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Tombois in West Sumatra: Constructing Masculinity and Erotic Desire

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During anthropological fieldwork on gender and agricultural development in West Sumatra, Indonesia, in 1989–90, I pursued a secondary research goal of investigating the situation of “lesbians” in the area. I met a small number of “women” who seemed butch in the way that term was used in the United States at the time.¹ In West Sumatra these individuals are called *lesbi* or *tomboi* (derived from the English words *lesbian* and *tomboy*). Although there are similarities, a tomboi in West Sumatra is different from a butch in the United States, not surprisingly, for social constructionists have shown that sexual practices reflect particular historical and cultural contexts (Elliston 1995; Weston 1993). The term *tomboi* is used for a female acting in the manner of men (*gaya laki-laki*). Through my relationship with a tomboi in West Sumatra, I learned some of the ways in which my concept of “lesbian” was not the same as my partner’s, even though we were both, I thought, women-loving women.

This article explores how tombois in West Sumatra both shape their identities from and resist local, national, and transnational narratives of gender and sexuality.² By focusing on West Sumatra, I provide an in-depth analysis of the complexities of tomboi identity for individuals from one ethnic group in Indonesia, the Minangkabau. This piece is not a general explication of tombois across Indonesia, although there may be considerable overlap (see Wieringa 1998). Much excellent work on postcolonial states explores the interplay of national and transnational narratives in the production of genders and sexualities. This article provides a cultural location for tombois oriented to Minangkabau culture as well as national and transnational discourses.

Theories concerning the intersection of genders and sexualities provide considerable insights into, and a variety of labels for, gendered practices cross-culturally (see, for example, Bullough, Bullough, and Elias 1997; Devor 1989; Epstein and Straub 1991; Herdt 1994; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Ramet 1996; Roscoe 1991). In opposition to biological determinism, social constructionists argue that gender is not an essence preceding social expression but an

identity that is constructed and fluid.³ The multiplication of “gender” categories in cross-cultural studies, however, suggests that gender remains a problematic concept. Part of the problem, I would argue, comes from the conflation of two distinct but interacting processes, gender as cultural category and gender as subjective experience.

Viewing gender as a cultural category foregrounds the social structural and ideological processes that make it seem bounded—all the more so in a “scientific” age replete with minute diagnostics of human experience. Studying gender as a cultural category highlights normative representations of gender and the ways they are legitimated, privileged, and hegemonic. It allows one to identify so-called traditional gender systems, or “everyday categories of gender” (Poole 1996), as ideological discourses and to establish which gender representations are dominant or acceptable, and thereby which are transgressive. By highlighting gender as a cultural category, I can delineate normative gender through an analysis of dominant ideological discourses at the local and state levels.

Viewing gender as subjective experience exposes all the processes of negotiation, resistance, manipulation, and displacement possible by human subjects. Gender in this sense constitutes a set of social identities multiply shaped from and through cultural contexts and representations (see also Bourdieu 1977; Poole 1996; Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Viewing gender as a subset of possible social identities allows one to do two things: remove gender as a fundamental aspect of sexed bodies and investigate the way culturally constituted categories shape, inflect, and infuse gender identities. Learning, piecing together, adopting, or shaping identities (such as race, class, gender, or sexuality) is an on-going social process through which individuals negotiate, produce, and stabilize a sense of who they are. These identities are shaped and redefined in relation to dominant gender ideologies that claim constancy and immutability.

Because tombois are enmeshed in several discursive domains of gender and sexual identity, I argue that they produce a complex identity not reducible to a single model. I show how the gender and kinship ideologies of the Minangkabau, the dominant ethnic group in West Sumatra, construct a system of oppositional genders (“man”-“woman”) that persuades tombois to see themselves as masculine. The discourses of a modernizing Minangkabau society, the Indonesian state, and Islam reinforce this system through their representations of femininity and “female” nature. At another level, tomboi identity incorporates new models of sexuality and gender made available by the transnational flow of lesbian and gay discourse from Europe and North America.

This essay also explores the relation between gender ideology and the production of gender transgression. *Webster’s College Dictionary* (1991) defines *transgression* as a violation of a law, command, or moral code; an offense or sin; or more neutrally, passing over or going beyond (a limit, boundary, et cetera). I use the term *gender transgression* to provide a new angle on a range of cultural practices not usually lumped under it. I include within it any gender identities—such as transgendered, reversed, mixed, crossed, cross-dressed, two-spirited, or liminal—that go beyond, or violate, gender-“appropriate” norms enshrined in

dominant cultural ideologies. By defining gender transgression in this way, I want to highlight the way that various social structures and cultural ideologies interconnect to produce gender transgression.

Central to this analysis is the concept of hegemony as developed and used by Gramsci (1971), Williams (1977), and Ortner (1989). Hegemonic or dominant gender ideologies define what is permissible, even thinkable; they serve as the standard against which actions are measured, producing codes, regulations, and laws that perpetuate a particular ideology. Dominant ideologies generate discourses that stabilize, normalize, and naturalize gender (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995); yet within any dominant ideology there are emergent meanings, processes, and identities vying for legitimacy, authority, and recognition (Williams 1977).

Work on gender transgression has prompted some preliminary, and in most cases implicit, formulations about the conditions that produce it. The growing literature on “female-bodied” gender transgressors tends to cast the transgression as resistance to an oppressive gender ideology, usually identified as male dominance or patriarchy.⁴ For instance, U.S. gender ideology has produced at various junctures butch-femme (Kennedy and Davis 1993), camp and drag (Newton 1972, 1993), and transgendered people (Bolin 1994; Garber 1991; Stone 1991). Some scholars argue that these identities result from a hierarchical gender system of compulsory heterosexuality and oppositional genders.

Evidence from Island Southeast Asia raises questions about the relationship between oppressive gender ideology and gender transgression. In her overview of gender in Island Southeast Asia, Errington (1990) suggested that gender is less salient than other categories, such as rank and age, in determining access to status or power. According to Errington, in the central islands of Southeast Asia “male and female are viewed as complementary or even identical beings in many respects” (1990:39). The “paucity of symbolic expressions of gender difference” suggests that gender is not highly marked in those areas (Errington 1990:4).⁵ Despite an apparent lack of oppositional genders, gender transgressors are well known throughout the islands (Atkinson 1990; Chabot 1960; Oetomo 1991; Peacock 1978; Van der Kroef 1954; Yengoyan 1983).

The Minangkabau tomboi poses a further challenge concerning the relationship between oppressive gender ideology and gender transgression. The Minangkabau are a hierarchical, kin-based society in which both women and men lineage elders have access to power. Because Minangkabau gender relations do not fit the usual criteria for male dominance, the presence of tombois in West Sumatra forces a deeper analysis of the conditions that produce gender transgression. Whether a dominant ideology produces gender transgressors, and in what form, depends, I argue, on a number of processes, only one of which may be an oppressive gender hierarchy. A closer reading of cultural processes circulating in West Sumatra suggests the interrelation of kinship, capitalism, religion, and the state in producing gender transgressions.

Misreading Identities

In the following I first provide a brief description of West Sumatra to set the stage for the story of my introduction to tomboi identity. This narrative of misreadings and negotiations of tomboi identity shows the moments that moved me beyond my own culture-bound interpretations and led me to realize that different identities were in operation.

West Sumatra is the home of the Minangkabau people, one of the many ethnic groups that have been incorporated into the state of Indonesia. The Minangkabau, with a population over 4 million people, are rural agriculturalists, urban merchants, traders, migrants, and wage laborers. They are also Muslim and matrilineal. Being matrilineal means that, despite the fact that they are devout Muslims, inheritance and property pass from mother to daughter. I conducted research in the province of Lima Pulu Kota near the district capital of Payakumbuh. In 1990, the province had a population of 86,000; the large majority were Minangkabau.

Far from being an isolated region, the province is well integrated into global trade networks. Rice and other agricultural products produced in the region are traded well beyond Sumatra. Many Minangkabau men and women work for years in cities outside West Sumatra, providing further connections to the national and international scene. Villages have anywhere from 15 percent to 25 percent of their residents on temporary out-migration. Despite out-migration, many villages maintain a rich cultural life based on kinship ties; most social and economic activities are centered in and organized by matrilineally related groups. Other villages are more urban oriented, particularly where migration has led to reliance on outside sources of income.

I had no trouble locating males in West Sumatra who were *bancis*, a term that is defined in Echols and Shadily's Indonesian-English dictionary (1989) as "effeminate or transvestite homosexual[s]" (see also Oetomo 1991). This definition links *bancis*' gender identity (effeminate or transvestite) and sexuality (homosexual). In the district capital I met several *bancis* or *bencong*, as they are referred to in West Sumatra. *Bancis* are obvious to local people, who comment on their appearance or taunt them when they walk down the street. Although *bancis* do not carry themselves as men do, they do not carry themselves exactly like women, either; rather, they behave in the exaggerated style of fashion models, a style that in itself is a caricature of femininity, one they have been exposed to through fashion magazines and televised beauty pageants. Their sexual partners are indistinguishable from other men and are generally thought to be bisexual, or *biseks* in local parlance, as these men might also have relationships with women.

My search for "lesbians" was more difficult. I asked some high school-aged acquaintances of mine,⁶ who had friends who were *bancis*, whether they knew any *lesbis*—the term they used with me—in the area. I was told that there were several but that those women were worried about being found out. I was given the impression that such women were very coarse and tough, more like men than women. After several months in West Sumatra, one of my young

friends introduced me to Dayan.⁷ S/he, however, did not fit the stereotype.⁸ In hir midtwenties, s/he appeared to me to be boyish-looking in hir T-shirt, shorts, and short hair, but s/he did not seem masculine or tough in any way that I could perceive. I consequently felt quite certain that I had met another “lesbian.” The term *lesbi* that my friends used also offered familiar footing to an outsider from the United States.

Negotiating our identities was a perplexing process in which we each tried to position the other within different cultural categories: butch-femme and *cowok-cewek*. *Butch-femme* is an American term that refers to a masculine-acting woman and her feminine partner.⁹ *Cowok-cewek* are Indonesian words that mean “man” and “woman” but have the connotation of “guy” and “girl.” It is the practice of female couples to refer to a tomboi and hir feminine partner as *cowok* and *cewek*. (Most Indonesians are unfamiliar with this use of the two terms.) In both the United States and West Sumatra, female couples rely on and draw from dominant cultural images of masculinity and femininity to make sense of their relationships. These similarities were enough to cause both my partner and myself to assume that we fell within each other’s cultural model, an assumption I was forced to give up.

Dayan operated under the assumption that I was *cewek*, despite the inconsistencies of my behavior, because that fit with hir understanding of himself in relation to hir lovers, who had all been *cewek*. For instance, my failure to cook for hir or organize hir birthday party were quite disappointing to Dayan. On another occasion, when I visited an American friend of mine at his hotel, s/he accused me of sleeping with him. In hir experience, *ceweks* are attracted to men and also like sex better with men. Yet, as the one with the cash in the relationship, I was allowed to pay for things despite it not being proper *cewek* behavior. In rural Minangkabau households, men are expected to give their wives their cash earnings. Expectations about the husband’s responsibility to provide income are even greater for middle-class Indonesians, for men are represented as the sole breadwinners. Perhaps Dayan justified my actions on the grounds that I was an American with considerably more income than s/he. Certainly s/he was willing to entertain the possibility of my difference from hir understanding of *ceweks*.

One day I overheard the following exchange between Dayan and a tomboi friend. Dayan’s friend asked if I was *cewek*, to which Dayan replied, “Of course.”

“Can she cook?”

“Well, not really.”

The friend exclaimed, “How can that be, a woman who can’t cook? What are you going to do?”

I was surprised to find that my gender identity was so critical to this (macho) tomboi. The fact that I had a relationship with Dayan said very little to me about what kind of woman I was. I interpreted my relationship with Dayan as reflective of my sexual identity (a desire for other women).

For my part, I assumed that Dayan was a butch, more or less in congruence with the way I understood butches to be in the United States in the 1980s, that is,

as masculine-acting women who desired feminine partners.¹⁰ S/he always dressed in jeans or shorts and T- or polo shirts, a style that was not at odds with the casual wear of many lesbians in the United States. One day, however, I heard a friend call hir “co,” short for *cowok*. I knew what *cowok* meant in that context; it meant s/he was seen as a “guy” by hir close friends, which did not fit my notion of butch. I heard another female couple use the terms *mami* (mom) and *papi* (pop) for each other, so I started calling Dayan *papi* in private, which made hir very pleased. But when I told Dayan s/he was pretty, s/he looked hurt. Then I realized my mistake: “pretty” (*cantik*) is what a woman is called, not a man. Dayan wanted to be called “handsome” (*gagah*), as befits a masculine self.

Dayan’s personal history underscored hir feelings that s/he was a man. S/he said s/he felt extremely isolated and “deviant” when s/he was growing up and acted more like a boy. People in hir town called hir *bujang gadis*, an Indonesian term meaning boy-girl (*bujang* means bachelor or unmarried young man, and *gadis* means unmarried young woman) that used to refer to an effeminate male or a masculine female (although not much in use currently). As a teenager, s/he only had desire for girls. S/he bound hir breasts because s/he did not want them to be noticeable. They did not fit with hir self-image. As a young adult, s/he hung out with young men, smoking and drinking with them. S/he said s/he felt like a man and wanted to be one. I finally had to admit to myself that tombois were not the Indonesian version of butches. They were men.

Cowok-Cewek

I met two other tombois in West Sumatra, Agus and Bujang, who were both friends of Dayan. The first time I met Agus, s/he was wearing a big khaki shirt and jeans; even I could not mistake the masculine attitude s/he projected. S/he wore short hair that was swept back on the sides. S/he carried himself like a “man,” smoked cigarettes all the time, played cards, and made crude jokes. S/he struck me as coarse and tough like cowoks were said to be. Dayan admired Agus and thought hir the more handsome of the two.

Dayan told me that Agus, who was approximately thirty years old, had only been with women, never with a man. S/he had had several lovers, all beautiful and very feminine, according to Dayan. One former lover married and had two children, but Dayan thought Agus probably still saw her occasionally. Agus spent much of hir time with hir lover, Yul, who lived in a large house only a few minutes by bus outside of Payakumbuh. Yul, who was in her early fifties, was a widow with grown children, some of whom were still living at home. After Agus started living with her, Yul wanted her children to call Agus *papi*. She said she did not care if her children disapproved of her relationship. If her children did not act respectfully toward Agus, Yul would get angry with them and not give them spending money when they asked for it. But one of Yul’s daughters argued that because Agus is not married to her mother, s/he should not be part of the family and be treated better than her own father had been. The frequent squabbling and lack of privacy at Yul’s house was too much for Agus, who spent less and less time with Yul and finally moved back to hir sister’s house nearby.

The other tomboi I met, Bujang, was at that time living at hir mother's in a rural village. Bujang seemed quiet and somber. Boyish features and oversized clothes that hid hir breasts made it impossible for me to tell if s/he was male or female. We talked very little because hir mother was there. Later Dayan told me Bujang's story. Hir mother had forced hir to marry; s/he had had a son but then left hir husband. S/he had a lover (who, Dayan said, was feminine) and moved with her to Jakarta, where they lived for some time to avoid the prying eyes of relatives. Under continued pressure from hir family, however, and lacking adequate income, Bujang finally returned home with hir son, leaving hir lover temporarily in hopes of finding a better way to support hir family. Hir cewek lover, however, eventually married a man.¹¹

Partners of tombois fit within the norms of femininity and maintain a "feminine" gender identity. Their sexual relationships with tombois do not mark them as different; their gender is not in question.¹² Like an earlier generation of femmes in the United States, tombois' partners are nearly invisible (see Nestle 1992). Yul, Agus's lover, was feminine in appearance. She had shoulder-length permed hair, wore makeup and lipstick, and had long fingernails. Yul had never been with a tomboi before she met Agus. She had not even thought about sleeping with one before. Although she sometimes wore slacks and smoked, even hung out at the local coffee shop with Agus to play cards, she was called *ibu* (mother) by men and *mami* by Agus. No one would think she was a tomboi just because she was partners with one; she was cewek. As a cewek, she adhered to the hegemonic standards of femininity in her appearance and behavior.

Although the fact that they sleep with tombois makes them "bad" women in the eyes of local people, for premarital sex and adultery are disapproved of for women, ceweks are still women. Even tombois expect ceweks to have greater desire for men because that is seen as natural for their sex. Dayan once said, "Unfortunately, they will leave you for a man if one comes along they like. It's our fate that we love women who leave us." No one seems to consider a cewek's desire for tombois problematic; she remains a woman who desires men.

Performing Masculinity

Tombois model masculinity in their behavior, attitudes, interests, and desires. Dayan often spoke of being *berani* (brave), a trait commonly associated with men, as an important part of who s/he was. S/he attributed the ability to be a tomboi to being *berani*; it meant, among other things, that one could withstand family pressures to get married. S/he said the ones that are *berani* become *cowok*. In talking about Agus's situation with hir lover Yul, Dayan commented that Agus was not brave enough to sleep at Yul's house anymore. S/he thought that Agus should not let Yul's children force hir to move out. Agus was not being as brave as Dayan thought a person should be in order to live up to the *cowok* identity.

Tombois pride themselves on doing things like men. They know how to play *koa*, a card game like poker, which is thought to be a men's game. They smoke as men do; rural women rarely take up smoking. They go out alone,

especially at night, which is a prerogative of men. Like men, they drive motorcycles; women ride behind (women do drive motorcycles, but in mixed couples men always drive). Dayan arrived at my house on a motorcycle one time with a man friend riding behind. Like Minangkabau husbands, they move into and out of their partners' houses. Dayan said s/he often gets taken for a man if someone only sees hir walking from behind. Sometimes in public spaces, particularly in urban areas, s/he is called *mas*, a contemporary Indonesian term of address for a man. The thought that a tomboi might marry a man or bear a child like a woman seemed unconscionable to Dayan. S/he had little sympathy for Bujang, who was forced to marry, saying, "This person is cowok! How could s/he have done that, especially having a baby. That's wrong."

The taunting and joking between Agus and Dayan reflect one way in which their masculinity is negotiated. Agus's teasing questions to Dayan about whether I was a proper *cewek* is one example. Another incident occurred one evening when we were hanging out with Agus at a coffee shop. S/he had been playing cards (*koa*) with some men for awhile and it was getting late. Dayan told Agus s/he wanted to leave. Agus said tauntingly, "You're a guy [*laki-laki*]! How come you're afraid of the night?" I knew Dayan wanted to get back to the privacy of hir own place, a 45-minute drive by motorcycle. Agus ignored that fact and implied that Dayan was acting like a woman, for women are supposed to be more timid than men and stay indoors at night.

Another time Agus heard me call Dayan by hir first name. S/he gave Dayan a disparaging look, letting Dayan know that s/he was not demanding enough respect from me as hir *cewek*. Minangkabau usually do not call their spouses by their first names. Women generally use the term of address for older brother (*udah*), while *papi* is more common in urban areas or among those who live elsewhere in Indonesia.

Dayan also commented to me about a story circulating in West Sumatra concerning a female who passed as a man. This individual was rumored to have married his partner by going to another district where no one knew he was female. He (the cowok) runs a store, it was related; he wears loose clothes and straps his breasts down so they are not apparent. His wife (the *cewek*) is said to be very pretty. Dayan's response to this story was, "Oh, that cowok must really be a cowok," signifying that he had become the ultimate tomboi, one who passes as a man.

The sparring and comparing of masculine selves reveal one of the ways tombois create, confirm, and naturalize their identities as men. The teasing helps to reinforce and interrogate the masculine code of behavior. Their actions suggest that being cowok is an identity one can be better or worse at, more or less of; it is something that must be practiced and claimed—which is not to say that it is inauthentic, for no gender identity is more or less authentic than another, but, rather, is more or less an approximation of the hegemonic ideological domain accorded to that gender (see Butler 1991). As any man does, they are negotiating their culture's ideology of masculinity.

Tombois construct their desire for and relationships with women on the model of masculinity. The oft-repeated statement that their lovers are all feminine underscores their position as men who attract the "opposite sex." Because I was Dayan's partner, hir friend assumed that I was a particular gender, in this case the feminine woman. Their use of gendered terms of endearment, *mami* and *papi*, and the terms *cowok* and *cewek* reflect tombois' understanding of themselves as situated within the category "men" (*laki-laki*). Tombois' adherence to the model of masculinity and their insistence on replicating the heterosexuality of a man-woman couple point to the dominance of the normative model of gender and heterosexuality.

Gender Ideology and Gender Transgression

In constructing themselves as masculine and their relationships as heterosexual, tombois are gender transgressors who nevertheless reflect the dominant ideology. Tombois' transgressions raise the issue of the relation between gender ideology and the production of gender transgression. What social conditions produce transgression of the dominant ideology? As I noted in the introduction, some preliminary attempts have been made to identify the conditions that produce gender transgression. Several scholars argue that oppressive gender ideologies (male dominance) force gender transgression.¹³ According to Kennedy and Davis, "butch-fem" identities in the United States developed in a period in which "elaborate hierarchical distinctions were made between the sexes" (1992:63).¹⁴ Because men and women were culturally constructed as polar opposites ("the opposite sex" being a typical folk designation for the two genders in the United States), behaviors and privileges associated with men, including erotic attraction to women, were restricted to those with male genitalia. Male dominance and an ideology of oppositional genders created resistance to and subversion of the dominant paradigm by butches and femmes.

Some gender theorists argue that "women" become "men" (including female "berdache," female soldiers, and passing "women") because of sexual desire for other women (Newton 1984; Raymond 1979; Rich 1980; Rubin 1975; Trumbach 1994; Wieringa 1989). In this view, because "women" are not allowed freedom of sexual expression, they are forced to pass as men (with great caution, however) in order to be with women. Thus, the constraints on their sexual desire, which arise from an ideology of male dominance and men's control of women's sexuality, forces women to transgress. Although this interpretation may work in some cultural locations, it is problematic because it assumes the essentiality of sex. These individuals are claimed as "real" women whose desire for women forces them to take on a man's identity.¹⁵ This explanation is implausible for tombois. As Dayan's story indicates, it was not sexual desire for women that "drove" hir to produce a masculine identity (a problematic construction anyway because being "driven" suggests a biological drive). S/he had already established a masculine identity before s/he was aware of hir sexual desires for women. Having identified himself as masculine, s/he also laid claim to a desire for women.

Cross-cultural evidence, predominantly from societies with strict gender polarity, seems to support a strong connection between male dominance and gender transgression. On the one hand, Wikan (1977), who studied the highly sex-segregated patriarchal culture of the Omani, found that the *xanith*, a cross-dressing male prostitute, moves in the women's world. By providing men with an alternative to sex with women, the *xanith* preserves the gender dichotomy and protects women's virtue, Wikan argued. The gender dichotomy, she claimed, is the "precondition" for a male transsexual. In my analysis of gender-stratified, patriarchal class societies, I argued that "women" in these societies were not allowed to take on a cross-gender role because such behavior was viewed as a threat to men's privilege (Blackwood 1986a). They did so, however, even at the risk of severe sanctions if they were discovered (see Crompton 1981; Cromwell 1997). On the other hand, so-called sworn virgins in the patriarchal Balkans are allowed to renounce their womanhood publicly, usually at puberty, and become social men (Dickemann 1997). Each of these cases supports the conclusion that male dominance and strict gender polarity produce individuals who reject or resist being slotted into normative gender categories. In these instances, it appears that the disadvantages of a normative feminine gender, such as the lack of access to men's privileges and the constraints against desiring women as a woman, produce gender transgressors.

Other instances of gender transgression, however, suggest that it is not always produced under oppressive conditions, nor is it always rejection of, or resistance to, normative gender. Although it goes beyond the limits or reverses cultural norms, gender transgression in some cases (in Indonesia and other cultures) is a culturally legitimated behavior believed to effect healing or give greater access to the spirit world. Examples include transformed shamans, clowns, and ritual specialists (Balzer 1996; Bogoras 1901; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Peacock 1978). In such cases, gender transgression is not the result of oppressive conditions but of the ritual power associated with gender. These examples suggest that transgressions can take many forms; different systems produce different types of transgressions.¹⁶

Another reason to ask what conditions produce gender transgressions has to do with essentialist claims about human "nature." Many scholars resort to essentialist explanations for gender transgression. For instance, a discredited theory of "berdache" gender argued that males became "berdache" because they were naturally effeminate and could not live up to the warrior role for males. Their refusal to become warriors was taken as an indication of the connection between physical nature and social identity; they were born that way. Although I do not deny the possibility of biophysical influences on human behavior, I want to pursue a social analysis further.

I use for comparison an example of the transgression of ethnic identity. In Stoler's (1996) work on colonial-indigenous relations, she found that ethnic transgressions were the subject of much concern in Dutch colonies. Colonial officials who hired indigenous women to care for their children found, to their chagrin, that their young children identified with the indigenous culture rather than

that of the parents. Although every effort was made to instill in the children the language, manners, and behavior of their European parents, they often chose to speak Malay and associate with local children in ways not deemed proper for people of a “superior” race (Stoler 1996). Their behavior, a transgression of European norms of behavior, was the result not of an inborn desire to be Malay but of the conflicting identities with which they were presented. That the children chose to speak the maid’s language first attests to what was most comfortable for them.

Culture works by applying social categories to bodies, but when individuals or groups reject particular categories designed for their bodies, such actions should not be deemed to result from “natural” desires. Rather, rejection or violation of cultural norms may arise from contradictory social processes and subaltern desires present in or produced by the culture itself. Thus, like ethnic transgressions, gender transgression is a rejection of social definitions that one finds intolerable or undesirable because other definitions are available that provide greater rewards or fit better with one’s sense of self. In the case of tombois, certain ideologies of masculinity fit better.

Rejection is often read as “resistance” because the power of the dominant ideology and the daily practice of that ideology forces on-going resistance. The actions of Dayan’s mother are a good example of a daily practice to slot Dayan back into the normative category of gender. Her efforts to have Dayan marry a man meant that Dayan was forced repeatedly to confront, question, and reassert her own violation and reconstruction of gender. *Rejection*, which implies a one-time act, is too simplistic a term to describe an on-going struggle to maintain the identity one produces. Thus, gender transgression can be both a resistance to and rejection of cultural norms.

What social conditions produce the tomboi identity? Are tombois forced into a transgendered role by an oppressive, male-dominant society? To answer this question I turn now to social processes (cultural ideologies) in West Sumatra and the Indonesian state, looking first at the interrelations of Minangkabau kinship, gender, and economics in the production of oppositional genders.

Minangkabau Ideology and Oppositional Genders

Although the Minangkabau people are considered a single ethnic group, there are many Minangkabaus—many “fantasies” of Minangkabau ethnic identity, to borrow Sears’s term (1996a). Minangkabau people are urban, rural, educated, and devout; they are civil servants, migrants, and farmers. Their identities vary according to their exposure to media, state ideology, Western-oriented education, and religious fundamentalism. The multiplicity of identities attests to the complex processes at work in contemporary Indonesia as individuals and ethnic groups situate themselves within the postcolonial state.¹⁷

The construction of gender in West Sumatra is equally complex. There are marked gender differences attached to male and female bodies, but these differences are produced within a matrilineal system that privileges women. Minangkabau women draw from and constantly rework several models of

womanhood based on the ideologies of *adat* (local customs, beliefs, and prescriptions for behavior), Islam, and the state (Blackwood 1993, 1995b). The Minangkabau gender ideology I describe here has its basis in rural, rather than urban or nonfarming, life in West Sumatra.

Through its very commonness, something as simple as the segregation of girls and boys enculturates and reinforces ideas about sex difference. As is typical of many Islamic cultures, there is lifelong physical segregation of the sexes in most public spaces and events. Girls and boys socialize in predominantly single-sex groups. Teenaged girls and women are expected to stay in at night; going out alone after dark is frowned on. In contrast, adolescent boys and men can be outside in the evenings and often hang out in predominantly male-only spaces, such as coffee shops. These gender differences reflect the Minangkabau (and Islamic) view that men and women have different natures.¹⁸ Men are said to be more aggressive and brave than women. Boys are admonished not to cry—crying is what girls do. Women are expected to be modest, respectful, and humble (all contained in the word *malu*), especially young unmarried women.

All ritual ceremonies—such as marriage, engagement, or death—are conducted by the sexes separately. During ceremonies women have control of the house space while men cluster outside until it is time to deliver speeches. I was told that men and women each have their own part of the ceremony and neither is more important than the other. Men make speeches, but women oversee the whole process and see it to its conclusion (see also Pak 1986). Ceremonial practices reflect the different rights and obligations of women and men but not their place in a gender hierarchy.

These gendered notions encode difference and men's privilege, yet they co-exist with practices and discourses that encode women's privilege and power (Blackwood 1993, n.d.). Women lineage elders are powerful figures who, if they are wealthy, control land, labor, and kin. Economically, women control the distribution of land and its produce. Men figure peripherally in their wives' houses, but they maintain important relations with both natal and affinal houses. Husbands are treated with respect and even deference by their wives (in certain matters); some elite men hold important family titles and are considered the protectors of lineage property. Elite men and women carry out kinship affairs in democratic fashion, with neither women nor men able to enforce decisions without the agreement of the other side. Although gender ideology signifies differences in rights and privileges, it does not encode men's hegemonic superiority.

Minangkabau kinship and marriage practices provide deeper insights into the construction of gender and sexuality. Individuals, whether male or female, are not considered adult until they have married heterosexually. Everyone is expected and strongly encouraged (in some cases forced) to marry, an expectation generally true throughout Indonesia and Southeast Asia as a whole. While this expectation is commonplace in most cultures, its significance goes beyond the mere requirement to reproduce. Marriage constructs an extended network of kin and affines that forms the basis of social life in the village. For Minangkabau women, the continuation of the matrilineal kinship network through marriage

and children is critical to their own standing and influence both in the kin group and in the community. An unmarried or childless daughter denies the lineage any offspring through her and risks the future status of the lineage, not only in terms of heirs but in terms of rank.¹⁹ A man's marriage does not produce lineage heirs, making men peripheral to lineage reproduction. In contrast, a woman's marriage to a lower-ranked husband can effectively decrease their lineage standing in future generations. Women lineage heads exert control over young women to avoid the risk of a bad marriage or no marriage at all. Thus, in this matrilineal system, men are not the primary ones controlling women through marriage; senior elite women control young women through their desires to maintain and strengthen their own lineage standing (Blackwood 1993).

In the context of this rural kin-based society, heterosexual marriage is a paramount feature of Minangkabau kinship ideology. Within the terms of the kinship ideology, women are producers and reproducers of the lineage. There are no acceptable fantasies of femininity or female bodies in rural villages that do not include marriage and motherhood. This ideology remains hegemonic at the same time that emerging discourses of modernity and capitalism have opened up possibilities of resistance to marriage restrictions (Blackwood 1993).

Minangkabau culture produces gender transgression, I argue, because of restrictive definitions and expectations of masculinity and femininity attached to male and female bodies. In this case, male dominance is not an adequate reason for gender transgression because the Minangkabau do not fit any standard criteria for male dominance. It is not "men" (patriarchy) or their oppressive gender hierarchy that creates transgressions but, rather, a gender and kinship ideology that privileges women and men, yet insists on oppositional genders.

How does this sex/gender system induce the tomboi to claim a masculine identity? Why is (or was) this the form that transgression took? I am assuming here the temporal precedence of gender-based identities (*cowok-cewek*) relative to more recent identities available through the lesbian and gay movement internationally. To answer these questions, one needs to look at the way tombois are treated within the dominant culture. Tombois imagine themselves masculine, and as such are tolerated to a certain extent,²⁰ but there is a contradiction between the way tombois define themselves and the way others define them. Tombois are under great pressure to carry out family obligations, to marry a man and be reproductive. Dayan said that every time s/he saw hir mother, she asked when s/he was getting married. Hir mother worried that a woman could not support herself alone; she needs a husband. Hir mother's statement was a clear refusal of Dayan's self-definition as a man, a refusal that typifies the attitude of others within the local community.

The constant pressure to get married and the threat of forcible marriage reveal the way a person's body determines a person's gender. In this system the hegemonic, legitimate gender is based on one's sex; gender is not considered an "identity," performed or otherwise. In many ways this ideological rendering is similar to the dominant sex/gender paradigm in European and U.S. societies: gender is believed to derive naturally from physiological sex; a "real" woman

possesses female genitalia, desires men, bears children, and acts like a woman.²¹ A tomboi, according to the Minangkabau sex/gender system, is a “woman” even though s/he enacts a masculine gender, hence the refusal to legitimate that enactment and the insistence on the fulfillment of hir reproductive duties. Denying the female body is impermissible. Although tombois insist on being treated as men by their partners, their masculinity lacks cultural validation. Society insists on the priority of the body in determining gender.

Dayan said s/he played too rough and enjoyed boys’ activities when s/he was little, so people called hir *bujang gadis*, a label that meant others perceived hir as masculine. At that time s/he had no other recourse but to assume s/he was a boy. Without other options available, and seeing that hir behavior falls outside the bounds of proper femininity, the tomboi denies hir female body, binding hir breasts so that the physical evidence will not betray hir. S/he produces the only other gender recognizable in the sex/gender system, the masculine gender. That interpretation would accord with the hegemonic cultural ideology, in which masculinity is male—with a twist, a twist that s/he continually has to substantiate and rectify in hir own mind and to others. Dominant ideologies, as noted by Poole, are “enshrined in prominent, powerful and pervasive stereotypes . . . and deployed in centrally institutionalized or otherwise significantly marked arenas of social action” (1996:198). The hegemonic persuasiveness of such ideologies means that other forms of identity are unimaginable.²² Consequently, some masculine females appropriate the masculine gender because it is the most persuasive model available.

The Promotion of Motherhood and Heterosexuality

Given the importance of the state and other institutions in the production and control of gender and sexuality, as attested to by a number of recent studies,²³ what messages about gender at the national level lead to the production of tomboi identity? The Indonesian state, particularly since the inception of the New Order in 1965, has avidly pursued a policy promoting nuclear families and motherhood.²⁴ This state ideology emphasizes the importance of women’s role as mothers and consciously purveys the idea that women are primarily responsible for their children and their family’s health, care, and education (Djajadinigrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987; Manderson 1980; Sullivan 1983; Suryakusuma 1996). In fact, the state argues that motherhood has been the traditional role for women in Indonesia since before the coming of the Dutch. According to Gayatri (1995), this line of argument has been used by state officials to fend off feminist efforts to change perceptions about women. All state family policies are oriented around a nuclear family defined as a husband, wife, and children in disregard of the many forms of family found within the borders of Indonesia.

Several state organizations for women perpetuate the belief that women are nurturing and selfless, if emotional, creatures who need to be married to be happy, productive citizens. The national dress code emphasizes femininity for women, with dresses, skirts, jewelry, and makeup the only acceptable attire for work. Dharma Wanita, the state organization for wives of government officials,

heavily promotes cosmetics to its members and sponsors what it assumes to be important activities for women, such as knitting and cooking.

Television and magazines are replete with images of soft, pretty, domestic women. Advertisements bombard women with the most fashionable clothes, skin care, and health care products necessary to make them successful women. Avon, Revlon, and Pond's are some of the non-Indonesian companies promoting this vision of femininity. Women characters on popular television series are primarily domestic, irrational, emotional, and obedient—and incapable of solving their own problems (Aripurnami 1996). This emphasis on hyperfemininity and the importance of motherhood reinforces restrictive gender boundaries. The message for women is that it is a national and religious duty to marry heterosexually and be feminine.

Minangkabau newspapers published in West Sumatra for local readers reflect state propaganda on femininity. The women's section in *Singgalang* is devoted to health, beauty tips, and heterosexuality. One columnist advises women not to worry if they are not beautiful; there are other characteristics they can develop that will still be attractive to men. Another column claims that men and women need each other; each sex is incomplete without the other. "Although it's not impossible for a woman to find meaning without a man," advises Fadlillah, "it gives women's lives new meaning when a man is there" (1996:3, my translation). Other articles admonish women to be modest (*malu*) and warn against too modern an attitude, *modern* here referring to the "loosened" values and attitudes of those in the cities.

Other representations of motherhood come from fundamentalist Islam, which claims that motherhood is the natural role for women and their destiny because they are female. Islamic fundamentalists idealize women as mothers and wives under the supervision of husbands (Blackwood 1995b). In regard to sexual practices, many Muslims believe same-sex sexuality is immoral, and this was Dayan's understanding of his faith. Further, Islamic leaders teach that not being "true" to one's own sex by acting like the other is a sin and an offense to Allah because it is a rejection of the way one was made (which underscores the belief that biological sex and gender are one and the same).

The emphasis on heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family suggests that compulsory heterosexuality and women's subordination are actively being produced at the national level by religion, the state, media, and multinational corporations. This heterosexual imperative threatens to reproduce a limiting and ultimately coercive form of gender, marriage, and sexuality predicated on male control and desire. Dominant state ideology offers no options to females other than marriage and motherhood, which in this case is a male-dominant vision of gender, further substantiating the dictates of sex/gender congruence enunciated by Minangkabau gender and kinship ideology. For those who do not fit the normative model of gender, or find it limiting and oppressive, such a model persuades them of their masculinity, producing gender transgression.

Despite the dominance of the ideology of femininity and motherhood at the state level, there are cracks within it—unintended consequences that ironically

open a space for imagining other gender and sexual possibilities. In its efforts to create modern nuclear families, state discourse undermines the influence of lineage elders in several ways. First, whereas rural life in many areas of Indonesia customarily centers around kin, state discourse emphasizes the priority of the nuclear (male-headed) family over the larger kin group. State support for nuclear families allows a daughter to contest her mother's authority (Blackwood n.d.). Second, the discourse of modernity, with its emphasis on individualism and consumerism, provides a model of self-earned income for the earner's use alone. Finally, the availability of nonagricultural labor for women in a global economy also models alternatives to life in a rural household. All these processes undermine extended families and their power to require a daughter's marriage and support of the lineage (Blackwood 1995b). These imaginable alternatives help to question the ideology of oppositional genders, creating the possibility of gender and sexual identities not predicated on sexed bodies. For tombois these alternatives raise the possibility that their masculinity does not have to make them men.

Cewek Resistance to Marriage and Heterosexuality

The hegemonic heterosexuality of the state and the Minangkabau kinship system produce not only the tomboi as gender transgressor but also a different form of transgression. Some women participate in compulsory heterosexuality, marrying men and bearing children, but then quietly claim the right to choose a tomboi partner.²⁵ For some women, the pressure to marry a man makes refusal nearly unthinkable and marriage inevitable. For other women who marry heterosexually, their action fulfills a sense of duty to their mothers, their lineage, and themselves. Whatever the reason, women who have married and borne children are in a better position to resist both state dictates and local sanctions concerning women's sexuality. As there are few private spaces where young unmarried women can safely pursue erotic relationships, marriage allows them to establish their own households apart from their mothers'.

Initial compliance with the dictates of heterosexual reproductivity creates new possibilities for sexual relationships. Once they have fulfilled their obligations, these women can establish relationships with female partners in the interstices of an apparently heterosexual household. Some women divorce their husbands, but others make use of the tradition of frequent separation between spouses—for instance, a husband often may be away on business or living with a second wife—to maintain the facade of marriage and carry on a relationship with a tomboi. At that point neither the state nor the local community can closely control a woman's sexuality, as long as she manages her household and attends to the care of her children adequately. Family and local officials are apparently much more willing to ignore a relationship with a tomboi once a woman has fulfilled the duties accorded to her gender, as long as such relationships are hidden. At the national level, there is a good model for such benign collusion: In the patriarchal New Order, adultery is very prominent among men who are high-

ranking government officials despite its official condemnation (Suryakusuma 1996).

A “normative” woman, that is, one who has the appearance of fitting gender norms, can pursue her desire for and sexual relations with a tomboi without becoming marked as a gender transgressor. This fact points to the privilege associated with the dominant gender ideology. Enacting the gender that is appropriate for one’s sex fits with the heterosexual paradigm and is less problematic than enacting the “wrong” gender.²⁶

Transnational Lesbian and Gay Discourse

In addition to local and state discourses, tomboi identity is situated within a transnational lesbian and gay discourse circulating in Indonesia primarily through national gay organizations and their newsletters. First organized in the early 1980s, these groups have nurtured a small but growing nationwide community of gays and lesbians (Boellstorff 1995), thereby developing a consciously new gay identity for Indonesians. *Gaya Nusantara*, a national magazine for gay men and lesbians that began publication in 1987, has been the leading edge of the movement. *Gaya Nusantara* is produced by a working group of gay men; their chief editor is Dede Oetomo, a Cornell-educated Indonesian gay man. Articles in *Gaya Nusantara* cover topics such as gay and lesbian identity, events on the international scene, and issues of local concern. *Gaya Nusantara* also carries stories about and advice on relationships and how to make them work, as well as personal ads for those seeking to get in touch with others within and beyond Indonesia. *Gaya Nusantara* articles assume a readership “out there” who, once they understand what being gay really is, will become part of the community and identify themselves as gay. Some of the contributors to the magazine urge readers to be out as much as possible while recognizing that such a position is extremely difficult for Indonesians.

Oetomo is one of the most visible members of the *Gaya Nusantara* work group. He has published several of his own articles in the newsletter as well as in national magazines and international journals. Oetomo himself uses the terms *gay* and *lesbi* “more or less as they are in the contemporary West; they refer to people who identify themselves as homosexuals, belong to delineated communities, and lead distinct subcultural lifestyles” (1996:259, n. 1). His work has been influential in constructing an Indonesian lesbian and gay identity. Although this identity is different from the lesbian and gay identity dominant in the “West” (see also Boellstorff 1995), both are constructed primarily as sexual identities and not gender identities.

Because *Gaya Nusantara* reaches primarily a gay male audience, a few politically active lesbians have made efforts to build a nationwide network of their own. These efforts were spearheaded by Gayatri, a well-travelled activist with a college education. Gayatri briefly helped publish a newsletter called “Gaya Lestari” as a section of *Gaya Nusantara*. One author writing anonymously in “Gaya Lestari” admonished lesbians to come out, bemoaning their invisibility and their preference for GTM (Gerakan Tutup Mulut, the close-mouthed movement).

References to “our lesbians” and “the lesbian world” in the article suggest that the author imagines the existence of a group of women who hold a common identity (quoted in Boellstorff 1995:31, 42, his translation). This new lesbian identity she envisions demands outward resistance to the heterosexual paradigm.

The new lesbian and gay movement in Indonesia is creating an identity distinct from the gender-marked *banci* and *tomboi* identities. Much as the post-Stonewall (post-1969) American lesbian and gay movement separated itself from butches, femmes, and drag queens (Kennedy and Davis 1993), gay and lesbian activists in Indonesia distinguish themselves from both *bancis* and *tombois*. Gay and lesbian identity is associated with a “modern,” educated middle class, while *banci* is a “lower-class construction” distinct from the gay and lesbian community, although the distinction between the two is not that neat (Oetomo 1996:263). Similarly, *cowok-cewek* are thought to be predominantly from the working class and not like lesbians of the middle and upper middle classes (Gayatri 1994). Gayatri (1993) specifically excluded *cowok* or “female-transvestites,” as she called them then, from her early work on lesbians in Indonesia because she felt that their identification as men separated them from lesbians. In the emerging lesbian movement, *tombois* were perceived as imitating men, and hence in need of modernization and education (see also Murray 1998), although this stance has softened over time (see Gayatri 1997).

Print media in Indonesia since the early 1980s have also been a major source of information on gays and lesbians (Gayatri 1997). Media attention to an increasingly international gay and lesbian movement has brought into common use the terms *lesbi* and *tomboi*, transformations of the English terms *lesbian* and *tomboy*. These terms coexist somewhat uneasily with older terms, such as *bu-jang gadis* and *banci*, which are associated with a “nonconforming” gender identity (see also Oetomo 1991). Even in urban areas in Indonesia, *bancis* are seen as asexual, gender nonconforming (cross-dressing) males, although *bancis* consider themselves to be a third gender and are sexually active with men who occupy the normative category for males in Indonesian society (Oetomo 1996). The terms *tomboi* and *lesbi* are now synonymous for many people, although *tomboi* is more consistent with the older gender identity. The media perpetuates the image that *lesbis* are masculine women whose partners are feminine. This usage is inconsistent, however, with the term as used by activists, who define a *lesbi* as a woman who is sexually active with another woman.

Despite sometimes negative and sensationalizing coverage, newspapers carry stories about gay liberation and gay couples living together in Europe and the United States. They also avidly report stories about Indonesian lesbians who try to marry (Gayatri 1997). Such stories broadcast nationally a *lesbi* desire to live together despite resistance from “concerned” parents, for the first time portraying an alternative (if negatively construed) lifestyle for same-sex couples.

The transnational discourse on gender and sexuality is complicated by media coverage of transgendered individuals in Indonesia and other parts of the world. Indonesians know of both American and Indonesian transgendered people who have had sex-congruence surgery (bringing their sex into congruence

with their gender). In fact Dayan's sister was so worried that s/he might want surgery that she specifically warned hir against it, at the same time pleading with hir to get married. Consequently, transnational narratives produce yet another possibility, that of surgically bringing one's body into conformity with one's gender, a model that fits with older indigenous notions of the primacy of bodies in determining gender.

The infusion of transnational gay discourse into the lives of tombois and their partners presents new cultural models of sexuality. In discussing gay culture in Indonesia's urban centers, Oetomo suggests that "whoever joins the metropolitan superculture adopts the going construction there, although traces of a local construction still may color the way s/he . . . construes gender and sexual orientation" (1996:260). Movement between urban and rural areas means that local and urban identities confront each other and must be negotiated and claimed in hybrid ways. "The going construction" is brought back "home" to be remarked on with others, reworked, and then updated with each new trip to the metropolis. (Oetomo's gay subjects are most likely permanent residents of metropolises.) Tombois and their partners have heard of Western lesbian and gay couples living together. From their urban cohort they have been told of a "lesbian" identity that is an unchanging part of self and have been urged to claim that identity. These new models are being incorporated into older gender-based models (*cowok-cewek*) in contradictory ways.

Plural Identities

I want to pull together the various threads of my argument to reveal how one particular tomboi is situated within these narratives of gender, sexuality, and culture. Many representations of femininity circulate in Indonesia (Sears 1996a). In like manner, female subjects who are masculine, erotically attracted to women, or both are represented in many different ways. They are seen as "deviants" from the model of mother and wife so central to Indonesian state ideology, as the stereotypically masculine lesbian portrayed by the media, as women who love each other (the model favored by some activists), and as men (the identity claimed by tombois).

Dayan is positioned within all these possibilities. A product of the post-colonial Indonesian school system, s/he graduated from a technical high school with ambitions for a career. But, like many others in the working class, s/he struggles to find work. S/he is a member of hir mother's lineage but lives with hir older sister on their deceased father's land in a community that is only 15 minutes from the district capital, where some of hir brothers work. A large number of migrants in the community work in other areas. Not a vibrant adat community, this village is moving into the margins of urban life in Indonesia.

Dayan's location on the fringes of urban culture helps to explain hir rejection of Minangkabau womanhood. Raised in a family with little matrilineal money or land and thus dependent on the father's family to provide land and house, s/he, hir mother, and hir sister have lost some of the crucial connections that authorize women's power. Further, because not all daughters benefit equally or

are treated favorably by their mothers, some, like Dayan, may never attain the power of a senior woman. Beyond that, the family's marginal position between rural and urban means that their desires are directed toward urban opportunities not village and matrilineal relations. The Minangkabau world Dayan knows is that of a struggling, urban-oriented family.

Like many youth growing up, Dayan has been influenced by divergent ideologies of womanhood. Educated in the "modern" school system, Minangkabau youth have received little state validation for the importance of Minangkabau women. Recent local efforts to provide more education about Minangkabau culture have only highlighted the role of men as "traditional" leaders (see Blackwood 1995b). Schoolgirls learn "proper" gender roles and are indoctrinated in the importance of becoming wives who serve their husbands' needs. They are inundated through media with representations of urban, middle-class, docile women. Yet with the increased availability of education, civil service, and other wage-labor jobs in the last 30 years, young women now have the right to choose their spouses or to pursue higher education and careers in urban areas. Many villagers believe that the potential economic benefits of higher education or urban careers may enhance lineage status, especially when successful educated daughters use their income to remodel or build new lineage houses. Many young women grow up believing that they are better off today under the patriarchal New Order because they can seek their own jobs and choose their own husbands. To these young women, the Minangkabau world of powerful elite women, wrapped up in the "esoteric" adat of ritual ceremonies and hard work in the rice fields, seems distant and old fashioned. Thus, the images of womanhood with which Dayan is familiar underscore the burden of privilege—of marriage, children, and lineage priorities—and the fear of dependence—of being a wife under the husband's control. Within this context the Minangkabau kinship ideology that requires daughters' obedience in marrying heterosexually may seem oppressive, but only in the context of postcolonial transformations that have weakened lineage priorities and promoted other images of family and happiness.

The masculinities that tombois construct reflect their different locations in the global market as well as the local community. Hegemonic masculinity is represented and enacted differently in the village, in urban areas, and on movie screens. It also is a hybrid of local, national, and transnational representations. In rural villages a young man may smoke, drink, gamble, and use coarse language, but he is also admonished to be strong, industrious, respectful of his elders, and responsible to his lineage and his wife's family. The bravado and coarseness of young urban (poor, working-class) men in Indonesia is far from the politeness and respectfulness of rural men. While Dayan's masculinity reflects more of the village, Agus's interpretation reflects a combination of the coarse masculinity and male privilege of urban areas. Dayan told me that when Agus is at Yul's house, "s/he expects to be served and won't do anything for his wife except give her money." This interpretation of a man's role could be drawn from middle-class Indonesian images of manhood but also seems to selectively draw on older representations of high-ranking Minangkabau husbands who, as

guests in their wives' houses (male duolocal residence), were served by their wives. Agus's "macho" behavior, like the *banci*'s performance of a fashion model persona, presents an extreme style of masculinity, one that is easily read as masculine by others.

Dayan's experience of lesbian and gay discourse creates another distinction between himself and Agus. Dayan described Agus as an old-fashioned tomboi, one who "is like a man and won't be any other way." Hir statement implies that s/he sees Agus as holding onto certain normative ideas of gender that contemporary Indonesian lesbians no longer find satisfying. S/he said further that "Agus has never been out of the *kampung* [village]," implying that had s/he been, Agus might see other models of lesbian relations and quit trying to be so much like a man.

In the past few years, Dayan has lived in Jakarta for one to two years at a time. Both at home and in Jakarta hir friends are *cowok-cewek*, but these friends also know about the Euro-American model of lesbian identity. At different times Dayan claimed both a masculine identity and a lesbi identity. S/he told me s/he has always been the way s/he is, meaning s/he has always been a tomboi, but s/he also calls himself a lesbi. Hir statements imply that despite feeling like a man, the availability of other models makes it possible to interpolate the tomboi identity with a lesbian identity. Oetomo (1996) notes a similar shift occurring between the *banci* and gay male identities for some Indonesian men. As with the proliferation of transgendered identities in the United States (Bolin 1994; Cromwell in press), tomboi identity is constantly being negotiated and redefined in response to local, national, and transnational processes.

Conclusion

Identity for tombois in West Sumatra at this point in time is a bricolage, a mix of local, national, and transnational identities. If their identity growing up was shaped by local cultural forces that emphasized oppositional genders, their movement between cities and rural areas means that they have been exposed to other models of sexuality and gender identity that they have used to construct a new sense of themselves. The complexities of their gender identity make it impossible to align tombois with any one category, whether "woman," "lesbian," or "transgendered person."

Tomboi identity refracts and transgresses normative gender constructs. While some theorists identify gender transgression as resistance to male-dominant hegemonic order, tombois in West Sumatra suggest a more complicated cultural production of gender transgression. They cannot be read simply as the product of male dominance. The tomboi identity in Minangkabau culture speaks to the significance of a hegemonic kinship ideology—in which each gender is rigidly distinct and based on two sexes but not male dominant—in producing particular forms of gender transgression. For the tomboi, processes of postcolonialism, capitalism, and modernity also converge to produce and reinforce gender transgression.

At the national level the tomboi can be read as resisting the constraints of state ibuisism in much the same manner as European and North American lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people are said to resist dominant gender ideology. Although the Indonesian state enforces heterosexuality, wage labor and capitalism create a space for the tomboi to live as a single female. The discourse of modernity—the importance of education, careers, and middle-class status—legitimizes models other than motherhood and femininity for females. Though the tomboi remains a deviant, s/he is also finding more room to negotiate a future.

At the same time, other models of sexuality and gender are becoming visible in a globalized world, multiplying, collapsing, and refracting social identities in new ways. Where sexuality was embedded in the ideology of oppositional genders (man-woman, cowok-cewek, banci-*laki asli* [real man]), sexual “identity” and the possibility of sexuality between two women or two men are emergent cultural practices. Desiring women is being rewritten for some as a product of the variability of human sexuality rather than the “natural” urge of the male body and the prerogative of “men.”

Notes

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1. I put *women* in quotes to problematize the use of “woman” for individuals who are female bodied but do not identify as women. As I use it, *female* refers to physical sex characteristics, and *woman* refers to a set of social behaviors and characteristics that are culturally constructed and attributed to female bodies. I use “women” in this instance because at the time of first meeting, I assumed these individuals were women.

2. In Indonesian, the plural is formed by doubling the noun. I choose to use a hybrid form to represent the plural, attaching the English “s” to Indonesian terms. Sears (1996b) also employs this construction.

3. For relevant literature arguing and refining the social construction perspective on gender and sexuality, see Blackwood 1986a, 1986b; Caplan 1987; Carrier 1980; D’Emilio 1983; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Padgug 1979; Plummer 1981; Ross and Rapp 1981; Vance 1989.

4. The term *female-bodied* is Cromwell’s (1997) and refers to physiological sex.

5. Recent work on Javanese culture, however, argues that the dominant ideology poses greater constraints on gender than previously thought (Brenner 1995).

6. This age group seemed to be experimenting in a range of sexual practices.

7. I use fictitious names for the individuals mentioned in this article. Dayan (pronounced “Dai-yon”) lived with an older married sister in a small town about an hour from where I lived. I visited Dayan mostly on weekends at the sister’s house.

8. Although I have used the pronoun *she* in the past to refer to a tomboi (Blackwood 1995a), at this point in my thinking “she” and “her/him” seem inadequate to represent the complexity of the tomboi identity, particularly because of the connotations an English-speaking reader brings to them. The Indonesian language provides no guidance in this matter because its pronouns are gender neutral. The third-person pronoun for both

women and men is *dia*. I have chosen to use the pronominal constructions *s/he* (for “she/he”), *hir* (for “her/his” and “her/him”), and *hirsself* (for “herself/himself”). These pronouns are gaining currency within the transgender movement in the United States (see Wilchins 1997). By doing so, I am not making any claims about the “gender” of tombois. These terms should not be read as suggesting that the tomboi is a transgendered person or some combination of masculine/feminine or not-masculine/not-feminine. Rather, by using these terms I want to unsettle the reader’s assumptions about gender and gender binaries.

9. Nestle describes butches more eloquently as follows: “a butch lesbian wearing men’s clothes in the 1950s was not a man wearing men’s clothes; she was a woman creating an original style to signal to other women what she was capable of doing—taking erotic responsibility” (1992:141).

10. This attribution is no longer so clear cut. Jeff Dickemann (letter to the author, November 30, 1997) argues that butches, who can be found in England as early as the 1820s, are degrees of transsexuals; there is no line between butch and female-to-male transsexual. See also for comparison, Nestle 1992 and Halberstam 1994.

11. I heard this news when I was in West Sumatra in 1996, but whether she was forced to marry or not, I do not know.

12. This practice is similar to one found in some Latin American cultures in which men who take the dominant (insertor) role in sex with another man are not marked as different because of their sexual behavior. They are seen as normatively masculine (see Carrier 1995; Parker 1986). I thank Jason Cromwell for making this connection.

13. The relevant literature includes Dickemann 1997; Frye 1983; Grimm 1987; Katz 1976; Kennedy and Davis 1992, 1993; Newton 1984; Rubin 1992; Shapiro 1991; Wikan 1977.

14. They use the spelling “butch-fem” in their book because it was the way women in the community they studied spelled the term.

15. See Cromwell’s (in press) critique of the way this interpretation erases transgendered females (female-to-males [FTMs]).

16. I thank Daniel Segal for making this point.

17. For relevant literature on the postcolonial state and ethnic identities, see Bentley 1987; Friedman 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Kipp 1993; Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Williams 1989, 1995.

18. Islam in West Sumatra is part of the everyday life of the Minangkabau, who generally see no conflict between adat and Islam. The two have come to be mutually constructed. For further discussion of this point, see Ellen 1983, Delaney 1991, Whalley 1993.

19. This is not an insignificant concern because prestige, status, and property are all at risk. One young married woman I knew was in turmoil over whether to have another child because her only daughter is not strong. Although she already has two children, a number that the Indonesian state says is sufficient for a family, she thinks that she should have another daughter to ensure the perpetuation of her lineage.

20. During my stay one young *banci* I knew in West Sumatra was forced to go to a *dukun* (shaman) by *hir* sister in an effort to “cure” *hir* of *hir* desire for men.

21. Building on Schneider’s (1968) formative work on kinship, feminist anthropologists and others have argued forcefully for the conceptual separation between sex and gender. See Ortner 1974; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Shapiro 1991; Yanagisako and Collier 1987.

22. I thank Deborah Elliston for suggesting the phrase “hegemonic persuasiveness” to describe the power of dominant models to reproduce themselves.

23. Some of the relevant literature on women and the state includes Alexander 1994; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Delaney 1995; Kandiyoti 1991; Ong 1987; Ong and Peletz 1995; Parker et al. 1992; Sears 1996b; and Williams 1996.

24. The New Order refers to the postwar regime of General Suharto, who became acting head of state in 1966 and remained president until 1998.

25. The action of Chinese marriage resisters, which was not veiled but public resistance, was explicitly interpreted as resistance to a patriarchal oppressive marriage system both by the women themselves and by outside observers (Sankar 1986; Topley 1975).

26. I thank Jason Cromwell (e-mail to the author, March 1, 1998) for his comments on this point. Cromwell notes a similar pattern in the United States. The female partners of FTM transmen are not marked nor are male partners of MTFs (male-to-females) (see also Cromwell in press).

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