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### The admonishment of vegetarian great aunt

*Reflections on sexual and gender multiplicity and culture*

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A black and white close-up portrait of Saskia Eleonora Wieringa. She has dark, wavy hair and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting her facial features against a dark background.

# The Admonishment of Vegetarian Great Aunt

*Reflections on Sexual and Gender  
Multiplicity and Culture*

A solid blue rectangular graphic element located in the bottom left corner of the cover.

Saskia Eleonora Wieringa

The Admonishment of Vegetarian  
Great Aunt

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# The Admonishment of Vegetarian Great Aunt

*Reflections on Sexual and Gender Multiplicity and Culture*

*Inaugural Lecture*

delivered on the appointment to the chair of  
Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations Cross-culturally  
at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences  
at the Universiteit van Amsterdam,  
because of the Stichting Lesbische en Homostudies  
on Friday April 20, 2007

by

Saskia Eleonora Wieringa

 VOSSIUSPERS UVA



*Dear Rector Magnificus, Dean, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am greatly honoured to stand today in front of you to deliver the inaugural address of the chair, 'Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations Cross-culturally'. To my knowledge it is the first chair worldwide on this topic. The University of Amsterdam and the Stichting Lesbische en Homostudies, have therefore pioneered in a new academic field. The location of this chair, in the department of sociology and anthropology, my own position as the director of the Amsterdam women's archive and library and the strong tradition of women's studies at the University of Amsterdam, indicate the contours of the field: cross disciplinary, fed by insights from anthropology, history and women's/gender studies.

Why a special chair on women's same-sex relations cross culturally? A number of arguments can be forwarded. In general the existing gay and lesbian studies programmes have been rather oriented towards the western world. They have also tended to focus more on men's same-sex relations than on women's, which present a different set not only of empirical but also of theoretical issues. In departments of history and anthropology, and in those of various area studies, such as Asian studies, individual research projects have been undertaken on the topic of this chair. However, theoretically these studies tended to be in dialogue with their direct colleagues in their field, rather than with other theoreticians on the topic of this chair. Also, sexuality has been a rather neglected topic in present day gender studies.<sup>1</sup> If sexuality is studied in the context of the south, those research projects were often motivated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, or, in an earlier phase, by demographic concerns. Anthropology has long been haunted by what Blackwood and I called 'Sapphic Shadows', the silence on women's same-sex relations, the colonial and postcolonial misrepresentations of the core elements of those relations, the denial of the erotic (Blackwood and Wieringa 1999a). Especially after World War II it was simply 'not done' for an anthropologist to study the topic.

So when I first met women who were living same-sex lives in Indonesia, in the late 1970s, I was both enchanted and startled. I soon started digging up older

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anthropological sources as well, while I continued meeting as many women in same-sex relations as I could, and documenting those meetings, while I travelled all over the globe on research and consultancy assignments on other topics. After some time I started writing about the women I met. Initially, as I could not yet find an academic voice, I wrote a fictionalized travelogue, entitled *Yours Sincerely Dora D.*, (1987). In it I reflected on my encounters with particularly b/f communities in Lima and Jakarta and with for instance the sisterhoods in Singapore, where I met the vegetarian great aunt of the title of this address. What started out as a tentative encounter, born out of a mutual need to meet 'like minded' others, has turned into a longitudinal research project and collaboration with the organizations they have set up in the meantime, such as the recently created Ardhanary Institute in Jakarta.<sup>2</sup>

This chair builds on the tremendous contributions that anthropologists, sociologists and historians such as Faderman (1980), Blackwood (1999), Kennedy and Davis (1993), Wekker (2006), Young (2002) and many others have made over the years. They and other pioneers have laid the foundations for this field of study. Now that this chair has been called into existence it has become imperative to begin to map out the dimensions of this field of studies What is its empirical basis? What are its theoretical and methodological ramifications? And equally relevant, what are its epistemological foundations? Lastly, are there any political lessons to be drawn from the study of what in many societies is considered the most abjected category of human beings? So what is the unique contribution that the study of gender and women's same-sex relations can bring to women's and gender studies, particularly women's anthropology and history and the social sciences in general? Due to reasons of space I introduce here only two case studies of women living in more or less institutionalized same-sex relations, the Chinese sisterhoods, and Bugis gender multiplicity. In my analysis I will also draw on other case studies, such as the African women marriages. and butch/fem (b/f) communities in Africa and Asia. I will then elaborate on some theoretical issues that arise from these cases. I will conclude by attempting to draw some political lessons, comparing Indonesia and the Netherlands on issues of gender and sexual multiplicity.



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### Chinese Anti-Marriage Sisterhoods

From around the middle of the nineteenth century so-called 'Orchid Societies' existed in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong (formerly spelt as Canton), a province in Southern China. Women who joined these anti-marriage associations were mostly silk workers. Due to their income they could afford to live independent lives.<sup>3</sup> The sisters vowed never to marry a man and instead engaged in relationships among themselves. The ceremonies in which they pledged loyalty to each other knew several elements that also took place in heterosexual marriages, such as the hairdressing ceremony. The vow of spinsterhood ensured that a sister's soul would be worshipped after her death and would not come back as a Hungry Ghost to bother the family of her birth.

They lived in pairs (as sworn sisters) or groups in spinsters' houses or in Taoist vegetarian halls or monasteries. Buddhism was an important inspiration, particularly the veneration of the androgynous deity Guan Yin (Topley 1975, Chafetz and Dworkin 1986). The depression of the 1920s affected the silk industry severely and many sisters went off to the cities to become domestic servants (Honig 1985, Sankar 1986). Up until the beginning of the 1980s I saw some of them, the black and white *amahs*, in Singapore (Wieringa 1987).

What allowed these women to choose a life on their own, in patriarchal China? First industrialization gave them the opportunity to earn an income. Secondly, Buddhism stimulated heterosexual chastity and purity. Also, the monasteries offered sisters a religious and political career as well as economic independence. Religion also offered a justification for sexual relationships among the women. It was sometimes said that if one had found one's true love, the partners would continue to search for each other after their deaths. In case both of them were reincarnated as women, their love would still thrive (Raymond 1986). Further of old women had their own cultural traditions, for instance in poetry and music. Unmarried girls would also sleep together and be educated in girls' houses (Topley 1975, Sankar 1986). Lastly, several commentators noted that the Taiping rebellion in which many women had taken the side of the rebels, had left a legacy of strong, militant womanhood (Croll 1978, Raymond 1986).<sup>4</sup>

After the Maoist victory the sisterhoods were branded as 'feudal remnants'. Many sisters ended up in the Chinese diaspora, and fled to Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Sankar 1986, Topley 1975). I encountered a vegetarian

sisterhood in Singapore in the early 1980s and struck up an acquaintance with the great aunt of a colleague of mine. This vegetarian great aunt, as I called her reverently, who was the abbess of the temple, was already in her eighties and had a long standing relationship with the abbess of a Guan Yin temple in Johore. The sisters had blended in with Singapore society, providing religious services to the neighbourhood. Vegetarian great aunt told me it was difficult to maintain their way of life, as unmarried (heterosexually unmarried that is) women couldn't get housing and were not allowed to adopt daughters. Daughters were prized, as they were supposed to carry on the tradition and to worship their vegetarian ancestors. Vegetarian great aunt encouraged me to keep the stories of women resisting heterosexual marriages alive (Wieringa 1987).

## Bugis gender multiplicity

Bugis society in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is recognized by a gender system that has five, rather than the usual two categories. The gender system comprises many elements; apart from biological sex these include spirituality, dress codes, occupation, sexuality, and subjectivity. The Bugis feel that though the body is a very important factor in gender identity, it is not the only factor. Bodies themselves are understood as being composed of various combinations of male and female. Thus being female, one does not necessarily have to become a woman (Graham 2004).

Bugis do not only recognize the male and female categories, but place three categories in between. They thus seem to illustrate very well what Grosz (1991) argues is a continuum between various sexual or gender categories. *Calalai* are female-bodied persons who in dress code, behavior, occupation and sexual orientation resemble males, *calabai* are male-bodied persons who in dress codes, behavior, occupation and sexual orientation resemble females. As elsewhere in Indonesia transgendered males such as the *calabai* also perform special functions for instance in wedding ceremonies. Bugis being Muslims, God also plays an important role in assigning one's destiny. *Calalai* and *calabai* identities are seen as originating from God's will.

There is also a fifth category, *bissu*. These are transgendered priests (both male-bodied and though rarer, female-bodied), whose combination of maleness and femaleness (sometimes also in a physical sense, in which they are intersexed per-

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sons) gives them the privileged position of being able to mediate between the spiritual world and the middle world on which humans dwell (Chabot 1950, Kroef 1954). Female-bodied *bissu* were highly respected, often came from royal families and performed all sorts of ceremonial duties, also in relation to armed conflicts (Blackwood 2005, quoting Andaya).

Interestingly modern developments strengthen the Bugis indigenous gender system. While in other parts of the archipelago the recent possibility of regional autonomy has led to a stronger emphasis on gender binarism and women's oppression, in a bid to stress their local identity vis à vis a supposedly secular national state, Bugis increasingly pride themselves on their own culture including the gender multiplicity they recognize.<sup>5</sup>

As Graham argues, the importance of particularly the *bissu* in wedding ceremonies and other rituals, their ability to mediate with the upper world, has ensured their survival in the period after independence when a great stress was put on a national unitary identity. So in Bugis society Islam and local customary law have been able to coexist. Many Bugis don't feel there is a contradiction between their own age old rituals and Islam. Although many old customs have disappeared or have been modified under the growing influence of Islam, the old nature gods are seen by some as 'Allah's helpers' (Graham 2004: 211). In Bugis society then, an acceptance of gender multiplicity rather than an enforcement of gender binarism, economic possibilities for the three intermediary gender categories (here the female bodied *calalai* have a harder time) and important ritual roles for particularly the *bissu* combine to form their unique gender system. Transgenderism is also an element in the Bugis origin myth, La Galigo and is related to military exploits.

### Abjected Women

What theoretical models are available to reflect on cases such as those delineated briefly above? The study of women in same-sex relations and of their communities is not only relevant in a narrow empirical way, but can also throw light on wider dimensions of both identity formation and subjectivity or of marginalization, what Butler (1990) following Kristeva referred to as the creation of the abject, the defiled non-other.

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The study of 'abjected' women, of those marginalized others that define the boundaries of a complacent heteronormativity, leads to analyses of individual strategies of survival, such as passing or closetedness, or the hiding behind 'female friendships' (Faderman, 1980, Everard 1994). An interesting line of analysis here is in which ways various categories of 'abjection' are interlinked. At present I am involved, with colleagues in India and Indonesia, in a comparative research and advocacy project in Jakarta and Delhi, on three categories of 'abjected' women, widows/divorced women, young urban lesbians and female sex workers.<sup>6</sup>

Empirical studies on cases of 'abjection' will document blatant rights abuses that are heaped on individual women or women couples in societies that prohibit or oppress such relations.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to reflect on several layers of silence, (which are at the same time meaningful speech acts, according to Foucault (1978)) that deal with the closetedness such societies impose. In a recent research project in Africa we found such silences for instance in Zimbabwe, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, where same-sex love was considered 'satanic' (Morgan and Wieringa 2005). The spectre of abjection is a strong deterrent to any who might wish to stray from the fold and speaks eloquently to the fear of gender and sexual diversity, of crossing the borders that have been so painstakingly erected and thus of the fragility of those borders. The punishments for living a life that is considered out of bounds, include (self-imposed) silence, various forms of violence, including suicide or murder, exclusion, stereotyping and medicalization.<sup>8</sup> This path of enquiry leads one to engage with issues of sexual rights and sexual citizenship. Debates which have a particular edge for female-bodied persons as they cannot count on the 'patriarchal dividend' male-bodied persons enjoy. Debates on sexual rights for women always have to take into account gender discrimination.

What is the interface with other feminist and anthropological theories as they pertain to women's same-sex experiences? Early feminist theories are dominated by the pervasive influence patriarchies were supposed to exercise over women's sexuality (Lerner 1986, Rubin 1975, Delphy 1984). Particularly Rich (1980) was a strong exponent of the transhistorical nature of women's sexual oppression. In her view women's history has been the history of compulsory heterosexuality. The radical feminist position that developed out of this assumption posited all sexuality as dangerous for women (Dworkin 1987). The study of women's same-sex institutionalised relations casts doubt on this transhistorical and cross-cultural nature of

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women's oppression by an 'always-already there' patriarchy and allows for the investigation of women's sexual and emotional agency, independence and pleasure.

Relatedly, the debates on the so-called women's 'romantic friendships' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Everard 1994, Faderman 1980), with Faderman arguing that these relationships were sexless, and Vicinus (1992), among others, questioning that, might be illuminated by reflections on for instance the Chinese sisters and the African women marriages. What is the importance and meaning of sexuality in a women's same-sex relation? Can we assume that these are unchanging? What other markers of identity and subjectivity might become salient at different moments in time and place?

Another relevant strand of feminist and lesbian theorizing is the debate on the 'medicalization' of homosexuality instigated by the early essentialist sexologists (Weeks 1981, Hekma 1987). Did they introduce a new category of human beings, whose behavior was no longer characterized by 'immoral choices' (and in the case of women this applied to male-identified women penetrating their women partners, for penetration was seen as a male prerogative) but who were seen as 'homosexuals', 'lesbians' or other 'perverts' whose 'innate characteristics' were responsible for their sorry condition? Was sexology in those years a 'science of desire or a technology of control', as Weeks (1985) phrased it?

The ensuing debates on identity versus behavior have been prominent in gay and lesbian anthropology as well (Lewin and Leap 2002). As Lewin (2002), rather unhistorically, argues, gay anthropology has tended to focus on behavior-based studies, delineating sexual practices in detail, while lesbian anthropology has paid more attention to gender asymmetries and to identities. This division of attention has harmed both fields. Feminist and lesbian anthropologists simply get richer data if they would pay more attention to sexual practices, as I argued elsewhere (Wieringa 2005b). Likewise gay anthropologists would do well to take the overall gender regime of the societies they work in into account. A more intense dialogue between lesbian and gay anthropologists might also lead to reflections on the different meanings of sexuality for male-bodied and female-bodied persons, and the implications on their identities and subjectivities.

## The Abject Comes Centre Stage

What happens when the abject comes centre stage? The above cases of institutionalized relations give rise to a different set of questions relating to the individual partners than can be asked when studying marginalized women. In the first place, what motivates female-bodied persons to take up this position in their societies? The answers will probably vary, for the social niches that these women's same-sex communities occupy differ considerably.

One can also ask how it is possible that certain societies know such a niche of women in same-sex relations, while in other societies women desiring other women are faced with extreme hatred and rejection? Actually the picture is more complex, as women's same-sex behavior falling outside of the accepted 'niches' might be severely punished as well. Other questions include: how do these communities keep together, how do they function internally, how are the identities and subjectivities of individuals belonging to such communities constituted? Related issues are how does one study those communities and the individuals that constitute them?<sup>9</sup> Several debates are interesting here, such as the one on essentialism versus constructivism and the various theories loosely labelled 'global queer studies'. I will focus on the latter<sup>10</sup>

## Essentialism Versus Constructivism?

Essentialist theories, particularly those associated with such early sexologists as Havelock Ellis and Krafft Ebbing, have become embedded in biological reductionism and are largely responsible for the medicalization of homosexuality, as indicated above (Weeks 1981). Their 'scientific' endorsement of female passivity and male aggression and their listing of so-called 'perversions' haunts the medical and psychiatric professions until now. Constructionism, with its emphasis on the historicity of sexual practices and subjectivities clearly is the more attractive option. Early anthropologists such as Mead (for instance 1928) helped to discredit medico-biological essentialism and to discuss sexuality as deeply embedded in societal structures of regulation and control.

However, the emphasis on the social led to a decline in the interest for bodily forms of sexuality. In Butler's (1990, 1993) early formulations on the performa-

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tivity of gender, the ‘materiality of the body’, that is sexuality itself, almost disappears. Thus, adherents of ‘strong constructivism’ (Vance 1989), such as Whitehead (1981) in her study of the ‘*berdache*’ fall into a cultural determinism, when individuals are seen to ‘choose’ to live the life of a *berdache* simply because such a social niche exists. Thus constructionism has made it possible to see the historicity of the body and sexuality, but this leaves open the question on how to discuss passion and desire and embodiment, as well as the origins of socio-sexual communities.

In an effort to address this issue, Foucault outlines what he calls the ‘practices of self’ in one of his later volumes of the History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure (1985), as I discussed elsewhere (Wieringa 1999).<sup>11</sup> They leave two major questions unanswered.<sup>12</sup> How come an individual ‘chooses’ a certain community which in many cases spells trouble (such as the b/f communities)? Secondly, how come certain societies institutionalize certain same-sex practices while in other societies similar behaviors may be punished severely?

In my view it is the study of the interplay between personal motivations and societal injunctions that is most fruitful here. For just as there is ‘no sexual desire outside of the cultural ontology that mediates between bodies and cultures, there is also no culture that is disembodied’ (Wieringa and Blackwood 1999: 16).

### Global Queer?

Global discourses have always impacted on sexuality. Colonial discourse in Africa and Asia for instance introduced homophobia. The orientalist discourse Said (1978) analysed was a highly sexualized discourse (see also Hyam 1992, Sinha 1995). At present the HIV/AIDS discourse, the human/women’s/sexual rights discourse and the global queer discourse are the major transnational discourses on sexuality. As I discussed elsewhere (2004) these discourses may become the latest form of sexual imperialism, as they generally take Anglo-American realities as their basis. Adherents of the global queer discourse tend to ignore local sexual cultures and posit a unilinear development, -from the West to the Rest, as Wekker (2006) argues. Authors like Adam etc who speak of ‘national imprints of a global movement’ (1999b 368) or Altman who posits ‘the apparent globalization of post-modern, gay identities’ (1996), assume that there is a process of ‘global queering’

going on in which behaviors and identities spread from Amsterdam, New York and Sydney to the (global) South. These authors seriously underestimate the persistence of local gender regimes. Their hegemonic discourse marginalizes non-western, non-urban settings.

Apart from its ethnocentrism the global queer discourse ignores the differences between the experiences of male-bodied and female-bodied persons in same-sex relations. Gender issues, women's economic deprivation and in general the 'patriarchal dividend' Connell (1995 and 2001) discusses cannot just simply be wished away. Elsewhere I criticize another element of this discourse, the assumption that a westernized romantic love culture is on the rise, following the democratization of love relationships (2005b).<sup>13</sup> I only need to refer here to the deeply romantic Ramayana, the Genji Monogatari (Heian Japan) or the East Javanese Panji tales to remind the audience that there was a deeply entrenched tradition of romantic literature in several countries before the French troubadours started singing about it. Yet global discourses do impact on women engaged in same-sex relations. However, rather than assuming that a blanket global queer culture springs up everywhere, it is more relevant to treat the women's same-sex communities discussed above as autonomous sexual cultures firmly rooted in local gender, or transgender regimes. In the present local-global encounters, via Internet or TV, both the local and the global become transformed. Concepts, or even practices may have different meanings in different settings.

## Translocal Comparisons

In the tradition of anthropologists like Margaret Mead, I will now attempt to draw some lessons from the study of communities of women in same-sex relations. The issue I address is societal intolerance for marginalized groups. In this case women in same-sex relations, but there is a correlation between all forms of cultural, societal intolerance.<sup>14</sup> Studying the specifics of one case can help reflecting on the cultural basis of intolerance in general from which other forms of intolerance, related to ethnicity and religion are fed.

My question here is then how it is possible that in some societies women's same-sex relations become intelligible, and can be institutionalized, while in other cases women with such rebellious desires are despised and marginalized? What can



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that teach us about accepting gender diversity and sexual multiplicity and maybe even cultural and religious diversity in general?

If we accept that both embodied desires and social embeddedness, both local and global forces are at work, is it possible to dig a bit deeper and interrogate the cultural and epistemological foundations on which woman's same-sex relations can be imagined or even be made intelligible in certain configurations? I tentatively propose here some epistemes of such cultural intelligibility, based on my reading of the above-mentioned women's same-sex communities. I suggest a number of factors are at work: the ability to accept different, even competing truth claims, an unstable belief in gender binarisms, the acceptance of women's economic, political and/or military roles (or the memory of those roles), and spiritual or religious belief systems that transcend gender binaries. A last point is a legal system that encompasses gender diversity and guarantees the rights of those who live in non-normative relations or of transgender persons.

### Indonesia and the Netherlands Compared

In the last part of this address I will compare two countries that I know best, Indonesia and the Netherlands, on the variables sketched above. The Netherlands seems to be much better suited to embrace gender and sexual diversity. Isn't the country known for its secular nature and its progressive legislation? Doesn't it pride itself on its tolerance? Doesn't it teach immigrants and even test their knowledge on these supposedly inalienable Dutch values? Indonesia on the other hand is the largest Muslim country in the world and it has a fundamentalist movement that seems to be growing in visibility and power. It is the site of home grown terrorist groups such as Jama'ah Islamiyah that committed gruesome atrocities, such as the Bali bomb attacks.<sup>15</sup> Superficially then, from a western perspective that associates Islam with intolerance and violence, the Netherlands seems to out-do Indonesia easily.

#### *1. Truth Claims*

The ability of a cultural construct to incorporate different truth claims is a critical aspect of tolerance for gender diversity. A truth claim in a particular cultural,

religious or spiritual context may be at odds with a truth claim in another (spiritual) setting. In certain cultural settings, religious or other social groups may or may not accept that other groups have different truth systems. If they don't accept the possibility of different truths existing side by side, they will tend to obliterate the 'false' truth. If they do they may still want to dominate the other truth but the need to destroy the other truth claim may not be felt so deeply. Fundamentalisms of all denominations typically battle against the 'false' views of their opponents, be they moderates in their own circles or members of other denominations. Sometimes the existence of multiple values for different groups in society may protect women living in same-sex relations in certain settings, while they may be marginalized in others. Marginalized persons may project a different truth to suit their various public or private performances. Their 'truth' is thus always provisional, conditional on circumstances. As Wijewardene (2007) analysed for Sri Lankan transgender female-bodied persons, these provisional truths become so many personal myths, to suit the occasion (family, landlord, NGO, lover). Though this strategy does not lead to greater tolerance for gender diversity in the wider society, it helps them to survive in hostile surroundings.

In Indonesia a variety of truth claims is an accepted axiom of social life. It is often considered more important not to hurt people's feelings or not to show one's displeasure than to be always 'honest'.<sup>16</sup> In the religious realm various forces are at work. In regions in which a tolerant Islam is practised, such as East Java or South Sulawesi, belief in an all-powerful Allah may co-exist with remnants of ancestor worship or the belief in particular Hindu or nature deities. In the mind of some Bugis for instance, if Allah wants to bless or punish the Bugis with a particular wind, the Bugis wind god may come to assist in this effort. Fundamentalist forces abhor these practices and have long attempted to purify Islam. The latest effort to do so is the recent wave of Arabization of Indonesian Islam, as exemplified by the fundamentalist PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Justice and Welfare Party).<sup>17</sup> The country remains committed to the slogan of its founding fathers, 'Unity in Diversity'. Indonesian religious tolerance and diversity is embattled but plurality is upheld by major sectors of the population, including the still-powerful armed forces.

The Netherlands has embarked on a search for its so-called Christian roots. The emphasis on communitarian values by the new cabinet, dominated by Christian parties, places these values squarely in the white heterosexual patriarchal family

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of the 1950s. The best example of such values I find described in Siebelink's brilliant novel *Knielen op een bed violen*.<sup>18</sup> In a revealing scene the wife of the born again Christian protagonist realizes that he has to feel sexually superior to her for their relationship not to deteriorate (2006: 271). Present day Dutch politics want to re-introduce the Christian patronizing attitude, which has often made it blind towards the realities of others. It is amazing for instance that Dutch society in general knows so little about Islam while it has associated for some 300 years with Indonesia.<sup>19</sup>

This belief in a unitary truth of the own group has not prevented a practical co-existence with other groups who fostered their own unilateral truth claims, in the Dutch model of pillarization (Stuurman1983). This has never meant the acceptance of alternatives to one's own truth but only served to strengthen the self-righteousness of the members of the own group. Though the various pillars existed side by side, they each existed within their own absolute truth claims. As Ghorashi (2006) brilliantly analysed, this resulted in 'categorical thinking', an indifference and closure towards others which ultimately undermines the possibility of a real encounter with a cultural, or, I add, a sexual other.

As Von der Dunk argues, the close relation between Christianity and the state has existed since the beginning of the Republic in the sixteenth century. Orthodox Protestantism was never just a personal belief, but a collective socio-cultural habitus. So that civilization itself, even among liberals, was seen as Christian (2006:13-4). According to Von der Dunk the Netherlands has remained a 'vicars' country' (domineeslandje) until in the 1960s secularization set in (2006:19). What this has meant for gender relations is analysed by Stuurman (1983) and Koenders (1996). For the 'vicars' finger' seemed to be particularly raised to warn against all manner of perversions and vice that might pop up in those areas of life considered critical for the confessional politicians, (heterosexual) family life, prostitution, (homo) sexuality, abortion, prostitution and so on). As in the orthodox protestant view human beings are naturally inclined to vice, the task of the state and the church is to educate people to eradicate vice, through instilling guilt. Sinners were taught to seek redemption, and if that didn't help sexual 'perverts', the state might help a little and resort for instance to castration.<sup>20</sup>

Indonesian Islamic fundamentalists are similarly inclined to make their influence felt upon the private life of their citizens. They seek to impose legal regulations rather than to internalize guilt feelings. Though intolerance increases in areas of

fundamentalist influence people take recourse to long-standing habits of avoiding confrontations with those who might not approve of their way of life.

## 2. *Unstable Gender Binarisms*

Deeply ingrained gender and other binarisms legitimate the various forms of collective hatreds a society may harbour. If we assume the diversity of human sexuality along many axes, it is imperative to interrogate the rigidity of gender binarism in any given society. To what extent are people with ambiguous, unstable gender identities accepted and respected? To what extent is it recognised, as the Bugis do, that there is a continuum of gendered behaviors and that all human beings have a mix of 'female' and 'male' characteristics?

In Indonesia there are mixed messages in this respect. On the one hand the dominant gender ideology is very rigid, with the *kodrat wanita*, women's code of conduct, imposed by laws and state and religious institutions, particularly since the New Order government of President Soeharto (Katjasungkana and Wieringa 2003, Wieringa 2002). Fundamentalist groups, both Islamic and Christian, enforce this code. Women's and sexual rights groups and liberal groups in general try to weaken this rigid morality. On the other hand Indonesia has a strong tradition of gender variance (Blackwood 2005, Boelstorff 2005, Wieringa 2005a).

In the Netherlands a different and in many ways contradictory movement can be noted. While Orthodox Protestantism historically naturalized sexual difference, leading to a very low tolerance for gender ambiguity or variance, the liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980 brought more openness. Though it has to be noted that the first phase of the 'new' lesbian movement, in line with the intolerant tradition in which it grew up, immediately ostracized the older community of women engaged in butch-femme relations (Wieringa 1999). Various authors (Everard 1994, Mak 1997, Van der Meer 1995) analysed the discourses and practices around 'passing' women (who might pose as soldiers), or of the partners in so-called 'women's friendships', and of the various waves of 'sodomy' trials in which also women were convicted. Passing of course is a practice of denial and deceit, born out of intolerance towards, not of acceptance of gender difference.

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### 3. Women's Political and Economic Empowerment

How do Indonesia and the Netherlands compare in relation to political and economic empowerment of women? If we ignore absolute levels of income and only look at the gender gap the following picture emerges:

#### Gender Gap between Indonesia and the Netherlands

Category	Indonesia	the Netherlands
Labour force Participation	0.60	0.77
Wage equality for similar work	0.79	0.65
Senior officials	0.20	0.35
Professional workers	0.72	0.92
Teachers at tertiary level	0.39	0.34
Professors*	16.5	9.9
Women in parliament	0.13	0.58
Women in ministerial Positions	0.12	0.56
Years with female head of state	0.07	0.00
Total score (World Economic Forum 2006)**	0.654	0.725

Source: World Economic Forum 2006

\* These are percentages. Source for Indonesia Unesco 2006, for the Netherlands- *Monitor Vrouwelijke Hoogleraren 2006*.

\*\* This is the score of the WEF only. The percentage of female professors is not included.

Looking at the above table it becomes apparent that as far as the socio-economic gender gap is concerned the two countries have almost equal scores. Indonesian women seem to have somewhat lower labour force participation. However the World Economic Forum Report uses the ILO data, which, as we discussed elsewhere, has serious biases (Charmes and Wieringa 2003). On the average Indonesian women have a comparatively higher income, related to Dutch women. This is most likely due to the fact that so many Dutch women combine paid work on a part time basis with care for their children.

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The Netherlands score higher on women in higher positions. The Netherlands scores notoriously low on the indicator percentage of female professors. Indonesia scores higher but still quite low, with 16.5%. As far as political power is concerned Indonesia scores much lower, while the Netherlands has never had a female head of state (apparently the World Economic Forum wasn't much impressed by Queen Beatrix). Indonesia saw president Megawati Sukarnoputri in office for a number of years, in spite of protestations from conservative Muslims that women shouldn't rule. In total in both countries the gender gap between women and men is considerable, for the above indicators. In the 2006 World Economic Forum report the Netherlands scores slightly higher, with 0.72, than Indonesia with its 0.65. The difference is small though, 0.07, and should be even smaller if the indicator on percentage of female professors would have been included and if the biases of the ILO data would have been corrected.

### *4. Transgender Elements in Religious or Spiritual Universe*

Christianity and Islam both know an originally transgendered God, who however for centuries has been portrayed as masculine and patriarchal.<sup>21</sup> The Netherlands hardly has any traces of a pre-Christian religious history that might broaden that perspective. The Dutch women's and lesbian movement are largely secular and have paid little attention to the potential of the critique of feminist theologians such as Catharina Halkes and Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes to this patriarchal interpretation of Christianity. The progressive oecumenical movement however supports gay and lesbian rights.

Indonesia has an important pre-Islamic culture, with great regional variations. We already discussed Bugis culture. Numerically more important is the influence of East Java, the home country of the influential NU (Nahdlatul Ulema, with its political party PKB, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, the Nation Awakening Party). East Java has a long history of transgender culture (Oetomo, 1996 and 2001) which has spiritual overtones.<sup>22</sup> It has also a strong Hindu heritage. Statues reminiscent of that heritage are found in Jakarta's National Museum. These include some magnificent Ardhanary statues, the transgendered god/dess (often seen as a combination of Shiva and Parvati). Traditional Indonesian Islam is strongly influenced by Sufi elements, which stress the bond between spiritual and physical love and in which the same-sex erotic poetry of for instance Rumi is quite influential.

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Indonesian Islam then, in its pluralistic form as exemplified by the NU and the PKB, is an all-embracing religion, supportive of cultural, religious and spiritual diversity. It cannot be said however to actively support women's same-sex communities, though it is more tolerant of male transgender identities. At the moment it is battling the fundamentalist forces as exemplified by the PKS, which is intolerant of gender diversity and advocates restrictive measures for women. Another troubling development is the recent drive of regional administrators to stress their Muslim credentials, which they find in intolerance of diversity and women's oppression (Wieringa 2006b; Noerdin e.a.2005).

### *5. Legal System*

The Netherlands is one of the first (and few, to date there are only five) countries that have promulgated equal marriage regulations for gay men and lesbian women.<sup>23</sup> However this doesn't mean an end to the discrimination of lesbian women and gay men. Just as with sexism and racism, open manifestations of homo- or lesbophobia are rare, but modern forms of homonegativity abound (Kuyper and Bakker 2006). The modern forms of homonegativity are more subtle and therefore more difficult to detect and resist. Internalization of these negative attitudes is likely and can lead to stress and a negative self-esteem (Sandfort 2005). Another issue is that Dutch law is based on a binary division of humanity and doesn't allow for gender multiplicity. For all purposes, such as identity cards, there is only the choice between male and female. There is no place for transgender people, who might like to fill in 'both', only if they resort to a lengthy process of sex change (and then become transsexuals, who can again be neatly categorized).

Indonesia's legal record is uneven. Since independence homosexuality has not been prohibited. Recently however some worrying developments can be noted. Several regions have introduced discriminatory laws (Noerdin a.o. 2005). In Aceh the introduction of sharia law was one of the negative side effects of the peace treaty. In some regions homosexuality has now become illegal, such as Palembang.<sup>24</sup> Present day Indonesia is characterized by two opposing forces. On the one hand the reformation period that started after the removal from office of Soeharto in 1998 has paved the way for a greater emphasis on human rights. On the other hand, Islamic fundamentalism, also suppressed during the Soeharto years, is gaining more ground. Apart from formal law, however, Indonesians from

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various ethnic groups also recognise customary regulations which, as seen above in the case of the Bugis, may incorporate gender diversity. A striking example of gender inclusiveness is provided by the capital of East Java, Surabaya. Male-bodied transgenders, called '*waria*', can put a 'w' on their identity document, instead of 'male'.<sup>25</sup> Female-bodied transgenders don't have that option.

### Conclusion

As far as the comparison between Indonesia and the Netherlands is concerned, here follows the score, on a 5- point scale of 0-4.<sup>26</sup>

#### Gender Diversity Scale

Issue	Indonesia	the Netherlands
Truth claims	2	1
Unstable gender binarism	2	1
Political and economic empowerment	2	2
Religion	2	1
Legal system	1	3
Total	9	8

The scale naturally has no predictive value. In both countries many intervening variables may occur to influence the future course of events. Also the numbers in themselves are not conclusive. Many refinements might be made. Yet a number of tentative conclusions can be drawn. The first is that both countries are below even half of the possible maximum score, which is twenty. The second is that both countries score differently. This indicates that measures to address issues of intolerance are lived differently and should be addressed differently. There is thus no single model that can be applied unilaterally to dismantle the categories that impose gender and other binarisms.

Indonesia scores low on law and should stem the tide of regional units imposing a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law in their bylaws. Holland must dig deeper and build cultural resources which break down the complacency of those who think that there is only one Dutch truth, that white Christians are the keepers of that truth, and that there are only two sexes and two genders. Thirdly, both



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countries should be serious about measures to bring women's economic and political position at par with the position men occupy. Lastly, the scale seems to indicate that Holland has a smaller cultural basis upon which the gay/lesbian and transgender movement can build its struggle for full equality. This is born out by the present Cabinet, which in a surprising move wants to go back to the fifties of the last century, and takes as its model that of the patriarchal white heterosexual nuclear family. On the other hand, Indonesia, which still has a very long way to go to achieve sexual rights for its minorities, has important own cultural resources to draw from. There seems to be no reason why Indonesia should turn to the west to find ammunition for its struggle for equal rights; its own legacy of gender diversity is promising. It should be preserved from attacks of fundamentalist Muslim groups who want to impose an Arabised version of Islam, which is alien to the much more tolerant and inclusive Indonesian Islam. And might Holland fall on dark times again, its own small cultural basis might soon get exhausted. In which case it might look to 'The Rest', possibly Indonesia, to draw inspiration from.

### Vote of Thanks

I will now proceed to the final part of this address, the vote of thanks to those who have made this day possible. In the first place I am indebted to the College van Bestuur for their support for this chair. The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dymph van den Boom, welcomed me warmly to the faculty. I am blessed with a brilliant curatorium, consisting of Walter Everaerd, who is also the chair of the Stichting Lesbische en Homostudies, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Frances Gouda. I am looking forward to cooperating with them, and with other colleagues, such as Peter van Rooden, and Niko Besnier, of the anthropological department, and the former and the present directors of the Amsterdam School for Social Research, Anita Hardon and John Grin, as well as Gert Hekma, Saskia Poldervaart and others.

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Ik heb gezegd.

## Notes

1. See Vance 1991 and Wieringa 1994.
2. See Pande (2004) for an account of Ardhanarishvara in India.
3. See Smedley (1976) for the economic aspects.
4. See Sang (2003) for a study on the making of the Chinese lesbian identity.
5. See Noerdin, Rahman, Laelasari and Aripurnami (2005) and Wieringa 2006b.
6. This project is funded by the Ford Foundation and Hivos. It is implemented in the framework of the Kartini network for women's studies and activism in Asia.
7. See for instances the collections of Reinfelder (1996) and Rosenbloom (1996). Amnesty International, ILGA (the International Gay and Lesbian Association) and IGLHRC (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) document human rights abuses against women and men engaging in same-sex behaviors or relations.
8. After homosexuality was removed in 1980 from the DSM-III (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) of the American Psychiatric Association, a related concept came in through the backdoor in the recent DSM-IV (Karasic and Drescher 2005). This concerns the concept of gender identity disorder (Zucker and Bradley 1995).
9. We already discussed these issues in Blackwood and Wieringa 1999a and in Wieringa 2005b.
10. I discussed these issues in more detail in Wieringa 2002 and 2004.
11. See also McNay 1992.
12. See for instance Wieringa 1999.
13. See for instance Featherstone, ed. (1999).
14. See for instance Morrison 2003 who demonstrates those who reject gay men and lesbian women are generally also racist and sexist. See for an overview of the literature on this topic Kuypers and Bakker (2006).
15. These attacks took place in 2002 and 2005. JL and the Mujahidin KOMPAK groups are allegedly also involved in the religious conflicts in Poso and the Maluku, in which thousands of people died. (*Jakarta Post* 8/2/07).
16. See also Berman (1998).
17. See Wieringa 2006b for an analysis of the gender aspects of Islamization in Indonesia. See Headley 2004 for a rich description of the co-existence of Islam and Hinduism in Central Java.
18. Siebelink 2006. 'Kneeling down on a bed of violets'. I am grateful for the contribution of Professor James Kennedy to this discussion.
19. This is not to deny the great Islamic scholars of the past, such as Snouck Hurgronje. See Kuitenbrouwer (2001) for the orientalist nature of much of Dutch scholarship in relation to its former colonies.

20. See also the ongoing work of Theo van der Meer.
21. See for instance Armstrong (1993) and Daly (1973).
22. For instance in Ponorogo the Reyog dance is performed by warok, who are older dancers and gemblakan, who are the sexual partners of the warok. Reyog has both a spiritual and martial arts origin.
23. In the Netherlands the law was passed on 1 April 2001. In Belgium, Spain, Canada and South Africa gay men and lesbian women can marry as well.
24. See *Jakarta Post* 3/10/06 'Sexual Minorities Protest Bylaws'. The article refers to a report by the gay/lesbian group Arus Pelangi that lists 28 recently promulgated bylaws that are discriminatory.
25. Waria comes from wanita-pria, woman – man.
26. I adopt the methodology here that I developed in a recent project on measuring the gender gap in Africa (Wieringa 2006a).

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