Media, Erotics, and Transnational Asia

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It is night; in the back of a house in the city of Surabaya, at the eastern end of Java, is a room where two gay men complete a new edition of the zine GAYa Nusantara (GN). At a table, Joko, one of the men, bends down over a ledger; with pen and ruler, he extends inked lines horizontally from a list of about 250 subscribers from across Indonesia, tabulating who has paid for the upcoming issue. Indra, the other man, sits before an old computer, adding final touches to the new issue of the zine before sending it to a local print shop. He looks down, then up again, entering a handwritten story sent from a gay man from a small Sumatran town. All that remains is the short stack of letters from men who wish to be included in the personals section. Next to the letters lies the glossy photograph of a gay man from Bali; as this month’s cover boy, his smoldering eyes will greet those who take GAYa Nusantara into their hands.

On the eastern coast of the island of Borneo, in the city of Samarinda, is a network of gay men: some hail from local Dayak and Banjar ethnic groups, and others are migrants from elsewhere in Indonesia. On this day, I am sitting in the windowless, rented room of Haru, a man from Java, when he removes a worn copy of GAYa Nusantara from a small, locked cupboard. He shares each new edition with gay friends, including Awi, an ethnic Banjar from Samarinda who lives with his sister and her husband and children. None of these family members know Awi is gay, but Awi tells me that when he reads GAYa Nusantara he is not alone. He has even contacted GAYa Nu-
santara to volunteer as a cover boy; they replied that cover boys have been selected for the next several issues, but once the backlog is cleared, he too can be a face of gay Indonesia.

These two vignettes, drawn from my fieldwork, hint at how the circulation of texts by gay Indonesians shapes notions of subjectivity and community under conditions of significant social marginalization. These texts—a relatively unknown genre of Indonesian print media—are the subject of this chapter. Since 1982 gay Indonesians have been producing what I will call gay zines. I use the term “gay” because this is the most common term for the sexuality under consideration here (others include g, homo, and hémong). I aim to demonstrate the connections between the systems of meaning deployed by the producers and consumers of these zines on the one hand and Indonesian national discourse on the other. As a result, I italicize the term gay throughout to indicate it is an Indonesian-language term, not reducible to the English term “gay,” despite the clear links between them. Gay men differ in many ways from gay men; for instance, they usually marry women and assume this does not contradict their being gay, and they rarely use metaphors of the closet or speak of “coming out” (Boellstorff 1999, 2005, 2007). Above all, gay sexuality is shaped by discourses of the Indonesian nation-state in a way that gay sexuality is not.

As privately circulated, small-scale publications, gay zines challenge definitions of “mass” media, providing unique insights into the relationship between print technologies, sexual subjectivities, and narratives of belonging. In particular, the producers and readers of gay zines do not see them as countercultural; they see the zines as part and parcel of the national character of gay sexuality, embodying and demonstrating the worthiness of gay Indonesians for social inclusion. My goal is to show how zines could hold such meaning. These zines are permeated with two zones of desire—homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging. (I use “zone” as roughly equivalent to “discourse.”) Zines relate these two zones in the idea that love (cinta) can be the ultimate prestasi, a word meaning both “good deed” and “performance,” indicating to society that gay people are worthy of national inclusion. In these zines, gay Indonesians assume that prestasi must be visible to society to have these effects of inclusion. Since speaking positively of same-sex love in Indonesia is difficult, however, love fails as a prestasi. Belonging is deferred, and tropes of separation permeate gay zines as a result. Thus, although same-gender desire is clearly sexual, I argue
that the second zone of desire—for national belonging—is sexualized in a manner not exclusive to gay Indonesians. Gay zines reveal a wide-ranging heterosexist logic of sexual citizenship at the heart of the very real “national culture” of postcolonial Indonesia.

As Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein note in their introduction, a key question explored by multiple authors in this volume is the following: “How, specifically, do transnational media help constitute the complex relationships between erotic yearning and other desires and fantasies?” This chapter examines such relationships by focusing on an “interzone” between forms of desire that are global (like “gay”) and national (like “Indonesia”). Its particular contribution is to home in on a particular moment within transnational imaginaries of desire: the very fact that they are transnational underscores how the nation-state plays a foundational yet historically contingent and variable role in the articulation of the global modern. The nation-state remains, in practicality, the only game in town for imagining geopolitical translocality: the map of the world is a patchwork of nations—not distributed empires, kingdoms, or city-states. Despite the great diversity in nation-state forms, to lose sight of the nation’s contemporary preeminence is to rob ourselves of a problematic and a method for addressing how desire and belonging articulate within the specific social and economic orders in which we live.

Production and Consumption

In the United States, zines originated with sci-fi fanzines in the 1930s and 1940s, reappeared in the 1980s with punk counterculture, and became a full-fledged genre in the 1990s (Duncombe 1997, 6–8; R. S. Friedman 1997, 9–13). One attempt at definition describes them as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (Duncombe 1997, 6). In many respects, this is an apt characterization of the print media created by gay Indonesians, and for this reason, I use “zine” as the best rough English equivalent for these texts.

My primary data source is a textual analysis of the complete run of nine zines (7,385 pages of text). This represents, to my knowledge and the knowledge of these zines’ producers, 100 percent of all gay and lesbi zines ever produced, from the appearance of the first such zine in 1982 up to November 2001. These zines were published in Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Makassar, and Semarang, with reader contributions from across the nation; three are lesbi zines and the rest gay zines with, in some cases, occasional lesbi
TABLE 3.1 Background Data on Gay and Lesbi Zines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zine</th>
<th>Abbreviation used in this chapter</th>
<th>Years published</th>
<th>Published in</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Gaya Hidup Ceria</em></td>
<td>g</td>
<td>1982–84</td>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>first gay zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jaka</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>1985–88</td>
<td>Yogyakarta</td>
<td>gay zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>GAYa Nusantara</em> (GN)</td>
<td>GN</td>
<td>1987–present</td>
<td>Surabaya</td>
<td>some former staff from <em>Gaya Hidup Ceria</em>; gay zine (with some lesbi content)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>GAYa Lestari</em></td>
<td>GL</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>first lesbi zine; published inside <em>GAYa Nusantara</em> (GN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>MitraS</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>lesbi zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Swara Srikandi</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>lesbi zine; some former staff from <em>MitraS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jaka-Jaka</em></td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>1992–94?</td>
<td>Yogyakarta</td>
<td>some former staff from <em>Jaka</em>; gay zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>New Jaka-Jaka</em></td>
<td>NJJ</td>
<td>1997–99?</td>
<td>Yogyakarta</td>
<td>some former staff from <em>Jaka-Jaka</em>; gay zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gaya Betawi</em> (Buku Seri IPOOS)</td>
<td>GB</td>
<td>1994–98</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>gay zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Media KIE GAYa Celebes</em></td>
<td>GC</td>
<td>1999–2001?</td>
<td>Makassar (Ujung Pandang)</td>
<td>known as <em>Paraikatte</em> for first 3 issues; gay zine (with some lesbi content)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>k-79 (Gaya Pandananaran)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>gay zine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>GAYa Priangan</em></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Bandung</td>
<td>gay newsletter (not in zine format)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

content (see table 3.1). I home in on two elements of these zines: communication between producers and readers (editorials, letters to the zine, and personals ads), and the short stories (cerita pendek or cerpen) sent in by readers. In this category I also include the genre of autobiographical true-experience narratives (pengalaman sejati), also sent in by readers and which do not differ greatly from short stories.² I present images from *gay* and *lesbi* zines to reinforce my analysis of the textual materials. A secondary source
of data stems from my fieldwork—primarily in Surabaya (East Java), Makassar (South Sulawesi), and Bali—which includes interacting with lesbi and gay Indonesians as they create, read, discuss, and exchange zines. With the exceptions of K-79 and New Jaka-Jaka (NJ), I am personally acquainted with the producers of every gay and lesbi zine that has been produced up to November 2001.

The continuity in zine thematics is notable, given that one might see the time period of gay zines, 1982 to 2001, as a time of great change in Indonesia. I can offer several hypotheses to explain this continuity. First, the nineteen-year period 1982–2001 was actually a time of remarkable stability—enforced by an authoritarian government—if compared with similar periods before it, for instance, 1965–81, 1948–64, or 1931–47. Second, 1982–2001 was the period during which the gay subject position came into its own as a conceivable way of life, if one largely hidden from Indonesian society and rarely claimed as an identity. The gay subject position appears to have emerged in the 1970s, becoming a socially self-conscious national network of primarily (but not solely) urban friendship networks, and occasionally organizations, in the 1980s and 1990s. It originated through transforming conceptions of homosexuality from outside Indonesia, with little input from “traditional” homosexualities and transgenderisms (Boellstorff 2005, 2007).

Gay zines are usually 8.5 inches by 6.5 inches (the size of an A4 piece of paper folded in half), or, more rarely, they are the size of a full A4 piece of paper. They are typically twenty to sixty pages long (occasionally only two pages or as many as eighty) and are produced by groups of two to five gay men using Windows-compatible desktop-publishing software. In the early 1980s (and occasionally later), they were produced on typewriters, with a physical cut-and-paste layout. Producers of gay zines are usually in their twenties or early thirties. One reason for this is that heterosexual marriage makes it more difficult to have the free time necessary to produce a zine. Another is that because Indonesians did not start calling themselves gay in large numbers before the 1990s, there are relatively few older men who consider themselves gay. The zines are reproduced at family-run photocopy shops or print houses and distributed by hand and through mail. They rarely carry advertising, in marked contrast to most Indonesian print media since the eighteenth century (Adam 1995, 3–4). Gay zines are published without government approval and as a result are almost never sold publicly (no zine has ever had a print run over eight hundred). They are often given away for free or sold for about the same price as a regular magazine (400 rupiah for the first zine in 1982; six thousand rupiah for GAYa Nusantara in the early
2000s, or about seventy-five cents). Although reports of zine subscribers as well as my own fieldwork clearly indicate that copies of zines are circulated among friends, even if (following the estimate of some gay zine publishers) one assumes that each exemplar is read by ten persons, this translates to a total readership of at most seven thousand for any one zine and a generous estimate of eight thousand readers of all gay and lesbi zines at any point in time. To date all gay (and lesbi) zines have been published from cities, but the heavy interchange between rural, semirural, and urban Indonesia means that they have a rural readership as well.

Most Indonesians who produce and read gay zines already see themselves as gay, because of encounters with the terms in regular mass media (Boellstorff 2005). Since zines are published and circulated outside official channels, their consumption is rarely solitary. Most people who read zines were apparently first given the zine by someone else and often continue to exchange zines with friends, even if they become subscribers. The consumption of these zines sustains gay networks, rather than alienating the reader from preexisting kinship or community ties. In other words, if and when gay Indonesians begin to read zines, this tends not to isolate them but can lead to the creation of new networks through the trading of zines.

That these zines do not appear to introduce Indonesians to gay subjectivities does not mean, however, that they have no influence on the character of these subjectivities. For instance, the longest-running and most widely distributed zine, GAYa Nusantara, combines in its name gaya (which means “style” but can also mean “gay,” with the first three letters capitalized) with nusantara (which means both “archipelago” and, colloquially, Indonesia itself). This is meant to recall the archipelago concept (wawasan nusantara), a key trope of national ideology analogous to (if more formalized than) the “melting pot” in the United States. Since this zine began publishing in 1987, about one-half of gay groups (and several lesbi groups) have named themselves with reference to GAYa Nusantara by pairing GAYa with a “local” term, even if the group does not publish a zine. Groups named in this manner that have published a zine include GAYa Celebes, in Sulawesi, and GAYa Betawi, in Jakarta. Zines named in this manner include GAYa LESTari, a lesbi zine from Jakarta. Groups without zines include GAYa Siak, in Sumatra; GAYa Tepian Samarinda, in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo); GAYa Sema-rang, in Java; GAYa Dewata, in Bali; and GAYa Intim, in Ambon (which became defunct in the early 1990s). In 1993 the zine K-79, published from the city of Semarang, in Central Java, changed its name to GAYa Pandanaran (after the hero of a local myth) with the following explanation:
This year we see the emergence of very many GAY organizations; we hope that with the emergence of these new faces with diverse styles we will add to the unity and integrity between us. (GAYa Pandanaran 3:8)

The tropes apparent in this excerpt are common in zines from the early 1980s to the present. As indicated by the use of set nationalist phrases “persatuan dan kesatuan” (unity and integrity) and the term “aneka” (diversity), as well as the metonymic chain linking gay to “gaya” and “gaya” to “nusantara,” the use of GAYa is part of a larger pattern of migration, letter writing, and imagining through which lesbi and gay Indonesians see themselves as national. This concept underscores how the ultimate impact of gay and lesbi zines will be certainly greater than the level of readership alone might imply: as is true for mass media generally, their effects on social relations and cultural logics are multilayered and contingent.

As noted earlier, this chapter focuses upon the intersection of two of the most pervasive discourses or zones in gay zines—homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging. While occasionally the topic of explicit commentary, these discourses (and their intersections) are often implicit. The analytic I bring to this material parallels that commonly found in ethnography, in which the goal is not simply to report what people say they do but also to interpret the broader cultural grammars within which their invested actions make sense to them, even if, as in the case of language itself, such grammars are not always available for conscious reflection: “It is far too positivist a conceit to presume that we can extract directly from our informants’ narratives all we need in order to understand the significations of media” (Mankekar and Schein, this volume).

**Love and the Nation in Indonesian Print Media**

Susan Rodgers (1995, 3) has written, “Personal narratives have deep public resonance in twentieth-century Indonesia, where the process of growing to adulthood and traversing a life is often recalled in terms similar to those used to think about society and the past in a more general sense. . . . In other words, Indonesian historical memory and personal memory are both animated by certain closely related key scenarios and social images, and societal histories and personal narratives interpenetrate.” Gay zines link personal narrative, love, and national consciousness in a manner consistent with
tropes of Indonesian literature. Late colonial literature brought together nation, people, and language through the power of love (cinta, less often kasih sayang or kasih), particularly around the conflict over “arranged” marriages (associated with tradition) versus “love” marriages (associated with modernity and nationalism). Such conflicts figure centrally in nationalist literature, condensing debates over tradition, modernity, choice, and collective identity. This literature frames love as selfless when directed toward the nation or hoped-for spouse: “Nationalism and love are linked because through it, peoples are mixed and a new authority is created” (Siegel 1998, 16). This is a love that “demands recognition” and is “inseparable from the struggle for progress” (Siegel 1997, 140). By definition it breaks from ethno-localized custom (adat). This national love reproduces the nation over time through heterosexualized procreation, but its force inheres more directly in its ability to fashion a proper citizen-subject. Proper love makes you a proper citizen. It is for this reason that the failure of national love is not barrenness, but sickness (sakit)—an unnational love that can kill:

What would the cure for love sickness be if not proper recognition, that is, recognizing cinta for what it is: the power to compel recognition. More precisely, it is the power to compel recognition of desire transformed into idealism. That idealism is directed towards the advancement of the Indonesian people. At that time [in the 1920s and 1930s], this meant not independence and not equality. It meant rather the possibility of having a certain identity. One which marked one as progressive. A progressive person was in touch with the modern world outside the Indies. (Siegel 1997, 146; emphasis added)

Thanks to a love that operates through choice rather than arrangement, Indonesian national literature enacts the “twin approach to constructing a modern self and imagining a modern society,” whereby “in gaining a modern self, [Indonesians] gain a modern vision of the world, and vice versa. Selfhood becomes permeated with political meaning” (Rodgers 1995, 44). In the decades before independence, love, modernity, and national belonging became interlinked. This pattern’s legacy continues to shape Indonesian literature and society, where arranged marriages are now quite rare and both women and men are typically assumed to play an active role in choosing their future spouses (Hatley 1997; Hull 2002; see also Brenner 1998; Tiwon 1996; Watson 2000). This is a love that does not just happen to you through arrangement but is also performed through choice.

Performatives depend on cultural context: only an umpire can declare a strike, and only a judge or jury can pronounce someone not guilty in a
court of law. The ability of love to compel national recognition in Indonesia depends on a modern conception of heterosexual desire (termed, like gay, with transformed English terms: normal or hetero). Gay love does not give one national belonging: heteronormativity lies at the heart of national cinta.9 When marriage is arranged, sexual orientation is secondary. However, when marriage hinges on choice—on a relational, choosing self animated by love—that self and that love fail, are sick, if not heterosexual. Choice, to be national and modern, must be heterosexual choice. It is through heterosexuality that self and nation articulate.

While being lovesick (sakit cinta) is, as James T. Siegel notes, a powerful theme in Indonesian nationalist literature, “sick person” (orang sakit) is ironically now a term that some gay Indonesians use to refer to themselves. How can a sick love complete its circuit of recognition? This is the crucial question addressed in gay zines, the question for which prestasi will be the answer. Love, for gay Indonesians, is also a desire for sexual citizenship. A key point in this regard is that while gender and sexuality obviously intersect, they are also analytically distinct and one should not conflate them. Even though gay Indonesians address a sense of failure (to belong) in gay zines, they do not experience this in terms of gender per se. They do not feel that they are failures as men; they do not feel, for instance, that they are male-to-female transvestites (waria or banci). Although warias, who are acknowledged if often ridiculed members of Indonesian society, have never published zines, despite the fact that many have the educational skills to do so, zines have proven an enduring means by which gay men, far less socially acknowledged than warias, make claims for a national belonging that feels beyond their grasp.

First Zone: Homosex and Homolove

One zone of desire in gay zines is homosex: the celebration of sexuality between men (and between women, in the case of lesbi zines). Positive discussion of homosexuality appears in virtually no other Indonesian mass media beyond these zines, where it is a constant theme of personal ads, editorials, dictionaries of gay language, guides to outdoor meeting areas (tempat ngeber), and images (see figures 3.1–3.4).10 Moreover, homosexuality is a guiding force in the narratives that make up the bulk of gay zines.

Rarely do these images and narratives present explicit sex (see figures 3.3 and 3.4 for exceptions). Obviously this is not because gay Indonesians are uninterested in eroticism, nor is this simply to avoid censorship, since zines are not published through legal channels anyway. When publishers of gay
3.1 and 3.2. Objects of male and female homosexual desire (GN 1994, 31, cover; GL 1994, 3:16, inside GN 31). The erotics involved can concern desire for bodies (fig. 3.1) or sexual acts (fig. 3.2).
3.3 and 3.4.
Explicit homo-sex and sex with Euro-Americans
zines politely reject requests for sexually explicit stories or images, they cite not a fear of censorship but the possible foreclosing of recognition, of acceptance by society (*diterima oleh masyarakat*). It is a wish that the zine be proper (*sopan*), a wish expressed not only by publishers but by readers who send in letters complaining of explicit representations of sex. The most striking example of this took place in 1993, when *GAYa Betawi (GB)* published two fifth issues. The first fifth issue contained explicit representations of sex between men (both line drawings and reproductions of Euroamerican gay pornography). The editorial in the following issue noted that the first had been found invalid (*tidak sah*) because it had “gone against the ethical codes of journalism and society” (*GB* 1993, 5:3). This is the only case of any *gay* zine republishing an issue. The following issue noted that the general magazine *Jakarta-Jakarta* had covered the zine (and the organization that produced it) for the first time, but had unfortunately focused on the sexually explicit issue, giving the impression that *gay* men were only interested in sex, when in fact the goal of the zine and organization was to create unity (*persatuan*, a nationalist term) among *gay* men and get them to do positive things for society (*GB* 1993, 6:24–25).

Despite this deemphasis of sex, erotics remain present in zines, appearing in stories that speak of sexual acts (often in veiled terms) as well as imagery that emphasizes the face (and often the partially clothed body). One difference between *gay* and *lesbi* zines is that there have been very few images of *lesbi* women and none in any state of undress. Images of *lesbi* women are typically in the form of drawings, while images of *gay* men are fairly evenly divided between photographs and drawings. This does not seem linked to the admonitions against showing the female body in Islam, since eroticized images of Indonesian women are common in contemporary Indonesian advertising and entertainment. The absence of photographs of *lesbi* women seems instead to flag questions of visibility (see figures 3.5 and 3.6). While few *gay* men wish to appear in electronic or print media, even with a false name, a surprising number are eager to appear in zines as cover boys, providing photographs and even home addresses. The number of *gay* men willing to be photographed is still small in absolute terms, but even fewer *lesbi* women are willing to be photographed; a greater tendency to either be dependent on a husband or family members for financial support—or, if they are higher class, to be in a career where female propriety is emphasized—makes such visibility an even greater risk.

What *gay* and *lesbi* zines emphasize is not sex but love. Reading over seven thousand pages of zine text, I did not find a single issue of any *gay* zine
3.5 and 3.6. Women as flowers: a symbol of lesbi community and social invisibility (GL 1994, 5:1, inside GN 28). The text identifies the zine as part of the “Archipelago Lesbian and Gay Network” and as open to all ethnicities. On the back cover, a flower with the caption “develop yourself”; kembangkanlah is from kembang, meaning “bloom” and “develop.”
in which the topic of love does not appear. Often two or three articles will have “cinta” in their titles. A first clue to this discourse of love is a particular semiotic chain: sexual acts (kissing, anal penetration, rubbing genitals together, and so on) are distinguished from generalized sexual lust (nafsu or birahi), which in turn is distinguished from love. One reader of GAYa Nusantara complained of sexually suggestive images by invoking this chain: “I don’t want to be a hypocrite because even I have a million sexual desires. But, what is more valuable than all that, friends, is Cinta. Love is what’s given me the strength to live this long . . . What will happen if we continue to allow lust to hold the reins of this life, which is already set apart?” (GN 1988, 3:6–7).

In a short story from 1991, Andre confronts his gay friend Yuzo, who seems interested only in sex. Andre confesses his love to Yuzo, who asks, “Why have you been avoiding me?” Andre replies: “Because you just think of me as a sexual object! I can’t live like you, switching partners and forgetting them. I desire a proper and normal life like hetero people, to meet someone and fall in love with them so as to live together. I can’t live prioritizing sex over love” (GN 1991, 15:29–30). In one installment of a comic strip that ran in Jaka from August 1985 to December 1986, the protagonist (also named Jaka, or “bachelor”) becomes promiscuous after his lover, Tomo, marries a woman. Tomo learns of Jaka’s behavior, and in the final two panels (see figure 3.7, bottom right corner), he confronts Jaka at the gym: “This is the image of ‘gay’ that you present to me! Apparently it’s true that you’re just chasing satisfaction of your lusts!” In the following issue, Jaka runs away to Europe and with the help of a white boyfriend—whom he does not love—sets up a salon business. Sitting alone at night, he confesses to himself: “Now I can buy anything I want with my money, but what I need now is ‘love’! Where I can share good and bad times, serve his needs. That has no price . . . oh, how beautiful it would be!” (Jaka 1986, 6:14). When a man who saw himself as normal had sex with a man and wanted to know if he might be gay, the editors of GAYa Betawi responded: “To become gay is not just proven with same-gender sex but other factors like the feeling of love . . . if after that event you continue to have same-sex relations with the addition of feelings of love, . . . it could then be said that you are gay” (GB 1997, 16:24). Employing nationalist language, an article sent into the zine k-79 in 1993 noted that “love unites [mempersatukan] us. . . Without love we are nothing, creatures without connection. . . When will it be that we can find a pure love that is not based on lust and selfishness?” (K-79, 1993, 4:7–8).

The pattern is clear: sex is displaced onto desire and then onto love, with each term more valorized than its predecessor.11 Desire is presented as uni-
directional, while love is framed as inherently relational and thus social, proper to a citizen-subject who gives and receives. In Foucauldian terms, this is not repression but an incitement that beckons sex and desire into the service of love. This incitement takes the form of the discovery that the desired Other reciprocates love; that is, the desired Other recognizes a person as gay. Even when self-knowledge is the theme, recognition usually figures prominently. And this also occurs in lesbi zines, as in the autobiographical narrative of Leonie, a lesbi woman: “When I was in my second year of high school, I was invited by a girlfriend to watch a porno film and by chance that
film had a lesbi scene. There I got to know the life of lesbi in bed. Then with another girlfriend, for the first time I acted out such a scene and lost my virginity" (**GN** 1989, 10:37). In the short story “I Reach for My Love,” the protagonist, Koko, is in high school and attracted to Yogi, a young man one class ahead of him. Yogi has been following Koko around, but Yogi’s motivations remain obscure to Koko while he is masih bodoh, or “still stupid” (a phrase often used in nationalist literature to refer to premodern ways of thinking). One day, however, Koko recalls: “As we were walking home, Yogi explained the contents of his heart to me. Before he had spoken very long, it was clear that the path of his life was almost identical to my own autobiography [*otobiografi*]. My feelings at that point were like a fish splashing into the water, or a bowl meeting its lid” (**Jaka** 1985, 1:11–14).

There is joy in discovery, and discovery in these narratives is the discovery of recognition. It is a climactic, almost orgasmic moment, as when fish meets water or bowl meets lid. For some gay men, but especially for lesbi women, the period prior to discovery is marked by isolation, a sense of being an island alone in a sea of heteronormativity (see figure 3.8). Since it is self-evident to gay Indonesians (and other Indonesians) that the concept gay originates neither in locality nor tradition, the moment of discovery—when one is recognized, when the desired Other becomes a desiring Other—replaces feelings of isolation with a sense of belonging to a national homo sexual community. This founding in the nation shapes the sense of an archipelagic, imagined communion with lesbian and gay persons across the national archipelago and outside Indonesia as well (see figure 3.9). These implicit cultural linkages between zines, isolation, and an archipelagic imaginary occasionally become the topic of commentary (see figure 3.10). In an archipelagic twist on the trope of the deserted island, a man dreaming of food finds a zine parachuted to him as a source of sustenance. Behind the image (meant for an Indonesian readership where everyone lives on an island) is an archipelagic zone of homo sexual desire, with zines connecting “islands” of persons and communities.

**Separation**

In the short story “A Thought,” the protagonist, Iwan, falls in love with a normal friend, Soni. He decides he must be honest about his self (jati dirinya) and asks Soni, “If you had a friend who turned out to be gay, what would be your reaction?” Soni replies he would feel “just as usual,” and a surprised Iwan tells Soni he is gay and loves him. Soni then admits that he has a “secret” of his own: he is gay and reciprocates Iwan’s love. Iwan is shocked


3.10. Zines linking persons beyond their “islands” (GB 1993, 6:30).
by the dual discovery: “Soni, who’s always being chased by women, who’s handsome, who’s smart, who has so many achievements [prestasi], is gay too!” Iwan is full of happiness, but the following week learns that Soni has moved to Australia without leaving word (GN 1997, 51:35). Iwan, and the zine reader, are left in the dark.

Whereas discovery involves recognition by the now-desiring Other, in gay zines this circuit usually leads to separation. “Happily ever after” stories in which two gay men share a household or sustain an ongoing relationship are rare. Gay zines portray separation as the inevitable complement to discovery: one recounting of a gay man’s life in Yogyakarta concludes, “Like the classic gay story, he had to be separated from his boyfriend,” when the boyfriend left town to continue his schooling (NJI 1997, 3:26). Sometimes a general sense of social rejection leads to separation. In the true-experiences story “Perpisahan” (Separation), the gay protagonist tells his lover they must separate after two years, because the protagonist’s mother has discovered the relationship: “You forget that we live in society, we cannot live apart from it, and we can’t just do anything we want. Sometimes society can be more cruel than we suspect” (GN 1994, 30:20).

Lesbi and gay zines often portray some force as causing separation by coming “between” love. In the true-experiences story “Between Love and Greed,” Rion, a lesbi woman, falls in love with Mira, glamorous, beautiful, and married to Franz. Franz thinks that Rion is just Mira’s friend and allows them to spend time together. Rion and Mira discover love for each other, and Mira leaves Franz, but because Rion cannot keep Mira in the glamorous lifestyle to which she is accustomed, “Mira [decides] to return to Franz’s embraces” (GL 1994, 5:8–9, in GN 28). In another true-experiences story, “Between Duty and Love,” the gay protagonist falls in love with a civil servant temporarily filling a position in a small Central Sulawesi town. Once his two-week shift is completed, the civil servant’s duty is to return to Manado (North Sulawesi). On their final night together, the civil servant begs forgiveness in national terms: “We both serve the needs of our country and people” (GN 1993, 22:20). In a third such story, “Between Love, Parents, and Studies,” Edo, a gay man from Biak, a small island near the island of New Guinea, encounters problems when his boyfriend’s former lover calls Edo’s parents to tell them Edo is having sex with another man. Edo’s fanatically Christian parents beat him and forbid him to see his lover. Here the boyfriend’s former lover commits a kind of anti-prestasi that separates Edo from both gay community and family (GN 1997, 48:23–25).

The overall dynamic of gay zine narratives, then, is one of discovery fol-
owed by separation from a beloved Other. Gay Indonesians discover recognition, but the person who makes this recognition possible—the gay lover—is placed beyond reach. This narrative structure predominates despite the fact that it is not a simple reflection of gay experience. While their lives can be hard, many gay men do continue same-sex romances after heterosexual marriage. The attraction of these narratives lies in how they narrativize and concretize a belief that being gay involves a profound sense of separation. What gives this separation its special sting in gay zines, a sense not just of desire thwarted but of selfhood called into question? The answer lies in the nexus between love and nation.

**Second Zone: National Sexualities**

While the first zone of desire is concerned with homosex and homolove, the second relates to the sense that the gay subject position has a national scale. Three factors sustain this linkage to national culture: language, a deemphasis of the local and ethnic (which are often conceptually conflated [Boellstorff 2002]), and a deemphasis of Euroamerica. All gay and lesbi zines ever published have used Indonesian, never an ethnolocalized language like Javanese, Balinese, or Batak, except for occasional terms suggesting local color.¹³ Since zines are published informally, this use of Indonesian is not simply kowtowing to state policy. My fieldwork indicates that it simply has never occurred to these Indonesians to publish a zine in any other language. Why make it inaccessible to so many potential readers—the “we” referenced so often in zine writing?

In line with foregrounding the national tongue, gay zines invoke an Indonesian personhood. While those calling themselves gay may think of themselves in ethnolocalized terms—as Bugis, Javanese, and so on—in some aspects of their lives, in regard to their sexualities, they think of themselves as Indonesians. One motivation for this is that the term “gay” appears to be universally understood not to be an indigenous concept. I know of no cases where it is believed that one learns the meaning of “gay” from one’s family or tradition. Such distancing from ethnolocality is encapsulated in names like GAYa Betawi and GAYa Celebes, where terms indexing ethnolocality are subsumed in a pattern GAYa X. Since adjectives follow nouns in Indonesian, this pattern ontologizes the national; the “local” term appears as modifier and GAYa (based on GAYa Nusantara, a simultaneously “archipelagic” and “Indonesian” style) as the subject.¹⁴ To my knowledge almost every appearance of ethnolocality in gay zines has occurred when Dédé Oetomo has published occasional articles on so-called traditional homosexualities and
transgenderisms (collected in Oetomo 2001). These articles appear under the rubric *adat nusantara* (customs of the archipelago). The articles also frame the persons involved as outside the imagined readership of *gay* zines. Their customs are presented as interesting, but never to my knowledge are they set forth as providing an autochthonous pedigree for *gay* subjectivities (and never for *lesbi* subjectivities, since such “traditional” homosexualities and transgenderisms are almost exclusively associated with men).15

The world beyond Indonesia plays a relatively minor role in *gay* zines. While *gay* zines occasionally reprint news clips or lengthier articles on *gay* or lesbian life in the non-Euroamerican world (for example, the Philippines or Brazil), such reportage is intermittent, appearing only sporadically in short stories, poetry, or letters sent in by readers. Euroamerica itself (which for most Indonesians includes Australia and New Zealand) does appear in these zines but is not emphasized. Although *gay* Indonesians clearly understand *gay* to be derived in part from the Euroamerican concept “gay,” it is portrayed in national terms. This does not mean that linkages to Euroamerican homosexualities are erased or denied: an archipelagic relationship pertains in which *gay* Indonesians are one island in an openly acknowledged, even celebrated, global archipelago of homosexuality. Such a sense of global belonging with regard to sexuality in no way precludes anti-American or anti-globalization views on political and economic issues. *Gay* zines sustain this archipelagic relationship by referencing Euroamerica, but these references are intermittent, in keeping with the fact that most *gay* Indonesians do not speak English or any Euroamerican language, have never traveled outside Indonesia, and have met lesbian or *gay* Euroamericans rarely, if at all. *Gay* zines have incorporated Euroamericans since the early 1980s, in the form of drawings (see figure 3.4) or characters in short stories. Recall the white boyfriend of Jaka (see figure 3.7). Euroamericans also appear in stories as tourists falling in love with Indonesian men, and Euroamerican *gay* men have sent in personal ads to *gay* zines since their beginning. In 1998 GAYa Nusantara even ran what was jokingly termed the “white guy edition” (*edisi bule*, no. 54), which included tips on how to respond to personal ads from white men.

Stories on *lesbi* and *gay* life in Australia, Europe, and the United States occasionally appear in both *gay* and *lesbi* zines. The *lesbi* zine *MitraS* has run articles on violence against lesbians in the United States (*MitraS* 1997, 1:8) and has even reprinted Euroamerican erotic lesbian short stories (*MitraS* 1998, 2:15–17, 3:15–18). One of the starkest differences between *gay* and *lesbi* zines is that when *lesbi* zines report on Euroamerica they are more likely to
emphasize homophobia and violence against homosexuals, concluding that while things are difficult in Indonesia, lesbi women are better off than their Euroamerican sisters (a perspective I have also encountered in my fieldwork). In contrast, gay men usually assume Euroamerica is a gay paradise, with “free sex” delinked from bonds of relationship and, at the same time, legal same-sex marriage. Despite these varied ways Euroamerica figures in gay and lesbi zines, however, its footprint is quite small. Like nationalism, which originated in Euroamerica but is now seen as authentically Indonesian, these sexualities are considered to be founded in the archipelago.

Invoking the Nation

Beyond these implicit references, the nation figures explicitly as a zone of desire, as the background against which gay selfhood and community play themselves out. This appears most succinctly in terms like “Indo*G*sian people” (bangsa Indo*G*sia) (GN 1994, 25:40), in which “G,” a common written shorthand for gay, is literally implanted into the core of “Indonesia.” More extended references to the nation are common in editorials. In the first issue of GAYa Nusantara, the publishers justified the incorporation of “nusantara” in the zine’s name as a reminder of “the special national/archipelagic [khas nusantara] lives of lesbi and gay people,” which the publishers hoped would “be reflected and supported by this bulletin” (GN 1987, 1:6). When a reader complained that early GAYa Nusantara zine covers had too many images of shadow-puppet theater, the publishers replied, “There has been an effort to give GAYa Nusantara’s covers themes of the archipelago’s culture” (GN 1988, 3:6). Six years later, the zine commemorated Independence Day (August 17) with a cover featuring two men standing side by side. One held the red and white Indonesian flag, and the other held the gay rainbow flag originating from San Francisco, modified with two vertical, red and white stripes recalling the national flag. That month’s editorial explained:

This August we remember an important event, the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence 49 years ago. This event could take place . . . because of a surge of new thinking from the beginning of the twentieth century that resulted in nationalism. . . . The lesbi and gay movement can be compared with this national movement. . . . It’s clear that in the communities of the Archipelago there have always been homosexual relations . . . and with the coming of modern civilization there have appeared comprehensive homosexual identities. But, only in the 1980s did homosexual identities become a foundation for a struggle for emancipation and self-empowerment amongst us. Particularly in the 1990s, we see clearly the de-
development of gay groups in our network, that gain attention of observers within and outside the country. (GN 1994, 32:3–4)

Such framing of homosexuality in activist terms by GAYa Nusantara’s editors is one of the clearest discrepancies between these zines and the everyday lives of gay men, for whom such understandings are rare. What is shared by even the most blatantly political zine writing and everyday gay life, however, is a sense of desiring recognition by the nation. This dynamic can be found in other gay and lesbi zines. The premiere issue of the lesbi zine MitraS noted that “there is definitely no place for gay and lesbi to act as freely as those who live on the Western half of the globe, . . . but that doesn’t mean that gay and lesbi in the Western countries are always more lucky than we who live quietly in Indonesia” (MitraS 1997, 1:8). Invoking the nationalist trope of “land and water,” the editor of k-79 noted that through the zine readers could “meet with friends of the same fate throughout our lands and waters [tanah air] without any barriers” (k-79 1993, 2:6). The editors of GAYa Betawi noted from early on that their zine was for gay men from the “whole archipelago” (diseluruh nusantara) (gb 1992, 2:1). The editors of Jaka-Jaka (jj) once noted that the goal of the zine (and the organization connected to it) was to “build” gay people full of skills and self-esteem, so that they could give their best to the “people and nation” (bangsa dan negara) (jj 1993, 5:15).

Readers also draw upon national imagery in gay zines. The cover boy interviewed in the issue of k-79 (noted previously) implored readers to “support the unity and integrity [persatuan dan kesatuan] between us” (k-79 1993, 2:7). Such phrases are common in letters to zines: one reader sent “greetings to the brotherhood of the Indonesian lands and waters” (persaudaraan setanah air Indonesia) (gb 1997, 15:4). Another exclaimed, “How beautiful it is to have gay friends from the whole Archipelago . . . We must be united in line with the third of the Pancasila, ‘the unity of Indonesia’” (GN 1995, 37:15). (The Pancasila are the five guiding national principles formulated by Sukarno, Indonesia’s first president.) Often the appeals found in personal ads are for “friendship with people like me [the purchaser of the ad] from across the archipelago.” They sometimes have an explicitly nationalist referent, as in the case of a Sumatran man who wrote, “With a foundation in democracy we struggle for freedom for gay people, like other normal human beings” (G 1982, 1:13). The emphasis is on a national community, and never, to my knowledge, has a personal ad requested someone from a particular ethnicity or region—in contrast to heterosexual personal ads in
Indonesian magazines, which usually specify a desired ethnicity. The desire is for persons from the whole archipelago (se-Nusantara, setanah air, or se-Indonesia). As one person put it, “After I appeared in the personal ads, I got many letters from friends of the same fate as myself from every corner of the Archipelago. My perspective [wawasan] broadened concerning the gay world so full of joys and sorrows” (GN 1993, 24:11; for a lesbi example, see GL 1994, 3:6, in GN 31).

**Prestasi**

A poem published in an issue of GN from 1990 read as follows:

In the quiet of my days / Even at night there is no song  
My heart barren / My soul fed up  
You come like a lamp / Lighting up my heart  
Bathing my soul / Humming the rhythm of love  
Let the periodical GN / Continue victorious and free  
Come friends! let us make merry / This environment, this place  
Full of peace and joy / For the sake of the GN periodical’s mission  
(GN 1990, 12:16–17)

These invocations of the nation as place co-occur with the invocation of a complementary practice; gay zines construe citizenship as an active process, not as a static category of membership. Such practices are called *prestasis* in gay zines. This term bears colonial traces; it derives from the Dutch *prestatie*, a noun meaning “achievement” or “feat.” The verbal form can mean “achieve” and “perform.” In standard Indonesian, “prestasi” also means both to achieve and to perform. Like any performance, prestasis require observers: “hidden prestasi” is an oxymoron. As a result, when gay Indonesians refer to prestasi, it is always with an audience in mind, and with one exception noted below, the national or general society (masyarakat umum) is that audience, not the gay community. Prestasis can involve direct help, such as adopting a child or caring for a sick relative, or they can be personal achievements that reflect favorably on one’s community, such as going on the hajj to Mecca if one is Muslim, or succeeding in one’s career. The distinguishing characteristic is that a prestasi is positive and fosters social connectivity, in contrast to selfish actions with destructive or centripetal consequences. Prestasis are often described as leading to success (*sukses*), a key New Order state term for the exercise of proper citizenship (Pemberton 1994, 9). The editor of k-79 once set forth a Gay Seven Charm Program (*Sapta Pesona Gay*), including closeness (*keakraban*) and social solidarity (*kesatyakawa-*)
This concept transforms the Sapta Pesona devised by the New Order government as principles for encouraging tourism in the early 1990s (e.g., safety and cleanliness), but these gay prestasis were conceptualized in reference to national society.

The idea that gay persons can do prestasis as well as other Indonesians is a frequent theme in zine editorials. The publishers of *Jaka-Jaka* once wrote: “We all know and perhaps already feel the attitudes and behaviors of most hetero people towards gay people. . . . Is it right that we be ‘goat-class’ citizens who only have sex? Of course not! There are many gay people who have reached the heights of status. . . . Gay people have quality and abilities equal to anyone else. . . . To have meaning and respect, one must have a high level of self-worth and self-respect. For that one must have prestasis” (*JJ* 1993, 4:11).

Another Yogyakarta zine mused that “prestasis. . . . will become a fortress strong enough to repel those minor tones [of social disapproval]” (*NIJ* 1997, 4:6). In 1998, during the worst period of a currency crisis, an editor of *GN* congratulated gay Indonesians for continuing their activities, noting that “[these activities] have an extra value for Indonesian gay people in the eyes of hetero society, [showing] that we continue to exist and carry out positive activities” (*GN* 1998, 55:5). Zine readers also care about prestasis, as is illustrated by an article titled “What Can Homos Do?” written by a reader of *GAYa Nusantara* from Malang in East Java: “We are becoming aware that although we are fated to be gay there are still many things that we can do for ourselves, our families, society, our beloved country and people, the Indonesian people. . . . We must ‘go public’ with our activities . . . and mix with regular society, for instance with social activities that serve society, like rehabilitation centers for handicapped children, the insane, beggars, the homeless, and so on. . . . What’s most important is that these efforts have a humanistic character (beyond the goal of helping our own people, but rather aiding humanity in general)” (*GN* 1995, 39:33–35).

As a reader of *GAYa Nusantara* from the town of Kisaran explained in an essay to the zine, “Our gay friends who are elites and celebrities with influence must have the courage to open themselves, to show the Indonesian government that gay people have prestasis and sukses in all matters and compare to hetero people. In this way it’s hoped that the opinion of society and the Indonesian government will change of its own accord” (*GN* 2000, 65:33). A cover boy from the town of Mojokerto, when asked his opinion about Indonesian society’s view that gay men are only interested in sex, replied, “The reality is indeed that gay people are always equated with sex. It’s
up to how we as *gay* people change that judgement. We can do it with showing our positive attitudes. We can show our prestasis, so that maybe that judgement will eventually go away, and society can accept our existence to the fullest” (*GN* 1999, 59:13–14). The short story appearing in the final issue of *Jaka* closes with a scene in which the protagonist, a young man, reveals himself to his parents. With tears in his eyes, his father says, “You are still our only son and you make us proud. No matter what choices you make in your life, what’s important is that you become a person who takes care of himself and is useful to society” (*Jaka* 1988, 18:15). Nine years later, a *gay* man’s confessions in a successor *zine* to *Jaka* echo this theme: “My mother would be sad if I engaged in *free sex* [English in the original] or other frivolous things without reigning myself in. Even if my *gayness* [kegayan] is seen as a shortcoming, I just keep working to be a good child who’s devoted to his parents, a good Muslim who prays regularly, a good student with good prestasis. In short, I want my mother to be proud of me. Even though I’m *gay*, I prove that I’m much better than those who are *hetero*” (*NIJ* 1997, 4:12). Such statements consistently emphasize that sex does not qualify as a prestasi.

Given this performative model of citizenship, it makes sense that the act of publishing *zines* might itself be framed as a prestasi, the only prestasi not directly oriented toward the general public. The editorial in the premiere issue of *GAYa Nusantara*, reflecting on the activities that the *zine* was to undertake, declared that “all of it has one goal, the acceptance of *gay* and *lesbi* people as a group with the same rights and responsibilities in Indonesian society” (*GN* 1987, 1:2). This sensibility is shared by *lesbi* *zines*. One editorial in a *lesbi* *zine* proclaimed, “*Swara* will become our pages that give voice to us” (*Swara* 2000, 1:7). In the premiere issue of the *lesbi* *zine* *MitraS*, the editors expressed frustration that “there isn’t a bit of media that can become a forum for information and communication for us in Indonesia, like what’s been carried out by *gay* men with their ‘*GAYa Nusantara*’ . . . so we found the courage to try publishing this ‘special’ bulletin after consulting with brother Dédé Oetomo” (*MitraS* 1997, 1:3). Thus “beginning from a feeling of concern about the fate of *lesbi* media that are always appearing and then disappearing to unknown places, four *lesbi* in Jakarta met to discuss the possibility of publishing a newsletter. From this discussion came a serious agreement. “There must be *lesbi* media!”” (*Swara* 2000, 1:6). In 1985 a *zine* reader from Medan (North Sumatra) wrote: “As a *gay* who could be called a veteran [because of his age], I am very proud and touched by your efforts and creativity. In the life of *gay* people, whom almost all people think of as just interested in satisfaction and not to be taken seriously, you emerge bringing
a mission that is fundamental for the whole gay society (*masyarakat gay*). Through this media, we can open our eyes clearly” (*Jaka* 1985, 5:3). For gay Indonesians, prestasis are good deeds that set in motion a cycle of moral exchange whereby society, in repayment for the prestasis of gay Indonesians, will accept and receive (*terima*) them. Through prestasis, gay Indonesians express a desire to overcome separation and be reunited with the nation.

**The Interzone: Cinta and Sexual Citizenship**

In the first zone of desire, zines portray gay sexuality as moving on a continuum away from sex; its endpoint is a relational self formed through the discovery of, but separation from, love. In the second zone of desire, zines portray gay Indonesians as desiring national belonging—a trope of overcoming separation, a trope of recognition depending on prestasis. A crucial cultural logic animating gay zines—and, I would argue, gay subjectivities—emerges in the intersection of these two zones of desire, as illustrated by the lyrics to a song published in the zine *Jaka* in 1987:

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Pgy Yogyakarta
Datang dengan cinta,
Berjuang dan berupaya / demi hak sesama
Dengan semboyan, / gaya hidup ceria
Giat berkarya
Demi negara dan nusa bangsa
Ayo kawan semua / gulung lengan baju
Mari bahu membahu / jangan ragu-ragu
Tunjukkan pada dunia / bahwa kita sedia
Baktikan jiwa
Membangun bangsa Indonesia
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Come with love,
Struggles and labors / for the sake of equal rights.
With our slogan, / the style of a happy life,
working energetically for the state and island nation.
Come all friends / roll up your sleeves
Let us stand shoulder to shoulder / don’t hesitate
Show the world / that we are ready
Devote your soul
to building the Indonesian people

*Jaka* 1987, 14:3

My analysis of this intersection draws upon a key concern of this volume as a whole: “The intertextualities that refract the myriad meanings that media acquire as they become sites of ‘intimate habitation’ for subjects living in specific historical and cultural milieus” (Mankekar and Schein, this volume).
In this interzone, love itself emerges as the implicit prestasi qualifying gay Indonesians for sexual citizenship (see table 3.2). The paradox, and the source of the particular sting of exclusion and separation found in gay zines, is that gay love remains almost completely hidden from society. Gay love fails as a prestasi because the postcolonial nation rejects homosexuality; it will not act as an audience authorizing it. Recall the key position of love versus arranged marriages in debates over modernity in Indonesian literature. Gay Indonesians presume that heterosexual Indonesians are citizens by default; they may choose a spouse, but their relation to the nation is “arranged.” Gay Indonesians, however, lack this relationship to the nation: the implication of the cultural logics of gay zines is that gay Indonesians must secure national belonging through active choice. Choosing the nation as the object of gay love stands as the prestasi that could, in theory, lead the nation to end its disavowal (see figure 3.11). But gay desire for national belonging fails to overcome separation: it is a sick love.

Zines thus present love as the ultimate prestasi, proving gay Indonesians are equivalent to normal Indonesians (see figure 3.12). The publishers of Jaka once noted, “Our differences with hetero people don’t need to be blown out of proportion. In fact, if we respect each other we can stand shoulder to shoulder and build this beloved nation and people. . . . As a minority that’s ‘put down,’ we have to show that our patriotism and nationalism doesn’t fail to compare!” (Jaka 1988, 17:2). An article sent to GAYa Nusantara, “Between Love and Lust,” uses the trope of betweenness to set forth love as a prestasi:

The lives of gay people are scrutinized and marginalized by hetero people, above all in regards to love. They accuse gay people of not having feelings of love, but only lust and desire. As one of many gay people in this country, I feel very apprehensive about this accusation. . . . [If gay men love each other,] we gay people
will still be scrutinized, but the comments will change: “Wow, look at the example that gay couple is setting!” In that way, hetero people will slowly become impressed with the model of gay love. I have a friend who is lesbi, and who lives in peace, having built a household with her lover. They sail their prosperous ship of life and have even adopted a child. It’s the same with a gay couple that work as lowly trash collectors. . . . Although they live in a simple home, their strong love shocks hetero people. . . . If gay people form lasting relationships, society itself will be taken aback and not reject us. . . . Let us hope that gay people are aware that we do not live only to fulfill our lusts, but that love is the ultimate thing. (GN 1989, 11:31–32)

Despite this optimism, separation haunts the interzone: gay zines voice a clear awareness that gay love for the nation is not reciprocated. This dynamic is illustrated by fantastical short stories, two examples of which are given below. In these parables, gay love magically produces the prestasi that should make it worthy of recognition, but these prestasis lead to separa-
tion—dooming the love to a nonsexual plane and exiling the beloved from the nation.

In one such story by a GAYa Nusantara reader from Jakarta, the married protagonist works as a geologist at a remote oil field in Sumatra. Soon after his unhappy wife leaves for Java, he meets a handsome young man, Nana, along the road near a forest. Nana follows the geologist to the oil-field camp, where he sits next to the geologist as the geologist ponders a map. The geologist observes, “Nana, watching over my shoulder, with a smile said that from this place to this place there would certainly be oil. When I asked him how he knew he only smiled.” They become lovers and Nana’s test wells are rich in oil. The boss is elated with this prestasi, for which the geologist takes credit. Nana continues to find oil on behalf of his beloved geologist and even heals the boss’s fever. Eventually the boss gives the geologist a promotion to Jakarta, but Nana is silent. “When I asked if it was because I had a wife in Java, he said no. . . . Finally he just said that he wanted to return to the area where I first found him.” Nana disappears into the forest. Suddenly an old, gray civet cat approaches the geologist. The cat kisses his feet, “strangely,
appears to be crying,” and then leaves. The geologist then sees an old man who says the forest is inhabited only by a 230-year-old civet cat that can take human form. The geologist laments, “Now I live alone, my wife left me because I didn’t pay attention to her. . . . Oh Nana, I love you so much” (GN 1996, 44:17–21).

In another story by a reader from the city of Solo, the protagonist, Calvin, falls in love with a fellow college student, Harold. One day Calvin sees a brilliantly written thesis with the same title as his own in Harold’s room. There is a note: “I will leave after I find what I’m looking for.” Harold explains he has been expelled for having sex with a professor and Calvin can use his thesis. That night they have sex; the next morning Harold is gone. When Calvin finds Harold’s grandmother and asks where Harold might be, the shocked woman replies that Harold died a year previously, “before he could graduate.” She recalls, “He was disappointed with his schooling and killed himself. He left a message that he would leave if he found what he was looking for, but I didn’t understand. Maybe you are what he was looking for. I beg of you, stay here with me, so that Harold can be at peace” (GN 2000, 74:35–36).

In these stories, fantastical gay men perform prestasis for their beloved, bringing them success in national society, but the love-recognition that should ensue does not come to pass. Both end in separation. Even short stories without fantastic elements often present this same dynamic, as in “A Red Orchid for Kresna,” sent to GAYa Nusantara by a gay man from Purworejo. In this story, Kresna is the childhood friend of Har, the protagonist, but as they get older, Har’s feelings get stronger: “What is this feeling? Is it love? . . . Does that mean . . . I’m a gay person?” (GN 2001, 82:32). Eventually Kresna tells Har he reciprocates his love, but in fear Har runs away and marries a woman. This separation is set to end when Har, realizing he is gay, divorces his wife and returns to Yogyakarta to find Kresna. He arrives at Kresna’s house to find the family in an uproar: Kresna, whose parents rejected him after learning Kresna was gay, went to work at an orphanage and recently donated a kidney to a young orphan. The orphan was saved, but Kresna died from complications. Har, filled with the pain of separation, writes to Kresna in his diary: “I have found the true meaning of love. . . . Today, you are no longer a gay person who dies without honor, but a knight who has fallen in shining armor” (34).

Because gay zines bring together homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging under the sign of love-as-prestasi, it is only logical that gay zines themselves can be construed not only as prestasi but as something loved (see figure 3.13). Professions of love to zines have been frequent since
zines’ beginnings, sometimes mixed with fears of separation: “I’ve fallen in love with Jaka; what’s more, if I can get to know other lovers [pencinta] of Jaka, the feelings will be a million times greater” (Jaka 1986, 7:3); “It’s like Jaka has become the heart of our people [jantungnya kaum kita]” (Jaka 1986, 8:2); “I fell in love with Jaka at first sight, and it grows deeper and deeper. I feel fearful and sad when I imagine Jaka disappearing” (Jaka 1986, 8:2; see also GN 2001, 81:47).

Zines sometimes even appear as agents of love. Toward the end of the story “A Million Lamps of the Heart,” the author-protagonist, Ar, is in his last year of high school and has met another student, Budi. One day Budi invites Ar to his house while Budi’s parents are still at work:

In the bedroom, Budi straightaway took off his shirt and pants. Wearing nothing but his underwear, he opened a bookcase, took out a magazine [majalah] and gave it to me. I started to read the magazine; its black-and-white cover just had a
big G surrounded by gaya hidup ceria and the edition’s number. Seeing me read the magazine, Budi smiled shyly and approached me.

“What about it, Ar?” . . . “Sure, Budi,” I replied. “Now?” “Yes, now.” Immediately I took off my clothes. . . . Suddenly we were kissing . . . “If I’d just known before, Ar—” he said. “What would you have done?” I interrupted. “I would [have] done like this!” And right away he moved on top of me. . . . Now I feel that I’m not alone anymore. Now I have a friend of the same world as me, in other words who also likes those of the same sex. Not just that. There is still something else. What? That magazine! Yes, that G bulletin. Now I feel that with the publication of that magazine I can get many friends who have the same feelings and joys as myself. Before I found that G, I felt my world was dark. Now that I’ve found that G I feel it’s not so dark anymore. Now my world is bright and clear because a million lamps of the heart shine together. (G 1983, 5:7–9)

This zine-within-a-zine flags the interzone where homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging come together: the “million lamps of the heart” is the gay archipelago itself, the national network of gay men whose sexual desires find form through the prism of national discourse. The links between zines, love, and nation appear even more explicitly in the short story “Selingkuh,” a term which means “dishonest” or “corrupt” in standard Indonesian but among gay men refers to having sex with a man other than one’s boyfriend (I have never heard gay men refer to sex with a wife or girlfriend as selingkuh). In this story, Adam and Sam are lovers who each, unbeknownst to the other, take out a personal ad in GAYa Nusantara, the very zine in which the story appears, to find a new sex partner (GN 2001, 83:27–32). When Sam gets a reply he is excited:

Yess! Sekali lagi Sam bersorak-sorak bergembira, bergembira semua, sudah bebas negri kita, untuk s’lama-amanya. . . . Aduh, sampe keterangan nyanyi-nyanyi lagu perjuangan.  

Yess! Once again Sam shouted with happiness, everything was happy, our nation is now free, for all time. . . . Oh my, to the point that I inadvertently sing a song of the struggle. (28–29)

When Sam’s joy leads him to sing a song from the anticolonial struggle, he breaks character (as in the “million lamps of the heart” story above) to
address the zine reader directly. When Adam receives his reply and is preparing for his blind date, he showers and dresses himself “carefully and in the shortest possible time (like the proclamation) [kayak proklamasi aja]” (GN 3002, 83:29). “Proklamasi” refers to the famously short (two-sentence) declaration of independence read by Sukarno on August 17, 1945, Indonesia’s Independence Day. These are ironic and joking references to the nation, but the joke’s bite comes from their appearance in a zine that, like all zines, regularly contains writing that employs nationalist discourse. Of course, it turns out that Adam and Sam have unknowingly chosen each other’s personal ads; when they learn this, they celebrate their renewed love with a night of raucous sex. This story’s author is from Ponorogo, the region of Java where “traditional” homosexual relations between waroks (male dancers and mystical experts) and gemblaks (their younger male understudies) originated, yet there is no mention of this tradition; gay love and gay belonging are national matters.

In the interzone, then, homosexuality and national belonging come together under the sign of love. As zines are produced in the interstices of everyday life and read in stolen moments on a bed or in a friend’s room, gay men imagine a new Indonesia. Through this national romance, they desire recognition from a nation-lover where now there is only separation. This is the story behind the story, so to speak, of gay zines. How might I leave the reader with an appreciation for the raw emotional sensibility of this implicit, unattainable interzone? It would be to construe Indonesia, the nation itself, as returning the gaze coming from the faces of gay men on zine covers. A nation that at long last turns to the gay Indonesian and looks you right in the eye, that accepts your prestasis and closes distance. An Indonesia that beckons you and in that impossible moment is consumed by homosexual desire. An Indonesia that gathers you, finally, into the warmest of embraces and whispers in your ear—“you are loved.” And you are home.

Notes
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1. This chapter is based on about two years of fieldwork in Indonesia, in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997–98, and 2000, with brief visits in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2007. Most of the zines discussed in this chapter were produced by gay men, but several were produced by lesbi women as well. I have strived to take into account the perspectives provided by these lesbi materials; see the Boellstorff (2007, chapter 2) study for a more extended discussion. The Internet was first mentioned in a gay zine in *GAYa Nusantara* (1996, no. 44). Since August 1999, a handful of zines have established Internet websites, as have some individual gay and lesbi Indonesians. Since the impact of the Internet differs from that of zines, however, I do not discuss it in this chapter.

2. One letter to the editors of *Jaka* praised the zine because “the short stories happen to be almost exactly like my own experiences” (*Jaka* 1986, 8:2). In a *GAYa Nusantara* readers’ survey conducted in 1996, true-experience stories were the favorite genre.

3. On five occasions, I have contributed articles to *GAYa Nusantara* (nos. 52, 53, 73, 77, and 78). I have also been interviewed by *GAYa Nusantara* on several occasions (nos. 23, 24, and 41).

4. *GAYa Nusantara*, the zine with the largest circulation, has had a print run of six hundred for most of its history (beginning in 1992 with no. 17), with a high of about eight hundred; by 2001 its circulation was down to about four hundred. *GAYa Nusantara* is also the only zine that has carried advertising of any consequence (usually for salons or drag events), and the only zine to have had any kind of public distribution. Beginning in the mid-1990s, *GAYa Nusantara* has been sold at a few bookstores in the city of Surabaya.

5. Letters to gay zines sometimes speak of being lent a zine by friends (*Jaka* 1986, 11:3; *Jaka* 1987, 13:3), or of obtaining photocopies of zines (*GN* 1988, 3:6; *GN* 1988, 5/6:2). Many gay Indonesians are unaware that gay zines exist, even if they live in a city where such a zine is published. The primary relationship between gay zines and regular mass media is that occasional coverage of gay zines in these media (or even more general news on homosexuality) can generate a flood of letters to the zines. The first such example was in May 1982, when the women’s magazine *Sarinah* ran an article about *g: Gaya Hidup Ceria*, the first gay zine; as a result a number of lesbi women wrote to the zine, seeking contacts and asking to become members of the organization associated with the zine (*g* 1983, 6:3).

6. Letters to the editor indicate cases of persons who, for fear of discovery or the fact that they live in an area where they do not know any lesbi or gay persons, obtain a single copy of a zine, then subscribe to the zine and do not share the zines with others. In such cases, the act of subscribing to the zine does not reduce social networks; it simply fails to strengthen them or generate new ones.

7. In a twelfth-anniversary retrospective, the editors of *GN* noted that the term “nusan-
8. “Very often the first conflicts and disappointments [between parents and children who had been given a ‘modern’ education] centered around the choice of a wife. . . . In such communities marriage did not merely represent the union of boy and girl, but a further extension of all kinds of family relationships. . . . It is thus not altogether surprising that in the literature of the young Indonesian generation, which began to appear in this atmosphere of conflict between modern and traditional Indonesian culture, the conflict, in all its aspects, was a major theme” (Alisjahbana 1966, 30–31).

9. Heteronormativity, of course, has been a key element of nationalist discourse since its beginnings (Eder, Hall, and Hekma 1999; L. Liu 1999; Mosse 1985) and has played a role in debates over definitions of proper citizenship in Euroamerica (Beriss 1996; Berlant 1997; Duggan and Hunter 1995; Parker et al. 1992; Warner 1993). In contemporary postcolonial societies, debates over national belonging can take forms that incorporate, in various ways, these European origins of heteronormative nationalist ideology (Heng and Devan 1995; Lumsden 1996; Mankekar 1999; Murray 1996; Parker 1999; Schein 1996).

10. Although homosexuality is increasingly a topic of discussion in mainstream Indonesian mass media, such coverage is overwhelmingly negative and the few textual or imagic representations of homosexual desire are usually of Euroamericans.

11. The only context in which sex consistently appears in gay zines is in articles on preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Such articles are fairly common in gay zines (and rare in lesbi zines) because many are funded directly or indirectly through HIV-prevention programs, provided in most cases by international development agencies.


13. The only language other than Indonesian that ever appears in gay and lesbi zines is English. Short stories and personals ads sometimes contain English words or short phrases. GN ran a one-page “Summary in English” from 1994 to 1997 (nos. 25–47), and lesbi zines have occasionally included entire articles in English (reflecting the high educational status of most of their producers). GB noted that some of the lesbi articles to be included within its pages would be in English so that it could conceivably reach readers at the “international level” (GB 6:7).

14. The only case of ethnicity’s entering narrative in a gay zine to date, to my knowledge, is in the “true-experiences” story of Alfred, a student from Irian Jaya (the western half of the island of New Guinea). Alfred feels cursed because of his dark “Negroid” skin and believes that a Javanese student (in the city of Jayapura, on the north coast) is staring at him, rejecting him for his ethnicity. In good national-culture form, however, it turns out that the Javanese student is desirous of Alfred, and they begin a sexual relationship (GN 1994, 25:22–23).

15. The first of these “customs of the Archipelago” columns, examining male homosexuality in Aceh, appeared in GN (1989, 11:15–18). The only case where there is cross-
over between these sexualities and gay subjectivity in zines is a true-experiences story in which a *gemblak* (male understudy actor in East Java) begins to live as a gay man (*GN* 2000, 69:37–41).

16. This discrepancy may be due to Indonesian women’s greater familiarity with domestic violence. Many gay men and lesbi women have seen either gay pornography, or straight pornography in which “lesbian” sex is presented, and these images (viewed firsthand or described by friends) shape the sense of Euroamerica as a place of untrammeled sexuality.

17. My thanks to Leena Avonius for reminding me of this point.

18. Persaudaraan Gay Yogyakarta was the first formalized gay group in the city of Yogyakarta (Java) and publisher of *Jaka*.

19. *Gaya Hidup Ceria* is the name of the first gay zine and can be taken to mean “happy gay life.”

20. In other words, Har does not appear to believe that he can be gay and married to a woman at the same time. As noted previously, such attitudes, while present among gay men for years, are still the minority view (see Boellstorff 1999, 2005).