

RESEARCH

BEYOND THE ‘CLOSET’:

THE VOICES OF LESBIAN WOMEN IN YOGYAKARTA

SUARA LESBI DI YOGYAKARTA



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Research Report

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dan
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Presently lesbianism in actuality is a topic rarely broached from the perspective of lesbians and women loving women themselves. As such I would sincerely like to express my deepest gratitude to the women I spoke with who willingly shared with me their stories. It is in the retelling of these stories that Yogyakarta society and the wider reading audience may come to understand the diversity of sexual expressions for women.

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Abstract

Women of alternate sexualities are marginalized at all levels of Javanese society, as is evident in the absence of 'out' lesbians. The reluctance of lesbians to risk entering the public domain whilst acknowledging their sexuality is the direct result of the restrictive gender roles and expressions of sexuality available. The impetus for writing this paper comes from witnessing the isolation and discrimination a lesbian woman faces within her family as the result of her sexuality. My intent here is not only to give voice to the life stories and experiences of lesbian identified women in Yogyakarta, which until now remain largely closeted and silenced, but further to analyze those political and socio-cultural factors which act to position lesbians as marginal in the first place.

1. Introduction

Cultural constructions of gender and gender roles in Indonesia are extremely pervasive while the subsequent spectrum of lived genders illustrate ways in which these limiting gender constructions can be and are negotiated in a social and religious environment that is primarily dichotomous and patriarchal. The purpose of this paper is to give voice to the women loving women of Yogyakarta and to look at the socio-cultural predeterminants to the visibility or rather invisibility of these women, who may identify as lesbian, and to elucidate their experience. Key questions I will be seeking to answer include how are lesbians positioned in Yogyakarta, how do they experience this positioning, in what ways do they identify and characterize their sexuality individually and within partnerships, and to what extent they are influenced by feminist discourse. Further, I wish to explore support structures for women marginalized due to sexual preference, both formal and informal.

This research follows on from Patrick Gardiner's (1999) suggestion that...

Establishing a fixed ideal for gender identity is destructive rather than beneficial. By proscribing certain traits and behaviours, gay and lesbian ideology limits personal expression instead of liberating it. Sexual preference should instead be viewed as a mutable category so that it is inclusive of all the differences that are present in human nature (p. 57).

I suggest that through viewing sexuality as a fluid experiential continuum we can perceive its expression more subjectively and less from the dichotomous viewpoint. People may demonstrate both male and female gender traits to varying degrees however gender, as typically conceived of, merely provides a framework within which to view such expressions, that is, whether it is representative of either of the two dominant gender options.

It is important to note here that it was until 1973 that homosexuality was listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), a key text for Psychiatrists and Psychologists in the United States, as a mental disorder, in the same league as pedophilia and other sexual deviations (Lippert & Russell cited in 1988 Journal titled *Out in the Mountains*).

1.1 Framing the Subject: Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbi (The Margins of Lesbianism)

Written by Herlinatien Suhesti in Yogyakarta, 2003, this fictional text provides an excellent framework within which to perhaps gain an insight into the experiences of lesbian women in Indonesia and illustrates the issues that face them as a result of their sexual orientation. Although fictional, the research the author undertook to gain the background information for the book involved in depth observation of lesbian experience. This book is one of many fictional texts written in Indonesia recently on the topic of lesbianism with fiction being the only medium through which such taboo topics can be discussed. Further here, I might add that writers broaching the subject of women's non-mainstream sexualities often take the opportunity to include an introduction chapter highlighting the systemic oppression of lesbians. These novels,

such as that by Putri Kartini (2003) are riddled with themes of violence suggesting lesbianism is a political choice based on negative heterosexual relations, with heterosexual marriage to a '*bule*' (European) cast as a way to escape women's and lesbians' restrictive gender roles in Indonesia.

The main protagonist of the book is Paria, an Indonesian woman and the oldest daughter of 3 children, who as such lives under constant family pressure to perform well and to achieve, particularly from her domineering mother. Paria has a stable career in the city, she is also a writer, is clever, witty and financially independent.

At the introduction to the story Paria has a female partner, Ri, who is also Indonesian. Background information suggests they were married and lived together in France, but for some reason they become estranged and Paria returns to Indonesia without Ri. She feels lost and finds herself the victim of vicious rumours about her sexuality and possible lesbianism. She loses her job as a result of the conflict and doubt surrounding these scandalous rumours. Once the heat dies down she is reinstated to a new position in the same company. Fortunately for her, being a shareholder in the company gives her leverage, a privilege not all Indonesian women can access.

Devi enters Paria's life. She is a female student with a history of past relationships with men. Paria resists Devi's attraction even though the longing for intimate female companionship is overwhelming. They have sex several times, with all explicit sexual detail omitted and focusing on Paria's feelings. Her expression of anger, towards both her immediate community and the wider society, which she believes contribute to her isolation and ostracization as a result of her sexual orientation, is a major theme of the book.

Paria has close relationships by mail with two other characters, Gita, a housewife and Rafael, a male priest. She is open and honest with them and through their mutual correspondence Paria is able to express her feelings regarding the socio-cultural constructs that act to position her sexuality as marginalised and 'abnormal'. Paria highlights the social injustices perpetrated by others as examples of the hypocrisy of the patriarchal system in which we live, for example the many cases of sodomy and child sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the Catholic priesthood.

Paria suffers from the prolonged distance from Ri, and has no way of contacting her. Once did they speak by phone but time was limited as credit was low. After grappling with the reality of her situation Paria comes to the conclusion that it is best to seek sanctuary and legitimacy in the institution of heterosexual marriage, to Mahendra, the step-brother of Devi. She sees Mahendra as a way out of her apparent social isolation, a legitimiser, an escape, a disguise, while remaining loyal to Ri in her heart. Mahendra however is already engaged and does not want to be involved in a marriage of convenience. The book ends with Paria returning to France to see Ri who has leukemia. The conclusion to the book suggests that Ri and Paria are reunited in France, the story ending with Paria about to board the plane.

The book is interspersed with cathartic letters that allow the protagonist to vent the anger and frustration of her situation. Paria rages against the ignorance of her family, her religion and society, and struggles to sustain her dignity as a woman loving woman who believes in her love for Ri, a woman.

This poetic novel is a cry in the wilderness that reverberates through all societies and cultures: across the divide of misogyny, compulsory heterosexuality, and rigid sexualities: The cry to be

allowed an unbridled expression of self. Using this fictional frame I will now examine some of those particular socio-cultural forces at play in Paria's life that she saw as unjust, undemocratic and inhumane. This will illustrate that the 'personal is political' and must be redefined and renegotiated. To do so involves a detailed look at the construction of 'woman' and femininity in Javanese society.

1.2 Socio-Historical Positioning of Women in Javanese Culture

The role of women in Javanese society is largely 'defined' in the *kodrat wanita* (Islamic: women's ideological code of conduct, women's destiny or rightful behaviour) originating in the text of the Mahabharata and played out in the Javanese *wayang* (shadow puppet play). According to the legend, Arjuna is a symbol of virility and invincibility, qualities derived not from his physical prowess but from self control, asceticism and spiritual power. Two of his wives were Sumbadra and Srikandi, Sumbadra symbolizing wifely devotion and Srikandi the warrior princess representing independence and strength. The traits inherent in these characters are generalized to empower men as rational, virile protectors of both the micro and macrocosms, with women less rational, more emotional and more worldly or material. Women's sexuality as an extension is the responsibility of men (Wieringa 1999).

These gender traits have been legitimized and reinforced in Indonesian society over time, and are seen as 'natural' with resistance to the 'natural' *kodrat* by women seen as a potential source of global destabilisation (Wieringa.1999). Since the spread of Islam to Java interpretations of the position and role of women as derived from the teachings of Muhammad, and documented in the *Qur'an* (Koran), have fused with the Hindu/Javanese traditional proscriptions to form a complex mesh of expectation.

Recent discussions of Indonesian women of the 20th century proceed from Kartini, considered to be Indonesia's first feminist, who focused on women's access to education, financial autonomy and the abolition of polygamy in Java at the turn of the century. Other female figures celebrated in the nationalist struggle for independence acted politically by taking up arms alongside men. These women include Cut Nyak Dien and Cut Meutia in Aceh, Roro Gusik, in Java, Martha Tiahua in the Molluca's and Emmy Saelan in South Sulawaesi, to name a few (Wieringa cited in Gower). As a result of Kartini's view to empowering women, organisations of educated women became militant in the nationalist struggle and championed women's issues in relation to women's position in society, the issues they confront and equality with men.

In the post colonial era, following both extended Dutch and brief Japanese occupation and believing nationalism was the key to Indonesia's stance as an independent nation, the state ideology of *Pancasila* (*panca*-five, *sila*-principles) was introduced under the Old Order of Sukarno (1945-1967). This includes the principles of nationalism, humanism, democracy, social justice and monotheism and is loosely based on the 5 pillars of Islam (Pancasila 2001.p.1). With this Sukarno "sought to lay down the foundations for revolutionary unity by restoring the sort of spiritual balance of power that the events of the previous hundred, and even twenty, years had destroyed" (Geertz 1968. p. 85). Sukarno shared with Kartini the realization of women's potential to inspire others (Dzuhayatin 2002).

The issue at this crucial time, according to Saskia Wieringa, centred on "who defines national identity" (2003 p.2). Following Sukarno's 1959 independence day speech, referred to as the *Manifesto Politik* (political manifesto), women as one half of the population were incorporated into the struggle for nationalist independence and were encouraged to have active roles in public

life, including in the political domain with the result that many women's organisations were formed such as *Gerwani* (an abbreviation of *gerakan wanita*-Women's movement; the women's organisation of the communist party of Indonesia) and *Kowani* (*Kongress Wanita Indonesia*- the Indonesian women's congress).

In the demise of the left leaning Old Order, the architects of New Order ideology falsely portrayed that *Gerwani* women were implicated in a sex orgy that resulted in the murder and genital disfigurement of five Generals of the Old Order guard during the 'events' of October 1965. The imagery of the propaganda, being sexually oriented, was intended to highlight the necessity of men to control women to protect their virility, hence power, and also men's role in maintaining the wellbeing of society. Propaganda such as this, together with New Order institutionalism acted to restrict the political role and involvement of women, who were now to be seen as 'loyal wives and educators of children' (Wieringa 1999). Here women were recast into the private domain, with differentiation between the public and private domains facilitating domination (bell hooks.1994). Patriarchal power and legitimacy was reinforced by state policy through organizations such as the *Dharma Wanita* (civil servants' wives association) and the *PKK* (*Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*: national women's movement) (Blackwood 1995b; Murray 1991; Suryakusuma 1996). All state policies and programmes were modeled on the all-pervasive *Pancasila*. Significant here was the *Panca Dharma Wanita* (the five responsibilities of women), loosely based on the Five Pillars of Islam, which mandated the precepts that a woman must: "(1) support her husband's career and duties; (2) provide offspring; (3) care for and rear the children; (4) be a good housekeeper; and (5) be a guardian of the community" (Sunindyo 1996.p.125). In many ways, through the enshrinement of religious discourse in state ideology, diversity was homogenized through proscriptions of acceptable ways of being (Ong 1995). The

sexual politics of the control of women's sexuality was the crux of New Order military authority, with women's organizations central to the policing of women's obedience (Wieringa, 2003).

Indonesia however has a history of alternate sexualities, expression of which was particularly available to men as Wieringa notes, "[c]ross dressing and transgender behaviour has long since been part of the cognitive domain of Indonesia" ((1999 p.216; Beatty 2002), all forming part of the expression of the ways people in Indonesia attempt to resist proscribed typologies to provide an alternative discourse through non-conforming gender behaviours (Anderson 1996; Bolin 1996; Errington 1990). Here I will give a brief account of these, whilst remembering the focus here is on women loving women.

1.3 Non-Conforming Gender Behaviours

Any discussion of Indonesian sexual minorities naturally begins with the largest community group, that of transsexual or transgendered men, often referred to as '*banci*', '*waria*', '*bencong*' or '*wadam*' depending on region. '*Waria*' (the preferred term) generally only have sex with heterosexual men and identify as women, their sexual expression seen as heterosexual. Historically transgendered men have been perceived to incorporate qualities of both sexes and therefore to be perfect, taking on an almost sacred potency across the archipelago (Anderson 1996; Bolin 1996; Errington 1990). Significantly in a world where segregation of the sexes is the cultural norm "*waria* identity is about the only 'acceptable' form of expression open to homosexuals" (Indonesia's *Waria* 1999.p.1).

Among homosexual males we encounter 2 groups *laki asli* and *homo*. *Laki asli* (real men) tend to conform to the male gender role, partner women, marry, can pass as straight and occasionally have sex with transsexuals (Oetomo 1991). These men consider themselves heterosexual, and are

viewed as such by others. *Homo* is the term for gay men, who partner only men. In Indonesia it must be noted that sexual interactions are more acceptable if at least one of the partners can pass as a woman. This may be considered true for lesbians and women loving women also.

Ancient epics such as the Mahabharata, depicting Srikandi, the warrior princess, together with the reliefs at Borobodor temple illustrating intimate female to female interaction (now covered) and stories of the closeness of the Sultan's wives of *Taman Sari* (Javanese court) provide a rich, albeit not widely known or discussed, history of female intimacy and homosexuality in Java. More recently however, according to Dede Oetome (1991), “ ‘[l]esbis’ (for all intents and purposes similar to lesbians in the West) are the least-known population group in Indonesian society” (p.125). Even in the mid nineties, despite abundant subsequent research conducted on Indonesian lesbians, attitudes such as that of Mien Sugandhi, the Minister for Women's Affairs 1994, highlight the barriers these women face,

I can also understand that lesbians have individual rights, but I cannot accept them as Indonesian women. My belief is that lesbianism is not in accordance with Pancasila, because lesbians have forgotten their fundamental duties as mothers, giving birth, and raising children (Suara Karya, 6 June; as quoted in Gayatri, 1996.p. 86).

Researchers of lesbianism in Indonesia, Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa, have found that among women there exist three non-conformist categories; *tombois* who identify as men, homosexual women and lesbians. In the context of Yogyakarta differentiation between female homosexuals and lesbians is not demarcated. There are predominantly two expressions of lesbianism, that of the butch and femme, referred to in Javanese as '*suntil*' (man) and '*cantil*' (woman), and in Indonesian as '*cowok*' (man) and '*cewek*' (woman), although, the terms 'butch' and 'femme' have connotations of roles within the category of women loving women while the Indonesian and Javanese terms in many ways fit the heterosexual paradigm. Interestingly, key to the findings of both of these researchers is that even within their communities it was important

for these women loving women to maintain strict gender dichotomy (Blackwood 1998; Wieringa 1999).

Whatever the terms, *butch/cowok* identified lesbians are very 'masculine' in appearance and behaviours, with *femmes/cewek* women adhering more to the "hegemonic standards of femininity in appearance and behaviour" (Blackwood 1998,p.497). Since in Indonesia "[s]ociety insists on the priority of the body determining gender" (1998.p.504), the 'masculinity' of *tombois* and *butches* lacks cultural validation, hence there are those who also succumb to the constant pressure to marry. Those who resist though are looked up to as courageous and strong, characteristics of 'real men', by other lesbians (Blackwood 1998).

Blackwood further explains that "enacting the gender that is appropriate for one's sex first with the heterosexual paradigm is less problematic than enacting the 'wrong' gender" (1998.p. 507). Similar to the *laki asli*, the 'femme' lesbian who fulfills the ideal of the 'normative' woman by 'fitting' gender norms, can pursue her sexual desires through sexual relations with a woman without being labeled as a gender transgressor. As such, heterosexual marriage is more common among the *femme* group.

I have used the term 'lesbian' here, however as B.J. Gayatri, an Indonesian 'female homosexual' anthropologist argues, lesbianism in Indonesia is associated with feminism (1996), which in Indonesia has limited meaning. "Feminism" however has a multitude of meanings and as such there are only 'feminisms' (Tong, 1998; Griffiths, 1995; Nicholson, 1990). Feminists are viewed as oppositional to government authority, possibly deriving from the 'myth' of the lesbian Gerwani members who were said to have murdered five generals during Suharto's claim to power (mentioned earlier). As a result feminists are labeled lesbians and vice versa, with wide

ranging negative connotations, regardless of who they sleep with. The term 'female homosexuals' in Gayatri's view, avoids such women being stigmatized in this way.

The reasons for the resistance to the Western feminist paradigm in Indonesia is not well understood however two possible lines of contention are evident. Secondary to the negative construction of feminism in Indonesia is the notion that Western feminism originates from the West and is therefore a discourse of the oppressor, the colonizer. This attitude to "foreign" discourse pervades despite comments by Said which project that we are living in

"new times in which processes of decolonisation within formerly colonized as well as colonizing countries allow for reconciliation, liberation and the necessary steps to go beyond essentialisms, hierarchies and binary oppositions" (Al-Ali, 2000:19).

In the real world however realities differ, "us" and "them" prevail.

This discussion of the literature delineates only a few of the myriad of 'sexual identities' expressed by the women interviewed in this research project. As Gayatri (1996), Oetomo (1996) and Blackwood (1998) allude, factors of class, education and local culture complicate these identities. However both Oetomo (1999) and Blackwood (1998) suggest that class and educational differences are no longer as significant as they once may have been, particularly due to increased movement between rural and urban areas, meaning 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...These new models are being incorporated into older gender-based models...in contradictory ways (Blackwood 1998.p.509).

I will now proceed to a discussion of methodology before going on to examine the evidence derived from the six interviews I have conducted. My aim will be to ascertain to what extent previous research regarding lesbians in Indonesia is valid in the context of Yogyakarta. It is

certain that socio-cultural factors in Yogyakarta together with individual differences among the interviewees will provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of expression of lesbian sexual identity.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Foreground

According to Andrew Beatty, “culture is the medium in which people conceive their choices” (2002.p.2), further illustrating Giddens formulation that it is the endeavour of ethnographic researchers to acknowledge the agency of individuals, their capacity for self awareness and creative expression whilst considering the situational constraints within which they negotiate and alter (1984). The autobiographical accounts provided by the interviewees I spoke with must be contextualised to include the cultural, historical, religious and social factors specific to the research group. If not, it is likely that responses will be similar throughout the world and understandings will not be elucidated to assist in gaining greater understandings of cultural exacerbants,

if we want to understand how cultural worlds (rather than persons) differ perhaps we should be looking at phenomena of matching complexity and giving priority to the multidimensional interactions which we observe in the field rather than to the subjective meanings, necessarily simpler, which actors bring to them (Beatty. 2002. p. 3).

The two go hand in hand and in fact cannot be separated out. Culture and environment (nurture) are significant in influencing the development of the individual, and hence must be considered in depth when attempting to study a specific group.

2.2 An Insight So Close to Home

Here I must mention that my reason for choosing to research this topic was confirmed for me through my experience in Indonesia. I was living with a family in middle class neighbourhood with the extended family of a university lecturer including the lecturer, his son, the son's first wife (now divorced) and his current wife, together with four of the son's children, two to each respective wife. The two wives are sisters who come from a family that includes 2 other sisters. One of these other sisters is married with children and this year moved out of her marital home to live with a woman. The ensuing events, responses and conversations created in me an interest in how lesbian women are perceived in Javanese, particularly Yogyakarta society. It was four months before the sisters living with me would speak with the other sister. I have been observing since.

It was upon my return to Indonesia following a short break in Australia that I was informed of the news. For me it was no surprise, I had already noticed the closeness between the two women but did not mention anything. The family, however were shocked and horrified, one sister commenting that it was "abnormal" in what seemed a continuous chant of exclamation. The eldest sister did not pass comment to me but from the conversations I heard between her and her brother in law, clearly she was upset. The husband of the woman 'turned lesbian' frequented the house daily seeking guidance and advice, which actually was more in the form of gossip and tales of his wife's actions. At one stage he indicated to me directly that he was sending his youngest child to live in Surabaya with his parents but had not told the mother and did not intend to. I could not hold back my rage as a mother and suggested that such a step was a form of emotional blackmail, was unjust and should not be taken. His self declared aim was to have his wife return to the family home. We discussed the ethics of the situation and to my relief he telephoned her during our conversation to ask her consent. She agreed. Later, after 6 months, he

asked me how I could live in Indonesia without a male sexual partner and more poignantly how his wife could go 6 months without a male sexual partner. Although shocked by his arrogance and ignorance of women's sexuality, I explained a little. For him the penis was the key to women's pleasure, and he could not imagine women being sexually intimate without a phallus. Somehow I felt I was truly in the right place at the right time with the right information and understandings to perhaps provide an insight into (women's) sexuality whilst at the same time intervening to circumvent child abduction, possibly however reinforcing my 'outsider' status. Upon realizing the complexity and closetedness of this situation I sought out interviewees from among my acquaintances.

2.3 The Research Participants

The research participants, or interviewees were chosen randomly, yet I feel that ultimately there was a pattern to the process. Firstly, four of the six interviewees frequented a café close to my home and to the university campus and as such we shared the same campus for some time. It was the café that provided the gathering, sharing space that enabled me to gain a greater insight into these women's lives. One interviewee was chosen for her position outside that community and another was referred to me by Dede Oetomo. Five of the six interviewees were university educated, with three studying psychology, one studying Arabic Literature and the other Creative Writing. The sixth interviewee works full time in a café and was high school educated, four of them were of '*priyayi*' family, all were aged between 21 and 33.

2.4 Methodology

Primarily, this analysis was carried out within a feminist action research methodology merging feminist ideas about research and education with action in terms of self and social critique (Lemish 2002; Nystrom, Lundstrom & Weiner 2003). Feminist social action is change oriented,

rejects universalism of law truth and knowledge recognizing that knowledge is always partial and socially situated whilst rejecting the “goal to achieve objectivity and value free research”(Lemish 2002,p.64). Further it is committed to empowering underprivileged groups through more egalitarian research methods (Lemish 2002).

The operational framework involves direct interview using a number of questions that relate to spheres of life. The questions however only provide a loose parameter for discussion while life narratives provide the key to the extent to which this framework is built upon in the course of the interchange between interviewer and interviewee.

My research was necessarily more comprehensive than the interview process alone since I established a rapport with members of the lesbian community prior to and during the process of approaching them to act as interviewees. This meant frequenting lesbian friendly cafés where women congregated, attending gay and lesbian consciousness raising events, seeking out non-government agencies that cater for people of marginalized sexualities particularly women, contacting known researchers of women’s alternate sexualities in Indonesia and visiting Indonesian lesbian internet chat rooms. Further, it seemed I moved in similar circles to many of the interviewees but in an informal manner. Many of us shared commonalities.

The key to understanding the experience of Yogyakarta lesbians is through their stories. For too long ‘herstory’ has been untold or, told from a biographical perspective and further overlaid with cultural bias and ethnocentrism (Porter & Hasan 2003). I intend to provide a commentary of my own cultural biases (where possible) in an attempt to highlight cultural differences between interviewer and respondent perspectives on gender construction, sexuality, lesbianism and feminism. Clearly as an Australian born woman my entire construction of self, with the intrinsic

facets of gender and sexuality, differs from those of the research participants born in Indonesia in many ways. A collaborative study conducted by Porter and Hasan (2003) sheds light on the positioning of voice in auto/biographical research and the need to contextualise influences and reference points. Clearly the research participants and I shared the marginalized position of women in a patriarchal society together with our sexual preference.

Having lived in Indonesia for a short time, 11 months, I feel that in many ways my position has changed. No longer am I looking from the 'outside' only, perhaps now I am what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as an 'outsider within' (1999). I have submersed myself into the lives of the women I have spoken to and as a result have come to view women's, particularly lesbian women's perspectives more holistically. I cannot however regress from my feminist/humanist principles and in many ways this is what sets me apart from most of the Indonesian women I have met. Feminism for me is not an ideology that stands alone and segregates as it is for many Indonesian women, rather it is part of every fibre of my existence and acts as a lens through which I view and interpret the world and its complexities.

3. Discussion

In discussing the findings of the research I think it may prove most useful to address the overarching questions one by one, firstly discussing broad and general commonalities in responses and secondly responses outside the norm for this group. I will attempt to analyse the responses and bring the findings together simultaneously.

3.1 Sexual Identities

The initial question asks the interviewees to identify their sexuality and to explain what their sexual identity means for them. In first draft, this question was rather closed, asking if the women identified as lesbian. I quickly realized that I was assuming I was already aware of the sexuality of the women. Although most responded similarly to this question saying they identified as “*lesbi*” (lesbian) or women loving women, one woman did not wish to identify or to be categorized suggesting that she was still in the process of forming her sexual identity, she was the youngest of the group. My assumptions about her sexuality were based on a conversation we had several months prior in which she expressed that she was in relationship with a woman, since ended. This interview was the first and it was then that I was reminded of the need to allow scope for individuality and sexual freedom without categorical constraints and to remain mindful that sexuality is not static and is a continuum.

3.1.1. *Butch, Femme or None of the Above*

Once the women had identified as “*lesbi*” I attempted to elucidate the gender roles and varying expressions of sexuality within lesbian relationships in Yogyakarta. This question evolved out of my past meetings with lesbians where I had noticed strong gender role identification, something I

personally was not used to, although such identifications do exist in Perth and more generally among most homosexuals; for me androgyny is more pervasive. Categorization in Yogya involves three clearly definable groups, as it does throughout the world: *'butchi'* (everyday Indonesian lesbian term for 'butch' or 'masculine', for want of another term, lesbian); 'femme' (stereotypically 'feminine' lesbian); and 'andro' (muted stereotypical gender traits). In Javanese the gender categories are referred to as *suntil* (butch) and *cantil* (femme). In this discussion I will use the more common terms of 'butch' and 'femme'. Three women immediately identified as *'butchi'*, another stated her reluctance to use such terms but for convenience sake would identify with the label, believing it to be the one that was most fitting: "people see us...and want to give us gender...like the people at my office see me as *Pak* (Indonesian term for Mr.)". One of the respondents identified as 'femme'. Her identification with the category was recent, in fact she had only been aware of the terms *'butchi'* and 'femme' in the past (but not the meaning of these terms), until when two months ago she was told by her girlfriend that she was 'femme' with her girlfriend identifying with the label 'butch'. She had been in relationship with the same partner for six years. Both she and her partner had shied away from the question, "are you *'butchi'* or 'femme'?" when asked by other lesbian community members with their recent understanding of the terms discerned from a lesbian internet chat site. The categories and terms 'butch' and 'femme' have only been used in Indonesian discourse on alternate sexualities since the 80's, following the advent of "transnational gay and lesbian discourse circulating in Indonesia primarily through national gay organizations and newsletters" (Blackwood, 2000. p.10). One woman did not wish to be categorized according to gender.

One of the women who identified as *'butchi'* expressed that she felt like she was "a woman who is in the wrong body. Since a child I felt as if I was a boy in thoughts and actions". Blackwood suggests that *'cowoks'* are considered to be transgendered or to be a man trapped in a woman's

body in some cases (1998). As a result this woman feels that lesbian is a label she has been given due to her love of women but “I feel like a transgender, though I feel hetero”. Since she feels like a man, the love of women to her is heteronormative. As a lesbian she feels transgendered. She agreed that the restrictive heterosexual gender roles in Indonesian society, particularly those influencing women’s sexuality, were significant in creating this feeling within her. Another suggested that “maybe I am a *tomboi* (tomboy); my abilities, the way I treat others and the rigidity of these is similar to the way a male acts”. The prevalence of rigid dichotomous gender roles creates in these women the impression that their behaviours are aligned with those of men, since the choice is to be either masculine or feminine and most of them are more ‘masculine’. All of the butch respondents equated butchness with masculinity, as did the femme, a parallel refuted by Sheila Jeffreys (1993) for its inadequacy in describing the diversity of ways of being woman/lesbian, and attempting to classify sexualities according to restrictive heteronormative binaries.

The lesbians identified as civil servant class and upper class. Amongst the Javanese *‘priyayi’* (Jav: upper class) gender roles are more prescriptive than among the lower classes, with media images of sanitized femininity portraying women as passive home bodies, beautiful, clean, ‘white’ mothers and grandmothers. Only those without access to television, very few nowadays, are not bombarded with such messages.

3.1.2 *Butch or Femme - What’s the Difference?*

Butch and femme identification involves overt and recognizable traits within the lesbian community itself. Amongst the respondents in this study the discernment of these traits of *‘butchi’* and *‘femme’* were similar. In general the characteristics ascribed to *‘butchi’* included firstly preference of wearing ‘boys’ clothes and short hair, and “walking like a man”. Character

traits included the inclination to be “ more like boys/men” which was described as being evident in their desire to protect their partners. As the contributors to the “Butch/Femme” collection by Sally Munt (1998) allude, ‘butch’ women’s demonstration of masculinity, even their masquerading as men, is but an exploration of the many ways of being a woman. In addition Judith Butler suggests that, within lesbian contexts,

The ‘identification’ with masculinity that appears as butch identity is not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into the terms of heterosexuality. As one lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that ‘being a girl’ contextualises and resignifies ‘masculinity’ in a butch identity. As a result, that masculinity, if that it can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible female body (1990.p. 123).

Individual differences in the ascribed traits of course are evident with one butch woman saying that she felt a strong sense of responsibility for her partner, this according to her being an extension of protectiveness and caring, considered more ‘masculine’ traits among the group. Interestingly, in a former group discussion with at least two of the respondents, their partners and others it was expressed that ‘butch’ traits included also emotional dependence, a heightened need for emotional expression and a certain childishness resulting from such emotionalism. The ‘femme’ respondent suggested different traits for ‘butch’ including “ stronger, more egotistical”, with strength being physical.

‘Femme’ physical/external markers include preference for ‘feminine’, body hugging clothing, fashion, makeup and hairstyles, and generally exhibiting more stereotypically feminine traits and mannerisms. From the ‘butch’ perspective one woman said she liked her partner to be “*lemah* (weak/limp/supple), *lembut* (soft/tender/gentle) *dan gemulai* (graceful/supple)...like a dancer, beautiful, very feminine and neat...patient...like a mother”, with the all the finest qualities of a woman encapsulated in the term ‘mother’, the most valued role for women: motherhood making ‘her’ complete. The Indonesian words above in italics are commonly used to describe the

desirable qualities of a woman in Javanese society, together with one other common term, *sopan* (polite). I heard her words in disbelief since for me such generalized and stereotypical traits, reinforced through language and the effect it has on restricting and creating specific meaning, have for so long acted to subjugate women.

Another butch respondent added that 'femmes' were "more dependent, more conditioned according to the constructs of society and gender roles...I must make decisions, my partner feels it's up to me...she gives her heart and depends on surrender". So strong is the socialization of gender roles in Javanese society from a young age. The eldest woman interviewed had been in a six year relationship, for her 'femme' was "stronger than butch, mentally and emotionally, more mature and adult". The 'femme' respondent said she desired "to be noticed, to be loved, and always desire care and favoritism". These comments contradict in many ways however what is clear is that 'femme' lesbians in general display what appears to be a more traditionally feminine persona than do 'butch' lesbians.

Another major difference between the categories of 'butch' and 'femme' was based on skills, abilities and level of dexterity, with delineation generally along traditional gender lines. However it was also evident that 'butch' lesbians are more androgenous in terms of practical or manual skills. In a recent Polish study conducted by Anna Herman-Jeglinska, Anna Grabowska and Stainslaw Dulko (2002), in which an adapted form of Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was used as a measure of masculinity, femininity and transsexualism, of the females in the heterosexual control group "there were more masculine sex-typed individuals than feminine sex-typed among control males" (p. 530).

3.2 Perceived Influences on Sexual Identity

Life narrative was employed by the respondents to relate the factors, events and influences on their sexual identity development. Gender roles in the family followed traditional lines, with the father working outside the home in all cases and in two cases the mother working as a teacher with one of these becoming a tailor upon her husband's death so that she was able to work from home. According to one woman "my mother could not work while she was with my father. That is an example of the egoism of men. He can prohibit, but he won't be prohibited". Of the women, three of the 'butch' identified respondents lived in families of more than two brothers, with two 'butch' women and the one 'femme' respondent having brothers only with whom they interchanged clothing regularly and spent their spare time flying kites and playing with marbles and cars, "I didn't want to play with dolls or cook". The 'femme' respondent also said she "liked to play with boys, climb trees, ride bikes and wear boys clothes".

The Moslem feast of Lebaran, a time when extended families come together to celebrate the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, posed a time of great frustration for two of the women since the family *pembantu* (housemaid) returned to her village. Thrust into the supervision of their grandmother, who maintained stricter traditional gender roles than the usual more egalitarian values of shared responsibility and equality between male and female children, the girl children were suddenly expected to help with food preparation and general home duties. One observed that "it is indeed good to be a boy, never becoming tired because of work", "I just walked off in refusal. I expressed my anger to my grandmother, she said nothing. At times I prepared the table and left without eating".

The family is the most repressive institution in Javanese society conditioning children in appropriate social etiquette, with expectation, of correct conduct traditionally aimed at guarding

family honour and parental approval incredibly pervasive. One 'butch' identified woman experienced enormous difficulty in the family home in Solo, a court city neighbouring Yogyakarta, due to constant rivalry and disputes with her elder brother and the strictness of her parents. She believed she was always deemed to be at fault by her parents and at the age of 10 she was told to leave home, returning intermittently, but predominantly staying with friends or on the street whilst still attending school. She suggested that the culture of Solo was more gender rigid and that Yogyakarta was generally more cosmopolitan and freer. Further, several of the respondents indicated their belief that they felt more able to express their sexuality away from their hometown, far from neighbours and relatives who may be disapproving of their sexuality.

There are always exceptions to family mores however as is demonstrated in the life of another of the butch respondents. After the early death of her father, a university *dosen* (lecturer), her mother gave up her high school teaching job to set up a tailor business in order to accommodate the needs of her young children with her daughter helping around the house in whatever way she could. As a result, she developed a wide range of practical skills "due to need, I was not aware it was not normal". Such skills include the ability to paint the house, repair the electricity, make cement, sew, and manage finances... "not because I'm like a boy but because I feel responsible". Another respondent said her father often asked her to assist with repairing the motorcycle, electricity etc rather than asking her brothers due to her curiosity and her innate skill in such matters.

All of the 'butch' respondents felt a same sex attraction from an early age, one as young as four. This woman felt a strong sense of love and mutual responsibility for a kindergarten friend who was always "giving me food and not wanting to see me sick, we were always together". The 'butch' respondents indicate they preferred girls to boys in an emotional sense but "I did not

know what it was, actually I didn't tell anyone because I feared my parents would find out. When I entered junior high I learnt the name, lesbian". Despite not knowing what her sexuality was or what it would be perceived as, she already had a developed notion that it was bad due to a large extent to an absence of positive role models in her immediate environment and in the media (see Gayatri 1993) together with the silence on alternate sexualities, for women, in Java.

In Junior high school all of the 'butch' identified women recalled strong attachments and friendships with women though, in the words of one, "I never hated men or was anti-male, and I didn't resent them, I just didn't like them". One respondent reported feeling sexual attraction to female teachers. The woman who was ostracized from her family home found the school peer group very supportive of her sexuality and had her first sexual relationship with a woman at 16. The others shared intimacy in the form of companionship, emotional closeness, kissing and hugging until at least their early 20's. Although they said they had relationships and perceived these relationships to be love relationships with strong commitment, sexual intimacy was not a part of it. The 'femme' identified woman had relationships involving sex since the age of fifteen with males, all short term.

It was not suggested that sexual preference was determined by external factors or dramatic life changing events... "there is nothing in my upbringing that was very traumatic or damaging at all, I just knew from a young age that I wanted to be with women". It is clear however that one woman was ostracized from the family home, one was supporting her mother in the home, while the 'femme' woman experienced traumatic physical abuse by her father. These are obviously environmental factors that do in actual fact influence the way a people perceive themselves and the way others perceive them, and these experiences represent strong external influences on the individual according to Social Learning Theory (Bandera 1977).

Self perception and the weight given to the opinions of others will affect the process of identification and acknowledgement of sexual identity, particularly if non heterosexual. “Coming out” as a lesbian to family and friends is a big step. One of the ‘butch’ women is ‘out’ at work, in the lesbian community, and to the family but has not made a public declaration. After moving from her hometown in Jakarta to study in Yogyakarta, she began taking different women home to Jakarta for *Lebaran* each year, meeting her first lesbian sexual partner at 24 whilst at university. They agreed that they would break up when one of them found a boyfriend. It was her partner that found a boyfriend first: “my first broken heart”. She was not “out” at that time but another of the respondents, a student in the same faculty, noticed her change of mood and told her she knew the reason for it. This was the first non-partner to be aware of her sexuality, the first person she felt she could confide in. After living with her current partner for four years, her parents asked her to undergo a *ruatan* (Jav, Sundanese: exorcism), a traditional Javanese ceremony to rid the person of evil spirits. Only two years later did her father tell her the reason for the *ruatan*, which was to cast out of her the spirit that was influencing her lesbian tendencies. She reported no effect was felt, nothing in her life changed. Two years later she was diagnosed with leukemia and required hospital care for four months. Her parents visited her in hospital in Yogya and witnessed the level of caring and love shown by her partner in catering to her needs, her parents “haven’t mentioned it since”. This woman is 33, has her degree and has been working for several years suggesting that perhaps either the sphere of parental influence is shrinking, or that their level of tolerance is increasing.

The ‘butch’ woman who was thrown out of home was “outed” to her parents at 17 by an older female family friend whilst she was not home. Upon her return home she was beaten and left home permanently. After finishing senior high school, her parents forbade her from leaving Solo,

so she started university in Solo, but “didn’t go to uni, just stayed in the *kos* (boarding house) and got drunk”. She later entered into a relationship with a gay man for appearances, that is, to appease her parents since they “won’t accept my sexuality”. There was no love relationship between her and this man, he was having sex with men in her presence. For the woman who lived with her widowed mother, things were different again, her mother dying when she was 16. Coming out was not a formality in her younger years since “I felt like a boy and my family also saw me that way”. She is out now to friends, lecturers and “I have never had a problem, because they are interested in me not from the perspective of sexuality”.

As can be observed from this discussion, support is essential to ‘coming out’ as a lesbian. Here the discussion turns to the support networks both formed within and for the lesbian population of Yogyakarta. How do these networks operate, for whom do they cater, how does one access them and do formal networks and structures exist for lesbian women?

3.3 The Lesbian Community in Yogyakarta

Many lesbian networks operate in Yogyakarta simultaneously, intersecting with one another at different points, with the larger lesbian community composed of smaller communities (*keluarga*-family) with more intimate associations. Of the women interviewed five had prior involvement with the same lesbian community, four of whom were strongly involved, all were butch. The fifth had met these other women but her experience of the community was as an outsider describing affiliation as “very difficult, they are inclined to be a closed community”. This woman lived on the other side of town and was more involved with the women of the European/ ‘*bule*’ (Indo: Caucasian) lesbian scene of the Prawirotaman tourist area, whom she believed to “think differently to Indonesian lesbians”. This European group of lesbians included many Dutch and Belgian women who are more inclined to androgyny, embraced ‘feminism’, many of whom have

had active roles in gay and lesbian activism in their respective countries of origin. This 'femme' identified woman said she had many other friends who did not network collectively or liaise with the lesbian community and believed that they "possibly limit themselves" by not socializing, their silence and closetedness perceived by her to be a barrier to their expression, although this was not expanded upon.

From my experience with the university linked community of lesbians it seems the 'butch' members are dominant among the group and if her partner is not among that group, the acceptance into the group of both her and her partner will be more difficult. Furthermore, the 'femme' respondent and her partner do not share the same educational levels and social status, with neither of them having studied at the common university. This may be the case for the other women outside the community mentioned above also.

The four women linked to the common lesbian community have all studied at the same university with the community meeting place located on the fringe of the campus. They frequent the venue, a café selling a limited range of food and beverages, on a daily basis. It is the centre of their social network: the place where "gatherings" (weekends away, or social/ political meetings) are organized, issues are discussed, friendships are made, good times are had and lovers are found. The owner of the café is one of the women I interviewed. She did not intend for her café to become a meeting place for women from the lesbian community, as it does not exclusively cater for lesbians. However it is evident that the network of students frequenting this café are her friends and peers, with many of them having studied psychology and sharing other commonalities on many levels, as with any other social group commonalities are necessarily the predominant factor in group or community formation and cohesion. One of the key links between

the interviewees was involvement with the *Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan dan Demokrasi* (*KPI*- Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy).

Among the group, three of the butch identified women interviewed had previous, intermittent or ongoing involvement with the *KPI* in Yogyakarta, particularly with the *KPI's Sektor* (Sector) 15, which according to the national *KPI* charter, caters for lesbians, bisexual and transgendered women. On several occasions one or more of these three women has attempted to initiate *Sektor* 15 in Yogya without success, "I called everybody to come, I prepared a lot of things, and then, nothing, no-one was interested, so I also lost interest". These attempts have led to fractures within the group of three and as a result the formation of *Sektor* 15 is uncertain at this stage. Among this group it is felt that the café network is not supportive of the idea to form *Sektor* 15 for various reasons including age and political leanings. Most important here is the awareness that "this sector makes sexuality the focal point. Identifying with *Sektor* 15 labels women as lesbian, bisexual or transgender". This is also an issue within the *KPI* membership itself and has been since *Sektor* 15 was proposed at the Indonesian Women's Congress five years ago.

Further the *KPI* does not allocate funding for *Sektor* 15, so activists for the sector must propose and organize their own fundraising. The possible candidates for leadership of *Sektor* 15 in Yogya are currently working or studying, so their level of involvement can only be part-time. As a result, more than one person is required to establish and maintain the smooth and ongoing facilitation of this sector. The formation of *Sektor* 15 is not yet possible due to the need for the support of at least two persons from the outset. In the words of one of the possible lesbian candidates for coordinator of *Sektor* 15 interviewed,

the *KPI* is too serious. I'm not matched with the *KPI* community, the issues are too wide. I only want to work for *Sektor* 15. I don't think the community

of *KPI* is ready to undertake the steps required to form *Sektor 15*. It has to come from the bottom of their heart, their consciousness, their Self.

Understandably many concerns are raised by potential *Sektor 15* activists, particularly the conservatism of the 700 strong *KPI* membership most of whom are wives and mothers. This conservatism is not evident at the administrative level, however consensus decision making positions women of non-heterosexual orientation as marginal within women's organizations in Indonesia.

Most importantly a supportive community group of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women is essential, given that these sexualities are thrust together in *Sektor 15*. Potentially, a group comprised of women from each of these categories, that is lesbian, bisexual or transgender, may prove problematic to say the least, given that the needs and issues of each group are different. Clearly the informal communities already in existence in Yogya are indicators of this. Any formal or organized groupings would certainly benefit by modeling on current, though informal organisations. In the lesbian network, transgendered women (those who wish to become men or who consider themselves male) are not affiliated, however many 'femme' identified women who have been and intend to be involved in heterosexual relationships in the future, are among the group in partnership with their 'butch' *pacar* (Indo: girlfriend /boyfiend/lover).

Organisations of women questioning sexuality have existed in Yogya in the past. A butch identified respondent said she was involved in the formation of a lesbian, bisexual and transgender network in collaboration with another Indonesian woman, who also identified as butch, 20 years her senior. The group was called *Opo* (Javanese:what) or *Opo We* (Jav:whatever), the name highlighting that any issue could be discussed or entered into within the group. Members were an amalgam of both of the women's friends and acquaintances. The

underlying philosophy of the group was that “regardless of a woman’s life experience, marriage, children...it is her basic human right to live as a lesbian if she has the sexual inclination”. The elder founding member of this group, now 46, married a man and had a child. She now lives with her husband (in name only), child and female partner in the same home. Although this arrangement according to the interviewee “is rare... because the husband is there, she is spared the questions from the neighbours”. Here I must add that it is common in Java for lesbians to marry to fulfill their social role as mothers, and then to separate from their husbands to live their lives in partnership with a woman. This trend however is more common among the ‘femme’ group.

The community mindedness of these women is demonstrated through their networking. One of the women has helped and counseled young lesbians through the internet, meeting them through the Indonesian lesbian chat rooms on mIRC (a Windows Chat application) and *Suara Sri Kandi* (Indo: the voice of *Sri Kandi*), an Indonesian lesbian networking and information website, and talking to them about issues of sexuality. After linking to such websites I too have been approached via email, with life stories of isolation, fear, self-hatred and suicidal ideation. However after sharing long confidences the women I have communicated with have gained self belief and have come to see guilt and shame they feel as being the result of putting the opinions of other’s before one’s opinion of self: hopelessness has been replaced with hope. Networking here is about sharing stories, experiences, problems, differences and similarities, it is about finding commonalities among marginalized women. Such shared realities help to validate one’s own experience. When there is no formal structure accommodating the needs of lesbians and women of marginalized sexualities, a network such as the above is imperative to the understanding that one is not alone. It is certain that such websites and chat rooms are only

accessible to those with prior information and it may be assumed that women of the lower classes and those less educated will not have immediate access to this specific knowledge.

3.4 The Wider Society

Lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women across cultures suffer oppression on two levels, firstly as women, involving a veritable arsenal of forms of domination, control and exploitation and secondly as women of marginalized sexuality. This discussion highlights women's perceptions of their experiences as part of the wider society, including the family, as lesbians or women of marginalized sexuality. The responses to this question were in general conflicting. For one of these women Yogyakarta is her home city while the others all come from other cities or towns in Java. Whilst many indicated they didn't experience any problems in expressing their sexuality in Yogya, this may be taken to be a generalized comment with varying degrees of relevance as the accounts below show. Of course although these women are 'out' amongst their lesbian network, the network itself is relatively closed. Such declarations as 'I declared myself as lesbian to myself and to those who were lesbians', 'I don't want to expose myself, if they know it's ok, but I don't make a point of it', 'They accept me. I'm out', indicate that these women are 'out' yet to selected audiences, to people who already value and know them as individuals. This is an important point, for in guarding one's privacy one also protects oneself from discrimination.

The diversity of views and attitudes towards lesbianism is summed up by one of the interviewees,

There are many who view lesbianism as a sickness, many, as abnormal, not natural and prohibited, there are also many who are in the process of understanding, there are those who say it's your choice, those who don't comment, those who don't agree and those who hate it and never speak to me again.

It is not surprising that in Yogyakarta many lesbians “ don’t want to come out, they fear the loss of their good name...university students also fear being thrown out of home by their parents”. As a university town, many young female students come to Yogya to study and enter into an intimate relationship with a woman free from family proximity and interference. Since the family is the sole financial support for many it is important that these women are perceived to be ‘cooperative’ and fulfilling expectations.

Once having obtained work and financial independence, these women feel a sense of liberation from the pull of the sense of duty towards the family. As mentioned earlier three of the women are ‘out’ at work, however their status as ‘out’ was insinuated rather than spoken: they did not actively try to conceal their sexuality or their partnerships.

Intimacy and touch are an expression of closeness here and Indonesian people in general are very demonstrative and affectionate among friends and family. Unlike the Western concept of the importance of personal space where touch may be interpreted as a form of control here it is viewed as a form of inclusion, invitation, warmth, play and friendship. In public in Indonesia one often sees groups or pairs of male friends walking arm in arm through the streets. Among women this is also the case however women also walk hand in hand. According to one of the women interviewed (an opinion later verified by the others), in lesbian relationships, women tend not touch each other when in public indicating a form of self censorship with regard to intimate expression to avoid perceived unnecessary or negative attention. This may also signify a sense of guilt or shame in these individuals.

The most significant factor shining through these interactions in heterosexual contexts was summed up by one of the women: “it is easier if you accept yourself, its easier to reflect

yourself...people won't think you are a hypocrite". Generally these women had male and female friends although the 'butch' respondents suggested that their actions and behaviours were often interpreted by others as being 'masculine', and that in the 'hetero' world they had closer affiliation with men.

Resulting from recent government incentives, specifically Article 65 of Law number 12 of the Indonesian Republic, aimed at increasing women's representation in political parties to 30%, one of the women interviewed was asked to join the *PDIP* (Indo: *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*- Indonesian Struggle for Democracy Party). She took up the challenge but was horrified to find the women of the party were toyed with and seen as sources of amusement for the male constituents, "I didn't like it. Too many men - no space for the women. Too much joking around with the women, they were not taken seriously". One wonders how many other women experience similar feelings in such a male dominated arena.

3.5 On Being Lesbian/ Islamic/ Woman

Religion and particularly Islamic discourse in Indonesia represent yet another male dominated sphere in which women are in a multitude of ways subjugated and marginalized. In analyzing the role of women, previous cross-cultural historical studies indicate that women's participation is greatest in societies where religion and society are least differentiated (Carmody 1979), while "the more institutionalized a religion becomes, the more it generally excludes women from positions of authority and power" (Ursula King 1993 p.37).

In Indonesia, authorities of power, including Islam and state control, both inherently patriarchal, have assumed women's role and status as being primarily based on biology or sex thereby

legitimizing gender differentials and disempowering women's experience. As Mary Daly points out,

It is necessary to grasp the fundamental fact that women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or our God. The old naming was not the product of dialogue...partial and inadequate words have been taken as adequate. To exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and God. The 'method' of the evolving spiritual consciousness of women is nothing less than this beginning to speak humanly- that is, reclaiming of the right to speak (Daly, 1974b, p.130).

Islam is the dominant religion of Java and Indonesia and all of the women interviewed Moslems. As with any religion, levels of faith, adherence to rituals and teachings, and interpretations of those teachings differ among individuals. The Islam of Java too is a syncretic blend of Islam and *Kejawen* (mysticism associated with the Javanese world view) with traces of Hinduism and Buddhism (Geertz 1968).

For each of the women Islam meant different things. Although the Islamic teachings do not prohibit lesbianism and intimacy among women, passages on sodomy are interpreted to relate to any same sex attraction by one of the women, "when I read (these teachings) I close my eyes, and when I relate sexually with a woman I have felt guilt". One woman is a follower of *Insy' Allah Islam* (Arabic: if God wills it). For her "religion is like an ocean, deep and wide, I've been to the shore but I feel scared". The others are moderate Moslems, one of whom wears a *jilbab* (headscarf) in public. The *jilbab* described is worn for a myriad of reasons, as vast as the number of wearers. Two of the generally accepted reasons for women's use of the *jilbab* are firstly to minimise the temptation felt by men on seeing the women's neck and hair (with women bearing the responsibility for men's sexuality), and secondly to equal the playing field of men and women such that interactions between women and men are on an intellectual rather than physical level. In Britain the Moslem Scholar Shabbir Akhtar suggested an alternative explanation of the

purpose of the veil being “to create a truly erotic culture in which one dispenses with the need for the artificial excitement that pornography provides”(cited in Geraldine Brooks.1995.p.24). The level of and availability of porn in Indonesia at present, due to the exponential rise in internet cafes, leaves this idea in the past.

There is no doubt however that the strength of many of the wives of Muhammad provide inspiration and example of how forthright women can be. Noteworthy among these is a comment made by Aisha, the Prophet's youngest wife, upon her recognition that Muhammad was receiving revelations relevant to problematic issues arising from his domestic arrangements, “It seems to me, your Lord makes haste to satisfy your desires”. Further it was not until the death of Khadija after 24 years of marriage, who provided financial (she was a business woman) and emotional support to Muhammad, that Muhammad received the revelation of the veil and the revelation that “men are in charge of women, because God has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (to support them)” (cited in Brookes.1995.p.4). This is a widely held belief in Indonesia today among the *'priyayi'*.

There was a general consensus among the women regarding the expression of their sexuality in relation to religion. Overall they felt that who they are, in its fullness, is a creation of God, and as such God must be approving of them. Many found this understanding helpful in counteracting the strong stereotypical images of women as wives, mothers and servants of their husbands, which are part of both Islamic and Javanese discourse. Common also was the notion that if one is sensitive to and considerate of the needs of others then this will be reciprocated. For these Moslem women *solat* (Arabic: prayers five times a day) and *puasa* (Ind: fasting during the month of *Ramadan*) are undertaken ritually, although the ritual daily prayers may be abbreviated when time does not permit. Significant is that as with any religion, Islam in Indonesia is generally

believed to be open to the interpretation of the follower since faith is between the individual and God.

3.6 Intimate Relationships

In comparison to my knowledge of youth relationships in Australia, the majority of examples mentioned among this group, although referred to as deep and intimate relationships, did not involve sexual intimacy. This was a significant factor for me since most teenage relationships or 'first loves' in Australia represent an experimental sexual phase, which may or may not involve sexual intercourse but are likely to involve heavy petting and/or digital penetration and masturbation together with kissing and hugging. In Indonesia recent novels such as 'Jakarta Undercover: Sex 'n the City (2002) portray the loosening of the moral grip of traditional attitudes to sex. Interesting in this research first relationships among the women interviewed were predominantly limited to emotional closeness, companionship, kissing and hugging.

Relationships with men were mentioned by two of the respondents (not including the woman who had a 'relationship' with a gay man to appease her parents). The 'femme' respondent had serial relationships with men which all involved sex prior to her first lesbian relationship. She is often asked why she partners a woman now and stated "because I feel I can accept women more, both intimately and in other ways". One of the butch respondents had her first relationship with a male however sex was not involved. She explained this short relationship as ending when "he started to dominate...he didn't allow me to wear short pants when playing basketball...there was no physical attraction". One woman expressed that her feelings for her female partner of 4 years, with whom she had not had sex, were such that if she had been a man she would have married her. Most are currently in a longterm relationship with women and of those all live with their

partners. All have partners of the complementary gender role to their own, that is, butch/femme, femme/butch.

3.6.1. Gender Roles, Gender Identity and Expressions of Sexuality Within Lesbian Relationships

Next the discussions turned to gender roles within the relationship in terms of delineation of tasks within the home together with issues of dominance and submissiveness in the home and in the bedroom. The women were incredibly open and honest in their responses whilst I acknowledge that subjectivity is constructed within an overarching heterosexist framework (Scott 1991). The gender roles played out in lesbian relationships are constructed from within the relationship as a negotiatory process according to the needs of each partner and are at the same time learned constructions of gender, often modeled on those experienced in the family particularly where the dominant gender polarities are significant. As with all relationships, individuals tend to perform those household tasks that they have had experience in, are more likely to enjoy, and perform more competently and efficiently. There is however here a strong indication that in the domestic domain the 'femme' lesbian performs those tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes ironing and vacuuming, which reflect the social norm for women, to a greater extent. 'Butch' partners, although sharing some of the tasks above, are generally more androgenous in their capacity to do a range of tasks within the home, for example general home and vehicle repair and maintenance. Traditionally both in Java and in Islam (and indeed in most patriarchal societies) the domestic domain is the domain of women (Safa 1981; Kristeva 1982; Koentjaraningrat 1985), although among the '*priyayi*' it was characteristic to employ household helpers (*pembantu*), with only female *pembantu* attending to domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing and childminding. According to Javanese tradition "being a housewife is a privilege, indicating one is free to stay at home" (Alison Murray.1991.p.4), a notion typical of upper class

values where wives are not required to work to support the family. All of the women in relationships suggested 'femmes' were most likely to perform the tasks stereotypically assigned to women, such as the above, in the home. Although the 'femme' women in the relationships dominated in the domestic realm, the 'butch' women did cook, clean, and wash etcetera however not on a regular basis. Many suggested that they delineated chores according to preferences. It must be remembered here that the respondents are predominantly students, are not living in traditional heterosexual marriages, and cannot afford paid domestic help.

The 'femme' respondent who works fulltime said that she is also expected to manage the home. In recalling the domestic delineation of chores she complained, "sometimes if I'm tired from working, she helps, but it's been five months". When asked how she negotiates this situation to suit her needs, she commented that she has said to her partner "if you can cook, please do, if you can clean, please do" however the perpetration of violence against her by her partner in the past as a result of such confrontation has quelled her rebellion. Interestingly, she explained her rationale, "if I was a wife I would serve my good husband", paraphrasing the first guiding principle of the *Kodrati Wanita* with no mention of her partner's duty to her. Her current, long term 'butch' girlfriend, has been involved in a relationship with a European male since before they met 6 years ago. When he intermittently comes to Yogyakarta he lives with the 2 women but sleeps with one. The interviewee explained this relationship as one of convenience and economics for her partner, as clearly many marriages are in Indonesia. She shares a similar level of commitment as her partner, taking a European lover when her partner was out of town and not telling her. She justifies this according to the rules her girlfriend lives by.

Digressing momentarily so as not to overlook the issue of violence in relationships, specifically lesbian relationships, much research has been done among gays and lesbians however the model

for analyzing this domestic violence has been based on the heterosexual model where the male is predominantly the perpetrator. According to studies undertaken by Scherzer (1998), analyzing the incidence and nature of domestic violence among lesbian couples in Canada and using a model adapted from the one used to analyse violence among heterosexual couples, it was found that of the women surveyed 17% experienced physical violence while 31% reported experiencing emotional abuse. This study highlighted the incidence of violence in first relationships as being significant since it was in these first relationships that women face societal opposition in many cases and had to confront many new issues, often blaming their partner.

3.6.2 *Dominance and Submission*

As in all human relationships issues of dominance and submission are key to initial attraction, partner choice, and the internal dynamics of the interaction (Hartsock 1996). However as Lynne Segal points out the sexual as an extension of the psychic allows for fantasy and adventure: “ We insert ourselves, whatever our sex, at one and the same moment as both active and passive, powerful and powerless, giving and receiving: desire flows through binaries in all directions at once, all of the time” (1994 p. 161).

Of the five lesbian women in relationship, two of the ‘butch’ women believed themselves to be the dominant partner in the relationship, a third being positioned as dominant by her partner. This latter woman understood her positioning and the issues behind it and tried to address those issues. One butch woman believed her relationship to be fairly equal whilst at the same time saying that she did not have expectations “I just go, I never think about anything, I don’t care about anything, we do what we do”. This attitude too was a very common sentiment emphasized in the Indonesian term *terserah* (its up to you).

Issues of dominance and passivity shine through in the bedroom. In delving into this private sanctuary, I did not push people to open up to this question if I perceived they felt uncomfortable. There was a general perception that 'butch' women dominate in the sense that they are the 'doers' and 'femme' women are the 'receivers', "I like to do to her and I don't like to receive what I give. I don't enjoy that. We enjoy sex in different ways."

I pursued this revelation further, asking if there were any parts of her body she did not enjoy being touched. She indicated those parts specifically female, the breasts and the vagina. For two of the butch women (the others did not comment) penetration was something to be done to others. Interestingly, research conducted by Levitt et al. (2003), suggests that 'femme' lesbians objectify themselves in their sexual relationships with 'butch' partners and make conscious effort to "please their partners sexually without making them feel too feminine and negating their butch identities"(p.8). With only a few of the respondents did I gauge that I could continue to delve into who did what and how they did it.

Intimate sexual questions are often more easily discussed through an anonymous medium such as the internet and its chat rooms. Internet services are easily accessible in the Indonesian *warnet* (internet cafe), which seem to have sprung up like weeds throughout Yogyakarta, and with an hourly rate of Rp 3500 (approx. AD 60c) access is relatively cheap with users often sharing access time. After visiting a lesbian chat site, on which I found a discussion on where to get 'dildos' with opinions ranging from "if you want a penis, why don't you get the real thing?", "why not use a banana?", "no don't use a banana you will get an infection", and "just ask anyone at the traffic lights where the sex shop is". I was keen to know these women's attitudes to sex toys, together with their views on masturbation given the emphasis on the fulfillment of men's sexual desire in both middle and upper class Javanese and Islamic culture (Murray 1991). And also did they masturbate? Of the women who responded the answer was an overwhelming no to both the use

of dildos and to masturbation although mutual masturbation was common, with the reaction to the question of masturbation being highly animated and rather embarrassed. I did try to elucidate what orgasm meant for these women however this was verging on too personal, with one woman saying “it can’t be described, only felt”. Given that there is a strong Javanese tradition of maintaining harmony in relationships such issues are rarely discussed in public so as not to provoke anger (Porter & Hasan 2003; Magnis-Suseno 1999).

One butch woman indicated that she preferred to watch heterosexual pornographic movies with her partner before sex as a part of foreplay, and that without the pre-sex porn, the desire to have sex may not be strong with climax more difficult to achieve. Initially she did not stipulate whether the porn was hetero or not, although I anticipated that it would be. Again the feminist anti-porn and commodification of women avenger arose in me. I asked what she felt when she saw ejaculation on the screen, she said it made her ‘hot’. Porn videos generally position the woman as submissive objects of men’s desire, prescribing sexualities, moves, positions, expressions; the woman has it done to her, anyone who does it to ‘her’ can relate to the power of the man in these images (Tong 1984).

3.7 Is Feminism Relevant?

Despite over a century of evolution in Western/Northern feminist discourse, the notion of multiple ‘feminisms’ is not embraced in Indonesia (Porter & Hasan 2003). Among the respondents it was hinted that perhaps feminism is not well understood in Java and Indonesia as yet, “although they know of feminism, they do not understand it...rarely are women aware of feminism”. Kumari Jayawardena argues against the notion that feminism as an ideology was imposed on countries of the third world, suggesting it developed as women resisted subordination in their struggle for equal rights both in the home and beyond (1986).

Feminism however is seen by many as a Western/Northern construct, and in many ways is not seen as relevant in the lives of the women interviewed. They believed they were not feminist, with one arguing "...they differ, feminism and lesbianism". Indeed they do, but it did seem that although not identifying as feminist, many acted out of feministic principles in everyday life when confronting the issues of being a woman. One woman who claimed not to be a feminist stated her reason for holding this view as being since " I don't do anything...a feminist is someone who struggles for feminism...sometimes I don't have the courage to say no to my father, I can't defend my mother to my father". For me feminism is about awareness, exactly the kind of awareness demonstrated in her acknowledgement that at times her mother is subject to her father's wishes. For this woman if she could not defend someone in one instance she could not call herself a feminist. In general the concept of feminism operates within a very rigid framework in Indonesia.

Three of the women did see a place for feminism in Javanese society in terms of "feminist social critique, and placing importance on the support and protection of women" however one of these two women also believed feminists to be "part of high culture... political...an exclusive group". In Indonesia the term 'women activists' is more commonly used than 'feminists'. While "feminism is political, lesbianism is not". Lesbianism is seen as an innate trait, perhaps somewhat learnt, but not a political choice. Feminism however in Indonesia has long since been associated with political and sexual deviancy as well as lesbianism, particularly since the 1965 coup and the manufacture of propaganda surrounding the 'events' (Wieringa 2003).

Clearly feminism is a discourse available to the middle and upper classes, accessed through tertiary education and/or international travel. As with one of the respondents both feminist and gay and lesbian literature were stumbled upon in her childhood readings of *Intisari* (Indo: quintessence/abstract) magazine, an Indonesian publication. She said that many people

commented that her reading of this magazine was inappropriate since she was 10 years old yet she had no problem with the subject matter.

In Indonesia the concepts tied up in ‘feminisms’ are lived and expressed through “the Asian way of doing things”. One woman recognized the autonomy of her aunt’s actions as a young child, and admired her sense of independence in catching the midnight bus home, something the child had never witnessed, and until then she did not think it possible that women could be outdoors at night without the supervision and protection of a male. This was life changing for the child. This exemplary woman was the founder of *Kalyanamitra* (Sanskrit: spiritual friend), the first Indonesian feminist organization and women’s resource center, one of the leaders of the Indonesian Women’s Congress of 1998, and a senior member at the national level of the *KPI*. Not many women however have such experiences or role models.

3.8 Synthesis of Interview Findings

This intimate glimpse into the lives of lesbian or women who identify as women loving women in Yogyakarta exposes many contradictions, not in the stories of the women, but rather in the way these women experience their positioning. For them the personal is not political and in most cases remains personal: in the sphere of the private.

Sex, sexuality and gender are constructed within a binary matrix that positions women as objects of the male gaze and hence women become objects of male construction. Since the dominant paradigm is heterosexuality women are socialized to collude in the process of their own feminisation. Homosexuality as the binary to heterosexuality remains its creation, becoming the ‘other’, and within homosexuality itself women as lesbian, bisexual and transgender are further othered (Butler. 1992).

Operating within this binary, lesbian women in Yogyakarta predominantly identifying as 'butch' or 'femme', resist the dominant heterosexuality whilst at the same time reinforce it. The possible gender options are incredibly rigid and social pressure to conform is covert and extremely powerful. It seems women who do not 'fit' the socially sanctioned feminine model of womanhood model their behaviour on that of men, with butchness equated with masculinity in this context. However a deeper reading of culture and its permutations provides us with a rationale less focused on heteronormativity, where 'butchness' is seen as an expression of the scope of what it means to be a woman, where the boundaries of gender conformity are pushed outwards (Levitt et al 2003; Munt, S. ed 1998).

The sense of confusion and gender dysphoria expressed subliminally in many of these women's stories is integral to the process of living within the dominant patriarchal discourse of Javanese and Islamic tradition whilst forging one's own gender and sexual identity within such a framework: an ongoing process for those who don't conform to traditional gender stereotypes.

Lesbian women who admit or accept their sexuality and live it unashamedly are reasonably well positioned to access community lesbian networks whereby their experiences are reified through commonality and relatively shared experience. Women less willing to risk being 'outed' remain further marginalised in their silence.

Research on lesbianism in Canada supports the conclusion that it is 'butch' identified women who tend to be at the forefront of gender bending in Indonesia through their tendency to be decisively lesbian and less transient in their sexuality, providing an essence of stability within the lesbian community as a whole (Levitt et al.2003). 'Femme' women conversely, in Yogyakarta at least, in the majority of cases tend to be fluid in terms of sexuality with the perception being that the transient nature of their sexual identity is due to social and familial expectation.

4. The Struggle for Socially Sanctioned Support Networks

This discussion now turns to the availability of support structures and social services agencies available to women of marginalized sexualities, particularly lesbian women. As an Australian resident I had anticipated to find support and counselling services that attempt to meet the needs of marginalized groups to be generally available, including those marginalized due to sexual orientation. The women interviewed told of their experience in forming informal associations and networks. In Indonesia women of non-mainstream sexualities have formed a myriad of organizations in the past, particularly in Jakarta. In this section I will provide a brief synopsis of recent developments in formal Indonesian lesbian networks.

Since the 1980's networks have grown, devolved and reformed throughout Indonesia. *Perlisan* (*Persatuan Perempuan Indonesia*) being one of the first in this decade, and from this also was formed *Kalyanamitra*, a women's library and resource center. In 1989 the Asian Lesbian Network (ALN) was formed by lesbians and women of alternate sexualities who were previously part of the Gay Indonesia network *Gaya Nusantara*, established in conjunction with Dede Oetomo. In 1993 *Chandra Kirana*, a specifically lesbian group, began publishing and circulating regular newsletters. At the second gay and lesbian conference in Yogyakarta held in 1995, the lesbian contingent found that their issues were not heard at all. Since then, lesbian networks have felt the need to separate their issues from those of gay men. In Yogyakarta itself, I pursued the largest networks available, both non-government organisations.

4.1. Non - Government Organisations

My examination of NGO's primarily focuses on those with some inclusion of lesbian issues in their agenda's or the potential for such inclusion. The two major organisations being the *KPI*, a

women's NGO and the *PKBI*, an NGO which centers on the issue of reproductive health in general. Firstly I discuss the *KPI* since it is the NGO most likely to accommodate women of marginalized sexuality due to its female only membership. Here I am only interested in the capacity of these organisations to include lesbians, to address their needs and the extent to which they do so.

4.1.1. KPI

In Indonesia the *Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan dan Demokrasi* (Indonesian Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy), the *KPI*, coincidentally came into existence at an annual meeting of the Indonesian Women's Congress, a group comprised of 75 women activists, held in Yogyakarta in 1998. The Pancasila with its five basic principles are the foundation.

The agenda of the *KPI* in the early formulation stages was to cater to the multiplicity of needs of Indonesian women in order to affect real change. This involved discussion and consensus on the issues deemed most pressing, and finally resulted in the establishment of 15 areas of concern to be addressed at all levels, structural or systemic, national, regional, local and personal. These 15 sectors aim to address the needs of the specific target groups. The 15th sector was developed to include women of marginalised sexualities, specifically including lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women. Further analysis of how this collaboration within sector 15 of these three categories is undertaken and the issues that may arise from the essentialising of the category itself to include women of non-heterosexual preference may prove an interesting subsequent research project.

The Indonesian researcher B.J.Gayatri specifically excluded “female transvestites” from her earlier research on lesbianism, because they did not identify as women or lesbians but as men (1996). Although essentialisms are the basis of any given category, still within a labeled group such as ‘lesbian’ variation and dichotomies exist.

The *KPI* was established on the 18th May 1998 in Jakarta and in Yogyakarta on the 17th December that year. Without going into an in depth discussion of all of the facets of the *KPI* I am primarily interested here in the extent to which the *KPI's sektor 15* is active in addressing the issues of concern for the sexualities included within its sphere of interest. *Sektor 15* is not yet formed in Yogyakarta, for a multitude of reasons, the main one being the apparent lack of political will of the women themselves. This broadly can be said to be due to the overarching depoliticization of women in general since the New Order regime (Wieringa 1999). In Jakarta a handful of educated and politically active women have tirelessly worked to build up *sektor 15* to its current membership of one hundred lesbian, bisexual and transgender identified women. This number in itself is a mere drop in the ocean when one considers the population of Java of around one hundred million. Factors such as cultural and religious mores act to disempower women politically and prohibit their choices.

In February 2003 there was a meeting of seventy two lesbian women in Yogyakarta, one of the key purposes of which was to create an awareness of the possibility of forming a *sektor 15* in Yogya. It was established that the “political and organisational awareness was not yet ripe, they are still in the closet and are inclined to exclusivity”. Similar such problems were faced by the *sektor 15* instigators of the Jakarta branch of the *KPI* only three years earlier. At that time 99% of the *KPI* members were heterosexual. My contact within the Jakarta branch was encouraged by the Secretary General (*Sekjen*) of the *KPI*, Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, to pursue the

development of *sektor 15* to address the needs of women of marginalized sexualities. She was given the opportunity to expand her knowledge of politics, gender and feminism within the organisation. A giant stride towards increased awareness came through her introduction to and acquaintance with Saskia Wieringa, a Dutch born feminist political commentator on Indonesia.

This knowledge empowered her to work to develop an operational base for *sektor 15*. One of the major hurdles faced by women's organizations not working within the hetero-normative framework is funding. *Sektor 15* had to self fund. Fundraising methods were devised which involved targeting middle-class women loving women to attend an educative as well as social event, charging them a fee that was enough to subsidize the cost for less financially able women. Thirty women attended and fifteen of them later signed up to join *sektor 15*. This number is now more than one hundred, ranging in age from 17-60.

The foundational principles of the *KPI* provide a stable framework within which women can struggle for justice and democracy. It is this sound and well defended premise that differentiates the *KPI* from other organizations such as the *PKBI*.

4.1.2. PKBI

When I first arrived in Indonesia I went to the *PKBI* (on the advice of a non-lesbian friend) seeking to make contact with a support network for lesbian women. Based on the information from my friend, a law student, I believed the *PKBI* may have had facilities catering to the particular needs of lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth/women. This was not the case, in fact no services or networks were provided for these groups. I was directed by the President of the *PKBI*, whilst attending a very elaborate AIDS vigil at the Gadjah Madah University, to the *KPI*. It was many months later that I returned to the *PKBI* in search of answers.

The *PKBI* is the Indonesian family planning NGO that concentrates on addressing on the sexual and reproductive issues that are not met by the Indonesian government including abortion, teenage pregnancy, birth control, sexually transmitted disease, HIV/AIDS, sexual orientation and sex worker issues. According to the mission statement *PKBI* “struggles for the social and reproductive rights of youth and people who are marginalized due to sexual orientation or choice of work like: gay, transsexual and sex workers” (*Program Kesehatan Reproduksi/Sexual untuk Remaja dan Kelompok Marjinal: Reproductive/Sexual Health Program for Youth and Marginalised Groups*, pamphlet *PKBI-Yogyakarta Special Region.2003*). This coupled with the values of “non-discriminative, gender justice, equality and participation” are very interesting since clearly women other those who are pregnant or work as prostitutes do not come into the equation. I approached the *PKBI* to see why there is no accommodation of the needs of lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women and was told that these women are living in a very closed community and that there is no way of accessing the community from without. When I suggested helping to find a representative of the community to act as an outreach officer, the next issue became one of funding.

It is nothing new that women’s issues are secondary to men’s particularly where men are not directly involved in women’s sexuality as in the case of lesbians, and that an agency that deals with men’s sexual health will expend enormous resources focusing on HIV/AIDS and STD’s. At the end of my interview I was advised that my proposal would be taken to the next committee meeting, with over twenty two counselors advocating at *PKBI* surely one could made available to women of marginalized sexualities or those questioning their sexuality.

4.1.3. Human Rights Conference for Sexual Minorities

This conference was held in Yogyakarta on the 13th and 14th December 2003. Primarily organized through joint affiliation with the non-government organizations *Pelangi* (rainbow), a group of predominantly gay, transsexual and transgendered males, *PKBI* (*Perkembangan Kesejahteraan Berencana Indonesia*/family planning), and the *KPI*. The two main speakers at the meeting represented the *KPI* and *Komnas* (*Komite Nasional*/The National Committee for Human Rights Advocacy), a man and a woman respectively. The aim was to increase awareness of international human rights law and to discuss what steps will be taken in the future to ensure *HAM* (*Hak Asasi Manusia*/Human Rights) be observed in Indonesia.

It was interesting to note that the conference participants were predominantly male, totally thirty, all of whom identified as gay, transgender or transsexual. Of the eight women attending on the first day, three identified as lesbian, the others working in an advocacy role with people of marginalized sexualities. The first day was oriented to human rights issues such as the right to existence, non-discrimination, preservation of identity of the group, to be different, to establish institutions, to be represented and to self-determination. Further, the conference discussed the cultural factors that act to marginalize homosexuality and alternative sexualities in Indonesia. Day 2 involved book reviews and film screenings, with discussions following. Of the 2 films, the first was a shocking sequence of footage shot in the wake of the vicious attacks perpetrated against the predominantly gay community in Yogyakarta in 2000 during a conference in Kaliurang on the northern outskirts. The conference had been under way for little over an hour when a group of 'mosque activists', many of whom were believed to be under the influence of alcohol, brandishing crude weapons, entered the building uninvited to unleash unspeakable and indiscriminant violence against the community with damage to the venue totaling 70 million rupiah and resulting in numerous people requiring hospitalization. Since then, legal action has failed to achieve any compensation or retribution, with the lawyer representing the gay

community receiving threats and preferring not to pursue the case in court. One of the organizers of the most recent event called for solidarity, "...we were there yet here we are still struggling for our rights, we haven't given up". Although this threat was directly aimed at the gay community it sends out a warning to others of non-heteronormative sexualities.

5. Conclusion

As with all cultures same sex relationships are not unknown in Indonesian, however the strategic melding of patriarchal, nationalist and religious discourses has acted to marginalize and silence women of alternate non-hetersexualities, including lesbianism particularly within the more traditional Yogyakarta society. Within the margins however, these women have built close informal support networks that provide for their social networking and emotional needs.

This research has given voice not only to those women who were interviewed but also to the many others linked to them in some way. Their voices provide an example of the experience of living as a lesbian or woman loving woman in Yogyakarta. This discussion has positioned individual women's stories in a social historical and religious context whilst acknowledging that they too possess active agency.

Significant is the finding that socio-cultural, and including religious, influences in Yogyakarta are extremely pervasive in covert ways, with the dominant gender discourse continuing to be reinforced through the *kodrat wanita* with girls strongly conditioned through the most powerful social institution in Java, the family. The family is evident as being most influential on the choices women make regarding sexuality. Strong but internal social networks provide the safety net where the family in many cases does not.

Presently, given the evidence, it seems that socially sanctioned networks and services are not yet available to women of marginalized sexualities in Yogyakarta, with government services particularly inattentive to such groups. Although the potential for inclusion within non-government organisations such as the *KPI* and *PKBI* networks exists, the reality remains that accommodation of the needs of lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women is not yet forthcoming. The question remains as to whether any lesbian woman, or woman of alternate sexuality will 'out' themselves to take on a leadership role in establishing formal support within the already established support options.

Appendix 1

- How do you identify your sexuality? Do you identify as 'butch' or 'femme'? What does this identification mean for you?
- Please give an account of your life from the perspective of sexual identity- what are the factors that influenced the development of your sexual identity?
- Please explain your involvement and experience with the lesbian community in Yogyakarta, how long have you been involved, what has been your role and what activities have you been involved in?
- What are your thoughts and feelings regarding society in general, ie.heterosexual society, how do you relate to heterosexual society, and have you had sexual relations with a person of the opposite sex?
- Lets talk about your romantic, sexual or intimate relationships.
- How do you reconcile your religious beliefs and your sexuality?
- Do you consider yourself a feminist? And what does feminism mean for you?

Appendix 11

- Bagaimana Anda mengidentifikasikan seksualitas Anda? Apakah Anda mengidentifikasikan diri anda sebagai butch atau femme?
- Apa artinya identifikasi itu pada Anda?
- Silakan Anda bercerita tentang kehidupan Anda sejak masih mudah - menurut Anda?
- apakah yang mempengaruhi sehingga Anda menjadi seorang lesbi?
- Silakan menjelaskan pengalaman Anda di komunitas lesbi, sudah berapa lama? Apa peran Anda? Aktivitas apa yang Anda lakukan?
- Bagaimana perasaan atau pikiran Anda tentang masyarakat umum, yaitu yang heteroseks? Bagaimanakah Anda menghubungi sesama orang heteroseks?
- Apakah Anda pernah hubungan secara intim dengan seorang berjenis kelamin lain?
- Menceritakan hubungan intim, seksual atau romantis dengan perempuan/laki-laki.
- Bagaimana Anda mengikapi seksualitas Anda menurut agama yang Anda anut?
- Apakah Anda pengikut feminisme? Apakah feminisme pada pandangan Anda?



Centre for Women's Studies

State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Sunan Kalijaga

Yogyakarta

Ethics Approaval

I consent for the information obtained by Tracy Wright Webster from July-December 2003 in the process of data collection to be used to inform her research project with collection methods including form of tape recorded interviews, anecdotal notes and informal meetings. All information will be held in confidence and used for academic purposes.

Director; Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin

Tracy Wright Webster

supervisor

Researcher

Respondent

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