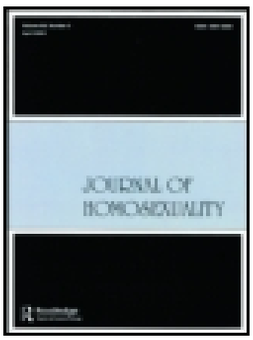

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Pre-Gay, Post-Queer

Peter A. Jackson

Pre-Gay, Post-Queer: Thai Perspectives on Proliferating Gender/Sex Diversity in Asia

Peter A. Jackson

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a number of authors have observed that the proliferation of gay, lesbian, and transgender/transsexual (g/l/t)[1] identities is increasingly a global phenomenon.[2] In Asia, new gender/sex[3] categories and erotic cultures have emerged at the intersection of multiple influences. These influences include: economic, social, and technological transformations in the context of globalizing market capitalism; intensifying hybridization of local and Western cultures/discourses; increasing rates of human movement through tourism and migration; and expanding international cooperation on issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and the human rights of gender/sex minorities.

To date, discussion of what Dennis Altman (1996a) has called "global queering" has largely been based on anecdotal observations of the emergence of new gendered and eroticised identities in Asian and other non-Western societies. While there is no doubting the accuracy of these observations, we, nevertheless, lack detailed historical studies of the transformations in Asian discourses which have incited the proliferation of new modes of eroticised subjectivity. We also lack studies of the changes in economies, social organization, and political systems which have created the spaces for the emergence of Asian gay

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and lesbian scenes. Current histories, ethnographies, and sociologies of gay and lesbian identities are overwhelmingly from the West, and we need studies of gay Bangkok, gay Seoul, gay Mumbai, gay Taipei, and other major Asian cities that are as detailed and comprehensive as those we have of gay Sydney, gay New York, gay London, and gay Amsterdam.

The study of cultural intersection is a relatively new field, and analytical approaches are still poorly developed. It is often the case that we simply do not know enough to be able to make definitive statements about what is happening globally in the gender/sex domain. This ignorance is compounded by the fact that the "objects" of study are not only the categories and identities constituted within discrete discursive domains, but also the "interference effects" and "diffraction patterns" formed when cultures intersect. Key notions in cross-cultural inquiries are hybridity, complexity, and syncretism, but these terms remain empty without detailed accounts of the precise articulation of discourses and practices at actual sites of cultural intersection. The following analyses of gay and lesbian Asia provide some of the details that are needed in order to begin answering important questions on what is universal in human erotic cultures and what are local and variable forms.

In this volume, a diverse range of perspectives from South, East and Southeast Asia are presented, providing rich insights on gay and lesbian identities and communities across the region during the final decade of the twentieth century. This has been a period of such dramatic and rapid transformations, from Beijing to Manila and from Jakarta to Seoul, that it will undoubtedly be seen as one of the century's major turning points. Sexual and gender minorities have been prominent in Asia's "roaring 1990s." Industrialization, urbanization, increasing wealth, and new communications technologies provided opportunities for gender/sex difference to be expressed more openly in many Asian societies. The anonymity of the region's burgeoning cities provided spaces for gay men and lesbians to socialise and build local communities and commercial scenes of bars, restaurants, discos, and other venues away from the heteronormative pressures of families and tight-knit village communities. New-found affluence gave many the opportunity to travel and experience gay/lesbian cultures in Australia, North America, Europe, and neighbouring Asian countries. And in the second half of the 1990s, the Internet provided a means to establish

virtual networks in countries where authoritarian and often homophobic governments limited opportunities for public expression.

It is important to note at the outset that Asian g/l/t identities are not so new. Some recent discussion of global queering, such as in the Australian journals *Critical InQueeries* (see Donald Morton 1997; Fran Martin & Chris Berry 1998) and the *Australian Humanities Review* (see Dennis Altman 1996b) has at times given the impression that gay and lesbian identities have emerged in Asia only in the past decade as responses to post-Cold War capitalist globalization and the spread of the Internet. However, gay and lesbian Asia is not merely a phenomenon of the 1990s. Rather, the East and Southeast Asian economic boom of the first half of the decade, which seemed to portend these regions becoming new global centres rather than a subsidiary postcolonial periphery, meant that in the 1990s many Western academics who previously had not taken an interest in the people or societies of Asia began to investigate the dramatic changes in the region. When, in the 1990s, increasing numbers of Western scholars began looking at Asian gay and lesbian cultures, they found many things that looked familiar. It was at times assumed that Western-styled gay and lesbian identities and lifestyles were products of the boom years, being sexual/cultural expressions of the changing economies and technologies of the 1990s. As Chris Berry (1994: 11) stated:

> Behind the adoption and adaptation of lesbian and gay sexual identities into Asian metropolitan cultures lies the global spread of postmodern consumer capitalism and the construction of identity not around national production but multiple niche markets.

While the 1990s forms of Asian gay and lesbian cultures and identities may indeed follow postmodern patterns, such an account implies that gay and lesbian Asians could not be found before this decade. However, visible gay, lesbian, and transgender cultures emerged in Bangkok several decades before the Internet era, and the word "gay" was being used as a self-identificatory label by homosexually active men in that city some years before the June 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City saw the establishment of the modern gay liberation movement (see Jackson 1999b). Neil Garcia (1996) also dates the origins of the Philippine gay scene to the 1960s. Bangkok's and Manila's commercial gay scenes are largely contemporaneous with similar gay scenes in non-metropolitan Western countries, such as Austra-

lia and New Zealand, and in studying Asian societies such as Thailand and the Philippines the issue is not so much to consider how these cultures appeared after they did in the West, but rather how they emerged at much the same time as they did in many parts of the West. It may be necessary to revise current accounts which imagine the West, in particular the United States, as the original site of contemporary gay and other identities and instead see these identities emerging by processes of parallel development in diverse locales.

BACKGROUND TO THIS VOLUME

This volume records part of an Australia-Asian gay and lesbian dialogue. All the authors, as well as the editors, are either from the Asian region or are Australia-based academics writing on Asia. In the 1990s, economic, political, cultural, and intellectual links between Australia and Asia multiplied as the predominantly White European settler society (located next door to Indonesia) attempted to reimagine its position in global networks. While there has been much rhetoric about globalization in recent years, the growth of geographical regionalism has perhaps been a more concrete phenomenon of the 1990s. Indeed, one can see parallels between Australia's intensified engagement with Asia, Britain's attempt to reimagine itself as a European country, and the intensification of the United States' links with Latin America.

In the 1990s, Australian and Asian gay and lesbian scenes also became more closely interconnected. This happened through increasing two-way tourism and migration, regional collaboration on HIV/AIDS issues, and the impact of widespread media coverage in Asia of Australia's highly visible gay and lesbian cultures. For example, international marketing to Asian tourists of Sydney's annual Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has seen this festival become a major focus for gay and lesbian pride celebrations in the Asia-Pacific. While Australia is not the focus of the following studies, this volume can, nevertheless, be seen as reflecting the many cultural and attitudinal changes that have taken place in that country in recent years. The article in this volume by Offord and Cantrell on notions of human rights reflects on some of the issues that Australian gay/lesbian researchers have had to address in conducting their dialogues with Asian colleagues.

This collection has grown out of a conference convened by the

Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research and held at the University of Sydney in September 1995 called "Emerging Lesbian and Gay Identities and Communities in Asia." The conference attracted participants from around East and Southeast Asia. In order to cater to the interests of many who were unable to attend, the conference convenors, who are the editors of this volume, invited those who had presented papers as well as others to submit papers for a book on the same subject. The response to the call for papers was overwhelming and enough material was gathered for three separate volumes.[4]

THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERSTANDING GAY AND LESBIAN ASIA

Asia is a considerably more diverse continent than Europe or North America. There is as much linguistic and cultural difference between societies located within the geographically contiguous domain now called "Asia" as there is between this complex set of Asian societies and those of Europe, the Americas, or Oceania. Despite this diversity, it is possible to make some generally valid observations. Every contemporary Asian society marginalizes gender and sexual difference in the sense that heterosexuality is valorised by cultural norms and sometimes by legal regimes that seek to enforce heteronormativity. However, the forms of marginalization differ, both in character and intensity, from one society to the next. In the face of historical and contemporary marginalization, homoeroticism and transgenderism have, nevertheless, claimed spaces for expression, whether, as in Korea and Singapore, in the semi-visible gaps in hegemonic forms of hetero- normativity (see Seo and Heng, this volume), or, as in the Philippines or Thailand, in the form of a publicly tolerated but still derided transgender role (see Tan, this volume; Jackson & Sullivan 1999b). Large numbers of Asian men and women continue to live within the "traditional" spaces for gender/sex difference and to understand themselves and their lives in "pre-gay" terms that often relate more to the pre-industrial rural pasts of their societies than to the postmodernizing urban present. However, there are also large numbers of men and women who are reacting against what they see as the historical constraints on homoeroticism in their respective societies and who are actively engaging in relocating homoeroticism from the shadows and the periphery to the centre stage of their lives. The chapters in this volume

describe both traditional forms of gender/sex difference (e.g., Khan) as well as recent gay and lesbian activisms (e.g., Tan, Chou, Heng, Seo).

Because the forms of marginalization are so different among Asian societies and because the historical spaces for homoerotic and transgender expression have also varied, the contemporary forms of gender/sex resistance that contribute to moulding new g/l/t identities also differ from one society to another. No general analysis can be provided for all new Asian identities. To understand 1990s Asian g/l/t identities in different societies, we need to know the local homoerotic and transgender pasts that they emerged from and against which they often counterposed themselves. The influence of Western ideas and cultures on these new imaginings of Asian homoeroticism is complex. Western gay/lesbian styles and terminology have often been appropriated as strategies to resist local heteronormative strictures and carve out new local spaces. However, these appropriations have not reflected a wholesale recreation of Western sexual cultures in Asian contexts, but instead suggest a selective and strategic use of foreign forms to create new ways of being Asian *and* homosexual.

The work of Mark Johnson (1997) has shown the complexity of this Western-Asian interaction in his study of a contemporary Filipino transgender culture. Johnson documents the culture of transgender males, variously called by the local term *bantut* or the borrowed term "gay," in the predominantly Muslim Tausug culture on the Southern Philippine island of Sulu. Central to Johnson's study is the argument that contemporary Tausug *bantut/gay* identity is in part configured in relation to a local imagining of America, a society which none of Johnson's informants had in fact experienced first hand. Johnson found that the Tausug notion of *gay* is inscribed within local discourses of transgenderism/femininity, and the borrowing of this lexical item has not been accompanied by a related borrowing of the discourses of homosexuality/masculinity within which gayness is understood in the West. Rather, the word "gay" has been appropriated to bolster the Tausug transgender understanding of homoeroticism and does not represent an intrusion of foreign discourses. This is because the "America" against which Tausug *bantut/gay* define themselves is not a "real" America but rather an exoticized other imagined from afar whose content is constituted upon an idealised projection of the local. That is, the *bantut/gay* imagining of "America" does not represent an actual Americanization of local gender/sex formations.

Instead, the symbol of a prestigious American other is used in order to enhance the status of the Filipino transgender formation. "Gay" then becomes a label for an idealised image of how these men would like to live their lives as Tausug transgender persons, not as American-style masculine identified gay men.

Understanding gay and lesbian Asia requires us to appreciate the relations between three phenomena: (1) the local historical forms of transgenderism and homoeroticism that have emerged in the context of different Asian regimes of heteronormativity; (2) contemporary gay/lesbian resistances to these heteronormative systems, which at times involve self-conscious separation from and even critique of the historical forms of gender/sex difference; and (3) the different ways that Western gay/lesbian discourses and styles have been appropriated as aspects of the local resistances.

Analyses of gay and lesbian Asia present fundamental challenges to Western-centred theories of sexuality. A key challenge is to incorporate an awareness of the specificity of historical Asian forms of gender/sex difference- those that existed before the identities now labelled "gay" and "lesbian"- with an appreciation that, despite being labelled with borrowed English terms, contemporary Asian identities often represent quite different forms of gendered eroticisms and eroticised genders from those that exist in the West. Some Asian erotic identities are "pre-gay," while others are "post-queer" in the sense that they exist outside Eurocentric understandings of sexual and gender difference. The expansion of Western-based knowledge to incorporate historical and contemporary forms of Asian erotic diversity will decentre many aspects of Eurocentric theory, forcing us to see Western eroticisms not as *the* model but as one set of historically specific forms beside many others.

In working through the limitations of current theoretical approaches, a number of related forms of analysis are required in order to arrive at non-Eurocentric understandings of g/l/t Asia. First, Western analysts engaged in this enterprise need to reflect critically on their motivations for engaging in cross-cultural research. Second, we need to develop detailed and nuanced understandings of the histories and societies of g/l/t Asia. And finally, priority needs to be given to avoiding seeing g/l/t Asians as reflections of Western gay men, lesbians, or transgender people. In summary, attempts at understanding g/l/t Asia

must be underpinned by a systematic deprivileging of Western-centred perspectives.

THE POLITICS OF WRITING ABOUT GLOBAL QUEERING IN ASIA

It is easy to see parallels in the lives of gay-identified men and lesbian-identified women in many Asian countries who have constructed social networks, lifestyles, and gay-oriented businesses similar to those found in many large Western cities. However, we need to be aware of the gender/sex political implications of placing an explanatory emphasis upon either "global/Western influences" or "local history" in developing accounts of the proliferation of Asian g/l/t identities. It may be argued that the idea of "gay" or "lesbian" as global identities can promote international collaboration between homosexually active men and women from diverse societies in their respective struggles for human rights or appropriate HIV/AIDS interventions. The label "gay" is indeed extremely popular amongst male gender/sex minorities around the planet although, at least in Thailand, the English word "lesbian" is strenuously avoided by "women who love women" (*ying rak ying*).[5]

However, there can also be a political downside to a globally uniform view of gay identity, which in some situations has been used as a weapon against Asian g/l/t people when it has been seen as being too closely associated with foreign models. The idea that gay is a Western phenomenon has been used by some conservative Asian governments to deny the significant histories of homoeroticism and transgenderism within their own societies. In Singapore and Malaysia in the 1990s, gayness was labelled as a Western phenomenon that at best was considered irrelevant and at worst was represented as a polluting foreign influence to be actively opposed. In a study of the politics of homosexual rights in non-Western societies, Chris Berry (1994: 73) observes that at the 1993 United Nations World Human Rights Conference in Vienna, then-Singaporean Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng stated bluntly, "Homosexual rights are a Western issue, and are not relevant to this conference." This response was made after an Australian delegation had sought to have the UN include homosexuals within the ambit of its human rights charter. The political complexities of taking either a "global/Western influences" or "local history" explanatory line in the global queering discussion alert us to the need to avoid

over-hasty generalizations in specifying what unites and what distinguishes different national or regional forms of g/l/t identity and culture. Indeed, in order to promote g/l/t issues in some Asian countries, it may be politically strategic to argue for a local rather than a global/Western view of homoeroticism.

THE WESTERN QUEER WILL TO KNOW G/L/T ASIA

The history of Western imperialism and the West's continuing domination of global economic, informational, and cultural flows influence the productin of knowledge of g/l/t Asia, and, also, often the wishes of Western g/l/t activists to aid local resistances against Asian heteronormative regimes of power/knowledge. Only by critically reflecting on the motivations underpinning their intellectual and political interests in g/l/t Asia can Westerners imagine forms of collaborative activity that do not reproduce Western hegemony.

Western academics' explorations of non-Western gender/sex systems often reflect their culture-specific subjectivities and expectations. For example, in numerous conversations with Australian, North American, and British colleagues, I have noticed that when a gender/sex category in an Asian society happens to be labelled with an indigenous term, such as *kathoey* in Thailand, then Western analysts are often prepared to grant that category a local history. However, if a Thai man self-identifies with the label "gay," then Western observers commonly overlook the possibility of a local history for this identity, and talk instead of "globalizing influences" and the "borrowing" of Western models. Despite queer studies' emphasis on multiplicity and diversity, there is still a tendency to be enchanted by the three letters "gay" and to see in them a reflection of sameness where we should be open to the possibility of finding difference. As American queer historian Scott Bravman (1997: 26) has stated, "[Western] gay and lesbian history can be criticized for reiterating culturally specific identity categories as universal." The articles in this volume challenge, to cite Chris Berry (1996: 14), "the often presumed universality of the post-Stonewall Anglo-American models of gay identity which are now beginning to appear as more culturally and historically specific."

Research by Western gay men and lesbians on homoeroticism in the rest of the world often seems to be motivated by concerns similar to those which lie behind the search for extraterrestrial life. A dominant

but unspoken question guiding such research is: "Is there someone else out there like me?" This Western quest for global self-affirmation is a successor to the naive gay and lesbian historiography of earlier decades which was often dominated by a concern to find eminent "gays" or "homosexuals" in past eras when these categories did not yet exist. This research was motivated more by a concern to legitimate contemporary homosexualities than to inquire into historical or social difference. A form of narcissism at times appears to underpin the academic interest in looking to the Asian horizon for signs of identities and cultures similar to those that exist in the West. The global queering discussion, in part, appears to have been based on a wish to find "clones" of Western-type identities in the rest of the world. Fran Martin (1996) has commented on this phenomenon:

> Are we dealing with transparent "description" of the global scene or a veiled desire for sameness on the part of the "Western" critic? . . . [the] Western subject seems able to see in another cultural context only that which he already knows, missing complex and potentially productive interactions and hybridizations both within and between cultures.

Academic narcissism can distort perceptions, with understanding remaining stuck within the internally reflecting mirrors of one's own culture-delimited subjectivity. Western analysts need to abandon the expectation, or hope, that Asian g/l/t people are becoming like "us" before it will be possible to begin seeing "them" for who "they" are. An account of homoerotic desire in cross-cultural imaginings and relations is, therefore, epistemologically important in arriving at an understanding of the forms taken by knowledge of gender/sex others, the issues that are explored and those which are overlooked.

"THAT'S WHAT RICE QUEENS STUDY!"

In this context, it is important to consider the way that research on g/l/t Asia has at times been minoritized within the Western queer academy by the same race-based exclusions that operate within Western gay cultures. The desires underpinning the gay Caucasian will to know Asian genders and sexualities are often marked by competing but ultimately related discourses of racism and fetishization. Domi-

nant discourses within contemporary Western gay male cultures stereotype Caucasian-Asian erotic relations in terms of two opposed models. These two models-of erotic denial and erotic fetishization-are, firstly, the exclusion of Asian men as erotically attractive and, secondly, the fetishization of Asian men as the only possible objects of erotic interest. Tony Ayres (1999), Kent Chuang (1999), and other writers document and critique these racist/fetishizing discourses in their contributions to a recent collection, of essays, *Multicultural Queer: Australian Narratives* (Jackson & Sullivan 1999a). As Audrey Yue (1999) indicates in the same collection, a similar account can be constructed for Western lesbian cultures. These two models are established by binaries that set up rigid race-based exclusions, not only within discourse but also in desire and social interaction within Western queer communities. Gays and lesbians in Asia (as well one might add gays and lesbians from Asian backgrounds living in Western countries) are often excluded both from their indigenous culture and from the Western queer cultures that supposedly hold out the promise of the full acceptance of sexual diversity. As Chris Berry observes, "there's plenty of evidence that neither heterosexist Asian patriarchies of that region nor established Eurocentric lesbian and gay cultures want to include them in" (1994, p. 12).

A dominant narrative in popular discourses within Western gay scenes involves the de-eroticization and effeminization of Asian men and a related privileging of a model of masculinity based on a fetishization of the attributes of an idealized Caucasian male body. The effeminization of Asian males has a long history in Western imperialist imaginings of the "exotic Orient" and has been explored in a number of recent studies (see Lane 1995, Sinha 1995) which relate this phenomenon to nineteenth century colonialist rationalizations of the European domination of Asia. A subordinate narrative within contemporary Western gay scenes related to the dominant exclusion of Asian men is that of the marginalized "rice queen," a Caucasian gay man whose desire is based on a fetishization of Asian men as the sole or preferred object of erotic interest and a denial of the attractiveness of race-same Caucasian men. Within expatriate gay Asian circles in Australia, the "rice queen" is mirrored by the "potato queen," an Asian man who fetishizes Caucasian men as the preferred or only object of erotic interest and who rejects other Asian men as sexual partners. The Caucasian rice queen occupies a stigmatized position

within popular gay discourses, being stereotyped as a sexually unattractive man who is unable to find a Caucasian partner. The rice queen is mocked as a man who "only Asians find attractive."

These competing discourses of race-based exclusion and fetishization at times speak unconsciously through the subjectivities of queer academics. Studies of g/l/t Asia have been marginalized within "mainstream" Western gay/queer research because of an implicit attitude that "that is what rice queens study." In other words, the dominant stereotyping of Asian men as sexually unattractive has contributed to the minoritizing of studies of Asian homosexualities within the White queer academy. However, both Caucasian anti-Asian racism and fetishization of Asian men involve the privileging of certain racialized bodies as erotically more desirable and hence intellectually more "interesting" than others. In order to write without privileging one particular position of knowing, whether Western or Asian, it is necessary to deconstruct the race-based exclusions that underpin the Western will to know, or to ignore, g/l/t Asians. I have explored this issue in a novel, *The Intrinsic Quality of Skin* (Jackson 1994), in which the gay Caucasian protagonist negotiates the contradictions of living and loving across both Western and Thai discourses of homoeroticism (see also Jackson 2000).

GLOBALIZATION THEORY VERSUS FOUCAULDIAN HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

In the light of the above reflexive critiques, how then are we to proceed in understanding the proliferation of gender and sexual diversity in Asia and, more particularly, the apparent similarities of many new categories and identities to Western-styled gay and lesbian forms? Two ultimately related explanatory models have been put forward. One, the "global queering" model propounded by Dennis Altman (1996a), argues that globalizing economic and technological forces have facilitated cross-cultural borrowing from the West. For Altman (1996a: 78), the emergence of "the global gay" is best understood as "the expansion of an existing Western category" and as being "part of the rapid globalization of lifestyle and identity politics." The other model argued by Rosalind Morris (1994) in the case of Thailand, draws on Michel Foucault's (1980) analysis in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* and maintains that gay and lesbian identities have

emerged as a consequence of the institution of a new discursive regime based on sexuality. According to Morris, this contrasts with an older not yet fully superseded Thai discursive regime based on gender. Morris's model, in fact, assumes processes of cross-cultural borrowing in the context of globalization when she describes Thailand as "a society that is deeply influenced but not fully determined by transnational forces and ideologies" (1994: 17).

Although both globalization theory and the Foucauldian history of sexuality have been invoked to explain global queering, there is an analytical tension between these two approaches. In studies of globalization the historical boundaries of nation states, ethnic regions and linguistic and cultural domains are often downplayed with an emphasis on phenomena such as the electronic media, migration, mass tourism, and transnational capital flows which cross the planet's increasingly permeable political and cultural boundaries. This stands in contrast to the Foucauldian emphasis on discourses as highly bounded domains marked by sudden discontinuities and sharp breaks. Foucauldian studies concentrate on the internal specificities of discourses, analysing the concepts, categories, and identities which exist only within a given discursive domain.

If one's analytical focus is on those commercial spaces in major cities commonly called "gay scenes," then the many transnational fashion, style, musical, and other connections among these localities will undoubtedly be a dominant concern. The commercial gay scenes of bars, saunas, discos, fashion boutiques, and restaurants in Bangkok's Silom Road, Sydney's Oxford Street, Paris's Marai quarter, London's Soho, New York's Greenwich Village, San Francisco's Castro, and so on are just as intimately related with each other as an interlocking global set of spaces as they are with the national cultures within which they are located. However, if one focuses on the indigenous discourses within each of these widely separated spaces, then instead of global homogeneity, one is impressed by local specificity and difference. In a discourse-centered analysis, materially and economically similar spaces are revealed as sites of remarkably diverse understandings of same-sex eroticism and equally diverse imaginings of possible gendered futures.

I suspect that it is no coincidence that advocates of the globalization theory approach have conducted their research in English, while those who follow a more Foucauldian model of gender/sex differentiation

have worked within the local languages of Asian g/l/t cultures. Many cross-cultural differences are only brought into sharp focus when one attains fluency in more than one language and experiences first hand the problems of representation and meaning that arise when one attempts to move between radically different linguistic and discursive systems. All the contributors to this volume have had to struggle with issues of translation and the specificity of Asian cultural forms.

We can also understand the analytical tension between globalization theory and Foucauldian historiography as emerging from the fact that each focuses on one of the interrelated dual processes that are at work in the creation of globalized cultural forms. Globalization theory is often invoked in attempts to appreciate transnational processes of homogenization while Foucauldian theory is more likely to be called into play in attempts to understand processes of indigenization or localization within the frame of globalization. Arjun Appadurai has identified the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization as "the central problem of today's global interactions." As he states:

> A vast array of empirical facts could be brought to bear on the side of the homogenization argument, and much of it has come from the left end of the spectrum of media studies. . . . Most often, the homogenization argument subspeciates into either an argument about Americanization or an argument about commoditization. What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenised in one or another way. . . . The dynamics of such indigenisation have just begun to be explored systematically. . . . (Appadurai 1996, p. 32)

I agree with Appadurai that we need to critique the universalist assumptions of some accounts of globalization. Globalization is not merely a one-way process transferring ideas, aesthetics and sex-cultural patterns from the West to "the rest." Globalization also needs to be understood as the operation of common processes in diverse locales, inciting semi-independent and parallel developments in these different places. In other words, gay and other new identities may have multiple origins in a globalizing world. We need to problematize the assumption that the correct answer to questions about cross-cultural connection can be provided by one model and only one model. It is clear that

no current formulation of the history of eroticism-whether based on Foucauldian or globalization analyses-is adequate to the task of explaining the global proliferation of gender/sex diversity in the twentieth century and that the challenge of understanding this phenomenon requires a refinement of our analytical tools in addition to detailed empirical studies.

EROTICISM AFTER FOUCAULT

Both the descriptive and theoretical issues in this discussion are much more complex than many authors have acknowledged. For example, how should we describe the proliferation of new Asian identities? In the global queering debates, the question of what is being "seen" or "described" in Asia and elsewhere has tended to be assumed as part of the explanatory theories that have been adduced. For example, to adduce Foucault's study on the history of sexuality in explaining recent shifts in Asian discourses is to assume that the new identities are sexualities. However, if identity is constituted within discourse, and if Asian gender/sex discourses are revealed to be qualitatively distinct from Western discourses, then Asian subjectivities will need to be seen as distinctive constructs that are not reducible to the Western notion of sexual identity. I have argued that in Thailand the "objects" of this inquiry are not sexual identities, but rather varieties of what in Thai discourses are called *phet* or eroticized genders (Jackson 1999a). I summarize this research below.

The analyses in Foucault's text *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* may not be immediately relevant for research on Asian discourses. Foucault, in fact, explicitly defined his study as excluding the non-West, noting that his object was "to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality *in our part of the world*" (Foucault 1980: 11, emphasis added). Foucault's "part of the world" was, after all, Paris (and to some extent San Francisco), not Beijing, Delhi, or Singapore. To mark my divergence from Foucault's analysis, in my own research I prefer to talk of eroticism and discourses of the erotic in Thailand in order to avoid the Eurocentric connotations that, since Foucault, now attach to the term "sexuality" and the notion of "discourses of sexuality." However, I am also aware that some Asian researchers (see Chao, Seo in this volume) have found Foucault useful, and the significant differences

between Asian societies may mean that Western analytical accounts provide better descriptions of some societies than others. However, this cannot be determined in any *a priori* manner and the relevance or otherwise of different theoretical models can only emerge in the process of undertaking empirically grounded studies.

GAY IDENTITY WITHOUT "SEXUALITY"?

Here I reflect on my research on Thai gender/sex cultures in order to consider some of the complexities of researching global queering in Asia. Before the 1960s, male homoerotic relations in Thailand were structured within discourses that ascribed masculine (*phu-chai*) and feminine/effeminate (*kathoey*) gender positions to same-sex partners. Historically, the *kathoey* category had included all forms of gender/sex variance from normative forms of maleness/masculinity and femaleness/femininity. However, in the 1960s this formerly undifferentiated category fractured into an array of *kathoey* varieties which labelled specific forms of difference in the domains of sex (hermaphroditism), gender (cross-dressing), and sexuality (homosexuality). In succession, gay men, lesbians, and hermaphrodites were relabelled and differentiated from *kathoey*. The extent and rapidity of the linguistic and conceptual shift has been so great that younger Thais are no longer aware that only three decades ago a woman was called a *kathoey* if she acted like a man. By the 1970s, *kathoey* had come to mean only a person who is born male but subsequently enacts a feminine role (male transvestite) or undergoes a sex change operation (male-to-female transsexual).

While borrowed English-derived terms came to mark some new identities (*gay* for men, *tom* [from "tom boy"] for butch lesbians, *dee* [from "lady"] for femme lesbians), in some cases these words merely replaced preexisting Thai expressions, and their introduction did not mark the emergence of a new phenomenon but rather a relabelling. For example, recognition of masculine men who are attracted to other masculine men predated use of the label *gay,* with expressions such as "second type of *kathoey*" being used for these men in the early 1960s. A "second type of *kathoey*" was a homosexually active male who did not fit the prevalent stereotype of effeminacy. Those categories which are still labelled *kathoey* today are those which tend to be conceived in terms of the mythicized equal blending of maleness/masculinity and

femaleness/femininity which lay at the core of the earlier meaning of the term. The linguistic persistence of *kathoey* means that popular English terms for transsexuality and transgenderism, such as "drag queen" or "tranny," have not been borrowed and are all but unknown in Thailand, except amongst those who have traveled to the West.[6]

The Thai borrowing of English terms for gender/sex difference has been highly selective and has involved a high degree of playful innovation. Male erotic cultures have enthusiastically appropriated the now dominant English label for male homoeroticism, *gay*. However, they have also felt a need to reflect persistent notions of the gendering of male homoeroticism through the uniquely Thai usage of *gay king* and *gay queen*. In contrast, female erotic cultures have trenchantly resisted the dominant English label for female homoeroticism, *lesbian,* instead appropriating and adapting the terms *tom boy* to *tom,* and *lady* to *dee,* to reflect the gendering of female same-sex relations. From a linguistic standpoint, Thailand's transgender cultures are largely uninfluenced by English borrowings and continue to use the long-established term *kathoey*. The complexity of this linguistic history - involving a combination of enthusiastic appropriation, resistance, playful adaptation to local patterns, and disinterest - alerts us to the fact that it is highly improbable that a simple unmediated process of "borrowing" from the West is the sole source of the explosion of Thai homosexual and transgender identities.

Thai discourses continue to be framed in terms of the indigenous category of *phet,* a notion that incorporates sexual difference (male vs. female), gender difference (masculine vs. feminine), and sexuality (heterosexual vs. homosexual). Within these discourses, *gay* and *kathoey* are not distinguished as a sexuality and a gender, respectively. Rather, *gay* and *kathoey,* together with "man," "woman," *tom* and *dee,* are collectively labeled as different varieties of *phet*. The new categories have not been constituted as a consequence of the emergence of a new type of discourse *a la* Foucault, but rather by a process of multiplication within the preexisting domain of *phet*.

The historical system of *phet,* with the *kathoey* imagined as blending genders within one body and psyche, has proved capable of capturing all the new categories by a refinement of the gender continuum to incorporate increasingly diverse and refined mixings of masculinity and femininity. This means that categories such as *gay queen* and *gay king* are imagined first in terms of their mixing of masculinity and

femininity and only secondarily in terms of the types of erotic partnering engaged in. Indeed, it is a person's location on the multipositional scale or gender continuum of *phet*- from one hundred percent "man" at one end to one hundred percent "woman" at the other and any proportional combination in between- that is imagined as determining his or her erotic preference. This means that within the *phet* hierarchy, it is more important to know how masculine or feminine one is than to know the types of sexed bodies and gendered performances one finds erotically interesting. In other words, gender remains the core of all Thai identities, with eroticism being imagined as a secondary or derivative component.

In Thailand, the words *gay, tom, dee* or *kathoey* primarily evoke images of gender-blending and only secondarily notions of same-sex eroticism. In contrast, in the West, the words "gay" or "lesbian" are more likely to be linked first to homosexuality, with thoughts of gender being secondary. It is not that eroticism is absent from Thai conceptions of *phet* categories or that gender is not a part of popular understandings of "gay" and "lesbian" in the West. Rather, eroticism and gender are articulated differently in the discourses and identities that are prevalent in the two cultures. Because eroticism continues to be seen as a byproduct or consequence of gender status, and because the *phet* system has proved so capable of expanding to incorporate new imagined blendings of the masculine and the feminine, an independent discourse of sexuality has not taken root in Thailand. Masculine gay identity is increasingly common in urban Thailand, but it is understood in a quite different way from gay identities in the West.

THE HISTORY OF EROTICISM AFTER QUEER

Current Western gay and queer research takes the gender/sexuality distinction as its starting point, and the history of sexuality can be conceived of as that discipline which inquires into the origins and consequences of this discursive break. As Donald Morton (1997: 14) states:

> The separation of "sexuality" from "gender" . . . marks the birth of queer theory. In *Epistemology of the Closet* . . . Eve Sedgwick (1990) declares the separation of sexuality from gender to be "axiomatic" for investigating sexual alterity: endorsing the hy-

pothesis of Gayle Rubin, Sedgwick says, "the question of gender and the question of sexuality . . . are . . . not the same question."

However, the proliferation of Thai categories cannot be interpreted in these terms. The impact of Western sexual and gender knowledges upon Thai discourses cannot be denied. However, this influence has not led to the emergence of a discourse of sexuality such as Foucault proposes occurred in Western societies in the nineteenth century. The interaction of Western discourses with other cultures/discourses does not necessarily reproduce the gender/sexuality split that is widely represented as now being hegemonic in the West. We need to understand the proliferation of Thai categories and identities as the consequence of an initial destabilization within the local discourses of *phet* followed by the institution of a new, more complex and re-stabilized discursive formation, not in terms of the "borrowing" or unmediated reproduction of a Western-modeled discursive regime.

Strictly speaking, sexuality as conceived in Foucauldian terms has no history in Thailand, remaining discursively bound to gender and so conceptually inchoate. Yet it would be Eurocentric to ascribe to the West a "true" history of sexuality and to Thai discourses only a "prehistory," with the implication that Thailand's "prehistoric" or inchoate sexuality may one day emerge into the light of global discursive history. The lack of a categorical separation between gender and sexuality should not be seen as an "underdeveloped" discursive state. What we have here is a demarcation between different histories of the erotic, not of history *versus* a lack of history. Thai discourses of *phet* need to be understood as autonomous from Western understandings, which means that, in tracing their recent transformations, it is necessary to conceive of new gay identities in that country as being new genders (alongside man and woman) as much as new sexualities. The categories used in writing the history of gender/sex transformations in the West have emerged from internal studies of Western texts and critical reflection upon Western discourses. A similar approach needs to be adopted in writing the history of the erotic in Asian societies, developing analytical categories from studies of local texts and reflections upon indigenous discourses and practices rather than imposing Eurocentric notions in an *a priori* manner.

The culture-specific analyses of *History of Sexuality Volume 1,* or any other text of Western gay and lesbian historiography, cannot be

used as a universal template for understanding the proliferation of gender/sex diversity in Asia-simply remove the French or American examples and plug in "parallel" instances from Asia. A much more fundamental and laborious undertaking needs to be engaged in. Foucault provides a model for this task, not in his theoretical conclusions but in his careful attention to the details of transformation within a given society. In the case of Thailand, China, India, or any other Asian society, the most important insights will emerge from a similar attention to the subtleties of discourses of eroticism in each of those localities.

REIMAGINING INTERNATIONAL G/L/T COLLABORATION

This brief survey has considered some of the multiple levels at which an inquiry into the global proliferation of gender/sex diversity needs to be conducted. In seeking to understand the specificity of Asian g/l/t identities, the foundations of current Western gay/queer knowledges may need to be rethought. While the above critiques have emphasized the importance of acknowledging the difference of Asian g/l/t gender/sex formations, it should also be emphasized that this inquiry emerges from a practical interest in imagining international and cross-cultural collaboration. The investigation of Asian specificities should be conducted with the objective of facilitating cooperation, not in order to argue for the impossibility of working together across cultural and linguistic divides. It is the vital question of imagining the practice of international g/l/t collaboration that motivates Dennis Altman's inquiry into global queering such and which imbues his project with such relevance and immediacy. In the light of the above critiques, how is this collaboration to be imagined? A formulation is possible, but it should be emphasized that it is as tentative and subject to critical revision as all of the preceding analyses.

G/L/T peoples across the globe do not necessarily share a common genesis. However, what often is shared is a dynamic of resistance. G/L/T-identified people often see themselves-whether by choice or fate-as being in conflict with their own society's gender/sex ideology. This is as true in Bangkok or Mumbai as it is in Sydney or San Francisco. "Gay" may not always be associated with a Western-styled political movement, but it is almost always linked with resistance to local heteronormative discourses and institutions. Perhaps it is in the

rhetoric, style, and practice of resistance, rather than in any common origin, that "gay" assumes its global commonalities. Rather than inquiring into the past in order to search for historical sources of cross-cultural commonality, we should perhaps investigate how different g/l/t peoples imagine their respective futures. Historical critiques remain relevant, for they provide an essential corrective to the Eurocentric presumptions and imaginings which hinder Western subjects from appreciating Asian worlds in their own terms. However, instead of looking in the rear vision mirror to see from where different g/l/t people have all come, it is perhaps more productive to look at how the road ahead is envisioned.

In a recent conference paper, Australian historian of Japan Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1999) remarked on the similarities between minority indigenous communities in diverse contemporary societies. Despite the cultural differences between indigenous people in Australia, Japan, Taiwan, or the Americas, the common experience of marginalization, and at times cultural if not biological genocide, means that these diverse people are often engaged in very similar struggles for cultural or political autonomy. Morris-Suzuki remarked that at international conferences on indigenous rights these people often find that the common experience of marginalization provides them with a frame of reference, a common language of expression and a common political agenda. One can see parallels here with the situation of g/l/t people from diverse societies who are not united in any essential way, but whose common yet always different experience of being marginalized because of their perceived gender or erotic difference provides a basis of communication and a sense of common purpose.

However, to be effective in changing local conditions, g/l/t resistance must always be locally modulated. In one place, the dominant form of resistance may be street marches and agitation for law reform. In another place, the most important form of resistance may be avoiding arranged marriage. In yet other places, the most urgent form of gay activism may be articulated primarily through style as masculine resistance to effeminization, while lesbian activism may focus on public declarations and expressions which challenge the historical silencing of female desire. The local inflections of male, female, and transgender identities will differ as local forms of heteronormative power incite different modalities of resistance.

What emerges from the following studies is that there is no global

gay, lesbian, or queer subject, only locally constituted g/l/t subjects, who at times appropriate elements of a global idiom and style as strategies in their locally determined and locally directed resistances. Labels such as "gay" do not denote a common origin or even prefigure a single destiny. What gay does label is the possibility of resisting local gender/sex norms. It gives a name to the idea that things might be different, that people marginalized within dominant gender/sex regimes can talk back and carve out spaces by strategic acts of subversion. It is in the imagining of how things can be different at the local level that we find the source of the infectious excitement that surrounds the label "gay" in many Asian cultures. However, appropriation of the language of "gay," "lesbian," or "queer" does not mean that Asian g/l/t people have become who they are from hearing these words spoken. When Asian g/l/t people call themselves "gay," they are not necessarily expressing a wish to become American, Australian, or European. Rather, they are articulating a desire to become who they imagine they can be as Thai, Singaporean, Filipino, Indian, Taiwanese, Korean, and so on. To be able to aid rather than hinder the realization of these imagined Asian futures, Western g/l/t peoples must be able to participate in recovering histories that are not their own and to share in lives within which their own aspirations may be irrelevant. As Chris Berry says, "it is only by recognising the ways in which Asian lesbians and gays change what it means to be lesbian or gay, and what it means to be Asian, that Western gays and lesbians can participate in the global rights decisions so vital their lives . . . " (1994: 19).

NOTES

1. I follow Fran Martin and Chris Berry (1998) in the use of the shorthand expression "g/l/t" to refer to all homoerotic and transgender identities considered "different" from heteronormative masculinity and femininity.

2. See, for example, Neil Miller (1992), Dennis Altman (1995), Gerard Sullivan and Laurence Wai-Teng Leong (1995).

3. The expression "gender/sex" used here inverts the word order of Gayle Rubin's (1975, 1984) influential notion of "sex/gender system" in order to mark what I believe to be the continuing priority of gender over sexuality in Thai and other Southeast Asian identities. The inversion of Rubin's sequence of terms also signals my disagreement with the contention that gender and sexuality can be considered independent constructs that require distinctive theories and modes of inquiry (see Jackson 1999a).

4. The two other volumes related to the conference themes have already been

published. One deals with the intersection of ethnicity and homosexuality in Australia (Jackson & Sullivan 1999a) while the other deals with male and female homosexuality in contemporary Thailand (Jackson & Sullivan 1999b).

5. Thai "women who love women" avoid calling themselves "lesbian" because this term entered the language to describe female homosexual visual pornography produced for a heterosexual male audience. It is also understood as representing woman-centred relationships in overly sexualised terms, with many Thai women who love women preferring to imagine their relationships in emotional rather than explicitly erotic terms. (Source: private communication with Anjana Suvarnananda).

6. A similar process appears to have taken place in the Philippines and Indonesia, where established local terms such as *bakla* (northern Philippines), *bantut* (southern Philippines), *banci* (Java), and *waria* (Indonesia) continue to be used to denote transgender and transsexual identities while "gay" denotes masculine homoeroticism. However, the reception of "gay" has not been uniform across all Thai, or Filipino, g/l/t cultures. "Gay" is commonly identified with the transgender *kathoey* and *bakla*/*bantut*, respectively, in non-metropolitan and rural areas of both countries. Mark Johnson (1997), in writing of the southern Philippines, and Jan Willem de Lind van Wijngaarden (1999) and Prue Borthwick (1999), in writing of northern Thailand, describe local g/l/t cultures within which "gay" is appropriated to rather than being distinguished from established transgender categories.

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