



A Coincidence of Desires: Anthropology, Queer Studies, Indonesia (e-Duke books scholarly collection.)

Tom Boellstorff

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In *A Coincidence of Desires*, Tom Boellstorff considers how interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropology and queer studies might enrich both fields. For more than a decade he has visited Indonesia, both as an anthropologist exploring gender and sexuality and as an activist involved in HIV prevention work. Drawing on these experiences, he provides several in-depth case studies, primarily concerning the lives of Indonesian men who term themselves *gay* (an Indonesian-language word that overlaps with, but does not correspond exactly to, the English word “gay”). These case studies put interdisciplinary research approaches into practice. They are preceded and followed by theoretical meditations on the most productive forms that collaborations between queer studies and anthropology might take. Boellstorff uses theories of time to ask how a model of “coincidence” might open up new possibilities for cooperation between the two disciplines. He also juxtaposes his own work with other scholars’ studies of Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore to compare queer sexualities across Southeast Asia. In doing so, he asks how comparison might be understood as a queer project and how queerness might be understood as comparative.

The case studies contained in *A Coincidence of Desires* speak to questions about the relation of sexualities to nationalism, religion, and globalization. They include an examination of zines published by *gay* Indonesians; an analysis of *bahasa gay*—a slang spoken by *gay* Indonesians that is increasingly appropriated in Indonesian popular culture; and an exploration of the place of *warias* (roughly, “male-to-female transvestites”) within Indonesian society. Boellstorff also considers the tension between Islam and sexuality in *gay* Indonesians’ lives and a series of incidents in which groups of men, identified with Islamic fundamentalism, violently attacked gatherings of *gay* men. Collectively, these studies insist on the primacy of empirical investigation to any queer studies project that wishes to speak to the specificities of lived experience.

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