

HOMOSEXUALITY IN OUR [INDONESIAN] CULTURE
several short notes

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Homosexuality is strange and new in our culture. Either in literature (read "Serat Suluk Tambanglaras, Centhini, 1742") or statement, expression, dance ("Reog Ponorogo", the old version of "Seudati"). Homosexuality, sodomy, has been known in our culture for a very long time. If the adventure of Cabolang, which is related in details in Centhini, is more of an adventure, exercise, homosexuality as an enjoyment of a perverse sexual intercourse, it is not the same thing as, for example, the relationship between "warok" and "gemblak" in Reog Ponorogo or the relationship between "anak syahi" and "syech" in "seudati" long time ago. The last two relationships mentioned above are different from the first one. Either the partners or the function of the relationships are different. The partners in the first relationship are adults, while for warok and syech, the partners (gemblak and anak syahi) are boys who are in their early teens. From the function of the relationships point of view, the difference can be found because the different meaning of the relationships. In the relationship between Cabolang and Adipati Daha, for example, the function of the relationship is for enjoying sexual intercourse which is different from the normal sexual intercourse. While in the relationship between the warok and the gemblak (or between the syech and anak syahi), the

relationship is meant to maintain or increase the magical power of the warok or the syech. Gemblak or anak syahi's function here is being the partner of a resource of a magical power. Here, it means that homosexuality is considered as something sacred.

The two categories of homosexuality described above, grow in our culture which is agricultural, traditional and feudal. A culture which has the orientation toward harmony, cosmological harmony, where every element in the universe has been determent where it should be in a hierarchy relationship. That is why in Javanese culture, it is known that there are two worlds. One of the "priyayi" and another one of "wong cilik" which are separated but anyway, they have to keep a good relationship between themselves if they do not want to ruin the big world where they live together. That is why it is interesting to read the homosexual relationship between Cabolang, the wong cilik and Adipati Daha, the priyayi who are both heterosexual. Perhaps one manifestation of maintaining the balanced relationship between the two worlds is also meant implicitly by this Cabolang and Adipati Daha. From the stories which came after the period of Centhini, namely the new era of Surakarta-Yogyakarta, stories about the immoral life-style of the lords, also relate the story about homosexuality between "abdi" and "bendoro" (the story about homosexuality between bendoro and bendoro is hardly ever heard). Why is it like that ? Does it give an indication that that is what it supposed to be in that kind of sexual relationship ? Whatever the meaning of this indication, it seems that in the era when Centhini was written, namely in the eighteenth century, when Paku Buwono V was reigning, at least in Javanese culture, homosexuality was known openly to the society and perhaps was accepted as a fact that existed. This is proved by the

complicity of the lively and numerous vocabulary and idioms which described the sexual intercourse like that in Centhini. Only when the Dutch had implanted the culture which had the orientation toward "protestant ethics", stories or reports about homosexuality became indecent things to tell and must not be known to public. As the result, there are rumours about scandals which happened in the kraton or the lords' residences. Concerning homosexuality which has the function of maintaining and increasing the magical power of someone who felt that he was called for playing a role which was magical, such as warok and syech, can also be explained in our cultural context which is agricultural and traditional. In our cultural concept where the universe must be kept in one by practically every element which supports it, then "power", "authority", "source of power and source of authority" are the concepts which are very concrete (Ben Anderson). Then the source of power can come from a small boy who is still white and pure.

Now after we exposed ourselves to foreign culture, after we have a country, after our society and "puak-puak" mix, wow, why homosexuality turns up clearly in front of us everywhere. In saloons, hotels, certain streets in the city, in the fashion and design worlds, etc. Suddenly ? There is nothing sudden in a development in society ! Everything that is considered as sudden is always a part of a flowing process. Homosexuality (with its function and meaning) which is present in our culture now gets a way to announce itself. They who formerly felt suppressed psychologically, who was homosexually oriented, who had limited outlet (with only the higher or lower class), who lived in the middle of heavy cultural burden suddenly have an option, more alternatives.