

GLOBAL GAZE/GLOBAL GAYS

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“What was fundamentally invisible is suddenly offered to the brightness of the gaze, in a movement of appearance so simple, so immediate that it seems to be the natural consequence of a more highly developed experience.”

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*

Over the past few years I have been involved in several debates about how best to understand the emergence of a western-style politicized homosexuality in Asia, and about the usefulness of the concepts of “gay” and “Asia” in these debates. At the 1992 Asia/Pacific AIDS Conference in Delhi there were real tensions within the gay caucus—which met, symbolically enough, in a park opposite the conference hotel once organizers claimed no meeting rooms were available—between those who defined the region geographically and those who defined it in terms of ethnicity. In the end it was an ethnic Indian from New Zealand who insisted that the white gay men from Australasia should be regarded as legitimate members of the region.

It is easy to point to the artifice of “Asia,” to say that any concept that includes Uzbeks and Koreans and Bangladeshis might as well find room for Australians. But this argument ignores the historical and racial ties of settler Australia to the western world, ties which make our claim for inclusion in “Asia” sound ignorant of history and look like a new form of colonialism. My own involvement in these debates has been part of an evolving research interest in the growth of self-conscious “gay” communities and identities in

Asia, and the problems of such terms are reflected in much of my research. Some readers of the first draft of this paper complained that the term "Asian" was too broad to be of value, yet it is frequently invoked by the groups themselves to stress certain commonalities in their histories and experiences.

I come to this research as a privileged, white, Australian gay intellectual, with access to considerable resources (intellectual, economic, political). But I am also very dependent on those people I am researching, who have far greater cultural and linguistic knowledge than I possess, and whose explanations of phenomena reflect as much as mine a particular set of emotional and intellectual positions. In this situation I see myself as coresearcher, ultimately dependent on both the goodwill and self-interest of my informants.

The anthropologist can usually assume her "otherness" from the subject of his study. In my interactions with Asian gay men this assumption fails to hold up. My research builds on social interactions with people in a variety of settings ranging from sitting on the beach in Bali to meetings in air-conditioned halls at AIDS conferences in Berlin and Yokohama, and is predicated on my sharing a certain common ground—sexual, social, political—with those of whom I speak. I would argue that the best understandings of the gay worlds have come out of this way of working—see, for example, Edmund White's account of pre-AIDS gay America, *States of Desire*—but both academically and ethically this sort of "participant observation" poses dilemmas.

In researching the development of "Asian" (specifically archipelagic south-east Asian) gay worlds I am both outsider and insider: indeed, I have had the experience of meeting Asian men, engaged in gay political work, who have been influenced by my own writings. Thus I am engaging with men where there is a complex power dynamic at work: I represent the power, prestige, and wealth of the west, but because we are meeting on a terrain of shared sexuality where mutual desire is an acknowledged possibility, and where I depend on their goodwill, the power dynamics are not simply unidimensional. My relations with Asian lesbians reflects a greater distance, and so far I have not been able to make more than very superficial contacts (not least because of the ways in which international AIDS politics have opened up space for homosexual men but not women). I constantly have to balance what I *seem* to be seeing against an awareness that my "informants" are telling stories for which I am the intended audience and which often fit their desires to see themselves as part of a "modern" gay world.

These relationships are further complicated by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, Asian gay men, by stressing a universal gay identity, underline a similarity with westerners. Against this, on the other hand, the desire to assert an "Asian" identity, not unlike the rhetoric of the "Asian way" adopted by authoritarian regimes such as those of China, Indonesia, and

Malaysia, may undermine this assumed solidarity. Moreover, the ubiquity of western rhetoric means that many of the informants use the language of the west to describe a rather different reality. For example, the *Gay Men's Exchange*, a four-page photocopied "zine" produced in Manila, includes a two-page "Gay Man's Guide to Coming Out," reproduced from a popular American publication (Muchmore and Hanson). The language of this and other western publications helps determine not only the language used in groups but also who might feel comfortable in discussions and how they may explain their own feelings to themselves. Last year in Manila I watched the film *Victor/Victoria* on local television. Although it is ostensibly set in Paris in the 1930s its characters speak of "coming out" as "gay." Such "politically correct" historical anachronisms presumably send messages to the larger audience who may have seen the film on prime time television.

Gradually, western lesbian/gay theorists and activists are beginning to perceive the problems of claiming a universality for an identity which developed out of certain historical specificities. In his introduction to a recent book of "queer theory," Michael Warner writes:

In the middle ground between the localism of "discourse" and the generality of the subject is the problem of international—or otherwise trans-local—sexual politics. As gay activists from non-Western contexts become more and more involved in setting agendas, and as the rights discourse of internationalism is extended to more and more cultural contexts, Anglo-American queer theorists will have to be more alert to the globalizing—and localizing—tendencies of our theoretical languages." (xii)

None of the contributors to this particular book take up this challenge—despite its title, *Fear of a Queer Planet*. American "queer theory" remains as relentlessly Atlantic-centric in its view of the world as the mainstream culture it critiques. Equally intriguing is the apparent lack of interest in "queer theory" in most of the non-western world, and the continued usage by emerging movements of the terminology "lesbian" and "gay."

SEX/GENDER/SEXUALITY IN "GAY" "ASIA"

In late June 1994 there was a large demonstration in New York City to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall, the riots at the New York bar of the same name which is, as a result, claimed as the birthplace of the contemporary gay/lesbian movement. The organizers went to some trouble to invite groups from the rest of the world—including the "developing" world—to participate, obviously believing that the events being celebrated

were of universal relevance. In ways which would shock many anthropologists, a claim to the universality of "gay" and "lesbian" identities is emerging in the rhetoric of groups such as (to speak only of Asia) Bombay Dost, OCCUR (not an acronym, but referring to the sense of "something happening") in Japan, Ten Percent in Hong Kong, Pink Triangle in Malaysia, the Library Foundation in the Philippines, and the lesbian group Anjaree in Thailand ("Anjaree—").

It could be objected that these groups represent only a very small part of the homosexual populations of these countries, and that their use of language and symbols derived from overseas means they will be unable to mobilize significant numbers within their own societies. But twenty years ago the gay movements of North America, Australasia, and western Europe similarly spoke for very few, and their growth was unpredictably rapid. Of course this happened where the largely American symbols could be made relevant to local conditions (as with Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, which has become a uniquely Australian version of what elsewhere are "gay pride parades"). But in a world where more and more cultural styles are imported and assimilated there seems no reason why a western-style gayness should not prove as attractive as other western identities.

The question is how to balance the impact of universalizing rhetoric and styles with the continuing existence of cultural and social traditions. Let me cite an encounter with a young Filipino in a bar in Quezon City, Metro Manila, early last year. Ricardo had just come from a meeting of his university's gay group, and was full of excitement at the prospect of an upcoming campus gay event. He spoke with enthusiasm of a march the group was organizing in the neighborhood, and of a play that had recently been presented in the bar where we were sitting.

The bar itself requires description: Cinecafé combines elements of a cafe, a bar, a porn video showroom, and a backroom for sex. All this is contained in a small, three-story building on a back street far removed from the tourist hotels of Makati and Ermita, with a clientele that is almost entirely Filipino. At the same time there are certain aspects of Cinecafé that very clearly link it to a larger global gay world: the posters, the magazines, the films themselves (exclusively French and American) are the same that one might find in similar establishments in Zurich, Montreal, or Sydney. In many ways Cinecafé is a third-world version of the male sex-on-premises venues found in Los Angeles, Melbourne, or elsewhere, though it is much smaller and less well appointed.

Ricardo himself (like so many middle-class Filipinos, as fluent in English as in Tagalog) sounded remarkably like the young men I had known in the early 1970s in America, Australia, and western Europe, and spoke indeed of gay liberation in phrases that were very familiar. This encounter raised a whole set of questions about the meaning of terms like "gay" and "gay

liberation" in very different cultural contexts. For the streets outside were the streets of an undeniably third-world country, and the men in Cinecafé, while in many ways shaped by western influence, were themselves part of Filipino society, seeking each other out in ways similar to the ways homosexuals seek each other out in the west; they were not at this establishment to meet westerners or other foreign tourists (as some theories of the globalization of sexuality would have it).

There are equivalents to Cinecafé in other parts of Asia. The past decade has seen the growth of a commercial gay world—beyond its few existing bastions, such as Bangkok and Tokyo—which now extends to most of the countries of Asia where there is sufficient economic and political space. Both affluence and political liberalism are required for a commercial gay world to appear: that it appears to be bigger in Manila than Singapore is due to a number of factors, of which comparative political tolerance seems to me the most essential.

In recent years gay film festivals and magazines have appeared in Hong Kong and India; in Malaysia the HIV/AIDS group Pink Triangle is a de facto gay organization, which engages in a constant round of community development activities (and now provides some space for lesbians as well); in Indonesia the gay organization KKLGN (Working Group for Indonesian Lesbians and Gay Men) has groups in about eleven cities.¹ Films and novels with gay themes have begun appearing, especially in east Asia.² Thailand has the most developed gay infrastructure in southeast Asia, including a Thai gay press (clearly not aimed at tourists) and several well-appointed saunas whose clientele is largely Thai (Allyn; Jackson, *Dear*). Lesbians remain almost invisible when their conditions are compared to those in western countries, and except for Thailand there is little public information about lesbian worlds; it is my impression that, except in Indonesia, only tentative steps have been taken to establish a mutual sense of lesbian/gay cooperation.

Such contemporary forms of gay life coexist with older forms (often linked to ritualized expressions of transgender) or hybrid forms—e.g., the annual "Miss Gay Philippines Beauty Pageant" (Remoto 156–59). Yet a certain blurring of the sex/gender order may not be that different from developments in the West, as revealed in ideas of the "third sex" which prevailed in the early stages of homosexual consciousness in Europe (see, e.g., Steakley) and more contemporary popular images such as the successful play/musical/film *La Cage aux Folles*. Western images of sex/gender in Asia often stress transgender images, as in the popularity of the play/film *M. Butterfly*, with its story of a French diplomat's love for a Chinese man he allegedly believed was a woman.³ But to see transvestism as a particular characteristic of Asian cultures is to miss the role of drag in all its perverse and varied manifestations in western theater, entertainment, and commercial sex.

Western fascination with these images may reflect a greater acceptance of transgendered people (more accurately, transgendered males) in many Asian countries. This is suggested in a report that the Indonesian entry to the most recent Gay Games in New York included an all-transsexual netball team—the national champions (Wyndham 26). In many countries such transgendered communities are institutionalized and have won an accepted, if marginal, social status, often as providers of personal services (hairdressers, beauticians, etc.) which may include prostitution. Thus in Indonesia there is a national association of *waria* whose patron is the Minister for Women's Affairs. In the Philippines local dignitaries will attend *bacla* fashion shows.

There are differences as well as similarities between groups such as Indonesian *waria* or *banci*, Filipino *babaylan* or *bac(k)la*, Malay *maknyah* or Thai *kathoeys*, which go beyond the scope of this paper. What they appear to have in common is a conceptualization of the sex/gender order which has no simple equivalent in the dominant language or social arrangements of western societies. In translating the term *kathoe* Peter Jackson makes clear the range of concepts the word conveys: "1: originally a male or female hermaphrodite; 2: male or female transvestite, or transsexual; 3: male homosexual or (rarer) a female homosexual" (*Dear* 301). And referring to similar groups in Polynesia Niko Besnier writes that: "sexual relations with men are seen as an optional consequence of gender liminality, rather than its determiner, prerequisite or primary attribute" (300).

In general, the new gay groups reject a common identity with more traditional identities, and define themselves as contesting sexual rather than gender norms. This is not to deny the significance of gender; as Richard Parker wrote of similar developments in Brazil,

It would be more accurate to suggest that, rather than replacing an earlier system of thought, this newer system has been superimposed on it, offering at least some members of Brazilian society another frame of reference for the construction of sexual meanings. In the emphasis on sexuality, as opposed to gender, sexual practices have taken on significance not simply as part of the construction of a hierarchy of men and women, but as a key to the nature of every individual. (95)

The existence of several "systems of thought" leads to a certain ambivalence; thus some Filipinos who belong to gay groups might also see themselves in particular contexts as *bakla*.⁴ Clearly the divisions are related—though not identical—to those of class, much as American or Australian men who twenty years ago defined themselves as "gay" were largely from relatively privileged backgrounds.

In much of urban Asia it is easy to see parallels with the West of several decades ago: existing ideas of male homosexuals as would-be women are being

replaced by the assertion of new self-concepts; more men are attracted to the idea of primary homosexual relationships, rather than marrying and engaging in "homosex" on the side; there is a development of more commercial venues (but simultaneously, perhaps, there is less public cruising as being "gay" makes homosexuality more specialized); in both organizations and media there is the emergence of a gay political consciousness. The mock-femininity of Thai or Indonesian "queens" and the mock-macho pose of hustlers is eerily reminiscent of John Rechy's novel of the early 1960s, *City of Night*, as is the fluctuation between overt queeniness and a certain prudery, public campiness and great secrecy vis-à-vis families and workmates.

There is, as well, a certain vulnerability and fragility which underlies much of the new gay life—not, of course, without parallels elsewhere. For many of the young men who become part of the growing gay worlds of Asian cities there is a rupture with family, village, religion, and social expectations which can be very painful. It is not uncommon to meet young men whose growing sense of themselves as gay has led to interruptions of study, to breaks with family, to a general feeling of being stranded between two worlds (where an older western man will often be cast in the role of protector). Guilt, self-hatred, even suicide are not uncommon for those who feel themselves irretrievably homosexual in societies that deny open discussion of sexual difference even while allowing for certain variations much less acceptable in the west (Emond).

It is tempting to accept the Confucian and other Asian discourses about the significance of the family, and forget that similar experiences are very common for homosexuals in most countries, even those in northwest Europe which have moved furthest toward official acceptance. American research, for example, suggests the rate of suicide among adolescent homosexuals is far higher than the average (Remafedi). Yes, most homosexuals in Asian (and South American, eastern European and African) cities are still likely to be more integrated into family roles and expectations than would be true in Sydney, San Francisco, or Stuttgart.⁵ But we are speaking here of gradations, not absolute differences, and the growing affluence of many "developing" countries means possibilities for more people to live away from their families, and a gradual decline in pressure to get married. One of the key questions concerns the ways in which gay identities will change as "Asians" recuperate western images and bend them to their own purposes.

To see oneself as "gay" is to adhere to a distinctly modern invention, namely the creation of an identity and a sense of community based on (homo)sexuality. Most homosexual encounters—this is probably true even in the west—take place between men or women who do not define themselves as "gay" or "lesbian," and certainly do not affiliate themselves with a community. The development of such identities and communities began in the nineteenth century, although some historians claim evidence of it—at least in London, Paris, and

Amsterdam—in the eighteenth (e.g., Huussen; Trumbach). My focus is very clearly on those men who perceive themselves—and increasingly present themselves to others—as having a consciousness and a politics which is related to their sexuality. They may or may not be behaviorally bisexual; what matters for the purpose of this discussion is their sense of identity. Frequently such men appear more comfortable within an international homosexual world, which they have often encountered firsthand through travel and study, than they are with the traditional sex/gender regime described by anthropologists and still existing in rural areas of their countries.

What characterizes a gay community? Writing of Hungary (where the political restraints until recently were similar to those of authoritarian Asia) Laszlo Toth argues: “There is a specific gay social institution system—from a specific nonverbal communication system to gay publications—which enables homosexuals to communicate with other gays, supporting gay community consciousness” (1). Despite the emphasis on communication, this is an institutional rather than a discursive view of community, recognizing that genuine community requires the existence of specific institutions within which a common consciousness can be expressed. These institutions may include a community-specific language (true of many homosexual subcultures, and now apparent in the emergence of clearly defined gay slang(s) in Indonesia).

The gay worlds of Bangkok, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Manila, or Seoul are obviously different from those of Budapest, Johannesburg, Hobart, Minneapolis, and Sao Paulo. Yet in all these cities—covering all continents and both the “developed” and “developing” countries—there are similarities which seem important and which I would hypothesize have more to do with common urban and ideological pressures than they do with the cultural backgrounds of, say, Thais, Hungarians, and Brazilians. There is a great temptation to “explain” differences in homosexuality in different countries with reference to cultural tradition. What strikes me is that *within* a given country, whether Indonesia or the United States, Thailand or Italy, the *range* of constructions of homosexuality is growing, and that in the past two decades there has emerged a definable group of self-identified homosexuals—to date many more men than women—who see themselves as part of a global community, whose commonalities override but do not deny those of race and nationality. This is *not* to present a new version of an inexorable march towards “development,” with the end point defined in terms of building American-style gay ghettos across the world. Stephen O. Murray has warned that “there are obstacles to the globalization of an egalitarian (gay) organization of homosexuality even in the relatively industrialised and ‘modern’ capitals of ‘developing’ countries” (29). But globalization, in both its cultural and economic manifestations, impinges on the very creation and experience of sexual behavior and identities.

The reasons for these developments lie in both economic and cultural shifts which are producing sufficiently large and self-confident groups of men (and some women) who wish to live as homosexuals in the western sense of that term (i.e., expressing their sexual identity openly, mixing with other homosexuals, and having long-term primary relations with other homosexuals). As such, the tradition that married men are reasonably free to have discreet homosexual liaisons on the side seems as oppressive to the young radicals of OCCUR (Japan) or FACT (Fraternity for AIDS Cessation in Thailand) as it did to French or Canadian gay liberationists of the 1970s. When I was in Morocco in 1995 I met several men who spoke of emigration precisely because they were not willing to engage in the common practice of marrying while continuing to have homosexual encounters outside the home.

It is sometimes assumed that the notion of "a homosexual identity forged through shared lifestyles" has been, as Chilla Bulbeck put it, "almost exclusive to the west" (Bulbeck 5). In fact, the evidence for homosexual identities, lifestyles, and subcultures in a number of "developing" countries, particularly in South and Central America, dates back to the early years of the century and arguably before that, at least in Brazil (Bao; Daniel and Parker; S. Murray; Trevisan). Similar historical work has yet to be done for cities like Bombay, Manila, and Shanghai; almost certainly there are recognizable subcultures whose history has not been recorded.

A political expression of homosexuality is far more recent. The first self-conscious gay groups appeared in Indonesia (Lambda, in 1982) and Japan (JILGA, in 1984) just before the advent of AIDS was to change the terrain for gay organizing in ways which would make it more urgent while opening up certain overseas sources of funding. In the past decade there has been a proliferation of gay (sometimes lesbian and gay) groups, and many other AIDS organizations do a certain amount of gay outreach or even community development.

It is clear that the language of HIV/AIDS control, surveillance, and education has been a major factor in spreading the notion of "gay identity" and in facilitating the development of gay consciousness, as it has also contributed to the creation of the self-conscious identities of "sex workers" and "People With AIDS" (PWAs).⁶ It is impossible to know how far the dispersal of western-style gay identities would have occurred without AIDS, which has opened up both space and resources for gay organizing and increased western influence through surveillance, objectification, and shaping of sexuality. Consider the large numbers of western or western-trained epidemiologists, anthropologists, and psychologists who have used HIV/AIDS as a reason to investigate sexual behaviors across the world, and by so doing have changed the ways in which the participants themselves understand what they are doing. The relationship is summed up in a flyer announcing a party at the 1995 AIDS in Asia Conference in Chiang Mai (Thailand):

Chaii Chuai Chaii is an NGO based in Chiang Mai. Our aim is to increase safer sex among gay and bisexual men, and male sex workers and their partners, through street outreach, bar outreach and one-on-one peer education. We are a non-profit voluntary organization staffed and run by the gay community in Chiang Mai.

Here the language of gay identity and gay-defined HIV education (“outreach,” “peer education”) are conflated to suggest a community which many Thais would claim is irrelevant to continuing cultural assumptions.⁷ Matthew Roberts has argued that AIDS has been the essential catalyst for these developments, although I suspect he may fall into the trap of assuming a linear development toward the western model: “At Stonewall 50 we will likely find ourselves an open and proud community globally, efficaciously practising safe sex . . . and with notable advances in our civil rights across the globe” (261).

NEOCOLONIAL “SEX WARS”

A large-scale construction of a lesbian/gay identity as a central social one—what Stuart Hall calls a master identity (280)—developed in the western world from the end of the 1960s on. Clearly, Asians who adopt lesbian/gay identities are conscious of and in part moulded by these western examples. In both North America and Europe gay liberation grew out of the counter-culture and other radical movements, particularly feminism. To some extent this is also true of the developing gay worlds of the south, but more significant is the global explosion of communications. One example: several years ago I walked into a hotel room in Buenos Aires and turned on the television to see a live broadcast of the Lesbian/Gay Rights March in Washington D.C. Similarly, the opening of the 1994 Gay Games in New York was on the front page of the *Jakarta Post*, and large numbers of young Asians are learning about lesbian/gay worlds from the proliferation of youth-oriented television and rock videos. (Of course print media served to disperse news of the rise of western gay movements before the days of MTV and CNN, although less effectively.⁸)

Michael Tan links the rise of gay identities/organizations to western influence and a growing “middle class” (“Tita”) and claims there is “a global Sexual Revolution, involving a gradual shift in transcending the view of sex-as-reproduction toward sex and sexuality as consent and commitment, respect and respectability” (“Introduction” xii). Yet as Tan recognizes, “modernity” in the countries under discussion is rather different from its western models, for it coexists with other and sometimes actively competing forces (see Corbridge 199–201). Tan and others have suggested that the absence of the

sort of hostility towards homosexuality found in Anglo-Saxon societies may also retard the development of gay political movements. This argument can go overboard, as in Walter Williams's argument that "Indonesian values—social harmony, peacefulness and the national motto 'unity in diversity'—seem to protect gays from mistreatment more completely than western notions of individual rights" (181). Such protection would not extend to those whose "gayness" took on political forms deemed harmful to the Indonesian state.

The importation of certain concepts of sexualities is not of course new: missionaries, anthropologists, government officials, and travelers have all played their roles in simultaneously interpreting and obscuring existing realities. In terms of importing homosexual identity, a significant western influence dates from at least the early years of this century. Western models of homosexuality have come to Asia both through large cultural forces and through the influence of individuals, who were often attracted to "the East" because of its apparent liberality.

This is particularly true of Bali, which from the 1920s on was constructed by rich European homosexuals as a "paradise" because of the seeming beauty and availability of young Balinese men. The life of Walter Spies, a German painter, most clearly expresses this. Spies was responsible in part for the western discovery and fetishization of Balinese art, and eventually he fell afoul of a colonial moral drive that came just before World War II (Rhodius and Darling 85). Indeed, Adrian Vickers claims: "It was not the Second World War but Bali's reputation as a homosexual paradise which ended the golden era of European Bali" (124; cf. Baranay). Yet after World War II and Independence there was something of a rebirth of Bali's reputation, and a number of gay foreigners, among them the Australian painter Donald Friend, settled there for a time. A similar role has since been played by European expatriates in Morocco (Finlayson). Today there is a considerable expatriate gay population in Bali, as there is in Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan, drawn by the lure of "available" young men and "tolerant" social mores.

It is easy to condemn these men in the tones which are increasingly being used in a blanket fashion to demonize all sex tourists, and it is undeniable that there are some very ugly aspects to gay sex tourism. At one level there is the same exploitation of young Asians common in the much larger heterosexual scene (Jennaway; Sturdevant and Stoltzfus): beach prostitution in Kuta (Bali) or take-out bars in Bangkok are not particularly attractive, and young men face many of the same threats to health and integrity as do young women. But without denying the ugliness born of larger economic inequities, one has to recognize a somewhat more complex pattern of relationships at work. In many cases young men are able to use their sexual contacts with (usually older) foreigners to win entry into the western world, either through

the acquisition of money, skills, or language or, more dramatically, through the possibility of emigration. Some young men have made a conscious decision to use their sexuality as a means for social mobility, settling for a "housewife" role with a richer and older westerner out of a mixture of glamor and calculation.

Nonetheless, these relationships are inevitably shaped by colonial structures, which are almost impossible to escape. Racism and colonial scripts of superiority/inferiority are replicated within structures of desire in ways which neither side is comfortable in admitting. (One reader of this manuscript assumed that I was speaking here of active/passive or top/bottom role-playing; I have something more complex in mind. As Genet showed in the relationships between servants and master in his play *The Maids*, such roles may well be reversed in an unconscious transgression of colonial assumptions.) Ironically, the assertion of "gayness" among young middle-class Asian men is beginning to erode their willingness to employ the same script an older generation has used to enter the Western homosexual world.

There is a danger that both moral indignation and over-romanticizing will get in the way of fully understanding the dynamics of western/Asian homosexual contacts. Undoubtedly many westerners desire in Asians (both men and women) deference and servitude that may be unavailable at home, and for some the colonial/racist framework of their relationships allows them to act out their own sense of self-hatred. While there is an extensive literature of the gay expatriate—from late nineteenth-century Frenchmen in northern Africa to Anglo-American writers such as Angus Wilson and Francis King and, more recently, Christopher Bram, Neil Miller, and Peter Jackson (*Intrinsic*)—there is virtually nothing written from the point of view of the "local," and there is a great need to hear those voices.⁹

But this is only part of the story: the gay men one sees in western-style discos at Legian (Bali) or bars in Bangkok are not the only ones. There are many venues in Bangkok, Tokyo, or Manila which cater almost exclusively to locals; indeed, a number of gay bars in Japan deliberately discourage foreigners, and the one gay sauna in Manila explicitly excludes them. In both cases fear of AIDS is the ostensible reason; the larger underlying motives are clearly more complex and operate on a number of levels. Long-lasting relationships exist between Asian homosexuals, marked by a certain equality, and part of the creation of "modern" gay identity appears to be a desire to open up the possibility of such relationships without their being framed by necessary differences of age, status or race.

There is another factor now at work: the development of significant communities of "gay Asians" in the diaspora. An Asian gay consciousness has emerged over the past decade in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Britain, expressed through a host of burgeoning social and political groups

(Chua). In this sense, the image presented in the film *The Wedding Banquet* is remarkably out of date: the film opposes a white gay world to a traditional Taiwanese heterosexual one, but nowhere recognizes the existence in a city like New York of a very significant and increasingly visible East Asian gay community. Gay Asian expatriates are playing a role of some importance in the furthering of gay groups and identities “back home,” even though, as Richard Fung has warned, they often seek to “conflate the realities of Asians in the diaspora with those living in Asian countries” (126).

GLOBALIZING INFLUENCES ON ASIAN SEXUAL IDENTITIES

There are three dominant scripts in which the globalization of gay identities are commonly described. The first sees southeast Asia as possessing a “natural” tolerance for sexual fluidity and expression before the onset of colonialism, and places great emphasis on the continuing traditions of both homosexual and transgender cultures. Thus Frederick Whitham writes: “The Philippines, as is generally true of Southeast Asian and Polynesian societies, has maintained a longstanding tradition of tolerance for its homosexual populations” (234). This script led to the twentieth-century view of some parts of Asia—Thailand; Sri Lanka; Bali—as homosexual paradises. Out of this grows the second script, strongly emphasizing the impact of colonialism and tourism in creating homosexual worlds. This in turn feeds a third script, which places its emphasis on the impact of modernity, and argues for the current development of gay identities, communities, and organizations across Asia as part of a larger pattern of economic and cultural globalization. Thus Kevin McDonald, though barely mentioning homosexuality, refers to “the importance of globally produced imaginary communities centred on forms of constitution of the body, consumption and sexuality” (21). As two Indonesian AIDS workers have written: “Globalisation and economic growth have allowed Indonesian youth unprecedented access to information and media about sex” (Murdijana and Prihaswan 10).¹⁰

It is constantly important to find a balance between the view of globalization as a new stage of imperialism and the triumphalist discourse of globalization as the creation of a new world society, characterised by Simon During as “magic”:

“General magic” is an appropriate term because it catches the astonishing cross-cultural reach of the desire for broadcasting, music, camera and video products. This general desire is not “natural.” . . . Desires are produced by transnational advertising campaigns, while the technologies are shaped by data gathered through ethnographic market research. (341)

While I accept the role of economic and cultural globalization as crucial to the development of new sexual identities, such explanations must build on existing sex/gender regimes and values, just as contemporary gay worlds in the west have built on preexisting traditions and cultures. But as I am skeptical that the recent claims of John Boswell for the existence of church-sanctified gay marriage in the early Middle Age tells us much about either current Catholicism or contemporary homosexuality, so I suspect that the emergence of gay groups and commercial worlds in modern Asia has relatively little to do with precolonial cultural formations. The comment of Clark Taylor—that “homosexual Mexicans often prefer their way of interacting to the U.S. forms because of cherished, cultural values” (117)—ignores the other factors at play.

This is not to deny the powerful symbolic and psychological reasons for exploring such connections: one of the benefits of a postcolonial approach is to unravel the ways in which colonial practices have denied cultural tradition. It is ironic that in many developing countries religious and gay interpretations present bitterly opposed views of the “traditional” status of homosexuality. Thus in Iran or China—with several thousand years of literary exploration of homosexual love—there is bitter persecution of “decadence.” The desire of developing elites to deny their own sexual histories because of imported moralities, and the resulting persecution of homosexuals, are explored for China by Hinsh (165–66; see Ruan and Tsai).

Sexual identity politics grows out of modernity but also shows the way to postmodernity, because it both strengthens and interrogates identity as a fixed point and a central reference. The claiming of lesbian/gay identities in Asia or Latin America is as much about being western as about sexuality, symbolized by the co-option of the word “gay” into Thai, Indonesian, etc., and by the use of terms such as *moderno* (in Peru) and *internacional* (in Mexico) to describe “gayness” (S. Murray 29). As Alison Murray puts it,

Jakarta is now gayer than ever, and despite the dominant discourse, gay is a modern way to be. This has undoubtedly been influenced by western trends and internationalisation of gay culture, and in the process, the distinctive position of the *banci* has tended to be subsumed within the definition of gay. (6)

While such developments are clearly related to affluence, it is nonetheless worth noting the slow development of a western-style gay world in such countries as Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. In these countries, despite both extensive American influence and a considerable commercial world, it does not appear that a large open community is developing—although there is growing media interest in gay issues. (I have been told that the first Korean

homosexual to “come out” on television subsequently received death threats.) In both Singapore and Hong Kong one feels a large gay presence about to burst forth; in both cities one meets large numbers of young men who identify as gay, but who are restrained by familial and governmental pressures from adopting the lifestyle which affluence and global media increasingly hold up before them.

A NEW GAY/LESBIAN POLITICS?

“The personal is the political” holds true for lesbian/gay politics in “developing” countries as much as it does in western countries. But where there is a legacy of colonialism, which has infused sexual relationships as much as other interactions, that slogan takes on particular meanings. In conversations among gay activists, particularly in the southeast Asian region, there has been some discussion of “Asian empowerment,” by which is meant a reversal of the traditional assumptions that Asian men are sexually available for westerners. Such conversations suggest particular forms of self-assertion, and involve a rejection not only of the image of Asian men as “available” but also of the dominant stereotype of them as “feminine” or “passive.” Just as western gay movements have asserted a certain masculinity in their constructions of male homosexuality, so Asian gays, having to counteract both indigenous and imported perceptions of them as men-who-want-to-be-women, are likely to be attracted by some variant of the western “macho” style. (Yes, gay men are beginning to frequent gyms in the richer cities of the region.) In gay discussion groups in Manila and Kuala Lumpur there is talk of “Asian” men learning to eroticize each other as a way of overcoming a deeply internalized sense of inferiority vis-à-vis Europeans.

The sexual-political relations of colonialism mean that for many gay men in Asia the phallus is white and must be rejected, sometimes leading to a rejection (more in rhetoric than practice) of European men as sex partners in the belief that they inevitably bear certain racial and colonial prejudices. To quote the Filipino-American poet R. Zamora Linmark:

They like you because you eat dog, goat and pig's blood . . .

They like you because you kneel hard, bend over quick and spread wide . . .

They like you because you're a potato queen . . .

They like you because you take it in, all the way down

They like you because you ask for it, adore it

They like you because you're a copycat, want to be just like them

They like you because, give it a couple more years, you'll be just like them

And when that time comes, will they like you more? (266)

On a more conventionally political level there are only occasional examples of Asian gay groups engaging in activity of the sort associated with their counterparts in the west. Recent success in ending the criminalization of homosexual behavior in Hong Kong seemed to have relatively little to do with gay activism; rather, as had been the pattern in Britain, it followed a recommendation of the Law Reform Commission in 1982, finally ratified by the colony's Legislative Council in 1990 ("After 10 Years"). Apart from limited moves in India I am not aware of political agitation to repeal such laws in other ex-British colonies such as Singapore and Malaysia, though the issue has been discussed within both Pink Triangle and People Like Us (Singapore). There have been several small radical gay political groups established in the Philippines in recent years, and although not directly connected with any of these groups there was considerable coverage of the suggestion by one Filipino Congressman that there should be explicit representation of homosexuals in the legislature.

The development of political movements among people whose identities are being defined in terms of their sexualities will reflect larger features of the political culture of their societies. Gay politics in both Indonesia and the Philippines reflects the class structures of the countries; in both countries there are powerful upper-class figures whose homosexuality is widely known but who refuse any public identification with a "movement." In Indonesia in particular there is some evidence of the emergence of gay activism among lower middle-class people who have less to lose. My impression is that there are certain tensions around class position between developing groups, often correlated with access to the English language and the outside world—but at this stage this is only a tentative suggestion based on limited observation.

Although the assertion of gay identities and communities in the west took a particular political form associated with the development of gay liberation movements in the early 1970s, this does not mean that groups in other parts of the world, whose sense of "gayness" is fueled by somewhat different sources, will necessarily follow the same itinerary. We must avoid what Michael Connors has termed the "narcissistic transition narrative in 'diffusion,' whereby the trajectory of the Third World has already been traversed by the First" (12).

The best example of western-style political activism has come from the Japanese group OCCUR, which has engaged in lobbying various Japanese Ministries, persuading the Japanese Society of Psychology and Neurology to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness, and which succeeded in a court case against the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in winning the right to use public educational facilities. Despite these gains, OCCUR has warned that

There are many obstacles to lesbian and gay organizing in Asia and the Pacific islands which do not necessarily exist elsewhere in the

world. These include not only the existence of governments repressive of human rights, but also problems that stem from cultural, historical and social differences with the West. For OCCUR this has meant resisting a direct importation of models of lesbian and gay activism developed in the West and developing instead an original form of activism that reflects Japan's specific social and political context. (OCCUR)

OCCUR and several other lesbian/gay groups from Asia and other developing areas participate nonetheless in international networks such as ILGA (International Lesbian & Gay Association) and IGLHRC (International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission), thus increasing their own links to the West and furthering the idea of a universal identity with claims to civil and political rights transcending other cultural and national boundaries. That this is highly contested was obvious in claims for lesbian inclusion at the recent IV World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), and in counter-claims such as that of Singapore's Foreign Minister at the 1994 Human Rights Conference in Vienna that "homosexual rights are a western issue, and are not relevant to this conference" (qtd. Berry 73).

I am optimistic enough to believe that these sorts of arguments will lose in the long run. In the words of United Nations Secretary General Butros Butros Ghali:

We must remember that forces of repression often cloak their wrongdoing in claims of exceptionalism. But the people themselves time and again make it clear that they seek and need universality. Human dignity within one's culture requires fundamental standards of universality across the lines of culture, faith and state. (Ghali)

The ways in which the new gay groups of Asia, South America, and Africa will adapt ideas of universal discourse and western identity politics to create something new and unpredictable—these will be the interesting developments.

Because of this belief, if we abandon the idea that the model for the rest of the world—whether political, cultural, or intellectual—need be New York or Paris, and if we recognize the emerging possibilities for such models in Bangkok and Harare, we may indeed be able to speak of "a queer planet." We may even recognize the need to question whether Anglo-American queer theorists are saying much of relevance to the majority of people in the world who are developing a politics out of their shared sexuality in far more difficult conditions than those within which western lesbian and gay movements arose.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the Australian Research Council for financial support for the research project reported in this paper, plus a number of people who read various drafts, particularly Ben Anderson, Mark Blasius, Peter Jackson, Shivananda Khan, Suvendrini Perera, and Geoffrey Woolcock.

NOTES

1. KKLGN produces a monthly publication *Gaya Nusantara* (contact: Jln Mulyosari Timur 46, Surabaya 60112).
2. On film see Berry. The best known novels are probably those of Mishima; few others have been translated, but see Hsien-yung (Taiwan). Lee (Singapore); Selvaduri (Sri Lanka) are in English.
3. See the discussion in Garber 235–48. While she emphasizes the transgender aspects of the play this is not to deny the other issues raised by the work.
4. For insights into these ambivalences see Garcia and Remoto.
5. This is the theme of a recent Singaporean novel (Koh).
6. I have deliberately limited the discussion of AIDS in this paper as I have discussed it at length elsewhere. See Altman 1994a; 1994b.
7. For more discussion of the role of “gay” organizing around HIV/AIDS in Thailand see Newsletter of the Thai-Australian Northern AIDS Prevention and Care Project (NAPAC).
8. Thus a book published in India in 1976 spoke of “gay liberation”—although in entirely American terms. See Devi.
9. A Western attempt to make “the boys” central to the story is Ashford.
10. This theme was developed in *AsiaWeek* (“Sex: How Asia . . .”) and *The Economist* (“It’s Normal . . .”).

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