

"GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF  
MALE HOMOSEXUALITY IN JAVA"

[Traditional and Modern Homosexual Roles in Java: Two Case Studies]  
[The Javanese Way of Creating Meaningful Lives: Two Case Studies of  
Homosexual Men in Indonesia]

by

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In 1987, I was awarded a Fulbright Scholar Award, to go to Indonesia. My previous research had been on gender role variance in American Indian cultures, and the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars, which awarded me this grant, wanted to send me to Indonesia to teach Indonesian scholars how to do this kind of research. Most of my work has involved interviewing elderly people about their life histories, so as soon as I had settled into my new home I began doing this research. I was living in the classical sultan's court city of Yogyakarta, in the central part of the island of Java, Indonesia's most populous island. I trained a group of Indonesians from Gadjah Mada University to assist me in this task, and together we searched out elderly men and women to tell us their personal narratives. We spent the next year doing this research. Out of this effort came the book *Javanese Lives: Women and Men in Modern Indonesian Society*, published by Rutgers University Press.

Right from the beginning, I found Java to be one of the most totally fascinating places I have ever lived. Yet, I did not realize,

as I began this research, that I would learn things from these Javanese elders, that would change my life. My own approach to life has been definitely influenced by my time in Indonesia. Javanese people over age sixty have seen incredibly drastic changes in their lifetime, probably more than any other single generation in human history. They were born in the era of European colonialism, when the Netherlands still firmly controlled Java, then suffered through the Japanese occupation during World War II. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the Dutch returned, and Java went through years of armed struggle until the independent nation of Indonesia was established. After years of economic chaos, and a massive extermination of leftists in 1965, Indonesia has moved into the present era experiencing massive industrialization and urbanization.

These years of upheaval and turmoil have seen colossal changes. It would be like an American living through the American Revolution, the Civil War, the era of industrialization, and right up to the

modern computer age, all in the span of one lifetime. The questions I asked, in interviewing these elderly people, is how they got through all this, and were able to keep their purpose of life, their happiness, and indeed their sanity. I think their answers will be of use to people in other nations, including especially the United States, as we struggle with our own era of change in the 1990s. I discuss these aspects in the gender analysis I do in my book *Javanese Lives*, and will not further elaborate on that topic.

What I would like to do today is to introduce the varying conceptions of homosexuality in Indonesia. Social psychologists who have written about same-sex eroticism in American culture have stressed the need to speak of "homosexualities," rather than one single monolithic lifestyle of "The Homosexual." Such diversity is doubly true in contemporary Indonesia, which is not only marked by incredible cultural diversity, but also has many varying degrees of modernization, and outside cultural influences from the West and from the Middle East, which affect sexuality. Indonesia is an example par excellence of the multiple ways society can construct sexuality and gender roles in very different forms. I will focus on four of the most established representations for males in Java:

- (1) positions for homosexuals in the royal courts,
- (2) alternative gender roles in the "Ludruk" theater and "Waria"
- (3) same-sex relationships among unmarried young men in Ponorogo,
- (4) modern gay-identified urban males.

#### I.

The first representation of homosexuality I wish to speak about is focused on the royal courts of Java's traditional cultures. Java is of course a classical civilization that emerged in ancient times based on irrigated agriculture. In agricultural societies much pressure exists for people to get married and reproduce, for two reasons: (1) for most peasants, having children represents practically the only means by which a family can add laborers to its workforce. Children are put to labor in the fields early, and strict discipline is stressed so that they will become obedient workers. Rice farming is hard work, with long hours and backbreaking labor required to plant the seedlings, irrigate the flooded terraces, weed the fields, harvest the rice, and repair the complex irrigation system. (2) Children are prized not only for their labor, but also for the support that they can offer to the parents in their old age. Even today, a peasant with no surviving children to offer support when they are elderly is left in a tragic situation. Cash savings, investments programs, pensions, social security, and public health care programs are largely undeveloped in Indonesia. An elderly person without children faces a fragile existence of poverty, lack of care, and loneliness. [For an example of a person in this situation, see the chapter on "A Singer" in *Javanese Lives*, pp. 110-115.]

With these kinds of economic factors promoting childbirth, it is not surprising that traditional Javanese rice farming families have, at least until the advent of recent governmental birth control programs, been characterized by large numbers of children. In my interviewing of elderly people, when I asked them what was their reason for getting married, they consistently said "to have children," rather than for love or other reasons. There is a traditional

statement in Java that "children are your wealth." One farmer told me, "Formerly, people said that the more children you have, the more fortune in your life." [Javanese Lives p. 70.]

Nevertheless, even though such economic factors pressured people to get married and have children, a significant outlet existed in the royal courts. The various kings and sultans of Java retained large courts for their entertainment and pleasure. The courts were supported by taxes-in-kind paid by the peasant laboring classes, but the excess wealth that flowed into the courts also offered a socially accepted place for individuals who did not wish to marry and have children. This outlet has existed mainly for those persons with artistic abilities. Even up to the present, the arts in Indonesia have been mainly supported and encouraged by the Sultans' courts. The Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono IX (1912-1988) was the single person most responsible for the renaissance of Javanese gamelan music, dance, wayang shadow-puppet theater, and batik arts, which have become so famous throughout the world in recent decades.

Frail children, who often might not be good agricultural workers, might still bring their family economic and social benefits if they were chosen to become a member of the Sultan's court. Having a family member at court might bring gifts to the family from the Sultan, and would certainly raise the family's social status within their village. If the individual artist became a court favorite, they might even be granted gifts of land which their relatives could use. Androgynous boys especially gravitated toward the arts. Psychological research suggests that childhood androgyny is the most significant trait in children who later become homosexually-oriented in adulthood. [Alan Bell, Martin Weniberg and Sue Hammersmith (1981) Sexual Preference: Its Development in Men and Women. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.]

While I do not mean to suggest that all, or perhaps even most, artists in the Sultans' courts are homosexual, the social structure has traditionally provided this role for artistically-gifted persons who can live their lives comfortably without reproducing. In fact, marriage and reproduction might even be subtly discouraged by the court system, since that would necessitate the support of more dependents. Artists in the courts tend to remain unmarried, and they are provided with a comfortable lifestyle by the court. When they retire they are still taken care of by the court, until their death. Therefore, such persons do not need children; all their economic and social needs are provided by the court. Their emotional ties are primarily to the other people in the court, which with the royal family, court officials, artists and staff, function as an extended family.

One interview contained in Javanese Lives is a good example of this phenomenon, of an elderly dance teacher in the Sultan's Palace at Yogyakarta. Though he came from commoner background, he feels closer to the court than to his relatives. He said:  
"Perhaps I was born to be a dancer.... I learned to dance in the prince's house, and the prince himself was the instructor. When I had to go to the school for the noble family, I did not feel at home. I was in the same class with the sultan's sons; I felt very awkward because they were royalty and I was not.... Only a few people are interested in Javanese classical dance because it is difficult to

learn and it takes time. You have to start very early, when you are very young. When you begin to learn dances too old your movement becomes awkward and stiff." [JL. p. 104] Such early beginnings would tend to favor androgynous young boys, who did not have the involvement with other boys in typical masculine games and pasttimes.

This man's life is completely focused on his dance and teaching. Even though he is known to have no sexual interest in women, and is said to be visited by males when they wish to have male-male sex, he does not define his life around his homosexuality. He is comfortable with himself, and is completely accepted as a member of the court. He is given a small salary for incidental expenses by the court, and lives with room and board provided, in his apartment in the house for nobles of the sultan's palace. When he presented his life's personal narrative, most of it concerned dance and the court. He only briefly mentioned his sister and brothers, who are married and live in other cities. For himself, he said, "I would rather stay here [in the sultan's court] in Yogyakarta. Yogya is a nice place to live; it isn't too busy. I don't like busy life. People must make a living to provide for their needs, but they also have to enjoy their lives. I think many Westerners are so caught up in making money to buy material goods that they forget to do this. Don't work too hard. Do things as you can, don't press yourself too much, and you will live longer.

"That is the attitude we follow at the palace. People who want to get a position at the palace do it, not because they want to make money, but because they have other special reasons... to enjoy participating in the many social activities of the court ... [and] to gain high social status. This provides a kind of psychological satisfaction. They receive only a very small amount of money, but they are very proud and happy to be part of the palace. You will see that life is not always measured by wealth. The Javanese philosophy says: 'Be rich without treasure and win without warriors.' It means that we are expected to be wealthy in the sense of our mental attitude; then we will be honored by love and fulfillment. People always want to achieve happiness, but they think wealth is the way to get it. You can more likely become happy by not being demanding. With the right mental attitude, you can achieve victory without fighting.

"In my own life, though I have very little money, I feel that I have achieved this. I do not have to worry about the future, and I know that when I am old I will be cared for adequately. Other people worry about having children to take care of them, but children can die or even turn against a parent. I am assured that I will be well attended to at the sultan's court. I enjoy my daily activities, and I do not feel under pressure. I enjoy my dance teaching the most of any of my activities." [Ibid. p. 106.]

With his homosexuality so comfortably accepted within the court subculture, there is no reason for this man to search for a "gay" identity in a separate homosexual subculture. His confidence in the court system comes across clearly as he spoke most intently about dance and his commitment to preserve Javanese traditions: "Thank goodness we still have our traditional way of living, as a part of our daily activities at the palace. Javanese people, especially Yogyakarta people, are trying to rebuild their sense of glory from the past.... We have to bear in mind that the development of the Javanese

culture is our responsibility. I am sixty years old, but I intend to do all I can to keep our traditions and values alive.

"By paying attention to the traditions, I think people today can get important messages for how best to live their lives.... You have to know the Javanese saying *Djo Dumeh*, which means you have to care for others. If you are able to achieve something better than other people, then you have to think of the others. Those who don't do this eventually find themselves alone and without support when they need it. You see, life is a wheel, and you are on that same wheel with everyone else. So, when you are on top, it is to your benefit to help others who are currently on the bottom. Because the wheel never stops moving: It moves up and down, and round and round."

Given his secure place in the palace social structure, it is easy to see why this man feels such a strong commitment to Javanese traditions. Java's traditional culture, through the court system, has provided an economically-secure place for non-reproductive people like him, which was otherwise not available for people who chose to remain unmarried and childless throughout their life. This man's attitudes, as a case study, provide much insight on the situation that must have existed for homosexually-inclined non-reproducers in other societies with royal court systems. Certainly there is much data to suggest that homosexuals were common in the courts of pre-modern Europe, China, and other historical settings. [See David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), especially pp. 316-333; Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

## II.

My 1987-88 fieldwork on gender variance in Java, built upon my previous research on gender variance among North American Indians, as reported in my book *THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH*. In the last chapter of that book, I introduced several examples of institutionalized berdache roles in various cultures around the world. "Berdache" is an alternative gender role that is distinct from the genders of "men" and "women," and characterized by androgyny and homosexuality. Indonesia is one of the nations where a tradition of acceptance and social veneration of gender variance and homosexuality has existed. While much more data needs to be gathered about the many cultures of Indonesia, we do have some data about respected "half-man/half-woman" androgynous berdache roles among the Dakak (Iban) of Kalimantan and Borneo, and the Bugis (Makasar) of Sulawesi. As with the American Indians, berdaches were traditionally considered sacred leaders of great spiritual power, wore a mixture of men's and women's clothing, combined masculine and feminine aspects in their character, and engaged in homosexual behavior. Among the Bugis, such "bisu" individuals traditionally resided in the courts of local sultans, where they took care of the sacred royal ornaments.

We need openly gay and lesbian ethnographers, who would have an advantage in gaining the confidence of the local people, to conduct fieldwork on either of these two groups. While the Bugis and Dayak, like most other peoples of the world, have been significantly influenced by the homophobic attitudes of Western culture, elements of

respect for the berdache still exist today. Nevertheless, traditional patterns of respect are being destroyed due to campaigns by Fundamentalist Christian groups, which are exporting homophobia in their many missionary endeavors in the non-Western world. Therefore, if we are going to gather research on societies that have accepting attitudes toward homosexuality, the need is great to begin this fieldwork quickly before it is too late. As I argue in a review essay about homosexuality in Thailand [ *Journal of Homosexuality* 19 (1990): 126-38.], anthropologists can provide an important function by investigating the means by which non-homophobic societies incorporate homosexuality into their social life. By learning from other cultures how same-sex eroticism is respected as an acceptable part of human behavior, we can thereby help to develop those social conditions favoring acceptance in our own society.

In Java the form of a berdache role is taken by males called Waria. The term itself is a combination of the Bahasa Indonesia words wanita ("woman") and pria ("man"), which as wa-ria literally means "woman-man." Another term used is banci. Every Indonesian city has a waria subculture. Waria commonly dress as women, or in a mixture of masculine and feminine styles that comes across as an androgynous gender ambiguity. Some of them are actors who play female roles in ludruk folk theater. These ludruk theater troupes travel around Java to different villages, and even married men openly admire the feminine ways of the waria stars. After the performances, waria often engage in sex with the married men who bring them presents and shower attention on them. Ludruk performances are even presented on Indonesian government-sponsored television, with the feminine waria stars being warmly beloved by the Indonesian public. [James Peacock, (1968), *Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.]

In urban areas, waria often make their living working in beauty salons and the fashion industry. They commonly organize fashion shows, sometimes under government sponsorship, that are popular among the general public and attended by families and children. Those without jobs often resort to prostitution, either on the streets or in houses of prostitution, where they are patronized by masculine men who are attracted to their femininity. These men do not identify themselves as gay or homosexual, and do not see themselves as different from "normal" men in any way.

### III.

In contrast to the androgynous berdache traditions, in eastern Indonesia exists a very different homosexual tradition among males, one that emphasizes masculinity. This cult of masculinity, as revealed by the important fieldwork of Professor Gilbert Herdt and others, is indicative of the Melanesian cultures of Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea. As Herdt points out, this form of institutionalized homosexuality is organized along intergenerational lines, involving same-sex relationships between men and boys.

The ethnographic literature that exists on male homosexuality in non-Western cultures suggests that a culture may have one of these traditions, but not both. Accordingly, I was surprised to find that the district of Ponorogo, in eastern Java, incorporates both the androgynous and intergenerational traditions. Like other areas of

Java, Ponorogo is an agricultural society that is mainly dependent on rice farming. Terraced rice paddies dominate the landscape. But the social institution which distinguishes Ponorogo from other areas of Java is reyog, a men's folk dance form that is the main source of cultural identity for Ponorogo villagers. The entire emphasis of reyog is a celebration of male attributes. The dance begins by depicting several battles between two competing groups of males, but all the battles end in a draw. Neither side can win, so in respect for the bravery and strength of each other, the two sides negotiate a settlement. They become allies, and at the end of the dance they all go off together arm-in-arm as friends.

The important theme of the reyog dance is male competition, which the dance suggests intelligent and strong men will subdue so that friendship wins out in the end. It is a message for men to settle their petty competition and differences, in favor of close personal alliances which will be a benefit to all. The message of the dance is the importance of masculine unity. This unity theme is a major aspect of Ponorogo culture. It is what keeps Ponorogo villages unified. I do not have time to go into the importance of reyog, but I have a slide show on this folk dance group which I might be able to present at a future meeting. What is important for us here is the commonly accepted role of one or more boys in the reyog group who serve as the gemblak, or loved one, of the reyog group's leader. The gemblak not only has sex with the leader, but also commonly with any other member of the group as well.

The prestige of reyog in Ponorogo villages leads to an accepting attitude toward sex with a boy who fulfills a gemblak role. Such boys may be as young as nine or ten years old, but are usually teenagers. A few gemblak remain in the role up until their mid-twenties. The boy who takes a gemblak role is chosen for his good looks. A representative of the reyog group will go to the boy's parents and offer to provide some sort of payment for the boy to become a gemblak. Usually this involves payment of an ox to the parents. Such a present represents a major economic advantage for the parents, since an ox can be used for plowing (so that the parents do not have to hoe so much in the fields), and for transporting crops to markets farther away.

Reyog groups are not the only males in Ponorogo to have gemblaks. In each village there also exists a group of unmarried young men, called a sinoman. Each sinoman is a closely-knit group of males, ranging in age from their mid-teens to their late-twenties, who would be roughly comparable to a "gang" among American young men in urban ghettos. Yet, unlike American gangs, in Ponorogo the sinoman functions in a more socially-useful way. First, they are often reyog groups-in-training. Second, they provide much of the labor to help other villagers besides their own family. They are interested in doing this labor because they wish to get payment, so that they can also afford to pay the parents of a boy who will become the gemblak for their sinoman. Usually a gemblak only serves in this function for a couple of years, and after that he goes back to live with his parents until he later marries a woman after he has reached adulthood. But I observed several gemblaks in Ponorogo villages who liked their group so much that they decided to remain longer as a gemblak for a decade or more. In that case, the sinoman made presents to the gemblak's parents every year after his original contract. The members

of the sinoman not only raised money to buy an ox for his parents, but every year they would labor in the fields of his parents. With a group of several strong young men helping them work on their farm, the financial success of such a family was assured.

The advantages of the sinoman to have a gemblak are three. First, a gemblak provides them with a sexual outlet. In Ponorogo, there is severe condemnation of heterosexual behavior outside of marriage. An unmarried young woman who gets pregnant would be ostracized from her family and the village, and the man who had sex with her would be severely punished. I never heard of a female prostitute in a Ponorogo village, and I doubt that they exist. Since males do not get married until usually their late twenties, they therefore have no female sexual outlets during the height of their sexual years. Given this restriction, it is not surprising that the young men will value their gemblak as sexual partner.

Everyone in the village of course knows that a boy who is a gemblak is serving as sexual partner for the sinoman. While doing my fieldwork in Ponorogo I slept in the house of several families, and observed that it was quite acceptable that it was quite acceptable for the son to sleep with his gemblak. Different sinomans arrange the sexual sharing of their gemblak in various ways. In some, the gemblak will reside with a young man in his family's house for a week or several days, while in other groups the gemblak will move every night to a different member of the sinoman. In each case, the family of the young man will prepare a comfortable bed for their son to share with the gemblak. Since everyone sleeps in the same room, or with only a cloth curtain separating them, it is impossible not to realize that the males are engaging in sex (even though Javanese are particularly quiet while engaging in sex).

In interviewing gemblaks and adult men who were gemblaks in their youth, I asked them "Didn't you mind moving from one house to another?" They uniformly answered that they did not, that their personal goods were always carried for them, and that when they arrived at a house the family treated them like visiting royalty. My other main question was more personal: "Weren't you sexually exhausted by sharing sex with all these men? Didn't you feel sexually exploited?" Again, the answer was no. I did not understand this, until I learned that male-to-male sex for Ponorogo villagers involved the gemblak lying down, wetting his hand with spit or hand lotion, and lubricating the penis of his partner, then guiding the erect penis in between his thighs. In Indonesian, this is called "jepat pahe" (between the legs), and it is the usual form of male eroticism. The top-man thrusts until orgasm, and that is it. If the gemblak wants to have orgasm, the man might sometimes perform oral sex on him, but it is not reciprocated by the gemblak. These two sexual forms are kept distinct. What is interesting here is that the inter-crural form of sex is completely safe sex, and is the typical means of male sexual interaction. [in this and many other societies]

The second function of the gemblak role is that it provides the basis for male bonding. Sometimes the sinoman members will have a party, at a member's house when his parents are away. Often during this party, the sinoman members will each engage in sex with the gemblak, one after another. It is not usually considered proper for members to have sex with each other, but they told me that they feel a

sense of bonding to one another by sharing their gemblak. As important as their sexual sharing, they also bond together because of their economic activities. It is expensive to support a gemblak, since they must labor for his parents and also must labor to provide their gemblak with fancy clothes and status symbols like jewelry, a wristwatch, an umbrella, and fine shoes. The time of the young men is thus spent in productive labor, since the prestige of their sinoman depends on how finely they can outfit their gemblak. He becomes their status symbol. By treating him so considerately, they and their families are thus bound in an extra-kinship network of pride in a group. Often, parents will have to help out their son to pay his share to support the gemblak. The gemblak thus becomes the focus of the sinoman, and he is their symbol of the unity of their group. The members feel like brothers to each other, and they retain this close feeling even after they get married and start having their own children.

Later, married men often join a reyog group, and replicate the sense of group closeness with other men that they earlier had within their sinoman. While it is expected that men above their late-twenties in age should become heterosexually married, the social arrangements in Ponorogo thus make it possible for virtually any man to have a socially-acceptable outlet for his homosexual desires. By channeling these desires into the institutionalized man-boy relationship with a gemblak, both prostitution and illegitimate births are avoided.

The third function of the gemblak role is the high social status that it provides for the boy. If he is in a sinoman, he becomes like visiting royalty to the families of the members he visits. He provides a significant economic contribution to his parents, and thus parents are pleased if their son is chosen to be a gemblak. I have spoken to many elderly Ponorogo villagers, who delighted in telling me how proud they are of the fact that their son (now usually married and a father) was a gemblak. If a boy takes a gemblak role for a reyog group, he can become a famous dance star at an early age. He is idolized by the crowd, and the dance performance of the young cavalry dancers occupies much of the performance.

Thus far I have focused on the intergenerational aspects of the gemblak role, but also notable is the androgyny of the boy dancers. Boys who are chosen for the gemblak role are those who seem more gentle, androgynous personality types. His androgyny provides a perfect complement to the masculine men who are his lovers. In the reyog performance, much of the dancing by the gemblaks involve very feminine body movements, which the boys are instructed in by their teachers (usually former gemblaks). They daintily hold sashes, which they flip at the other dancers and to the audience. The whole emphasis is their regal attitude and their androgyny. Even very young boys are encouraged to take up the gemblak dance role, to practice in their childhood so that when they get older they can possibly take up the gemblak role. This shows the importance of socialization in allowing individuals to adjust to a sexual role that societies like our own might look upon with horror and dismay. In Ponorogo, because it has been an accepted social role from their earliest memory, boys and their parents do not look askance at this practice but look forward to it as a possibility for their future.

Many Western anthropologists have had difficulty in understanding homosexuality, because they do not understand how it is socially "useful" for anything beyond physical pleasure. We can see from the Ponorogo example, that homosexual desires can in fact be channeled into functions that are quite beneficial for some societies. Most important is that no one feel exploited. In Ponorogo, everybody wins: The parents get major financial assistance from the sinoman, the males who get a gemblak get sexual satisfaction and social prestige, the gemblak himself gets exalted treatment and high social status, and the village as a whole gets several things. The village gets a major form of entertainment and cultural identity due to the fame of their Reyog Ponorogo dance troupes, and a sense of shared purpose that unites the young men and the adult men together into groups that go beyond kinship connections.

Anthropologists should be the first ones to emphasize the inaccuracy of the notion that the only purpose of sex is reproduction. If we just think about it there are many other purposes of sex, including the promotion of close intimate bonding among non-related individuals, for the release of personal stress, for entertainment and pleasure, and other things. Same-sex eroticism can easily fit into these functions, if only a society does not take a condemnatory attitude toward it.

Anthropologists have emphasized how marriage functions to provide a larger network of individuals to whom one can turn in times of need. What they have ignored is that there are often other forms of social unity besides heterosexual marriage and childbearing for accomplishing these goals. And sometimes, it is homosexual forms of bonding that can tie people together in a shared sense of village unity. As the example of Ponorogo demonstrates, homosexuality can be a means of helping society. What this implies, is that if we want to promote a greater acceptance of homosexuality (not just tolerance, but genuine acceptance) in our own society, we need to come up with ways by which homosexual relationships can provide benefit to society. To do that, the best places we can look are to other cultures, which have worked out myriad ways by which same-sex eroticism can be accommodated without people feeling it is a threat to children, to the family, to religion, and to society in general. Lesbian and gay ethnographers are just beginning to uncover the social mechanisms by which cultures of the Native Americans, Siberians, Japanese, Thai, Polynesian, and other world areas have accomplished this task. The tragedy is that Western homophobia is beginning to be felt in places like Ponorogo, where people in the more Westernized urban areas are already beginning to consider the homoerotic aspects of their culture as a shameful practice. Even if this respected tradition might die out, at least anthropologists can try to record what is possible of these traditions before it is too late.

#### IV.

With the impact of homophobia coming from the West into Java, such institutions have gone into decline and do not hold the high respect for gender diversity and homosexuality that existed in the past. Throughout the colonized Third World, homophobia has been part

of the cultural imperialism that Europeans have imposed on indigenous cultures. From the Spanish campaign against "sodomy" among American Indians in the sixteenth century, which I discuss in my book *The Spirit and the Flesh*, to the Dutch in Indonesia in the twentieth century, the patterns are quite similar.

Also similar to the West has been the emergence of a gay male community in Indonesian cities. Few social contacts exist between gay males and lesbians, who remain quite secretive about their sexuality, even from gay men. We desperately need research on lesbian lives, which could most effectively be done by lesbian-identified researchers. As far as males are concerned, non-cross-dressing gay men in Java are seen by the general society as being quite distinct from the transvestitic waria. Some androgynous gay males will sometimes dress in drag, and may joke among themselves that they are "banci," but they also see themselves as different from waria. Although gay men are active in every field of labor, they are most noted as clothing models, dancers, tourist guides, hair stylists, and fashion designers.

Anti-gay discrimination in employment is rare. Police are not known for being anti-gay the way they traditionally have been in the West, and violence against homosexuals is not a problem. Government policy in general is not discriminatory. Some top ministers of the government are commonly known to be gay, yet this does not lead to scandals or calls for their dismissal. Indonesian values -- social harmony, peacefulness, and the national motto "unity in diversity" -- seem to protect gays more completely than Western notions of individual rights.

As a result of the general absence of discrimination, there has not been much in the way of a Western-style politicized gay and lesbian liberation movement. Thus, a separate gay community has not developed its own institutions to care for its members. While society in general is tolerant, increasingly severe forms of homophobia are making themselves known due to Western influences in education, movies, television, and tourism. Another source of homophobia is fundamentalist Islamic thought, which is expanding into Indonesia from the Middle East, which has in recent decades campaigned against sexual "sins" much more than was traditionally the case among Muslims. As a result, some young people from both Westernized Christian families or from fundamentalist Muslim families are ostracized by their relatives when their homosexuality is discovered. Such youths often have nowhere to turn, unless they can find an older sympathetic homosexual to help them.

I interviewed such a person, as reported in *Javanese Lives*, a seventy-three year old retired educator who identified himself by the English term "gay." While his memory of his childhood was that he had been a typical boy, from age twelve he had recognized that he was sexually attracted to males. He was quite sexually assertive in his teens, and was sexually involved with a number of teenage boys and adult men. Nevertheless, when he was twenty years old he repressed his sexuality because of his fear of "scandal" in the Dutch colonial teacher's training college where he was a student. He said: "The Dutch were extremely hostile to homosexuality, and in 1933-34 there was a big controversy when a high Dutch colonial official was kicked out of [his] job because he was gay. Several other men, both

Dutch and Indonesians, were implicated. It was in all the newspapers. That had a big impact on making me afraid to do anything sexual with another man, and so I went into a long period when I hardly did anything sexual. Antihomosexual feelings in Indonesia today are a result of the influence of the Dutch, and also the Arabs. Unfortunately, the Arabs have had a big influence here due to the impact of Islam. There are many Islamic men who will go to bed with you. It is so easy to get them to do it.... Ninety percent of them are sexually available. Yet, even though they are engaging in homosexual behavior, they say that it is wrong and that Islam forbids it. They are hypocrites, pure and simple." [Javanese Lives p. 184.]

Recognizing the homophobia that existed, he remembered: "As a young man I wanted to show people that I was more masculine, so they would not suspect that I was gay. So I did all the athletics. I put so much effort into it, and I became a star in basketball, swimming, tennis -- oh, so many fields. I enjoyed these activities very much, but I was also motivated for appearances' sake. My chief motivation was to gain community respect. I did not want wealth or power, but I did want the respect of people." [JL p. 184.] He was able to accomplish his goal, and eventually became the most well-known high school principal in his city.

In 1965, in the midst of Indonesia's "Year of Living Dangerously," many innocent people were accused of being communists and were fired from their jobs. Despite his success, this man was one of those who were fired. He remembered: "I knew I was not a communist, yet I was still thrown out, despite my years of service. This had a big impact on making me realize that respect had to come primarily from myself rather than just from others. I gained the gift of self-respect, by which I was able to survive that difficult time. Another thing that helped me become more self-respecting was the influence of my nephew, who was openly gay to our whole family. He was a very nice person, and all our relatives liked him. The family was not ashamed of him. That is because our family is not so strict... [in expecting all] sons to get married and have children. Luckily, my family did not put that kind of pressure on me or my nephew. I always said that I was married to my career, and they accepted that.

"In recent decades, what I have observed is that both my family and my former students continued to respect me. In the 1970s a group of my former students ... raised the money to buy me a trip to Europe. It was a great experience for me.... Now I can truly say that I have done the things I have wanted to do in my life. Now I am content to stay at home, with my friends and my books, and enjoy my retirement years. It has really only been since my retirement that I have taken a more relaxed approach to life and decided that people must accept me as I am. I do not advertize my preferences, but I take no pains to hide or cover up my feelings. I have had many young men living with me and visiting here, and I have no hesitation about them being seen coming and going to my house. I will even give them a kiss in the yard and do not feel tense about showing my feelings. I feel much more accepting of myself than I used to be." [JL, p. 184-85.]

Several years after his retirement, this man began to help young gay males. He tutored them in English, and used his contacts in the tourist industry to help them get a good job. He let them live at his

home for free while they went to job training schools, and even began to pay their school tuition. He had supported the schooling of twelve boys, between ages fifteen and twenty-six, during the previous fifteen years before I interviewed him. In 1987-88, when I gathered his personal narrative in a series of interviews, he had four boys living in his house with him. Beyond his role as counselor and mentor for his housemates, he also became like a father to the young men. They preferred to call him by the English term "Daddy."

Besides that, this man's house served as an informal social center for the gay community of his city, with friends of the residents often visiting and parties being held for each person on their birthday. He said: "All the gays in the city know about my home, and if they find a homeless gay they send him to me. I never look for these boys; they always come to me... [if they] had been kicked out of home." [JL, p. 188.] One young man who was living with him in 1988 had come from a very wealthy Javanese family. He was in law school, but when his parents found out about his homosexuality they stopped sending him money to pay for his tuition, and would not even answer his letters. Having nowhere else to turn, he came to this elderly man for a place to live. The man told me, "Unfortunately I cannot afford the high costs of law school, so he has now gotten a job. Regrettably, it is not the best job to match his intelligence.

"I provide these boys a free place to stay; I pay for their food and give them a little spending money sometimes. I wish I were rich so I could do more. If I have trouble with my finances, I pray to God, and I always manage to get some money from the most unexpected places. I pray to the Chinese Buddhist goddess Kwan Yen to be my intermediate god. Former students will drop by sometimes and give me money. I never have to ask them for money, but they send it because they know I try to help others. These younger homeless boys cannot, of course, yet afford much, but they will give me gifts of clothes for the boys and whatever they can afford. I want to try to build among them a sense of responsibility toward the younger ones coming along so they can help others as they themselves were helped. I hope that some of them will continue this tradition after I am gone.

"I try to imprint into my boys that there is no wrong in being gay, if they are living right and helping other people. What they do in their love lives is their own business. I always tell these youngsters that living as a gay is very hard because many people in the community do not approve of them. If living as a gay is hard, I tell them, it gets harder if you are gay and poor. So I advise them to study and work hard so as to get a good job and to be very careful with money so they can afford to live well. And then later, when they are mature, if they want a boy they can afford to help him financially also.

"I always advise them not to be afraid to help people, to help those in need, otherwise they will become very lonely men. Alone with their money. I know some gays who have much money and much more beautiful houses than I can afford, but it is not a home because they are there alone. They try to buy love, and I don't want to do that. They may throw expensive jewelry and clothes at their current sexual interest; but they are not really helping this person, and they are not helping themselves. Those who don't help people always end up worried that they will be alone. I have seen this occur often in the

decades I have been observing gay men.

"We gays do not automatically have a family to fall back on, so we have to work hard to create our own sense of family. Helping others, especially the young, gives a reward later on -- when, I never know, but I am sure there will be. I have my reward already, and the major reward for me is that I like my life and I like my home. I read my books, watch TV with the boys, advise them with their problems. My boys and my friends and my books are my companions. I don't mind being by myself when they go out, and I don't mind getting old."  
[JL, pp. 189-90.]

When I attended this man's seventh-third birthday party, his house was crowded with his former teaching colleagues and students plus about forty gay men whom he had helped in the past. In private conversations with me, they unanimously expressed gratitude for the generosity and love that the man had shown them. In his role as mentor, and in the genuine feelings of family that he created within those intergenerational relationships, this elder performed a socially useful act in caring for homeless youth. By going his own route in life, this man created intense feelings of respect from those he helped. In his old age he learned the important lesson that, by benefiting others he also benefited himself.

This man centered his life around an urban gay subculture, and developed a sense of gay identity as an important source of his self-respect. In contrast, the dance teacher mentioned earlier did not center his life around his homosexuality. Yet, he still held a forthright and uncloseted respected role, as an artist in the subculture of the sultan's court. Both of these men expressed a positive outlook on life, based on their commitment to helping others and a feeling that what they were doing was important.