

THE PERFECT PATH

Gay Men, Marriage, Indonesia

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In a 1997 ad for Ciputra Hotels that appeared in the Indonesian national airline's in-flight magazine, a smiling Balinese dancer in bejeweled "traditional" garb stands juxtaposed to glittering hotel facades. The ad proclaims that "Indonesia is *also* home to Asia's newest hotel concept. . . . While tradition thrives in Indonesia, the world's most modern concepts are equally at home" (fig. 1). Presumably, one of these "modern concepts" is the "Western" male business traveler, who will feel "at home" under the domestic attentions of the female staff.¹

It hardly takes a subversive reading to see that the ad constructs Indonesia as a hybrid of tradition, gendered female, and modernity, gendered male. This binarism has a long history, extending from colonialism to modernization theory. Many non-"Western" intellectuals have addressed its symbolic violence, including the man many consider Indonesia's greatest living author, Pramoedya Ananta Toer. His novel *Footsteps*, which opens in 1901, is set in the late colonial period but speaks by analogy to the Indonesia of the 1970s and 1980s, when it was written. The protagonist, Minke, has just come from Surabaya to the capital, known informally as Betawi. Alone and poor but on his way to medical school and a "modern" career, Minke frames his arrival as a change of time as well as place:

Into the universe of Betawi I go—into the universe of the twentieth century. And, yes, to you too, nineteenth century—farewell! . . . People say only the modern man gets ahead in these times. In his hands lies the fate of humankind. You reject modernity? You will be the plaything of all those forces of the world operating outside and around you. I am a modern person. . . . And modernity brings the loneliness of orphaned humanity, cursed to free itself from unnecessary ties of custom, blood—even from the land, and if need be, from others of its kind.²

Through Minke's voice, Toer questions the perfect path of modernist teleology, with its assumption that "footsteps" to the future necessarily lead to a homogenized subjectivity that denies the local, the "others of its kind." One can well imagine Minke as the modern business traveler, building his career, reading an in-flight magazine, experiencing the "loneliness of orphaned humanity," and hoping to find a home. But where would Minke's footsteps have taken him if he had flown into Jakarta International Airport in 1999, rather than disembarked on its shores in 1901? How would he think of the relationship between past and future, tradition and modernity, self and other? There is no doubt that the forces of globalization have grown and shifted tremendously in recent decades. But many scholars of transnationalism question whether this growth implies homogenization or instead may result in new forms of difference. As Arjun Appadurai notes, the contemporary moment is marked by disjunctions in the global movement of images, commodities, and persons and by "a new role for the imagination in social life."³

On the most fundamental symbolic level, for instance, the Ciputra Hotels ad requires that the woman staring out at the prospective customer not be lesbian. Her heterosexuality structures the very opposition between tradition and modernity on which the ad's semiotic logic rests. This logic is part and parcel of a system of governmentality in which the Indonesian state strives to efface the distinction between itself and society through metaphors of the heterosexual, middle-class family. Such heteronormativity raises the question of why there are *lesbi* and *gay* subjectivities in Indonesia, the fourth most populous nation, at all. By exploring the "homoscapes" in which some non-"Western" subjects identify as lesbian or gay—in particular, by exploring the "mystery" of gay-identified men's marriages to women in Indonesia—I hope to clarify the processes of "reterritorialization" and "localization" identified by scholars of globalization.⁴ What is the history and social context of these subjectivities? These are the kinds of questions that came to my mind when I first saw this ad on my way to Indonesia to begin fieldwork.

My consideration of these questions took place in a postcolonial frame. By *postcolonial*, whose scope and validity remain ambiguous, I refer to a theoretical stance according to which the emergence of nations in the formerly colonized world poses a new set of questions about belonging, citizenship, and the self. I turn to creative uses of this framework by such scholars as Homi K. Bhabha, Partha Chatterjee, Stuart Hall, Akhil Gupta, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak rather than to analyses that reject "postcoloniality" by claiming that it implies that colonialism is "past," that economic forces are irrelevant, or that all nations

