

Unlearning Human Rights and False Grand Dichotomies: Indonesian Archipelagic Selves Beyond Sexual/ Gender Universality

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This study presents a critical genealogical analysis of the narratives and politics of representation of various human subjectivities in Indonesia who transgress dominant universalising sexual and gender norms. It traces various streams of regulation, including those reliant on liberal legalistic discourse of human rights, whose extremities produce the stringent 'heteronormative' versus 'homonormative' poles – the two mutually reinforcing otherworlds bereft of the intrinsic complexity of sexual/gender experience across the country's archipelagic selves. This tacit othering, inapt to account for numerous local identity frictions, transitions and re-appropriations owed, inter alia, to distinct non-sexual and non-gender communitarian dynamics, continues to usher in an alien dichotomy of personhood, whose referential, idealised 'self' and juxtaposed 'other' are both violently simplified and tainted with heightened ideological overtones. Against a backdrop of these impoverished binaries, this study confronts the multiple difficulties that a researcher of such phenomena inevitably encounters, ranging from the perils of internationalised taxonomies, such as 'LGBT', to the paradigmatic strategy of silent disidentification employed by the local subjectivities as a peculiar form of resistance. It is posited that these complexities are perhaps best captured and exposed if numerous globalised a priori binaries ('hetero'/'homo', 'male'/'female', 'East'/'West', etc.) and legalistic 'panaceas' (eg liberal discourse on human rights) are gradually unlearned and disestablished in favour of locale-specific inquiries into collective and individual selves and their counter-hegemonic social stratagems. The Indonesian narratives of archipelagic personhood offer one such opportunity.

Je suis l'espace où je suis¹

– Noël Arnaud, *L'état d'ébauche*, 1951

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is today the world's largest archipelagic state, where more than 237 million people inhabit around 6,000 of the total 17,508 islands.² Over 300 different ethnic groups, speaking some 742 languages

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1. *I am the space where I am.*

2. Statistics Indonesia, Indonesia Population Census (2010), retrieved from: <http://dds.bps>.

and dialects, hail from these islands. The turbulent tides of trading, migration and warfare have raged along their shores for centuries, moulding syncretic *ethnoscapes*,³ wherein an islandic self is dynamically negotiated between the allegiance to local narratives and the need to adjust to foreign winds, be they of Indic, Arab, colonial European or some other more or less distant origin. The archaeologies of cultural memory in Indonesia, typically fashioned as ethnographic studies, reveal a vast archipelago of locale-specific (and, in many instances, island-specific) cosmologies guiding the community's ethos, hieropraxis, forms of kinship and an individual *habitus*.⁴ While nominally linked to Muslim, Christian or Hindu credos, these epi-narratives resiliently enshrine the islanders' *genius loci* – the spirit of the place imbued with the distinct meta-histories and worldviews. Hence, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has famously described the Indonesian, heterogeneous Muslim communities as, “remarkably malleable, tentative, syncretistic, and, most significantly of all, multivoiced.”⁵

While Indonesian cultural and spiritual plurality is broadly acknowledged, it is less readily and carefully linked to an exceptional diversity of the Indonesians' gendered and sexual experiences. Instead, the sites of desire and gender/sexual relations are often fiercely contested and ideologically coloured, forcefully homogenised and expurgated of their inherent complexity. It is, in fact, the need for oversimplification that marks all such regulatory tendencies.

Starting with the first President Sukarno's 'family principle' (*azas kekeluargaan*), later developed into an all-encompassing state *familist* ideology,⁶ the domestic, political elite have always been heavily engaged in encouraging and producing the model 'nuclear' hetero-patriarchal

go.id/eng/aboutus.php?sp1/41; Statistics Indonesia, Percentage of Distribution of Area and Population by Island (2010), retrieved from <http://www.datastatistik-indonesia.com> (all last visited July 15, 2012).

3. ARJUN APPADURAI, MODERNITY AT LARGE: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF GLOBALIZATION (2006); Anthony D. Smith, *Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 72 (3) ROYAL INST. INT'L AFF. 445 (1996); Conrad Schetter, *Ethnoscapes, National Territorialisation, and the Afghan War*, 10 (1) GEO. POL. 50 (2005) (The neologism *ethnoscape* was introduced by Arjun Appadurai, who describes it as the globalised spatial diffusion and mobility of correlated people. This study, however, does not follow this definition. Instead, it endorses Anthony Smith's conceptualisation of *ethnoscape*, who understands it as 'the territorialisation of ethnic memory').
4. PIERRE BOURDIEU, OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF PRACTICE (1977); PIERRE BOURDIEU & LOIC J.D. WACQUANT, AN INVITATION TO REFLEXIVE SOCIOLOGY (1992) (I am inclined to use Pierre Bourdieu's elucidation of *habitus* which he understands as a system of acquired personal dispositions (e.g. judgments of sentiment and taste), dependent upon history and human memory.).
5. CLIFFORD GEERTZ, ISLAM OBSERVED: RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT IN MOROCCO AND INDONESIA 12 (1971).
6. STEFAN EKLOF, POWER AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN SUHARTO'S INDONESIA: THE INDONESIAN DEMOCRATIC PART (PDI) AND DECLINE OF THE NEW ORDER (1986-98) 12 (2003).

family, which would gradually throttle all other forms of kinship or gender/ sexual relations and expressions. The benevolent *bapak* (father) and the dutiful, selfless *ibu* (mother) are central to this political imagery,⁷ concomitantly signalling how both the public and the private spheres should be managed. *Bapak's* wise leadership of the family and of the state was to be complemented with *ibu's* sacrifice in a perpetual service for these societal entities. The private, family life was to reflect the public model of governance and vice versa.

Other forms of heteronormative regulation, particularly those purported on behalf of the burgeoning theo-political opposition to the central government, in the aftermath of the 1998 demise of the second President Suharto's autocratic New Order regime and the beginning of the so-called *reformasi* (reform) era, endeavoured to re-appropriate the familist narrative with a characteristic, religious 'twist'. The woman's sacrifice to the male-governed state and family was thus portrayed not only as her patriotic but also a religious duty. The early years of the twenty-first century saw the enactment of numerous gender-biased provincial and local regulations, claiming their legitimacy from selective readings of classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).⁸ The state elite responded with a competing yet in many ways similar vision of heightened public morality, epitomised in the controversial 2008 Law on Pornography.⁹

These regulatory interventions peculiarly resemble the early parageographies of the archipelago,¹⁰ such as a twelfth century map charted by al-Idrisi, which shows the territory of today's Indonesia "as a random assortment of blobs."¹¹ A similar 'accuracy' is achieved in the contemporary governmental and broader theo-political mapping of the Indonesian gender, sexual and relational archipelago. The need to homogenise and simplify, in order to control and politically employ, produces here a kind of Althusserian effect of "[s]pace without places, time without duration"¹²: a totalitarian *tabula rasa* beyond the putative nation-building ethos. While tracing similar currents in what

7. KATHYRN ROBINSON, GENDER, ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA 68 (2009).

8. VANJA HAMZIĆ & ZIBAMIR-HOSSEINI, CONTROL AND SEXUALITY: THE REVIVAL OF ZINA LAWS IN MUSLIM CONTEXTS 63-67 (2010) (The new gender-biased regulations included the prohibition of *khalwat* (close proximity between persons of different gender, if they are at a secluded place and not related to each other), various types of women's clothing and driving of motorcycle for women.).

9. *Id.* at 61-63.

10. Bertram Schrieke, *Ruler And Realm In Early Java*, in *INDONESIAN SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES: SELECTED WRITINGS OF B. SCHRIEKE, PART TWO 1*, 267 (1957).

11. MICHAEL F. LAFFAN, ISLAMIC NATIONHOOD AND COLONIAL INDONESIA: THE *UMMA* BELOW THE WINDS 11 (2003).

12. LOUIS P. ALTHUSSER, POLITICS AND HISTORY: MONTESQUIEU, ROUSSEAU, HEGEL AND MARX (Ben Brewster trans., Verso 2007) (1972).

he terms *dissemiNation* – an evolving cultural difference 'from within' and liminality inscribed in an imagined nation-space, Homi Bhabha recounts “the incommensurability in the midst of the everyday” that a totalitarian nation-building or indeed sexuality-cum-gender-building cannot surpass.¹³ It is from such *common interstices* that one's self-perception and cultural memory are reinvigorated. In this scheme, the liminality of *Indonesianness* – its archipelagic quality *par excellence* – is juxtaposed against the imagined normative subjectivities of *bapak* and *ibu* as their alterity.

Parallel to the familist ideologies engaged in producing specific heteronormative selves, the past several decades have witnessed in Indonesia an ascendance of a liberal discourse, typically drawing on global, northern meta-narratives and taxonomies of sexual liberation, which attempts to explain away and indoctrinate Indonesian sexualities and gender variance so as to fit neatly into the presupposed universal moulds of human sexual/ gender experience and orientation. As a relatively new purchase within international liberal governance strategies across the globe, this *homonormative* discourse¹⁴ has triggered significant academic criticism¹⁵ albeit with sparse ramifications in non-governmental policy-making. In the context of Indonesia, although identified somewhat tacitly by the prominent ethnographers of sexuality and gender,¹⁶ homonormative identity politics remain skilfully under the

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13. Homi K. Bhabha, *Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation*, in *NATION AND NARRATION* 311 (Homi K. Bhabha ed., 1990); Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, in *ILLUMINATIONS* 75 (Harry Zohn trans., Jonathan Cape ed., 1970).
 14. Lisa Duggan, *The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism*, in *MATERIALIZING DEMOCRACY: TOWARDS A REVITALIZED CULTURAL POLITICS* (Russ Castronovo & Dana D. Nelson eds., 2002).
 15. JASBIR K. PUAR, *TERRORIST ASSEMBLAGES: HOMONATIONALISM IN QUEER TIMES* (2007); Paola Bacchetta, *Rescaling Transnational 'Queerdom': Lesbian and 'Lesbian' Identitary-Positionalities in Delhi in the 1980s*, 34 (5) *ANTIPODE: RADICAL J. GEOGRAPHY* 947 (2002); Scott Long, *Unbearable Witness: How Western Activists (Mis)Recognize Sexuality in Iran*, 15 (1) *CONTEMP. POL.* 119 (2009); Arvind Narrain, *The Articulation of Rights Around Sexuality and Health: Subaltern Queer Cultures in India in the Era of Hindutva*, 7 (2) *HEALTH HUM. RTS.* 142 (2004); Dennis Altman, *On Global Queering*, *AUSTL. HUMANITIES REV.* (1996), retrieved from <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-1996/altman.html>; Dennis Altman, *Rupture or Continuity?: The Internationalization of Gay Identities*, 48 (48) *SOC. TEXT* 77 (1996); DENNIS ALTMAN, *GLOBAL SEX* (2001); Peter Drucker, “*In the Tropics There Is No Sin*”: *Sexuality and Gay-Lesbian Movements in the Third World*, 218 *NEW LEFT REV.* 75 (1996); Peter A. Jackson, *An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Reimagining Queer Theory*, 2 (4) *CULT. HEALTH SEX.* 405 (2000); Peter A. Jackson, *Capitalism and Global Queering National Markets, Parallels Among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities*, 15 (3) *J. LESB. GAY STUD.* 357 (2009); Sonia Katyal, *Exploring Identity*, 14 *YALE J. L. & FEMINISM* 97 (2002); *QUEER GLOBALIZATIONS: CITIZENSHIP AND THE AFTERLIFE OF COLONIALISM* (Arnold Cruz-Malave & Martin F. Manalansan IV eds., 2002).
 16. TOM BOELLSTORFF, *THE GAY ARCHIPELAGO: SEXUALITY AND NATION IN INDONESIA* (2005); Tom Boellstorff, *Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia*, 107 (4) *AM. ANTHROPOLOGIST.* 575 (2005); Evelyn Blackwood, *Tombois in West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire*, 13 (4) *CULT. ANTHROPOLOGY.* 491 (1998); Evelyn Blackwood,

social radar.

This brief piece attempts to shed some light on this grey area of Indonesian sex/ gender politics as a premise toward a broader theoretical framework for *archipelagic* (Indonesian) *selfhood* and its inherent complexities.

II. PERSONHOOD BEYOND RIGHTS

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson underscores the difference between an old habit of the European colonisers to name their overseas settlements as “‘new’ versions of (thereby) ‘old’ toponyms in their lands of origin” (such as New York, Nueva Leon, Nouvelle Orléans, Nova Lisboa, Nieuw Amsterdam and Nieuw Zeeland) and the Southeast Asian custom to mark certain toponym with a term for novelty only when the old referential site has either vanished or been enlarged (hence, Chiangmai ('New City'), Kota Bahru ('New Town') or Pekanbaru ('New Market')).¹⁷ Unlike the Southeast Asian diachronic or utilitarian relationship between the 'old' and 'new', European colonial imagery has allowed for the synchronic, parallel existence of the venerable original and its 'new-worldly' counterpart(s).

Precisely this kind of hierarchical parallelism and the zeal to superimpose one's own identitary scripts characterise homonormative regulatory streams in Indonesia and elsewhere. The aetiological complexity of the encountered subjectivities, their sociality and spirituality, their communitarian non-sexual and non-gender needs and roles – all this is subsumed under an impoverished vision of a gendered and sexual being understood through the prism of international identitary taxonomies and politics of 'emancipation'. Yet this stark vision is not always disseminated directly, partly because it is not readily welcomed by the communities it endeavours to infiltrate. Instead it often takes an intrinsically relational, *biopoweristic*¹⁸ shape: it is implicitly contained in donor policies and civil

Gender Transgression in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia, 64 (4) *J. ASIAN STUD.* 849 (2005a); Evelyn Blackwood, *Transnational Sexualities in One Place: Indonesian Readings*, 19 (2) *GENDER SOC'Y* 221 (2005b); Evelyn Blackwood, *Transnational Discourses and Circuits of Queer Knowledge in Indonesia*, 14 (4) *J. LESB. GAY STUD.* 481 (2008); Saskia E. Wieringa, *Gender Variance in Asia: Discursive Contestations and Legal Implications*, 14 (2) *GENDER TECH. DEV.* 143 (2010); SHARYN GRAHAM DAVIES, *GENDER DIVERSITY IN INDONESIA: SEXUALITY, ISLAM AND QUEER SELVES* (2010).

17. BENEDICT ANDERSON, *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF NATIONALISM* 187 (Verso 2001) (1983).
18. MICHEL FOUCAULT, *THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY, VOL. 1: AN INTRODUCTION* (Robert Hurely trans., 1978) (Foucault theorised *biopower* as an intrinsic practice of modern nation-states developed to control their subjects, which does not always appear as a top-down subordination but in a rather more sophisticated, *relational* form. By entering various relations with the

society programmes, it permeates HIV/ AIDS prevention strategies and lingo or it is propagated by a community member who endeavours to 'correct' others in their self-expression and self-identification.¹⁹

The homonormative discourse is 'traditionally' fond of the messianic liberal parlance of human rights, as its legalistic phraseology appeals to the non-governmental sector even though it is usually devoid of any substantial locale-specific analysis. As a false heuristic device, liberal rights are conceived as a block to re-thinking workable solutions for problems at hand. By claiming tenaciously their *sui generis* (conceptual) supremacy over all other normative or non-normative considerations, they effectively *pre-empt* situations which might otherwise result in some novel substantial *bargaining power*²⁰ of the underprivileged constituencies concerned. For, if espoused in this peculiar fashion, the abstract humanism behind the idea of rights is reduced to yet another auxiliary normative system of the liberalist empire. It pompously confers upon the 'new' 'overseas' sexual/ gender subjectivities, modelled in the image of the original, 'old' global northern selves, the freedom of personhood, the moral *raison d'être*, thereby enlarging the cognitive map of liberal identitary scripts. Yet it fails to account for the asymmetries, frictions and anxieties of the 'new' subject positions; it falls short of disclosing the traumatic consequences of their forceful assimilation. After all, these subjectivities, like those 'new' overseas settlements of the European colonisers, are but an excuse for replicating the *base* – an egotistic and expansionist idea of the 'enlightened self' superior to all other forms of humanness.

Intriguingly, however, the liberals' reliance on their shallow vision of human rights in Indonesia has often proven to be in vain. One of the paradigmatic stories concerns a grassroots women's organisation, *Suara Ibu Peduli* (SIP; Voice of Concerned Mothers), which has used one of New Order's most important ideological tools – that of 'motherism' – *against* the regime:

While state practices have intensified women's association with mothering [...], women's activism on the basis of motherhood has made a counter-hegemonic use of this trope, as a strategy of resistance to state policies which threatened a fundamental concern of poor women [...] – their ability to feed their families.²¹

state and each other, the subjects are often being subjugated without their knowledge, for the governing hand of the state is not necessarily readily visible.).

19. Blackwood (2008), *supra* note 16, at 481.

20. Robert Mnookin & Lewis Kornhauser, *Bargaining in the Shadow of the Law: The Case of Divorce*, 88 YALE L. J. 850 (1979).

21. ROBINSON, *supra* note 7, at 152.

The thrust of the SIP's powerful programme has been in rebuilding community relationships, instead of relying "on abstract rights."²² It has significantly contributed to the eventual downfall of the New Order regime²³ through resistant acts of the everyday and ordinary. In a similar vein, Indonesian subjectivities outside the dominant heteronormative (and, arguably, homonormative) sexual/ gender matrix have been building mutual relationships on the basis of their understanding that they share the 'same spirit' (*sama jiwa*),²⁴ day-to-day experience and, oftentimes, their *Indonesianness*,²⁵ rather than on a common human rights framework. Furthermore, their often-invoked desire to be accepted (*diterima*) by society at large is not seen as their inherent right but as a consequence of their sincere contributions to the broader community with their many good deeds and accomplishments (*prestasi*). These subjectivities "almost never say they should be respected just because [of who] they are, but in terms of good deeds: 'We've got prestasi too (*kita punya prestasi juga*)'."²⁶ Clearly, liberal, rights-based, identity politics make little sense in these narratives. Instead, other successful bargaining strategies are being devised and deployed.

How then can the apparent resistance to both the hetero- and homonormativity of the Indonesian non-conforming subject positions be understood? Where does it stem from? What makes these communities so resilient even on the shifting sands of liberal rights discourse? A peculiar spatial occurrence – *islandness* – of these selfhoods seems to account both for their astonishing variance and their ability to rebuff assimilatory schemata. It is, therefore, further analysed as a trait and as a strategy.

III. ISLANDIC 'SACRAL' AND 'COMMON' SELVES

Numerous subject positions across the archipelago transgress gender binarism and dominant sexual norms. Some of their ethnographers tend to divide them between those who are sexually and gender variant, *primarily* because of specific spiritual/ ritualistic reasons – these are, then, said to embody a 'sacred gender'²⁷ – and others, whose sexual/gender

22. *Id.*; Phil Brown & Faith I.T. Ferguson, 'Making a Big Stink': *Women's Work, Women's Relationships, and Toxic Waste Activism*, 9 (2) GENDER SOC'Y 145 (1995).

23. ROBINSON, *supra* note 7, at 68 (The regime fell due to a popular reformist (*reformasi*) uprising; hence the subsequent period became known as the *Reformasi* Era.).

24. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 236-237.

25. Tom Boellstorff, *Playing Back the Nation: Waria, Indonesian Transvestites*, 19 (2) CULT. ANTHROPOLOGY 159 (2004).

26. *Id.* at 178.

27. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 866; Wieringa, *supra* note 16, at 143; Leonard Y. Andaya, *The Bissu: Study of a Third Gender in Indonesia*, in OTHER PASTS: WOMEN, GENDER AND

experience has no apparent *causal* connection with ritual.²⁸ It seems that the category of 'sacred gender', signals a modality of social *relationship* that Victor Turner had termed “normative *communitas*”: a ritual-based “perduring social system”²⁹ *outside* an “area of common living.”³⁰ It is, however, questionable to what extent a form of sociality (including an assumed gender identity) based on spirituality/ ritual can be distinguished from 'common living' wherein supposedly other genders inhere. Firstly, the ritualistic practices in question form an inalienable part of the ethnoscaapes in which 'sacred gender' in Indonesia occurs. Secondly, more often than not, members of 'sacred gender' tend to live it (including through sexual relations thought to be appropriate for it) well beyond their ritually prescribed realm i.e. *commonly*. These tendencies effectively blur the artificial borderline between 'sacred' and 'common,' thus further complicating some of non-normative selfhoods of the archipelago.

Perhaps the best-known 'sacred gender' are *bissu* amongst the Bugis of South Sulawesi, of which the earliest accounts date back to the sixteenth century.³¹ While it had been possible for the Bugis youth, of all sexes (male, female and intersex), to become *bissu*, it seems that, at least since the mid-1800s, there were no longer any female-born *bissu*.³² According to Bugis cosmology, *bissu* are an earthly manifestation of the primordial unity of all genders,³³ hence their attire, behaviour, religious and social roles uniquely resemble that sacred oneness.

Similarly, among the Ngaju (an offshoot of Dayak people) in Kalimantan, two gender variant subject positions known as *basir* and *balian* have been known as ritual practitioners.³⁴ Both male-born *basir* and female-born *balian* have had attire and mannerisms distinct from other genders.³⁵ It could even be the case that *basir* and *balian* have shared a single, 'sacred gender' – much like *bissu* – irrespective of their

HISTORY IN EARLY MODERN SOUTHEAST ASIA (Barbara Watson Andaya ed., 2000).

28. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16; Blackwood (2005b), *supra* note 16.
 29. VICTOR TURNER, THE RITUAL PROCESS: STRUCTURE AND ANTI-STRUCTURE 132 (1969).
 30. *Id.* at 96.
 31. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 849; Andaya, *supra* note 27; DAVIES, *supra* note 16; SHARYN GRAHAM DAVIES, CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS: FIVE GENDERS AMONG BUGIS IN INDONESIA (2006).
 32. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 849; JAMES BROOKE, NARRATIVE OF EVENTS IN BORNEO AND CELEBES DOWN TO OCCUPATION OF LABUAN: FROM THE JOURNALS OF JAMES BROOKE, ESQ. VOL. I (John Murray ed., 1848).
 33. Wieringa, *supra* note 16, at 151.
 34. HANS SCHÄRER, NGAJU RELIGION: THE CONCEPTION OF GOD AMONG A SOUTH BORNEO PEOPLE (Rodney Needham trans., 1963); ANNE SCHILLER, SMALL SACRIFICES: RELIGIOUS CHANGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY AMONG THE NGAJU OF INDONESIA (1997); Andaya, *supra* note 27; Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 854-855.
 35. SCHARER, *supra* note 34.

biological sex, and their imputed 'gender ambiguity'³⁶ simply attests to the global northern sex/ gender lenses through which these subjectivities are usually viewed.³⁷

In the Ponorogo region of East Java, the actors in *reog*, an eighteenth-century old Javanese drama style, assume subjectivities known as *warok* and *gemblak*. They are traditionally age-stratified, with older *warok* assuming a long-lasting guardianship over young *gemblak*, which may lead to a sexual relationship.³⁸ During this ritualistic apprenticeship, they are expected to live in close domestic partnerships. While the *warok* are today exclusively male-born, there are strong indicators that suggest that female-born actors could have also assumed this subjectivity in the past,³⁹ whereas the *gemblak* subject position which were open only to young boys, has, due to shifting public mores, been dictated to gradually being replaced with female-born actresses.

No doubt these sex-based changes in *warok/ gemblak* subjectivities – comparable with the disappearance of female-born *bissu* and the gradual 'correction' of 'gender ambiguity' amongst *basir* and *balian* – occur as a dire consequence of an imposed heteronormativisation of their society. Yet the relative malleability with which 'sacred gender' is constructed and performed – which is almost invariably mirrored in other, non-ritual gendered relationships – signals a deep-rooted cultural memory which resists and transforms major assimilatory schemata even when it strives to incorporate some of their aspects into a workable social and gender/sexual present and continuum. This catalyst ensures *coexistence*, even though never without a struggle, of social temporalities with varying cultural tropes, whereby gender variant Indic rites,⁴⁰ integrative Sufi metaphysics⁴¹ and other peregrinating or locale-specific cosmologies merge into an array of islandic spiritual and social selfhoods. Moreover, whilst being socially validated and replicated in the sacral/ ritual domain, such gender-constructive cultural transience invariably 'spills over' into 'common' relationships and existence.

36. Andaya, *supra* note 27.

37. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 854-855.

38. BOELLSTROFF, *supra* note 16, at 41.

39. Seoiono Hardjomartono, *Rejog, Warok dan Gemblakan di Ponorogo: Tritunggal Jang Tak Dapat Dipisah-pisahkan*, in *BROSUR ADAT ISTIADAT DAN TJERITERA RAKYAT* (Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1962).

40. Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 849; Wieringa, *supra* note 16, at 152 (Gender variance in Bugis, Ngaju and Javanese tradition (*inter alia*) is often linked to Hindu mythology, in which deities such as Ardhanaŗśvara – usually depicted as a half-male and half-female – are thought to provide a convincing script for sacral dis-essentialisation of gender rigidity.).

41. GEERTZ, *supra* note 5, at 12; RONALD LUKENS-BULL, *A PEACEFUL JIHAD: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AND MODERNITY IN MUSLIM JAVA* (2005); ARSKAL SALIM, *CHALLENGING THE SECULAR STATE: THE ISLAMIZATION OF LAW IN MODERN INDONESIA* (2008) (Muslim Javanese mysticism is often accredited for preserving cultural memory – including that pertinent to the island's rich Indic past – within an elaborate and delicate religio-social system.).

Paradigmatic for these phenomena are, again, the Bugis of South Sulawesi, famously branded as people of *five genders*⁴²: beside *bissu*, male and female, there are *calabai*' and *calalai*' – the latter two being gender-transgressive subject positions. *Calabai*' "are male-bodied persons who dress like women, perform women's roles, and often have male partners," while *calalai*' "are female-bodied persons who may live with their women partners and fulfil male roles."⁴³ That these two subjectivities exist alongside *bissu* amongst the Bugis is often taken as evidence of social delineation between 'sacred' and 'common genders'.⁴⁴ Yet at least *calabai*' are known to perform various functions in marriage ceremonies,⁴⁵ much like the contemporary Indonesia-wide gender transgressive ('male-to-female') subject position *waria*.⁴⁶ Whilst *calabai*' perhaps can no longer claim their aetiological connection with ritual, it is curious that they and some other 'common' gender variant subjectivities usually negotiate their place in society by reassuming roles directly engaged with key social ceremonies – such as that of marriage. Ritualistic mediation of one's gender variance apparently persists as a salient *modus operandi*, despite historical disconnections.

IV. NEGOTIATING ARCHIPELAGIC SELFHOODS

Whereas ethno-locality of specific gender variant and/ or sexually diverse subjectivities – usually spanning the territory of a single island – had been more or less preserved in the earlier times, the ultimate stages of the Dutch colonial administration and especially the ascendance of pan-Indonesian political resistance, leading to the turbulent formation and independence of a new *nation-state* (1945), have challenged their ethno-cultural particularity. The term *archipelago* (*nusantara*) has thus been heavily politically re-styled as a synonym for the new national motto – 'unity in diversity' (Old Javanese: *bhinneka tunggal ika*, 'fragmented but one'), whereby "the notion of archipelagic culture (*kebudayaan nusantara*) has served as a central attribute of the unified nation, as one of the pivotal notions that has enabled the positing of the national subject's continuity across History."⁴⁷ Archipelago has effectively become the state's unique 'personality',⁴⁸ through which ethno-localised subjectivities can

42. DAVIES, *supra* note 31.

43. Wieringa, *supra* note 16, at 154.

44. *Id.* at 143; Blackwood (2005a), *supra* note 16, at 849.

45. CHRISTIAN PELRAS, *THE BUGIS* (1996).

46. Boellstorff, *supra* note 25, at 159.

47. Greg Acciaoli, *What's in a Name? Appropriating Idioms in the South Sulawesi Rice Intensification Program*, in *IMAGINING INDONESIA: CULTURAL POLITICS AND POLITICAL CULTURE 12* (Jim Schiller & Barbara Martin-Schiller eds., 1997).

48. David Bouchier, *Totalitarianism and the 'National Personality': Recent Controversy about*

collectively envision their postcolonial future, including by re-imagining their precolonial pasts.⁴⁹ In Indonesian everyday usage, *nusantara* has indeed become a byword for the state (*negara*) and its intricate nationalist ideology.

Yet the *nusantara*'s official sexual/ gender politics soon have revealed their stringent heteronormative zest. Although enthusiastically 'united in diversity' under the ideological roof of their new state, the Indonesian gender variant and sexually diverse subjectivities have faced sustained efforts to remould themselves into the model normative *men* and *women*. As of the 1980s, these efforts were increasingly complemented with the emergent liberal homonormative discourse,⁵⁰ thereby creating the rigid heteronormative *versus* homonormative poles – two mutually reinforcing *otherworlds*, bereft of the intrinsic complexity of Indonesian historical and present-day selfhoods. These hegemonic attempts, however, have not succeeded in depriving the archipelago of its cultural, sexual and gender diversity. Yet they have forced previously by-and-large islandic, non-normative subjectivities to rethink and rework their relationships with the *rest* of the archipelago as well as to re-imagine *themselves* from a multi-islandic, *nusantara* vantage point.

There are at least two major resistance strategies pursued by non-normative subjectivities – that of *re-appropriation* and that of *disidentification*. Seemingly at odds with each other, these approaches are, in fact, often simultaneously used so as to achieve the desired outcomes at two juxtaposed hegemonic ends. Re-appropriation is, for instance, employed by *waria* (*banci*, *béncong*, *wandu*, *kedi*, *kawe-kawe*), who often claim that their *waria*-ness (*kewariaan*) is a distinct *nusantara*-wide phenomenon.⁵¹ In doing so, they effectively make use of the nation-building ideology and celebrate the fact that various historical male-bodied gender variant subjectivities – such as *calabai*' – have been reunited under a 'single vision' (*pandangan satu*) of the *negara nusantara*. *Waria*'s high mobility *within* the national borderlines, in fact, corroborates this narrative. Some *calabai*' for example, live today in Kalimantan, amongst the broader *waria* communities.⁵²

Disidentification, on the other hand, is chiefly used to resist homonormative encroachments. For instance, *tomboi* in Padang, West Sumatra – a female-born masculine ('men-like') subjectivity is locally perceived as a part of so-called 'lesbi world' (*dunia lesbi*). Importantly,

the Philosophical Basis for the Indonesian State, in *IMAGINING INDONESIA: CULTURAL POLITICS AND POLITICAL CULTURE* 157 (Jim Schiller & Barbara Martin-Schiller eds., 1997).

49. Boellstorff, *supra* note 16, at 193.

50. Blackwood (2008), *supra* note 16, at 575.

51. Boellstorff, *supra* note 25, at 159.

52. *Id.* at 162.

“[b]eing lesbi in Padang is generally understood as an expression of gender rather than a form of sexuality engaged in by two women.”⁵³ Hence, although local terms such as *tomboi* or *lesbi* sound similar or even the same as their global northern cognates, their meaning is often crucially *different*.⁵⁴ However, in their still relatively rare encounters with the Jakartan or international activists, *tomboi* from Padang are sometimes told that they cannot be part of *dunia lesbi*, because they are not 'lesbian' but 'transgender'.⁵⁵ Some of the *tomboi* resist this dictum from the hegemonic 'centre' through disidentification: they return to their locale and retain their own concept of selfhood and of their 'peripheral' *dunia lesbi* as long, and as resiliently, as possible.⁵⁶ Moreover, it is from *their island* experience and cultural viewpoint that they continue to see the rest of the archipelago. This strategic disjunction enables Padang's *tomboi* to contemplate an archipelagic self from their islandic, re-localised *place*.

The anti-racist, feminist activist Zillah Eisenstein terms multiple but connectable experiences as *polyversal*.⁵⁷ The intricate elasticity of the Indonesian islandic and archipelagic selves signals their polyversal nature which enables them to dynamically shape their gender, sexual, cultural and spiritual geographies. In *nusantara*, cultural tropes are connectable, but not unconditionally: peripheries and centres can be reshuffled, locales and their subjectivities partially yet not inseparably merged. Even if the archipelago is united into 'a total organism'⁵⁸ of some kind, its real and metaphorical islands will remain 'organs' in their own right.

V. UNLEARNING GRAND DICHOTOMIES

The perennial ambivalence and what Walter Benjamin has described as “the profound perplexity of the living”⁵⁹ abound, amidst the human experience, including that related to sexuality and gender. Yet the societal organisation of one's *place* and the modalities of desire require clustering and crude categorisation. A distinct *binary* approach, fuelled

53. Blackwood (2008), *supra* note 16, at 486.

54. BOELLSTORFF, *supra* note 16; Boellstorff, *supra* note 16, at 575; Blackwood (2008), *supra* note 16, at 481.

55. Blackwood (2008), *supra* note 16, at 498.

56. *Id.* at 499.

57. BOUVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS, COGNITIVE JUSTICE IN A GLOBAL WORLD: PRUDENT KNOWLEDGES FOR A DECENT LIFE (2007); Vanja Hamzić, *The Case of 'Queer Muslims': Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in International Human Rights Law and Muslim Legal and Social Ethos*, 11 (2) HUM. RTS. L. REV. 237 (2011) (Tantamount expression – *pluriversal* – has been coined by the de-colonial semiotician Walter Mignolo.).

58. Michael Van Langenberg, *The New Order State: Language, Ideology, Hegemony*, in STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDONESIA 124 (Arief Budman ed., 1990).

59. Benjamin, *supra* note 13, at 75.

by nineteenth century European worldviews had coalesced into a rigid set of mutually opposed *pairs* through which personhood is objectified and researched: 'hetero' *versus* 'homo', 'male' *versus* 'female', 'East' *versus* 'West', and so on. Ontically anchored and steadfastly reproduced, these dichotomies have been orbited into everyday as chief heuristic *and* mnemonic devices.

Some of the key common strands of liberal thought – such as egalitarianism, meliorism, and universalism⁶⁰ – not only fit well but, in fact, *require* rigid binary concepts of personhood in order to thrive: equality is best established amongst two; the very idea of progress seemingly necessitates an inferior entity contrasted with its superior alterity; the universal nature and span of human rights – which justifies foreign intervention, occupation, re-colonisation – is most easily achieved if the spectrum of human subjectivities is kept simple and, of course, globally applicable. Such heightened Manichean contrasts inform and *produce* the liberal urge to act and spread, *against* all odds and disparities. It is not there to negotiate its presence but to offer a total worldview into which the human experience and cultural memory are forcefully embedded.

Researching alternatives to the grand dichotomies requires a peculiar *unlearning* process. Otherwise, for example, one may still be benignly assured that “[t]he most promising discourse on the acceptance of gender variance is the rights discourse.”⁶¹ It is indeed exceptionally hard to see *beyond* the elaborate façade of liberal dichotomies and their localised decorations *into* a multitude of hidden social fabrics and construction techniques. One surely stands a better chance if the façade is dilapidated. Yet unlearning these deep-seated truisms is not an easy task. There are, for instance, some mechanisms of forgetting – such as lapsing or superficial rejection⁶² – which may not suffice as the remnants of the façade will continue to inform one's analytical directions.⁶³ Other techniques – such as conversion, an epiphany or even an anarchist deconstruction – epitomised in Proudhon's *destruam ut aedificabo*⁶⁴ – might simply replace the façade with other totalised systems, without

60. JOHN GRAY, *LIBERALISM* 43 (1986) (Meliorism is a philosophical principle holding that progress is an all-useful concept leading to a betterment of the world.).

61. Wieringa, *supra* note 16, at 164.

62. Sigmund Freud, *Negation*, in *ON METAPSYCHOLOGY* 435-442 (Penguin Books, 1984) (1925) (This type of rejection has been identified by Sigmund Freud as 'negation' (*Verneinung*): a mental process in which an unconscious wish is negatively formulated; it is rejected 'on the surface', but it retains its *uncanny* existence.).

63. *Id.*

64. PIERRE-JOSEPH PROUDHON, *SYSTÈME DES CONTRADICTIONS ÉCONOMIQUES OU PHILOSOPHIE DE LA MISÈRE* (Chez Guillaumin et Cie et C^{ie} libraries, 1846).

fully comprehending its constitutive elements.⁶⁵ Unlearning, in this context, not only involves a critical expulsive phase in which the grand dichotomies are *gradually* analytically repudiated but also a relocatory reparative phase in which one is *accustomed* to seeing from a non-binary *place*.

VI. CONCLUSION

Beyond their obvious political appeal, geographies of desire and belonging primarily and crucially intersect in an *intimate* space of human lifeworlds. Hence, studies of affect⁶⁶ or of peculiar “intermediate area[s],” between internal and external – those “resting-place[s] for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related”⁶⁷ – offer invaluable insights into the formation of spatially predicated selfhood. This piece attempted to illuminate how human subjectivities and desire *extend to* a phenomenological site of intimacy,⁶⁸ located within (and throughout) an interiorised *island*, or even *archipelago*, and how this *place* in turn provides them with the heuristic and mnemonic tools to sustain their (thus attained) selfhood against the hostile foreign/ exterior winds. That certain topographic extremes – such as highlands – can dramatically influence the cultural and political shape of the peoples that inhabit them is a rather well established idea.⁶⁹ This study was concerned with exploring more intricate (and reflexive) aspects of this phenomenon, imprinted in cultural memory, syncretistic cosmologies and sexual/ gender performativity. Ultimately, however, the Indonesian islandic and archipelagic selves are also reaffirmed as political conduits toward less hegemonic identitary scripts. As such, they provide an excellent incentive to *unlearning* the liberal worldview's pervasive and abysmal dichotomies.



65. Trevor Pateman, *Lifelong Unlearning*, in *THE SHIP OF THOUGHT: ESSAYS ON PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LEARNING* (Duncan Barford ed., 2002).

66. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes*, in *AFTER SEX? ON WRITING SINCE QUEER THEORY* (Janet Halley & Andrew Parker eds., 2011).

67. Donald Winnicott, *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*, 34 (2) *INT'L J. PSYCHOANALYSIS* 89-91 (1953).

68. GASTON BACHELARD, *THE POETICS OF SPACE* (Beacon Press, 1994) (1958).

69. See JAMES C. SCOTT, *THE ART OF NOT BEING GOVERNED: AN ANARCHIST HISTORY OF UPLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA* (2009) (This is a delightfully meticulous study, analysing the culture and politics of the inhabitants of *Zomia*.).