across their differences.<sup>38</sup> Any English classificatory term for "gender" or "sexuality" that I use in this book can be contested because their meanings are not fixed and their use in translation to represent other meanings and practices may be ill fitting at best. In fact, my own preferences have changed over the time I have been writ-

ing about Indonesian tombois and their girlfriends, in part due to the growing popularity of certain terms in the American English lexicon, such as “queer,” and in part to my own developing ideas about the meanings of gender, transgender, and globalization. Here I lay out the reasons for the choices I have made and then elaborate on these terms throughout the book.

The terms “lesbi” and “lesbian” are Indonesian words used in Indonesian print media and by lesbi, gay, and waria individuals and activists. The terms have circulated in Indonesia since the early 1980s and tend to be used interchangeably. The meaning of lesbi fluctuates depending on who is using the term. I have seen it used in print media to refer to a woman involved with another woman, a woman who is attracted to a tomboi, or a female who acts like a man. With the emergence of the lesbian activist movement in Jakarta in the 1990s, efforts were made to restrict the definition of the term “lesbi” to a woman who loves another woman, which was in accord with the lesbian feminist and international lesbian activist definition of “lesbian,” a process that I discuss more fully in chapter 7. In this book I use “lesbi” instead of “lesbian” for two reasons. First, despite the fact that “lesbi” is a cognate of the English term “lesbian,” it does not share the same meanings and resonances as its English counterpart. The English word “lesbian” calls up Eurocentric notions of a sexual orientation directed toward other women and an identity that is a core aspect of one’s self. Katie King, who argues against using a global term, points out that in global lesbian feminist writing, “lesbian” has come to be defined as “lifelong, stable after ‘coming out,’ autonomous of heterosexuality, sex-centered, politically feminist, not situational, and exclusive of marriage” (2002, 42). In contrast, the term “lesbi” is used in Padang as an umbrella term to refer to both tombois and their partners, thus signaling a gender-based practice marked by difference.

Second, using the term “lesbi” serves as a reminder of the differences between Indonesian lesbi and Euro-American lesbians, who are themselves quite various. Gopinath rightly warns against a tendency to hold the category of lesbian as the standard against which other forms of female desires are measured. She encourages descriptions that “exceed fixed framings of sexuality” (1998, 119), to which must be added gender. And yet at the same time North American, Australian, and European LGBT terminologies have been appropriated and complexly intertwined with localized meanings (Blackwood and Wieringa 2007). In some cases the terms “lesbian” and “gay” are used by members of national activist organizations, as is the case in Indonesia, because these are internationally known terms that can be used as identifiers across multilingual and ethnically diverse countries. Consequently, the word “lesbian” has a place in the Indonesian lexicon despite its foreign origin.

I use the term “lesbi” as an inclusive term for both tombois and femmes. The term is used and acknowledged among lesbi in Padang, although, as I noted earlier, they prefer to use the gender-marked terms *cowok* (guy) for tombois and *cewek* (girl) for women involved with tombois (see further Blackwood 1998). The lesbi I interviewed usually used the terms *cowok* and *cewek* without any modifier when they were talking amongst themselves or to me. However, if I was not sure whether they were talking about ordinary men and women or tombois and femmes, they would clarify by saying *cewek lesbi*, girls who are lesbi, or *cowok lesbi*, guys who are lesbi.<sup>39</sup>

Because I think it is important to mark the gender differences between masculine and feminine partners in a lesbi relationship, and because this is the practice among Padang lesbi, I use the gendered terms “tomboi” for a masculine partner and “girlfriend” or “femme” for a feminine partner. My choice of the English cognate “tomboi” and the English word “femme,” rather than *cowok* and *cewek*, as is commonly used in Padang, stems from a desire to use words that are recognizable to English speakers (and more easily pronounceable). Saskia Wieringa (1999, 2007) prefers to use “butch” for masculine-identified lesbi, which would seem to be the obvious choice when paired with “femme,” but I am afraid the term “butch,” which is so closely identified in the United States with a type of lesbian, would foreclose readers’ ability to imagine tombois as transgender.

My preference for using tomboi as well as lesbi differs from other scholars writing on lesbi in Indonesia, some of whom have chosen to use lesbi only, including Dédé Oetomo and B. J. D. Gayatri, or lesbi primarily, with brief references to tomboi (Boellstorff). Davies uses terms particular to South Sulawesi (hunter, *calalai*). Gayatri notes that tomboi “is indeed generally used, especially in Jakarta” (1994, 8), but avoids using it herself because of the implication of masculine behavior that she feels is inappropriate for lesbi *women*. The term was apparently available in the 1980s in Indonesia but became more commonly used in the 1990s for a masculine lesbi. Although tombois can be included under the label lesbi, a tomboi is not always the same as a lesbi. The term “tomboi,” which refers to gender behavior, does not necessarily connote sexuality, while the term “lesbi” does. Boellstorff (2005b) notes that the term “tomboi” first appears in a 1991 Indonesian dictionary, where it is defined as a young girl with boyish behaviors. Thus young girls who act boyishly by wearing pants and being physically active in sports may be called tombois, as one twenty-four-year old tomboi’s statement indicates: “All my sisters [and I] are tombois, but I’m the only lesbi.”

As should be clear by now, even though tombois may be included under the umbrella category of lesbi, they are not “women” as that construct is normatively defined in Indonesia. I address various aspects of tomboi gender subjectivity

throughout the book. At this point let me say that tombois identify as men and therefore do not consider themselves women. They interact with others in everyday life as men; however, they enact feminine behaviors in certain contexts and are addressed by female terms by their relatives and neighbors.

In the conundrum of sex and gender there are no easy solutions for the translation problem that tombois' gender subjectivity poses. No English pronoun adequately conveys the Indonesian usage, in which the third person pronoun (*dia*) is gender neutral. Saskia Wieringa (2007) uses "s/he" and "hir" to refer to Jakarta butches, while other writers have chosen to use the English pronoun that seems to most closely resemble their subjects' gender identity.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Boellstorff (2005b) refers to tombois as "he" based on their statements to him that they see themselves as having men's souls, although he includes them in the category of lesbi *women*. Sinnott (2004) uses "she" for *toms* in Thailand, which is based on her assessment that *toms* are transgendered females who do not "pass" as men, and who claim a hybrid masculinity that both appropriates and rejects aspects of Thai masculinity.<sup>41</sup> While not negating these other choices, to my mind "he" or "she" act as glosses that foreclose the complexity of multiple subjectivities that tombois (or *toms*) enact. These English pronouns also have the potential to reinsert transgressively gendered individuals into binary genders.

My own choices reflect a rethinking over time. In the very first article I wrote on tombois, a reflexive piece about my relationship with Dayan that sought to challenge the distance inscribed in ethnographic fieldwork between "us" and "them" (Blackwood 1995a), I used "she" when referring to Dayan. At that time, given my own self-positioning as a lesbian, I was more comfortable thinking of Dayan as female despite h/er comments that s/he felt like a man. I assumed that because s/he used the word "lesbi" for h/herself, s/he was somewhere between butch and transgender. By the time I wrote "*Tombois*" in 1998, however, I had become convinced that female pronouns were inappropriate for tombois because they consider themselves to be men. Consequently, in that journal article I switched to the gender-neutral third-person pronouns "s/he" and "hir," which were gaining currency in the U.S. transgender movement, as a way to disrupt the binary genders of the English language. I continue to use s/he but have changed hir to h/er in part for consistency in the form of the two words (I use the same pronouns for male-bodied women). More importantly, pronouns such as "ze" and "hir" mentioned by David Valentine (2007) seem to me to signal a "third gender" slot for transgendered individuals that I want to avoid because they have the potential to reinforce the normality of binary genders. By using the pronoun constructions "s/he" and "h/er," I want to leave open the meanings of tomboi (and waria) subjectivity. Note that the pronouns s/he and h/er are different from

the construction “she/he,” which has a somewhat derogatory connotation in U.S. English of someone who is both woman and man, suggesting a confused blending of genders.<sup>42</sup>

Tombois’ girlfriends do not trouble gender pronoun usage because they identify as normative women, making “she” the appropriate third-person pronoun in English. Girlfriends, however, are not simply normative women, but women who are involved with tombois. Lesbi in Padang sometimes distinguish between ordinary women (*cewek biasa*) and women who are lesbi (*lesbi cewek*). Because the women I interviewed generally identify as lesbi only when they are in relationships with tombois, I refer to them as “girlfriends,” which is a translation of the Indonesian word *pacar*, a gender-neutral term for girlfriend or boyfriend, used by both tombois and girlfriends. But since “girlfriend” indexes these women only in relation to their partners, I also use the term “femme.” As I discuss further in chapter 7, both “butch” and “femme” were part of the Indonesian lesbi vocabulary probably as early as the 1980s and were derived from the U.S. English terms used in lesbian communities historically (see Nestle 1992b; Kennedy and Davis 1993). The terms appeared in print in at least one Indonesian women’s magazine sometime in 1981–1983 (Puteri 1984; the original date of publication is not given). By using “femme,” I am not suggesting that girlfriends have the same feelings or desires as femmes in the United States, who, according to Joan Nestle (1992a), see themselves differently from normative women. And of course “femme,” as used in the United States, is itself not static but has changed over time and incorporates a range of differing subjectivities.<sup>43</sup> Further, as I demonstrate in this book, the Indonesian terms are contested among lesbi as well, either directly or indirectly through localized processes of meaning construction. Thus my translation of Indonesian terms with words such as femme or girlfriend must be taken as provisional glosses rather than fixed signifiers.

I am equally cautious when applying the term “transgender” to tomboi subjectivities because the complexity of their practices makes untenable a simple equation of tomboi with transgender. As a term used in the United States, “transgender” has shifted in meaning since the 1990s from a more general category to a specific identity. In discussing the U.S. transgender movement Riki Wilchins (1997) warns against the likelihood of “transgender” becoming an identity with a capital “T.”<sup>44</sup> Ten years later David Valentine’s (2007) discussion of transgender studies identifies some of the processes at work in the institutionalization of the term. My own caution, then, stems not from any desire to reinstitute the border wars between categories of butch and FTM (Female to Male), as it has been debated among transgender and lesbian writers in the United States, Canada,

and Europe, but to leave open the possible meanings of “transgender.”<sup>45</sup> As I discuss in chapter 7, “transgender” is used by lesbian activist groups in Jakarta to distinguish *between* lesbi women and masculine-identified tombois; this usage, however, conflicts with tombois’ understanding of themselves as lesbi.

Ultimately I am not interested in seeking new or better ways of imagining transgender, to borrow David Valentine’s phrase, but to complicate masculinity and femininity by addressing the possibility of multiple and contingent selves. By situating tombois’ masculinity as contingent, I offer a concept of trans-identities and gendered subjectivities that takes into account the social relations and cultural frameworks within which people live and make sense of their self-understandings. In this vein I understand “gender” as a process of meaning assignment to particular bodies that is always in negotiation and always being produced in relation to particular social, political, and historical contexts. Or, as Wilchins (1997) aptly puts it, gender is a fiction that does not exist prior to the political system that created it.

Another term that may avoid the potential fixity of “transgender” in a global world is Halberstam’s (1998) concept of female masculinities. Halberstam employs the term as a way to separate masculinity from men, thereby usefully undermining the naturalness of men’s performance of masculinity. In creating a new taxonomy, she offers a way to see subjectivities beyond the binaries of Western gender categories. By not fixing a position called “transsexual” or “transgender” or “butch lesbian,” she offers a way to think about female masculinities that can incorporate differing versions of masculinities, such as those found in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, although for transmen in the United States who see their bodies as male, the term is less apt (see Noble 2006). In using “masculine females,” I make no claims to the coherence of such a category, nor do I place all masculine females within a single identity framework (see also Rubin 1992). I do not mean to suggest that these individuals are “men” or even that they constitute a “third gender,” as such assignments tend to overlook the particular histories, practices, and experiences of culturally and globally situated individuals.

I also find it useful to use the term “queer” in this book. The term has become popular in academic and activist circles primarily in the United States and Australia (less so in Europe), where it is used to disrupt identity politics. Because it emerges from and defines a particular Western discourse, it is problematic as a global signifier for groups and movements oriented around sexualities. But at the same time, because it is proliferating in the discourse of U.S. and Australian academics and activists, as well as in international conferences and Web sites, I find it difficult to make an artificial distinction between (Western) discourses



that use the term “queer” and (other) discourses on sexualities that might not use the term. In a transnational world there are no borders or neat boundaries that contain particular words. Nor, as Ruth Vanita (2002) points out, are words or meanings ever fixed; all terms are approximations and never fit well across or even within borders. Transnational sexualities are by definition porous sites.

My use of “queer” stems from my understanding of the complexity of sexual discourses and knowledges that circulate and proliferate globally under such signifiers as lesbian, gay, LGBT, same-sex sexuality, bisexuality, and transgender, as well as words in national languages adopted from or in reference to those terms. The use of “queer” may reify or reproduce a Western way of understanding a current profusion of non-normative gender and sexual subjectivities in the United States, but I think the value, and also the problem, in using “queer” lies in its nonspecificity. As I use it, “queer” refers to a range of transgressive possibilities that encompass and surpass “LGBT,” thus creating a more inclusive global gay ecumene (see also Rofel 1999), even as it erases specificities across those same spaces.

Although “queer” is not used in Indonesia at this time, it is available to Indonesians via the Internet and at the queer international conferences they attend.<sup>46</sup> Part of the purpose of this book is to examine the processes by which labels are established, appropriated, and claimed. I use “queer,” then, when I discuss multiple forms of gender and sexual subjectivities, discourses, or knowledges. Terms such as “queer knowledge” and “queer discourses,” in relation to Indonesia in this book, refer to discourses that are inflected by and participate in the globalized discourses of sexualities. I do not use “queer,” however, in reference to specific subjectivities in Indonesia but instead use Indonesian words, such as lesbi or tomboi.

This discussion of terminologies is meant to provide some preliminary guidelines to the subjectivities represented in this book. It is my intent to analyze the complexities and reworkings of these subjectivities without limiting them to rigid definitions or expectations about what “modern” selves must be like. Whether tomboi, girlfriend, masculine female, lesbi, transgendered, femme, or woman is used, none of these labels are meant to suggest fixity, consistency, or unidimensionality. Each one reflects part of the complex and contradictory practices in which tombois and their partners engage.

This book offers the experiences and words of tombois and femmes as a way to understand the global connections and localized practices that constitute their subjectivities. Even though tombois and their girlfriends in Padang do not fit

the model of Western sexual identity, they are a product of national and transnational processes in much the same way as those in the West. By examining tomboi and femme selves in the context of global queer movements, this book demonstrates the multiplicity of sexual and gender subjectivities in Indonesia and the importance of recognizing and validating these subjectivities in global queer space.

# Notes

## Chapter 1: Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Desires

*Epigraph.* Butler 1993, 231.

1. When referring to tombois, I use the pronominal constructions “s/he” and “h/er” as a way to disrupt the binary genders of the English language. This point is discussed more fully later in the chapter.
2. To protect their identities, I use fictitious names for all the individuals mentioned in this book. In addition, life history details are altered or purposely left imprecise to some extent to maintain anonymity of the individuals.
3. See also Boellstorff 2005b; Mark Johnson 2005; Wilson 2004.
4. See also definitions offered by Bornstein 1994; Wilchins 1997.
5. *Lesbi* and *gay* are Indonesian words derived from the English terms “lesbian” and “gay,” but they do not have the same meanings as their cognates. *Gay* is used in Indonesia to refer to gay men only.
6. For critiques of anthropological ethnocartography, see Boellstorff 2002; Weston 1993.
7. *Waria* is one of the Indonesian terms for male-bodied individuals who dress and act in a manner similar to normatively gendered women and take men as lovers. For *gay*, see note 5.
8. For lengthier discussions of issues related to research on lesbians, see Blackwood 2002; Sinnott 2009; Saskia Wieringa and Blackwood 1999. For discussion of problems related to historical research on lesbians, see Vicinus 1993.
9. See Blackwood 1995a, 1998, for a more detailed discussion of these individuals’ lives.
10. I use the pronominal construction “s/he” for waria as well as for tombois. See note 1.
11. Most people in West Sumatra speak two languages, Indonesian, the national language, and Minangkabau, the first language for most people born in West Sumatra. I usually conducted interviews together with my research associate, who is a native speaker of Minangkabau. Since most of my interviewees spoke Minangkabau as their first language and were more comfortable in that language, Sri took the lead in the interviews, asking questions in Minangkabau; I would follow up with some questions in Indonesian. Our conversations outside of formal interviews were a mix of Minangkabau and Indonesian.

12. See Kennedy and Davis 1993 on a butch-femme community in the 1930s–1960s in New York State. See Nestle 1992a, 1992b; Stein 1997, regarding the rejection of butches and femmes by lesbian feminists in the 1970s.
13. For a detailed history of the region, see Abdullah 1972; Dobbin 1983; Drakard 1990.
14. Based on shipping data from 2001–2005, <http://www.telukbayurport.com>, accessed September 30, 2006.
15. Based on economic factors such as facilities and services provided, Rutz (1987, 208) lists Padang as a “higher order center with partial functions of a regional metropolis”; it falls just below six major urban centers in Indonesia labeled as “regional metropolises” and the one Indonesian city Rutz labels a metropolis, Jakarta.
16. Exact figures are not available because state census statistics do not identify inhabitants by ethnicity.
17. See Blackwood 2000; Sanday 2002.
18. The New Order refers to the regime of General Suharto, who became acting head of state in 1966 and remained president up until 1998.
19. I also heard stories of several wealthy married women who had been involved with tombois, but I was unable to meet any of these women.
20. See Dick 1985; Robison 1982, 1996; Tanter and Young 1990.
21. The ranking of Minangkabau clans is based on the origins of the clan members. Those who first settled the village became the elite or high-ranking lineages. Later arrivals (“newcomers”) attached themselves to the high-ranking lineages to become the middle rank or client lineages. The low rank was composed of descendants of slaves, or servant kin, who served elite families and were subordinate to them. See Blackwood 2000.
22. See Boellstorff 2005a for a discussion of gay Muslims in Indonesia.
23. Of the four lesbi I met in 1990, the three tombois were at that time all in their late twenties to early thirties; the one woman involved with a tomboi was in her early fifties.
24. Her story is presented in chapter 5.
25. These migrants came primarily from the northern and coastal districts of West Sumatra, including Pasaman and Padang Pariaman, and the southern district of Pesisir Selatan.
26. See also Manalansan 1997, 2003, which call for recognition of multiple localized articulations of sexualities.
27. This problem, of course, is not just true of queer studies but has been a founding assumption in Western scholarship, as a number of feminists and other scholars have pointed out. See for example, Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Mohanty 1991.
28. In fact tracing queer globalization may unintentionally highlight European and American origins. See, for instance, Puar’s (2001) identification of queer globalization processes in Trinidad with the multiple circuits of gay tourism, postcolonial

- gay identities, global gay cities, international HIV/AIDS activism, and global drag performances.
29. See also Gopinath 2007; Nast 2002; Sinnott 2009.
  30. See further Blackwood 2002.
  31. Other analyses of queer female subjectivities in Southeast Asia and in diasporic South Asian texts include Gopinath 2005; Sinnott 2004; Wilson 2004.
  32. See Boellstorff 2005b; Howard 1996.
  33. Regarding *bijra*, see Nanda 1990; Reddy 2005.
  34. For Asia, see Sinnott 2004; Saskia Wieringa, Blackwood and Bhaiya 2007; Wilson 2004; for Africa, see Morgan and Wieringa 2005.
  35. See in particular, Alarcón 1990; E. Patrick Johnson 2005; Moya 1997; Quiroga 2000; Sandoval 2000.
  36. For more on this topic, see Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007; Hall 1996; Ortner 2006.
  37. For more in-depth discussion of this topic, see Dirks, Eley, and Ortner 1994; Mahmood 2005; Moore 1994.
  38. For more discussion of the problem of categories in sexuality studies, see Elliston 1995; Mohanty 1991; Saskia Wieringa and Blackwood 1999.
  39. Note on pronunciation: “c” in Indonesian is pronounced like “ch” in “church,” “e” is pronounced “ay” (ā), “k” in this instance is a glottal stop. Thus *cewek* is pronounced “chayway’” for speakers of U.S. English.
  40. Davies (2007a, 2007b) also uses s/he and hir for *calalai* (male-identified females) and *calabai* (female-identified males) in Sulawesi.
  41. See also Besnier 1993; Elliston 1999; Kulick 1998 regarding their takes on gender/pronoun usage.
  42. Thanks to Jeffrey Dickemann for pointing this out to me.
  43. See, for instance, Volcano and Dahl 2008; also the Femme Collective at <http://www.femmecollective.com>, accessed December 24, 2008.
  44. See also Towle and Morgan 2002.
  45. Literature on the butch/FTM border wars includes Halberstam 1994, 1998; Halberstam and Hale 1998; Rubin 1992. See also Cromwell 1999.
  46. A good example of such a conference was the 1st International Conference of Asian Queer Studies held in Bangkok, Thailand, July 2005 and sponsored by the AsiaPacifiQueer Network of Sydney, Australia.

## Chapter 2: Shifting Discourses of Gender and Desire

*Epigraph.* Stoler 1995, 166.

1. See Foucault 1978, 1980.
2. See, among many others, Ramazanoğlu 1993; Hartsock 1990; Sawicki 1991.

3. See, for example, Abrams 2002.
4. See, in particular, Manderson and Jolly 1997.
5. See Blackwood 2005a; Peletz 2006, 2009.
6. See Andaya 2000; Boellstorff 2005b; Duff-Cooper 1985; Mark Johnson 1997; Karsch-Haack 1911; van der Kroef 1954; Peletz 1997, 2002, 2006; Sinnott 2004 (esp. chap. 2); Yengoyan 1983.
7. See Blackwood 2005a regarding the disappearance of female ritual transvestites. Peletz 2006 provides a rich history of the decline of male ritual transvestites across Southeast Asia. Andaya 2000 shows that male-bodied *bissu*, ritual transvestites in Muslim South Sulawesi, continued to practice until well into the twentieth century despite conversion to Islam. Davies 2007a (chap. 6) documents contemporary *bissu*, who perform for ordinary people as well as nobility.
8. See Blackwood 2005a; Atkinson 1990; Davies 2007a for more details.
9. Many thanks to Tom Boellstorff for sharing this account with me.
10. Similarly Sinnott recounts an older style of female masculinity in Thailand, before the word *tom* was coined, in which a masculine woman was said to be “like a man” or referred to as “the woman who was like a man” (2004, 53–56).
11. The history of women’s efforts to gain political power in Indonesia documents some of the ways these gender ideologies were refined. See Hadler 2008; Sears 1996; Saskia Wieringa 1992, 2002.
12. The five principles of the *Pancasila* are: (1) belief in one God, (2) just and civilized humanitarianism, (3) Indonesian unity/nationalism, (4) democracy led by wisdom born of consultation, and (5) social justice for the Indonesian people (Morfit 1986).
13. The one exception was a married woman who was born in 1964 and did not self-identify as a lesbi, despite being involved with a tomboi.
14. This discussion bypasses a long-simmering debate in Western gender theory about the relation between “sex” and “gender” and whether they should be conceptually distinguished or not.
15. See Blackburn 2004; Robinson 1989; Sullivan 1994.
16. The substantial literature on the state ideology of women as wives and mothers includes Bennett 2005; Blackburn 2004; Brenner 1998; Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987; Sears 1996; Sullivan 1994; Suryakusuma 1996; Saskia Wieringa 1992. See also Boellstorff 2005b; Howard 1996 regarding men and the Indonesian state’s family imperative (*azas kekeluargaan*).
17. See also Gouda 1995.
18. But see Bowen 1993; Hefner 2000; and particularly van Doorn-Harder 2006.
19. NU is considered more traditionalist and Muhammadiyah reformist or modernist. These two organizations claim a total membership of 70 million (van Doorn-Harder 2006; Hooker and Lindsey 2003).
20. Wahid is a highly respected Muslim cleric who was the third president of Indonesia (1999–2001).

21. With the end of Indonesian state control of television in the mid-1990s and the increase in foreign television series and movies, the range of women characters has increased dramatically.
22. See Hatley 1990; Hughes-Freeland 1995; Keeler 1987; Pausacker 1991; Peacock 1968; Saskia Wieringa 2000.
23. The two stories appeared in *Tempo*, April 23 and 30, 1981.
24. See also Boellstorff 2005b.
25. See also Alison Murray 1999; Oetomo 1996.
26. The Minangkabau terms can be translated “mother cow” and “calf” (connotation unknown). My consultant explained that the two men become sweethearts (*jadi gula-gula*). Aceh had a similar tradition, called *seudati* or *sadati*, of young men performers who played women’s roles and had men lovers (Dr. Herwandi, Department of Literature, Andalas University, personal communication, July 7, 2004; see also Hurgronje 1906; Oetomo 1987, 2001).
27. See also Pauka 1998.
28. Folktales have been standardized and published by the Indonesian and Regional Literature Project of the Indonesian State Department of Education and Culture.
29. One of the earliest appears to be a novel by the Chinese Indonesian writer Lie Kim Hok written in 1884, which is itself based on an older epic Malay folktale, *Syair Abdul Muluk*. Lie’s novel recounts the exploits of Siti Raffiah, second wife of Abdul Muluk, who dresses as a man in order to rescue her kidnapped husband and along the way kills seven men and is married to the younger daughter of the sultan as a reward for bringing peace to his land (Zaini-LaJoubert 1996). Other Minangkabau stories that draw from this genre include *Siti Baberam* and *Sabai nan Aluih*. Many thanks to Matthew Cohen for bringing this literature to my attention.
30. My synopsis is based on the preface and summary in the book, which is written in Indonesian. The tale is written in Minangkabau.
31. Elements of this text that are incongruent with Minangkabau matrilineal practices suggest it originated with Chinese and Malay storytellers. For instance, Nafis (n.d.) notes that the father has a lead role, whereas in many Minangkabau tales the uncle plays a lead role. In still others, the senior woman or mother has the lead role (see Johns 1958). At story’s end Gadih Ranti moves with her children to her husband’s kingdom, whereas according to Minangkabau matrilocal practice, her husband would remain with her.
32. The chapter is titled “Gadiah Ranti bajalan panjang” (M.) (Gadiah Ranti’s distant travels).
33. Jennifer Fraser, e-mail to author dated July 21, 2004. Thanks to Jennifer, who recorded this performance, for bringing it to my attention.
34. Further, as I argued in Blackwood 2000, despite the dominant ideology of womanhood, rural Minangkabau women in Taram construct their own understandings of motherhood and wifedom that incorporate their ownership, control, and/or labor in the rice fields.

35. For other expressions of gender nonconformity in Indonesia, see Alison Murray 1999; Sears 1996; Saskia Wieringa 2002.
36. The relevant chapter in Oetomo 2001 is “Homoseksualitas di Indonesia,” originally published in 1991.
37. See also Jackson 1997.
38. A young tomboi from South Sumatra said the term s/he knew was *jantan tino*, which means male-female or effeminate male. *Jantan* means male, *tino* is short for *batino* (*betina*, Indonesian), which means female or woman in South Sumatra (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004).
39. See Robinson 2001 for further discussion of the relation between *adat* and Islam.
40. Article 292 of the State Penal Code.
41. See Alexander 1991; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Puar 2001.
42. Regarding Dutch treatment of homosexuality and transgender behavior historically, see Crompton 1981; Dekker and van der Pol 1989; van der Meer 1991.
43. For further discussion of these changing discourses, see Blackwood 2007.
44. See Dwyer 2002 for more on the complexity of processes between the nation and everyday life.

### Chapter 3: Learning to Be Boys and Girls

1. For overviews of the anthropological literature on childhood, see Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 2007; Hirschfeld 2002.
2. For examples of feminist anthropological studies that address girlhood, see Abu-Lughod 1993; Callaway 1987; Watson 1986.
3. See also Mageo 1991.
4. See also Benedict 1939; Munroe, Whiting, and Hally 1969.
5. See, for example, Besnier 1993; Elliston 1999; Herdt 1993; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Mark Johnson 1997; Manalansan 2003.
6. Adolescence for girls in the United States disrupts that truth as their tomboyish behavior, which had previously been accepted as a phase of childhood, is now met with a blanket refusal by others to relate to or see them as tomboys or to treat them as anything other than feminine women. See Elise 1999; Halberstam 1999.
7. See Bowen 1991; George 1996; Junus 1994; Steedly 1993; Tambiah 1985.
8. I assume that any harrowing or abusive events experienced by tombois at the hands of their parents or other kin would have been mentioned to me.
9. See Lancaster 2003 on the prevalence of biological views in U.S. media accounts of homosexuality.
10. See further Shelly Errington 1983; Keeler 1987 regarding Indonesian selves.
11. Like any folk theory, this one works when it works. Other tombois did not grow up surrounded by brothers or other men but had both brothers and sisters, and, in one case, all sisters.



## Chapter 4: Doing Gender

*Epigraph.* Butler 1990, 174.

1. The social history of this dichotomy is quite extensive; Eley 1994 provides a good introduction to its use from the French Revolution through Habermas that includes various feminist critiques. See also Gal 2002; Landes 1998; Yanagisako and Collier 1987.
2. See, for example, Mary Weismantel's discussion (2001) of the blurring of domestic/public space by Andean market women.
3. See Phillips et al. 2000; Gill Valentine 2002.
4. For works that attend to relations between queer and non-queer family and kin, see Manalansan 2003; Quiroga 2000; Wekker 2006. Other relevant work queering non-white/non-U.S. intimate domestic space includes Gopinath 1998; Patel 2004.
5. From the *Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, accessed on-line Sept. 30, 2008.
6. See also Kulick (2000); Livia and Hall (1997).
7. This speech practice may vary within and across locales in West Sumatra and may also depend on the relative status of speakers.
8. According to J. Errington (1998), *mami*, *papi*, *tante*, and *om*, which are Dutch cognates, are commonly used among educated urban speakers and are considered typical of Jakartan lingo. Use of these terms in Padang demonstrates their movement beyond Jakarta. However, unlike Errington's Javanese speakers, who use *mami* and *papi* to refer to parents, lesbi couples in Padang use the terms for each other.
9. See also Kulick 1998.
10. As I discuss in chapter 6, however, some public spaces do carry risks for tombois. Their unwillingness to use men's restrooms speaks to a concern about the possible risks present in such an intimate, yet public, men's space.

## Chapter 5: Desire and Difference

1. "Coming out" takes many different forms, but see Stanley and Wolf 1980; Zimmerman 2000.
2. Upik and Jon's relationship also seems to bear some similarity to the much-debated woman-marriages in Africa, although in this case neither partner had any money to begin with.
3. Some of the tombois may prefer not to be touched sexually, although I did not ask any of the tombois I interviewed about that. Sinnott 2004 mentions the practice of untouchability among *toms* in Thailand. Some masculine females in the United States who engage in a similar practice are called stone butch. See Faderman 1991; Feinberg 1993; Kennedy and Davis 1993.
4. See Bennett 2005; Blackwood 1995b, 1998; Howard 1996.
5. See also Boellstorff 2005b; Howard 1996.

6. As with gender, the mechanisms that regulate sexuality are a product of the synthesis of customary practices (*adat*) and Islamic law. See Robinson 2001.
7. Schein's 2000 discussion of shifts in Miao identity offers a similar example, although the potential consequences are not as severe.

## Chapter 6: Ambiguities in Family, Community, and Public Spaces

*Epigraph.* Mohanty 1991, 11.

1. See Boellstorff 2005b; Howard 1996.
2. See Blackwood 2000; Kipp 1993.
3. See Geertz 1984; Kipp 1993.
4. See also Bennett 2005; Howard 1996.
5. In contrast, see David Murray, who counterpoises Martinique *gai* men's concerns to maintain family respectability with their desires to escape to places where "same-sex desire and sociality may be freely expressed" (2000, 268).
6. See Stack 1974; also Blackwood 2005b. For literature on Afro-Caribbean extended families, see, for instance, Mohammed 1986; Monagan 1985; Olwig 1981.
7. See also Sinnott 2004.
8. The term *banci* is considered somewhat derogatory and was replaced by the neologism "waria."
9. See Butler 1999; Case 1993; Davy 1994; Meyer 1994; Sarah Murray 1994; Tyler 1991. Davy 1994, for instance, argues that camp does not work for lesbian theatrical endeavors in the way that it does for gay men.
10. However, even during the time Peacock conducted his research in the 1960s, reformist Muslims were attempting to discourage transvestite performances. Such opposition has seen a resurgence since the fall of Suharto in 1998. Radical Islamicist groups in Indonesia have attacked waria groups, including one attempt to stop a waria beauty contest in 2005. At the same time waria/transvestite entertainers seem to be even more popular in Indonesian television and movies. See BBC News 2005.
11. See also Morgan and Wieringa 2005.
12. See further Moore 1994.
13. Anzaldúa 1987; Cromwell 1999. For other theorists who have developed this line of thinking, see also Alarcón 1990; Ferguson 2004; E. Patrick Johnson 2005; Muñoz 1999; Quiroga 2000; Sandoval 2000.

## Chapter 7: Translocal Queer Connections

*Epigraph.* Butler 1993, 116.

1. Some of the literature and debates about butch-femme identities includes Case 1993; Faderman 1991; Lyon and Martin 1972; Nestle 1992b; Radicalesbians 1997; Stein 1997.

2. Among those theorists building bridges across categories of lesbian, butch, and FTM, see Rubin 1992; Halberstam 1998.
3. The “B,” or Bisexual, tends to receive much less attention in activist discourse, while Lesbian and Gay are privileged.
4. LGBT is prominently used on the Web sites of, among many others, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), <http://www.ilga.org/index.asp>, and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, <http://www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/>, both accessed April 23, 2007.
5. See, for example, “Third ILGA-Asia regional conference,” which states that ILGA “recognizes the diverse ways by which genders and sexualities are experienced and defined in Asia,” at [http://asia.ilga.org/3rd\\_ilga\\_asia\\_regional\\_conference\\_chiang\\_mai\\_thailand\\_24\\_27\\_january\\_2008/about\\_the\\_conference](http://asia.ilga.org/3rd_ilga_asia_regional_conference_chiang_mai_thailand_24_27_january_2008/about_the_conference), accessed December 10, 2007.
6. For histories of these organizations, see Boellstorff 2005b; Howard 1996; Oetomo 2001; Saskia Wieringa 1999.
7. See Saskia Wieringa 1999, regarding the development of PERLESIN.
8. The terms “minority sexual orientation” and “lesbian” are used by Sector 15 in their English-language writings.
9. Some of the travel facilitated by external funding for members of Swara Srikandi in the early 2000s included attendance at an Al-Fatiha (LGBTQ Muslim) conference in the United States, an International Lesbian and Gay Association—Asia (ILGA-Asia) conference, and a Sydney (Australia) Gay Games and Global Rights conference.
10. Early issues of *GAYa Nusantara* contain long lists of places where gay men or waria hang out (*tempat ngeber*), but none are mentioned for lesbi. See also Boellstorff 2005b; Oetomo 1996.
11. Regarding their circulation among gay organizations, see Boellstorff 2005b; Howard 1996.
12. Actually Robi said *lines* (see derivation in text) rather than “lesbi.”
13. See also Kulick’s (1999) caution concerning the identification of language with particular identity groups.
14. This list, provided in 2001, included the following words: *cium* (kiss) > *cumi*; *pegang* (hold, touch) > *peges*; *tidur* (sleep) > *tinjau*; *payudara* (female breast) > *tetong*; *pantat* (buttocks) > *pastra*.
15. These two terms are now identified as Javanese. See Webster 2008.
16. English words are appropriated in some cases in tattoos, such as “Love Hate” on one tomboi’s foot, or nicknames, such as the one the children of a femme lover used for her tomboi partner: Loy, standing for “Love-Only-You.” These words are not used to articulate desire in the way that they are for gays in the southern Philippines, as is suggested by Mark Johnson (1997), which may indicate a potential class difference across regions.
17. Asnita, who did not socialize with the other femmes and tombois that Tommi knew,

had already distanced herself from Tommi when I arrived in 2004, so I was unable to interview her.

18. Some of the videos she had seen included *If these walls could talk 2*, *Bound*, *Aimee and Jaguar*, and *Kissing Jessica Stein*.
19. See also Saskia Wieringa 2007, which addresses the situation for a generation of Jakarta butches and femmes in their forties through sixties.
20. Translations of Indonesian are mine. The spellings of LGBT in the original are “lesbian,” “gay,” “biseksual,” and “transgender.”
21. For an interesting comparison, see Lorway 2008, which suggests that lesbian activists in Namibia enable and support the expression of female gender transgression.
22. This branch was established after I left West Sumatra in 2001 and was comprised of several of the individuals who had participated in my research and whom I had connected with lesbi activists in Jakarta.

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