

Playing Back the Nation: *Waria*, Indonesian Transvestites

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Thursday Nights at Taman Remaja

Taman Remaja Surabaya (Youth Park Surabaya) can be found on a downtown thoroughfare next to the Surabaya Mall.¹ It is night-time and the Mall is closed—a hulking, padlocked mass to my left as I pass a sea of motorcycles, *becak* (pedicabs), and buses pulling up at the curbside. Together with a couple thousand Surabayans, I plunk down 1,300 rupiah to pass under the glittering neon and white bulbs of Taman Remaja’s gates.² With its assortment of amusement rides—a Ferris wheel, bumper cars, a shooting gallery—to my Midwestern eyes this is a county fair that never left town. A sea of voices provides a constant backdrop; occasionally a single voice emerges from the cacophony—a generous laugh, a child’s wail, a shouted retort—then disappears into the noise. Every few minutes a low electric drone announces the approaching monorail, a cramped affair four feet wide and no longer than a car. It grinds uncomfortably along a red steel track only five feet above the ground; those leaning absent-mindedly against its pillars receive a good-natured tap from a neighbor and duck as the bright yellow beast crawls overhead. Beyond the monorail’s track, encircling the rides, is a wide stage fitted out with all manner of colored lights and glittering disco balls, looking out over a seating area with row upon row of wooden benches. Behind the benches lay some public toilets. To the right of the stage, a permanent sign about two meters high by three meters wide: “*Waria* Night with Live Band, Thursday Nights.”

The band has been playing, warming up before the promised performance; by 8:30 p.m. the seating area is jammed. Perhaps eighty percent of the audience is made up of men between fifteen and thirty years old; flip-flop plastic sandals and well-worn clothes mark their blue-collar, low-income status. Cleared of benches, the first twenty yards in front of the stage are occupied by these men, smoking and conversing with each other. On the benches behind they are interspersed with better-dressed husbands and wives, young children perched on laps or chasing each other

down the aisles. There are about thirty warias in the audience; some sit at the benches in small groups, but most gather next to the stage. *Waria*, a combination of the terms *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man), can be roughly translated as “male transvestite.”

Now the first singer, a woman, appears before the audience. Many of the single men in front of the stage begin to dance with each other, both feet on the ground, swaying slowly and sensually to the music, laughing and comparing moves, or swinging their hips and rubbing arms to chests with closed eyes, hypnotically, as if alone in a small room. A few warias dance in a corner by themselves or in pairs with a man. The female singer is followed by a male emcee, who announces that three door prizes will be given out before the main part of the show. “This first prize is especially for women [*cewek*]. I’m looking for a woman who’s from outside Surabaya.” Two or three women rush the stage; the first to make it up the stairs proudly presents her identity card (KTP or *Kartu Tanda Penduduk*) to the emcee, who scans it with a flourish before handing her a prize. The woman descends the stage with a brightly wrapped box as the emcee shouts “the next question is especially for men [*cowok*]. I’m looking for a man whose name begins with ‘R.’” Several men dash up the stairs; the first to reach the emcee presents his KTP and, identity confirmed, receives the requisite gift. Then the emcee says: “this last question is especially for warias. I’m looking for a waria whose hair is braided.” An elegantly dressed waria with braided hair is first to reach the emcee—no identity card requested in this case—and accepts the prize. Now the emcee retires and the band starts up again, this time with a waria singer resplendent in red sequins and high heels, and the audience begins an evening of dancing and relaxing to waria voices.

Introduction

While the Thursday night waria show at Taman Remaja is one of the better-known showcases for warias in eastern Java (e.g., Plummer and Porter 1997:43-45), warias are salient

members of contemporary Indonesian society more generally. Better known as *banci* or *béncong*, these male transvestites are visible in daily life—above all in salon work, which includes bridal makeup—to a vastly greater degree than Indonesians who identify as *gay* or *lesbi*. (I italicize these to underscore that they are Indonesian terms, not identical to the English terms “lesbian” and “gay,” and do the same for the Indonesian term *normal*, which is not identical to English “normal”). Warias are also far more visible than female-to-male transgendered Indonesians (usually known as *tomboi* or *hunter*; see Blackwood 1998). However, despite this visibility (and the general visibility of male transgenderism in Southeast Asia (e.g. Jackson 1997, Johnson 1997)), warias have received little attention in the scholarly literature. This article, part of a larger project on non-normative genders and sexualities in Indonesia, represents one step towards a more sustained exploration of waria life. Like much anthropological writing, which tacks between the universal and particular (Geertz 1983:68), I use ethnographic material on warias to reflect on Euro-American theoretical debates. This bringing together of theory and ethnography is of particular importance given that the study of transgenderism, like lesbian/gay studies in anthropology, “has not been immune to the documentary impulse that brushes aside theory in the rush for ‘facts,’ or to a tendency to reify and idealize ‘traditional’ forms of homosexuality in nonindustrial societies” (Weston 1993:340). This “ethnographic” impulse—which, extending Weston, also includes a tendency to reify and idealize transgenderism (see also Towle and Morgan 2002)—hides how the division between theory and ethnography is illusory, since description always takes place within the horizon of some set of theoretical assumptions, and theorization always takes place within the horizon of some set of phenomenon construed as data.

Following this introduction, I provide material concerning the history of the waria subject position and the contemporary waria subjectivities. In place of the concept of “identity,” I distinguish between subject positions—socially recognized categories of selfhood that extend beyond and between individual lives—and subjectivities, the specific ways individuals inhabit a

subject position, and that always exceed and transform the subject position's logic even while powerfully shaped by that logic. This material draws from ethnographic work (participant observation, interviewing, HIV prevention activism, and other activities) with warias in three primary urban fieldsites (Surabaya; Makassar, South Sulawesi; and southern Bali) and several additional urban and rural fieldsites.³

Obviously, within the scope of a single article I cannot present a comprehensive portrait of warias in even one of my fieldsites, or to delve into every dimension of these Indonesians' rich and diverse lives. In place of such broad goals I focus my analysis rhetorically and theoretically. Rhetorically, I often use vignettes that, based on my research as a whole, exemplify some aspect of waria life. Theoretically, I center my analysis upon two key areas in which the "tendency to reify and idealize 'traditional' forms of transgenderism" has been particularly strong. The first of these is the nation. Despite the fact that persons like warias live in postcolonial nation-states, the "tendency to reify and idealize" often leads to analyses that frame them in terms of locality, tradition, and ritual. This analysis will illustrate how warias emphasize a sense of belonging to (and exclusion from) national society and popular culture, not locality or tradition. As noted below, this is probably linked to the history of the subject position, but in this article I explore how a linkage between the waria subject position and national belonging plays out in contemporary waria life. This is foreshadowed in what might appear to be an insignificant exception: why was the waria with braided hair who climbed the stage at Taman Remaja not asked to show an identity card?

A second consequence of the "tendency to reify and idealize 'traditional' forms of transgenderism" has been the construal of the waria subject position as a "third gender." While there are subject positions in various parts of the world that could arguably be seen as "third genders," I (and others) argue that the "third gender" concept is often over-employed and poorly defined. Within the scope of this article, I will show how warias are not a "third gender," but a

male femininity. This issue is foreshadowed by, of all things, Taman Remaja's toilets. There are two toilets there, not three, and since at least 1992 the sign (first hand-painted, now illuminated) on one side of these toilets reads "WANITA" (women), while the sign on the other side reads "PRIA/WARIA" (men/waria). Why are warias grouped with men rather than women and not given a third toilet, since such a public toilet would not be expensive to build? My analysis will show how the concept of "waria" operates within the orbit of "man." This parallels Rosalind Morris' interpretation of Thai *kathoey* male-to-female transgendered subjectivity as a "feminized maleness" which "has been contained within" and "has indeed been the containment of" maleness (Morris 1997:62).

The ultimate contribution of this article, however, lies not just in analyzing the national character of the waria subject position, or its status as a male femininity, but in its linking of these. Indeed, the position of warias as feminine males is informed by, and in turn shapes, their sense of partial belonging to national society. Drawing a term from waria performance, I will call this the *playback* of authenticity. This is a question of recognition.

Definitions and Histories

While any English gloss for waria falls short, I prefer "male transvestites" to "male transgenders" for theoretical reasons I explore later.⁴ This poses a problem regarding pronouns, since Indonesian (like most Austronesian languages) uses a single term (in this case, *dia*) for third-person singular reference (English "she," "he," and "it"). In discussing tomboi, Blackwood uses the term "hir" as an effective compromise (Blackwood 1998). Such choices are difficult; novel coinages like "hir" circumvent the automatic gendering of "he" or "she," but connote an exoticism that may not do justice to the social position of the persons being described. Following Blackwood

I will employ a coined pronoun: the compromise I use is “s/he,” because it connotes an imbrication of male and feminine. For possessive and indirect reference I will use “her/his.”

Three sources of confusion concerning warias stem from the rich terminological and sexual landscape in which they live. The first concerns the relationship between the term *waria* and the most common day-to-day term for these persons, *banci*; its *gay* language variant *béncong* has entered vernacular Indonesian as well.⁵ But since *banci* can also mean “effeminate male,” it can sometimes distinguish men from warias; one can say “I saw a man who was very effeminate, a *banci* not a *waria*.”⁶ For this reason, and due to the derisive tone with which it is typically deployed, many warias find *banci* offensive. The preferred term *waria* originates not in tradition but government dictate. The first non-derogatory term for *banci* appears to have been *wadam*; its appearance in the 1960s was linked to the greater social visibility and protection given to warias in Jakarta (Indonesia’s capital) under the activist mayoral leadership of Adi Sadikin, the former Major-General whom Sukarno appointed as mayor of Jakarta in 1966 and whose progressive policies throughout his eleven-year tenure transformed the metropolis. *Wadam* is usually explained to be a contraction of *WAnita* (woman) and *aDAM*.⁷ By the mid-1970s some Muslim groups were expressing displeasure that the name of a prophet was incorporated into a term for male transvestites. To settle this problem the Minister of Religion at the time, Alamsyah, coined the term *waria*, a decision apparently supported by Soeharto, the former authoritarian president, and made official when published in the newspaper *Kompas* on June 7, 1978 (Budiman 1982:1).

A second source of misunderstanding originates in the many terms for *waria* linked to “ethnolocality,” the presumed conjunction of place and ethnicity (Boellstorff 2002). These include *keci* (Javanese and Balinese, but also found in Sulawesi), *kawe-kawe* (Makassarese, but also Buginese (Millar 1989:83)), *wandu* (Javanese, but also found in Sulawesi) and *calabai* (Buginese, but also found in Kalimantan, possibly due to Bugis migration).⁸ I have never been able to establish any consistent differences between persons who identify themselves through these

various terms (and who all appear to use *waria* and *banci* in some contexts). For instance, in Sulawesi not only *warias* but others (including *gay* men) say that *kawe-kawe* and *calabai'* are local terms for *waria* in the same way *pete-pete* is the local term for *bemo* (“minibus”). One Bugis *waria* explained “I’m called *calabai'* with family... usually we say *calabai'* based on ethnicity [*biasanya mengatakan calabai berdasarkan sukunya*] but it means the same thing as *banci*. For instance, I’m a Bugis; I might say ‘that’s a *calabai'*.’ If I were Makassarese, I might say *kawe-kawe*.” When I asked “is *kawe-kawe* the same thing as *calabai'*?”, s/he replied “The same! *Calabai'*, *kawe-kawe*, *béncong*, *waria*, *banci*, they’re all the same... They’re only terms [*cuma sekedar istilah*].” Malinowski’s observation concerning Trobriand lexicon remains relevant more generally:

Though important as a clue to native ideas, the knowledge of terminology is not a miraculous short-cut into the native’s mind. As a matter of fact, there exist many salient and important features of Trobriand sociology and social psychology, which are not covered by any term, whereas their language distinguishes sub-divisions and subtleties which are quite irrelevant with regard to actual conditions (Malinowski 1922:176-7).

A third source of misunderstanding is that in many parts of Indonesia there have been (and sometimes still are) what I will provisionally call *ethnolocalized professional homosexual and transvestite subject positions* or ETPs. I use this acronym to avoid terming these “traditional” or “indigenous” homosexualities or transgenderisms, which would assume ahead of time which kinds of sexualities are authentic in contemporary Indonesia. With ETPs, homosexuality or transgenderism is secondary to a restricted ritual or artistic activity; they are first and foremost professions, not sexual or gendered subject positions. You are not born into them or even “become” them in a developmental sense; you learn them through apprenticeship. The *waria* subject position is not an ETP (though, for instance, *warias* can become *bissu* with proper

training). The two best-known of these are probably *bissu* transvestite ritual officials in southern Sulawesi and *warok* actors in the Ponorogo region of eastern Java, who sometimes have homosexual relationships with their understudies (known as *gemblak*).⁹

The history of the waria subject position is a topic unto itself, and since this article focuses on contemporary waria subjectivities, I provide only a summary here.¹⁰ While ETPs have varying histories, it is clear that many have existed for hundreds of years. It appears that *gay* took form as a widely (if imperfectly) known subject position quite recently, between the 1960s and early 1980s, a decade or two later than in some other Southeast Asian nations like Thailand (Boellstorff 1999; Jackson 1999). The *lesbi* subject position appears to have a similar time frame but became a topic of public debate as early as 1980, earlier than the case of *gay*. In the case of the waria subject position we find little historical material. I know of no records of waria being associated with ritual practices and to my knowledge they do not appear in the sacred texts associated with those practices. Nor is there much colonial documentation on any form of transgenderism or homosexuality during the 350-year Dutch period. This underscores how Dutch civil law, derived from the Napoleonic Code, paid little attention to (and rarely prosecuted) sodomy.¹¹ It also reflects how heterosexual miscegenation dominated colonial thinking on sex and race, since it was understood to undermine the racial logic upon which the colonial project depended (Stoler 1995). Stoler notes that her own “silence on this issue and the prominent place I give to heterosexuality reflects my long-term and failed efforts to identify any sources that do more than assume or obliquely allude to this ‘evil,’ thereby making the other ‘lesser’ evils of concubinage and prostitution acceptable” (96).

Thus, while ETPs like *warok* and *bissu* appear in travelers’ accounts and local histories as early as the fourteenth century (Andaya 2000:39; Pelras 1996:166; Wilson 1999), from information currently available it appears that the waria subject position has a recognizable

continuity going back to the early 1800s. Around this time there begin to appear scattered references to effeminate men in coastal trading centers (and some rural contexts); these persons are linked not to ritual but petty commodity trading, lowbrow entertainment, and sex work. Work along the lines of contemporary salon work (making up women, especially brides, but also cutting men's hair) does not appear to have been significant at the time. Accounts of persons occupying this subject position (the earliest name for which appears to be *banci*) agree they were male-bodied but dressed in an effeminate manner—not necessarily all of the time, but frequently enough that casual visitors would notice them. This may reflect the extreme importance placed on sartorial practices as an index of status by the colonial regime (Nordholt 1998).¹²

From the beginning *warias* do not appear to have been seen as limited to any one ethnic group or locality. By the 1830s the “Bantji Batavia” (literally, “Batavian Transvestite”) could be interpreted as “a typical manifestation of Batavian [Jakarta] popular culture. It was exclusively Batavian (though similar to the Surabaya *ludrug* [Surabaya *ludruk*]) and was thought to be of Balinese origin. It was performed by young men clothed as women, sometimes wearing Western dresses, with long white hose and an ankle ring” (Milone 1967:472). In 1855, the Dutch lexicographer Rooda van Eysinga listed *banci* with *pâpaq* and *roebia* as “local, Malaysian terms alongside the Arabic *chontza* for ‘hermaphrodite’” (Bleys 1995:179). Newspaper accounts from Batavia (now Jakarta) indicate that some districts were known “as the haunts of *banci* (transvestites), whose origin in Batavia seems to go back to the late nineteenth century” (Abeyasekera 1987:92,127). In 1937 Miguel Covarrubias, the Mexican intellectual and cartoonist whose book *Island of Bali* helped popularize Bali as a tourist destination, noted that:

There are in Bali curious individuals called *bentji*, interpreted by the Balinese as “hermaphrodites”—a condition which is characteristic of gods, but bad and ridiculous among humans. The *bentji* are men who are abnormally asexual from birth (impotent,

according to the Balinese), who act and dress like women and perform the work of women. In Den Pasar there was one of these pitiable creatures, a man who dressed like a girl and talked in falsetto, selling goods at a public stand in the main street. It was a great joke of the village boys to sit by the bentji and make him offers of marriage. He answered coyly and even seemed to enjoy the puns. (Covarrubias 1937:144)

Covarrubias' rendition emphasizes commodification in its focus on dress, speech and bodily comportment, and its evocation of the market. The fact that *banci* appears as a "local" Batavian term in 1830, a "local" Malay term in 1855, and a "local" Balinese term in 1937 suggests that despite the tendency of observers to ethnoculturalize *warias* (note Covarrubias' language of "gods" with reference to predominantly Hindu Bali), the subject position had a broader scope from its beginnings.¹³

While the historical record is too incomplete to permit a definitive account, it thus appears that a male transvestite subject position bearing some apparent continuity with the contemporary *waria* subject position appears to have coalesced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the context of the colonial encounter. Male-to-female transgendered subject positions arose in many parts of the world during this period; in Peter Drucker's analysis, such a "commodified transgender" sexuality:

resembled traditional, kinship-based transgenderal sexuality [i.e., ETPs] in that it involved certain people taking on social roles and characteristics of another gender. But it differed from any traditional transgenderal sexuality in that it was largely urban, largely detached from rather than integrated into traditional kinship networks, more or less associated with prostitution for money rather than any kind of socially sanctioned marriage, and at odds with instead of sanctioned by the dominant religion. This type of

sexuality put down deep roots in Latin America. Aspects of it seem to have been taken on by indigenous Southeast Asian transgenderal sexualities [ETPs]. (Drucker 1996:77)

It may be, therefore, that colonialism created social conditions enabling the rise of certain kinds of male-to-female transgenderism, including male transvestism, that were not founded in ritual, ethnicity, locality, or tradition. This hypothesis does not imply that the waria subject position is a foreign import; there is a longstanding pattern of incorporating “foreign” cultural logics in the archipelago, including conceptions of what Indonesians now term “*normal*” sexuality (Boellstorff 2003a). In any case, by the 1960s, warias had become well-known for their presence in markets and as sex workers, as well as their roles in lowbrow performing arts. The best-known example of this is the Javanese dramatic genre known as ludruk, the classic study of which was undertaken by James Peacock in 1962 and 1963 (Peacock 1968). While “[s]ome say that stage shows called ludruk existed as far back as Java’s thirteenth-century Majapahit empire,” Peacock notes that the first recorded performance of ludruk dates from 1822 and included “transvestite performers” (29).¹⁴ This is the period in which the waria subject position appeared (compare with Milone above). While never using the term *banci* (perhaps because of its derogatory tone) it is clear that Peacock’s performers were transvestite offstage.¹⁵

The lives of warias in Peacock’s 1960s Surabaya do not appear markedly different from those of Covarrubias’ Bali or Hirschfeld’s Batavia of the 1930s, or those of the earliest known accounts of warias in the 1830s. However, this changed between the late 1950s and late 1960s. Strains within the new nation, particularly around Islam, led to a new marginalization of warias. Some warias associate this period of intolerance with places where Muhammadiyah (a modernist Muslim organization) had a strong following. This was exacerbated by the mass violence around the birth of Soeharto’s New Order, which does not appear to have been directed at warias

(compare Wieringa 1999), but did lead to a virtual abandonment of the public and market spaces where warias found community and employment.

From historical materials and oral history research, it appears that one of the biggest shifts in the waria subject position was in the mid-1960s to early 1980s (depending on locale, with the key period 1965-1970). It appears to be at this point that the majority of warias shifted from wearing women's clothes only in certain contexts like performances or nighttime sex work to wearing women's clothing all of the time. It also appears to be at this point that salon work started to become the prototypical waria employment. While warias are usually known as such even while wearing men's clothing (and typically retain effeminate mannerisms while wearing men's clothing), this shift seems to have made the existence of warias as part of the social fabric impossible to ignore. Certainly some warias dressed as women most of the time prior to the 1960s, as evidenced by oral history informants and also Peacock's observation that in the early 1960s ludruk troupes felt it necessary "in the name of 'progress' to clean up the transvestite's sexual image... it is considered *madju* [progress-oriented] for *ludruk* female impersonators to confine their feminine role to the ludruk stage" (Peacock 1968:206). But several warias in Surabaya confirm the following observation by Eddy, an older *gay* man, who recalled that in earlier times:

There were no bancis wearing dresses. None at all. They weren't brave enough to do that back then... that began around 1980. Before that there were bancis, but only in the ludruk dramas.¹⁶ During the day they'd be normal; then at night they'd work as a woman. But it was certain those people were bancis. They weren't wearing women's clothes twenty-four hours a day, but they were effeminate all the time in the way they walked and carried themselves.

The new visibility of the waria subject position seems to have coincided with the coming to power of Soeharto's "New Order" government in the late 1960s, which coupled authoritarian rule and developmentalist economics. This shift probably began in the cities of Jakarta and Medan (in Sumatra), spreading throughout the archipelago by the late 1970s.

Becoming Waria: Childhood Dreams and Adult Transformations

For those visiting Indonesia since the 1980s, the social salience of warias seems utterly different from the Western situation. While rosy fantasies of tolerance are overstated, waria is now an important cultural category. Even educated, urban Indonesians are not always familiar with the terms *gay* or *lesbi*, but *everyone* knows what *banci* means.¹⁷ If you were Indonesian, you would expect to find warias in salons, and might assume a waria would apply makeup for your daughter on her wedding day. Some tailors and shopkeepers in your neighborhood would probably be warias, and at night you would see warias looking for men near the town square. Warias occasionally "pass" as women to co-workers in a salon, or even to sex work clients (hiding their penis between their legs if the client wishes to penetrate them anally). Warias themselves, however, see such cases as exceptional: typically the social others with whom a waria interacts at home, in the neighborhood, on the street, and at work know s/he is waria and not wanita, a woman, yet accept her/him as a member of the community. Representations of warias appear on television sitcoms and advertisements—in the year 2000 a nationally-played commercial for Bayer Aspirin featured an apparent waria—as well as news reports in the print media.¹⁸

Since the waria subject position is both widely known and visibly embodied, the process of occupying it involves from the outset the reactions and commentary of social others. While there are occasional cases of Indonesians becoming waria later in life, most warias think of themselves as such by their early teens, and in some cases as young as five years old. In this they differ from

gay men, who according to my research typically begin to identify as *gay* in their late teens to early twenties. Sexuality (specifically, a “homosexual” desire for men) is not central to waria subjectivity (as it is for *gay* subjectivity); almost all warias come to see themselves as waria while children and do not recall an attraction to men as key to this early development.¹⁹

The first and most absolute condition of the waria subject position is that only males, it is assumed, can occupy it. You cannot become waria if you are seen to be born with a vagina, and despite misconceptions on the part of the Indonesian public, few warias are intersexed. All narratives of waria selfhood of which I am aware are thus driven by movement away from normative masculinity. Most warias engage in gender-atypical play as children. One waria recalled that “the signs [*tanda*] of my waria-ness [*kewariaan*] have been visible since I was a child. Usually, boys who are going to become normal ride bicycles, play tag. I was different [*beda*]; I hung out with the girls and played jumprope, played with dolls.” Some warias see these activities as formative and speculate they would not have become waria had their parents forbidden them. Others believe gender play only reveals that they have had “the soul of a woman since birth,” as one waria put it. Such an interpretation is common among warias who grew up in environments where gender play was actively discouraged.

This environment of gender play is shaped by the fact that in contemporary Indonesia “male” and “female” tend to be strongly dichotomized, despite the fact that historically many cultures of the archipelago have downplayed gender difference and understood the male-female binary in complementary rather than opposed terms (Errington 1990; Hoskins 1998:17). A naturalized gender dualism in Indonesia is the product not only of “world religions” like Christianity and Islam, but national discourse, as in the case of most nation-states (Yuval-Davis 1997) and particularly postcolonial nation-states (Chatterjee 1993). The clearly delineated male and female toilets at Taman Remaja thus reflect not an eternal gendered binary but rhetorics of the modern Indonesian nation-state (e.g., Anderson 1996; Sen 1998; Suryakusuma 1996).

“Modern” clothing in Indonesia, for instance, is usually much more gender-specific than “traditional” forms of dress; such clear semiotic regimes provide the raw material waria rework and redeploy.

While warias are generally known to contemporary Indonesian society, this does not mean that families welcome a waria member. Ita, who was from the island of Lombok but lived in Makassar for the last fourteen years of her/his life, recalled that:

In my village there aren't warias; they don't understand about warias. There, even though our movements may be effeminate, we cannot dress up like women. We can become banci,²⁰ but we cannot use makeup, wear women's clothes, or have long hair... I think so much about my family and the fact that they don't accept me. It's a great load upon my thinking... My name is not spoken there.

Ita's tale is by no means unique: many warias are not accepted by their families. Warias as children have been beaten until they bled, have been held under water by their fathers until they have almost drowned, or have had an older brother stick their finger into a light socket. Estrangement from the family sometimes continues through adulthood, as in Ita's case. Others are accepted to some extent by their families. One waria recalled how “when I was small I got very sick. My mother prayed: ‘what does my child have to become in order to live?’ I survived and this was the result, and for that reason she accepts me.” Many warias are acknowledged as such while small children, particularly by mothers but often fathers, siblings, and neighbors as well. Others reach understanding with their families when they are in their teens: “I explained that if I die and am reborn, I will still be a banci.” Warias sometimes bring waria friends home “so my parents would know that it's not just me who's like this,” or a male partner (the acceptance of whom is usually seen as a definitive acknowledgment of their waria status). Belonging and recognition are

important: The goal of these efforts is to be accepted (*diterima*) by the family, just as warias also hope to be diterima by society.

By adulthood most warias have a clear sense that they are unalterably waria for the rest of their lives. Occasionally a waria's family will suggest (or insist) they marry a woman, but families usually release waria from this imperative. For by adulthood, to occupy the waria subject position is seen to encompass sexuality as well as gender: warias, it is expected (on the part of waria themselves and on the part of other Indonesians), have sex with men. However, while the desire of *gay* men for other men (*gay* or not) is usually understood in terms of "desiring the same" and could thus be more or less accurately translated as "homosexuality," warias' desire for men (and men's desire for warias) is understood most often as the reciprocal desire of femininity and masculinity; that is, as heterosexual desire.

While many warias struggle with a sense of sin, by adulthood most have made some kind of peace with their religious beliefs. When my waria interlocutors speak of sin they tend to speak of things warias do (particularly promiscuity and sex work) rather than the state of being waria itself. Warias have formed both Christian prayer organizations and Muslim prayer rooms or *musala* where they wear women's garments (*mukenah*) while at prayer.²¹ Some Muslim warias have made the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) as men, others as women (as many as nine times) without the knowledge of their fellow pilgrims.²² Speaking to one such waria, I asked "does God think of you as man, woman, or waria?" S/he answered "God thinks of me as a waria, not a woman or a man. To be waria is my fate [*pasrah*]." In the context of the all-powerful nature of God, many warias take their inability to change as evidence that God wishes them to be waria. While the quotation above seems to imply an understanding of the waria subject position as a third gender, when warias wrestle with the question of sin, they typically conclude not that God created three genders, but that they were created with a feminine soul. Thus one waria believed s/he was sinful "because there are only two kinds of people, men and women," but concluded that "warias are

born as a man with the character (*sifat*) of a woman, and character is something given by God. We are lying to ourselves if we do not live as waria. God has written the script, and we are just the artists.” Or as one waria explained in an editorial: “in my opinion, Allah has not created two kinds of person [*insan*] but two feelings [*perasaan*], those of a man and of a woman. For if one says Allah created two kinds of person, man and woman, that what kind of creation am I? There’s a third creation?”²³

Indeed, to only be interested in women’s clothes or activities is not usually seen as sufficient to make one waria; at some point, usually while a child but sometimes in the teenage years, warias come to know that they have the soul (*jiwa*) of a woman. To bring the body into alignment with the soul by wearing women’s clothes, makeup, and so on) is a source of pleasure for warias. While warias do sometimes fool people into thinking they are women, theirs is not a phenomenology of passing. The goal is not to “pass” but to look like a waria. This is one sense in which one could arguably speak of waria as a “third gender” subject position. Despite usually dressing as a woman and feeling they have the soul of a woman, most warias think of themselves as warias (not women) all of their lives, even in the rather rare cases where they obtain sex change operations (see below). One reason third-gender language seems inappropriate, however, is that to the extent warias think of themselves as waria, they see themselves as originating from the category “man” and as, in some sense, always men: “I am an *asli* [authentic] man,” one waria noted. “If I were to go on the haj [pilgrimage to Mecca], I would dress as a man because I was born a man. If I pray, I wipe off my makeup;” to emphasize the point s/he pantomimed wiping off makeup, as if waria-ness were contained therein. Another waria summed things up by saying “I was born a man, and when I die I will be buried as a man, because that’s what I am.”

When I began learning of these two understandings of what makes someone waria, I suspected that the sense of having a woman’s soul was more central. This reflects the dominant Western conceit that both gender and sexuality originate as internal essences that must be

confessed to ever greater spheres of life to be authentic and valid (Foucault 1978; Segdwick 1991). This ontology of the closet draws heavily from a Christian metaphysics construing the transient body as secondary to the everlasting soul. It is not, however, the ontology of waria subjectivity, and there appear to be both diachronic and synchronic reasons for this.

Diachronically, for warias looking like a woman may be becoming more important, and having a woman's soul may be becoming less important, compared to prior decades. Should this prove to be the case—should the waria subject position emphasize “confessing” an interior state less and less—this would run counter to the stereotype that globalizing processes create greater sameness. Synchronically, waria do not always assume that soul makes one wear women's clothes; the causality can be seen to work in the other direction or to be mutually constituting, an assumption that reflects widespread views in the region: “although in English we may speak of a ‘well-balanced personality,’ we have no expectation that that fortunate person will have good posture; but in [much of Indonesia]... balance or centeredness is taken literally” (Errington 1989:76-7).

Such an assumption about inter and outer states might explain why it is that amongst warias there is no consensus as to whether looking like a woman or having a woman's soul is causally prior. Some warias see external practices as manifestations of an internal state: one explained that “it is the soul that pushes us to wear women's clothes,” while another stated that “to dress in women's clothes is just to perfect our appearance: our soul is ninety percent of the matter.” Others, however, see the soul as shaped by external practices: warias sometimes claim they were “infected” (*ketularan*) because of wearing women's clothes for entertainment. What is significant is that the waria subject position is not founded in a sexual orientation: warias usually assume their desire for men flows causally from a prior mismatching of soul and body.²⁴ As a language of *homoseks* and *heteroseks* becomes better known in Indonesia, many warias regard themselves as heterosexual, not homosexual. Their feminine souls and bodily presentations mean

that while male-waria sex is understood abstractly as a kind of homosex, it is clearly distinguishable from sex “between two men.”

By adulthood most warias have identified as such for many years, and typically—in contrast to *gay* men—they have also been identified by their social interlocutors. Women’s clothing, makeup, and hairstyling are the important external markers of contemporary adult waria subjectivity, though a few warias dress as men during the day or while on public transport, and some mix articles of women’s and men’s clothing. This clothing is usually the modern Indonesian style (for instance, jeans and a “Western” women’s shirt) but can also be “traditional” women’s clothing, especially on formal occasions. In terms of bodily comportment, warias stress moving (*gerak-gerik*) “like women” when walking, gesturing, lifting objects, sitting down, or dancing. The goal is a refined, coy, slow grace—to be *halus*.²⁵ In terms of speech, the ideal is a high, melodious tone and rhythm, at a soft volume. Non-waria Indonesians interviewing warias for news stories typically comment on their subjects’ ability to appear feminine: how the waria in question “is as beautiful as a woman” or “speaks exactly like a woman.” This is a performative sense of gender as something that must be achieved and re-achieved; that is, iterated (Butler 1990). It is this association of warias with ongoing transformation that makes them seen as ideally suited to work in salons, where they can transform others.²⁶ Later I return to this crucial fact—the thing that makes one distinct as a waria when you do it to yourself is the same thing that, when you do it to others, leads to your being recognized as member of society.

However, warias do not equate being feminine with being female—they distinguish *wanita* (female) from how they usually refer to themselves, *gaya wanita* or *kewanitaan* (roughly, “in the style of a woman”). Indeed, waria subjectivity is marked not so much by the wholesale adoption of feminine forms as by the mixing of men’s and women’s styles, just as warias amalgamate a woman’s soul to a man’s body, or the term waria amalgamates “male” and “female.” Warias can incorporate typically masculine forms of bodily comportment and speech when the

occasion demands—a joke, a perceived slight, a sex work client who refuses to pay, a threatening situation in public, or a jealous confrontation. *Warias* are often said to be stronger than men and capable of extremely rude speech and obscene gestures. *Gay* men frequently observe that *warias* can be more “man” than themselves. As one *gay* man put it in a conversation with some street youth asking about *warias*, “you can’t push them around too much. If you get them mad, their maleness comes out [*keluar*] and they’ll beat up the person who’s threatening them.” Suranti, a *waria* living in Bali, was highly successful in her performance of femininity, fooling sex work clients into thinking s/he was female by keeping her/his penis hidden between her/his legs. In everyday interaction, however—ranging from an afternoon tea break to a formal meeting at an AIDS organization—s/he would often comment “it’s so hot today!” or “I have such a hard-on” and lackadaisically lift her/his dress, revealing an erect penis. An American expatriate friend once commented “Suranti never wants anyone to forget she’s a man.” But while Suranti never explained her/his unusual behavior (which most *warias* would deem inappropriate), it seems s/he was reminding those around her/him not that s/he was male, but that s/he was *waria*.

Categorized with clothing (as an undo-able body modification that one undergoes on a daily basis) are the activities known as “putting on makeup,” which includes things like shaving one’s legs or styling one’s hair. The term for all this is *dandan*, often referred to as *déndong* through the same transformation (associated with *gay* language) that turns *banci* into *béncong*. An example: one evening I visited a *waria* who operated a salon from the front room of her/his small house. Vera, who worked and lived at the salon, was beginning to *déndong* with a third *waria*, Sita, who like many *warias* had grown her/his hair and fingernails long. Vera led me to the living room where we joined Sita, along with a young boy and an older married man who lived nearby. We engaged in small talk while Vera, sitting on the floor, shaved her/his legs and then plucked her/his eyebrows and chin with a tweezers and small hand-held mirror. After bathing, s/he continued her/his preparations with Sita in a little bedroom in the back of the house. Vera’s

makeup began with lotion over her/his arms, legs, and face, followed by a liquid foundation, then a regular foundation, then rouge, lipstick, eyebrow pencil, and eye shadow. Sita began by smearing small amounts of lipstick all over her/his face to give it a pink look, followed by foundation. Then Vera put on a stuffed bra, a pink long skirt and a matching pink sweater. Sita put on an orange pastel dress with shoulder straps. During this process people walked in and out of the room, exchanging comments with Vera and Sita. At one point, I asked the older man “have you ever dressed up as a woman?” and he replied “no, I’m a man.” I added “then what is Vera?” Vera—back to shaving her/his legs—deadpanned without even looking up: “I’m a *cewok*.”²⁷ We laughed at the clever turn of phrase, combining *cewek* (woman) and *cowok* (man), paralleling the combination of *wanita* and *pria* in *waria* (and my terms s/he and her/his).

Warias and non-warias alike expect that a man who identifies as waria will *déndong*, and conversely that a man who *déndong*s on a daily basis is waria. *Gay* men, it is true, will occasionally *déndong* for entertainment, but not for sex, since their subjectivity is framed in terms of “desiring the same.” Those few *gay* men who *déndong* to obtain male partners talk about themselves as crossing the boundary from *gay* to waria; it is possible to cross this boundary because both *gay* and waria are forms of maleness. I have never heard of a waria becoming a tomboi, or a tomboi becoming a *gay* man, or a *lesbi* woman becoming waria.

Gay déndong includes the kinds of transformations undergone by Vera. For most warias, however, bodily modification also includes more permanent alterations such as silicone injection and sex-change operations. Significantly, I have never heard modifications like these called *déndong*; they are, in fact, more optional than *déndong* (you can be waria without injections, but if you never wear women’s clothes you will not be viewed as waria). There are three main types of permanent body modification; while I know of no survey research that could provide a definitive distribution of these procedures, the most common appears to be consuming massive doses of female hormones in birth control pill (or injection) form. Rita has large breasts of which s/he is

very proud: “when I was around fourteen years old and decided I wanted to change [*merubah*], I took three birth control pills at once, four times a day. Now I just take two a day.” For warias the goal of hormone therapy is to grow breasts and achieve an overall bodily softness (*lembut*), in contrast to the rigidity (*kaku*) associated with masculine bodies. The second kind of body modification is injecting silicone.²⁸ The injections are often performed by untrained “experts,” often waria themselves, charging as little as 30,000 rupiah in 1998 (about four dollars at the time). A number of health problems have arisen from injections that move under the skin or become infected; silicone has thus become increasingly controversial. It is theoretically possible to have regular plastic surgery to obtain results similar to those sought through silicone, but due to cost this seems to be rare.

The final kind of body modification is undergone by warias who have sex-change operations that remove the penis and testicles and replace them with labia (more rarely, with a complete vagina). However, while these operations have been available for almost thirty years, few warias have them.²⁹ These procedures are also beyond the financial horizon of many warias.³⁰ The relative lack of warias who undergo sex-change operations, however, cannot be explained in financial terms. The pilgrimage to Mecca, for instance, costs about four times as much as a sex change operation, yet some warias perform the pilgrimage or pay for a family member to participate. A second reason warias do not have sex-change operations is the fear of a loss of sensation. Third, warias do not have sex-change operations because they see themselves as, on some level, men. As a waria in Makassar put it, “that thing has a function for me.” I have heard warias speak of a waria who has undergone a sex-change operation as “becoming a woman” (*jadi perempuan*), and in the media post-operative warias are described as considering themselves women.³¹ But from my ethnographic work and that of others, it seems clear that such persons are still considered warias socially, even if they can become women in a legal sense.³² Unlike some transgender subjectivities (e.g., hijras in India, see Cohen 1995; Nanda 1990), genital alteration is

not central to being waria: it is as a male femininity that warias understand themselves and their place in Indonesian society.

Sex and Romance with Men

A dichotomy prevails in the Indonesian public's perception of waria sexuality. On one hand is what Oetomo sums up as the belief that warias "are sexually impotent and/or have abnormally small or even shriveled genitals" (Oetomo 1996:261). Other Indonesians (including warias themselves) believe warias normally have sex with men rather than women or other warias.³³ Waria sexuality has long been linked to money, and indeed many (but by no means all) warias engage in some form of sex work. This can range from an occasional "date" supplementing wage labor to a sole source of income. Beyond financial benefits, warias say they enjoy sex work for its variable hours, thrill, camaraderie between waria sex workers, and the sex itself. However, sex work is not always a preferred occupation and many of those involved have additional sources of income. Sex work is usually a low-paying job, ranging from fifty cents to as little as five cents per act. In many places local waria groups try to regulate sex work, requiring, for instance, that warias wishing to solicit in a certain area have an identity card provided by the organization. In the sex work market, warias are in competition with female sex workers; even though these women have usually been coerced into sex work to some degree, in comparison with waria they are better organized (often officially registered) and work out of brothels with private rooms and other conveniences, ensuring privacy for their clients. Waria also compete with male sex workers; in some cities (e.g., Makassar) these men sometimes have small brothels. Being forced to solicit and engage in sex acts in public places like parks and roadsides places warias at risk not only of social opprobrium but physical violence at the hands of disgruntled or drunk clients, or even random passersby. The most common clients of warias are unmarried and unemployed men, often

still in secondary school, some as young as thirteen or fourteen years old. Older clients of warias are usually unemployed or in low-paying occupations like driving pedicabs that put them in frequent contact with warias. A final reason for sex work being unattractive is the risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Waria sex workers who contract sexually transmitted infections find it difficult to obtain treatment, due to its cost and an unwillingness to be examined by a doctor who might make fun of them.

The most common practice during sex work is receptive oral sex, i.e., the waria taking the man's penis into her mouth. Anal receptive sex (the waria taking the man's penis into her anus) is also common and sometimes carried out in public locations (usually behind a bush or tarp). Some men ask to suck the waria's penis. But men also ask warias to penetrate them anally. I can illustrate this with a story from "Renon," an undeveloped field the size of a city block near the Governor's office in Denpasar (mentioned by Covarrubias above as "Den Pasar"). The ground at Renon is swampy and overgrown with weeds, save a few dirt paths traversing its expanse. During my fieldwork there in 1998, warias would hang out alongside these paths as men passed by on motorcycle or foot. Man and waria would meet, an agreement made, and sex would usually take place right in the grass.

Many warias visited Donna's house in the afternoons before heading off to Renon. Donna was well-liked by other warias in Denpasar; while not all of the waria who visited her worked at Renon, her home was popular because of its location only a few hundred yards from the field. With cement walls, two small rooms, and a color television set, the house was a step above what most warias could afford on their own. Tina came to Donna's house often because s/he worked many nights in Renon. One afternoon, I was talking to Tina and a few other warias at Donna's house. The conversation turned to sex and I asked Tina if her/his clients ever ask to be anally penetrated. S/he replied "oh yes, the majority of them want that. It usually just happens right there in the field, behind a bush or something." Since s/he was one of the few warias at Renon to

have had a sex-change operation, Tina carried a dildo with her/him so that s/he could service men who asked to be penetrated: “I bought the dildo when I was in Jakarta once.” Donna had been listening to our conversation: “Oh yes, lots of men want me to screw them up the ass, even the schoolkids. So I have to do it. Because they’re real men, not *gay*, and if you don’t do their bidding and penetrate them they’ll be shamed [*malu*].”

These cases are not necessarily typical: Indonesian men do not usually publicly express a desire to be anally penetrated, and such penetration is often described as effeminizing. What interests me here is that I have never heard a waria question a man’s masculinity simply because of a desire to be anally penetrated. And as the example above indicates, such desires do exist (as they do on the part of “normal” men in other parts of the world; see Kulick 1998). On occasion such desires are even vocalized: While I have not been able to interview “*normal*” men who desire to be anally penetrated, I have seen men in small groups approach a waria sex worker, and one man then openly negotiate fees to be anally penetrated. Should a man consistently wish for warias to penetrate him, gossip about his masculinity might ensue; the relevant point is that soul and bodily presentation secure gender in Indonesia, including what is termed “*normal*” manhood, as much as sex acts do. This contrasts with many parts of the world (even other parts of Southeast Asia) where, under what is often termed an “active/passive” logic, to be anally penetrated is the “Moment of Truth” that immediately and fundamentally compromises masculinity.³⁴ In Indonesia, the waria subject position is a male femininity marked not by lacking a penis or receptive sexual practices, but by 1) having a woman’s soul in a man’s body, 2) being a man (or rarely, an intersexed person) with a feminine social presentation, 3) or both. A central reason warias rarely have sex-change operations, then, is that “*normal*” men expect them to possess penises, and “shame” (*malu*), a salient cultural keyword across Indonesia (Boellstorff 2003d), inheres not in being anally penetrated, but in having one’s request to be anally penetrated turned down.

While most *gay* men marry women and see this as a key element of their lives, marriage with women is usually incompatible with waria subjectivity; it is seen as the result of familial pressure or a strong desire to have children. As one waria in Makassar put it, “everyone agrees that if someone doesn’t want to get married, that means that they’re 100% banci.” Instead of heterosexual marriage, most warias seek romance in the form of a long-term boyfriend (*pacar*) or “husband” (*suami*), who typically identify as “*normal*” and are accepted by their waria partners as such. While these relationships are not formalized, they are often recognized by the social others with whom they interact, and are in all likelihood as old as the subject position itself.³⁵ For warias with an unmarried boyfriend, a major concern is retaining the boyfriend in the face of potential marriage to a woman. Since most warias assume that all men eventually marry women (and often feel this is best for them), the goal is often to avoid being broken-hearted by finding a way to sustain the relationship after marriage, with or without the wife’s knowledge.³⁶ Sometimes a waria and her/his partner live together as a conjugal couple and the man rejects heterosexual marriage altogether. Even though warias are rarely confused with women, their gender presentation is such that their male partners are sometimes supported in their decision not to marry heterosexually by their families. Neighbors usually accept the presence of such a couple in their midst. Sometimes the waria and male partner raise children, adopted or from either party’s previous marriage to a woman.

Waria in National Society

The relationships between warias and their boyfriends illustrate not only important moments of romance, affection, and sex, but a linkage between the waria subject position and Indonesian society more generally—what *gay* men and warias term “general society” (*masyarakat umum*) or the “normal world” (*dunia normal*). To better understand waria subjectivities, it is

therefore necessary to place the lives of warias in the context of the postcolonial nation-state.

Warias and their social interlocutors do not see warias as exclusive to Balinese culture or Javanese culture or Ambonese culture; warias are seen to be (and see themselves as) elements of national culture. Since warias can be found in rural areas, this is not simply due to association with an “emerging metropolitan superculture” (H. Geertz 1963); its national spatial scale draws from the same colonial boundaries and social dynamics to which the postcolonial nation-state is heir.³⁷

It appears that from the time of the first formalized waria groups in the 1970s, such groups were understood to be in conversation with national culture, not tradition (*adat*). In 1972, Jakarta mayor Ali Sadikin supported the creation of the waria association *Himpunan Wadam* [later Waria] *Jakarta*” (Abeyasekere 1987:231). Its name recalls *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (*perhimpunan* is a variant of *himpunan*), the first anticolonial organization to use “Indonesia” in its name: its “stress on the Indonesian nation and its promotion of a national, as opposed to a regional, identity, were of lasting importance” (Ingleson 1975:71). In justifying his support, Sadikin spoke in terms of national belonging, not the preservation of tradition: “I feel responsible for everything that happens to my citizens... I saw that this group was not regarded as having a right to exist. They were ostracized by society... We must see them as humans, as citizens of this city, as citizens of this country” (Atmojo 1996:18). Sadikin’s phrasing closely reflects how my waria informants in the 1990s and 2000s have spoken of wishing to be “accepted by general society” (the phrase often used is *diterima oleh masyarakat umum*), and I suspect he was voicing a viewpoint shared by the warias of *Himpunan Wadam Jakarta* themselves. Warias are now familiar figures in the political sphere, though they do not hold political office themselves: they perform at party rallies and even express preferences for candidates.³⁸ Warias in Makassar recall how in 1999 a local *bupati* (district official) sponsored a waria beauty contest, where he told those gathered that “society must accept warias, because ninety percent of all salon people are warias”—and the audience clapped in response.³⁹ The acknowledgment of warias even extends to official circles. For instance, some

waria in East Java have successfully lobbied the provincial government for a special “male (waria)” designation on their identity cards (Oetomo 1996:266), a formulation recalling the toilets at Taman Remaja.

Warias’ understanding of their history often reflects a national imaginary. One of the clearest statements of this in my fieldwork came from Tri, a Bugis waria living in Makassar who had spent time in the Soppeng and Bone regions of South Sulawesi and was familiar with the (mostly waria) persons in the area who were reviving the bissu ritual subject position (see Graham n.d.). When I asked Tri how warias in different parts of Indonesia were similar or different, s/he explained they were “branches off a single tree” rooted in Bugis culture. Tri maintained that bissu had been scattered across Indonesia because of a war and had forgotten their magic.⁴⁰ This “tree” metaphor seems to reflect widespread Austronesian conceptions of relationality, but like the use of the banyan tree image by Golkar, the political party of former President Soeharto, it receives an national twist. When I asked “were any warias scattered to Malaysia or the Philippines?”, Tri hesitated: “I don’t know, because I have never been to those places.” But while Tri had never been to parts of Indonesia beyond Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and Bali, her/his imagined community extended confidently to the limits of the nation.

Many warias engage in performances, and indeed the subject position has long been linked to performance. In the postcolonial period these performances have often been construed in terms of national belonging. For instance, while warias have been performing in ludruk theater since at least the 1920s, after independence in 1945 warias became increasingly linked to the national so that by the early 1960s “the transvestite singer is the only ludruk performer who regularly and directly exhorts an audience to be *madju* [progress-oriented] and loyal to the nation... He [sic] beseeches “all ethnic groups” to be united... The transvestite addresses a system, the Nation” (Peacock 1968:208-9).

The theme of national belonging remains important to warias on and off stage. Warias will spontaneously ruminate on their place in society (rather than solely the family or their immediate social environs) and interpret daily events such as catcalls from a neighbor or the organizing of a successful waria beauty pageant as indicators of a shifting state of being accepted (*diterima*) by society. At such beauty pageants, earnest waria contestants call for societal acceptance in much the same way that Miss America contestants are parodied as calling for peace on earth. Warias in all three of my major fieldsites and throughout Indonesia have made recognition a key desire, one that links everyday belonging with national belonging.

I recall arriving one night at the salon of Marina, a leader in Makassar's waria community: we were to attend the wedding celebration of the brother of one of Marina's waria staff. The salon was a buzz of activity as warias put finishing touches on their outfits. Marina was splendid in a traditional-looking outfit with batik skirt (*kebaya*), lacy blouse, and cloth thrown over her shoulders; she explained the outfit was not Makassarese but mixed (*campuran*). We headed to the north side of town where the wedding celebration was underway—a typical affair in which a tarp on tall bamboo posts forms an impromptu ceiling over a neighborhood street cordoned off and filled with hundreds of guests. After the obligatory greeting of the bride and groom we made our way towards the stage at the far end of the street where a band played. The area was filled with warias and *gay* men: family members, neighbors, and well-wishers sat on the periphery. Like myself and the other guests, the *gay* men present were spectators as the warias—from across Makassar and also many regions of southern Sulawesi: Pangerang, Sidrang, even distant Pare-Pare—checked the makeup and dresses of their friends (and themselves) with intense care. By about eleven o'clock the bride and groom had departed and it was time for the presentation of waria awards based on voting earlier in the evening. The award for “most unique [*unik*] waria” went to a waria with a glittering silver outfit and short blond hair. There were awards for most beautiful waria, “waria *nostalgia/legenda*” (older waria), and many others. All these awards were announced

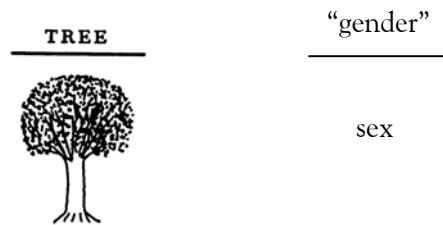
by two warias, one of whom, Endi, wanted to be sure the audience understood the good deeds (*prestasi*) of waria. “Long Live Waria!”, s/he cried. “Waria are now being accepted by society because of all of their good works, especially in the fields of beauty and fashion. This shows that our heroes [*pahlawan*] are not just men and women, but warias. In this era of reform [*era reformasi*] there should be a place for warias, because warias have organizations and do good things in society.”

Waria, Authenticity, and Playback

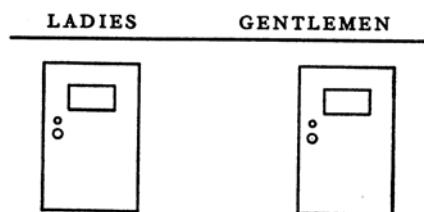
In moments like these warias talk explicitly about belonging to national—not local—society. In this concluding section, I explore the underlying cultural logics that shape both the gendering of warias and their included-but-marginalized place in the nation.

At the toilets of Taman Remaja, warias are grouped with men. I have indicated at several points in this article that while in some regards one could arguably describe the waria subject position as a third gender,⁴¹ the designation seems inappropriate overall, and it is not clear what “gender” would mean in such an expression. The term makes waria appear equidistant from male and female, eliding the fact that warias begin life as men and tend to see themselves as feminine men throughout their lives. A growing number of scholars have difficulty with claims that the “third gender” concept “questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis” (Garber 1992:9-13). Such scholars disagree with Garber’s assertion that the concept “function[s] in an inherently critical manner” (Morris 1997:92), noting how it actually “tends to stabilize” conceptions of male and female (Halberstam 1998:261). It does so “by suggesting that individuals who do not fit the male-female binary fall outside it and transcend it, rather than disturb it, blur it, or reconfigure it... [t]hird-gender language leaves the traditional male-female binary intact” (Kulick 1998:230; see also Towle and Morgan 2002; Weston 2002). It also has romanticizing effects: for instance,

while used in speaking of Native American transgenderisms (“berdache”) or transgenderisms outside the “West,” discussions in dominant United States culture rarely describe sissies, tomboys, and drag queens as third genders. While third-gender language might appear to disrupt the isomorphism between gender and sex (three or more genders can’t be slotted into what are assumed to be two sexes), it can only do so by treating “gender” as the signifier of “sex” in the same way that Saussure’s famous illustration of the semiotic function pairs an image of a tree with the word “tree” (de Saussure 1959:67; this version of the image is taken from Lacan 1977:151):



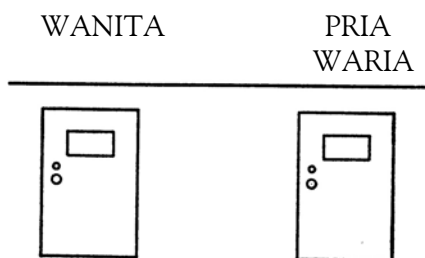
Of course, Saussure stressed that signs gain meaning in relationship to other signs. Lacan illustrated this point through what he termed “urinary segregation,” contrasting Saussure’s tree image with a pair of toilets (Lacan 1977:151):



Here male and female gain meaning not through reference to physicality (toilet doors need not use images of genitalia to convey meaning like Saussure’s tree image does), but in relation to each other, sign to sign. Lacan saw this not only as an illustration of semiosis, but as a foundational moment in human subjectivity: “Any speaking being whatever is inscribed on one side or the other... These are the only possible [two] definitions of the share called man, or else

woman, for anyone who finds themselves in the position of inhabiting language” (Lacan 1985:150).

As many scholars and activists of transgenderism have noted, Lacan’s illustration recalls a very concrete “bathroom problem” for persons who deviate from gender norms, one that “illustrates in remarkably clear ways the flourishing existence of gender binarism despite rumors of its demise” (Halberstam 1998:22). It illustrates that to date, even the most radical conceptions of transgenderism, no matter how MTF (“male-to-female”) or FTM, retain F and M in some fashion. This is one factor making “third gender” language so unfocused, proscriptive (calling for transcending binarisms) rather than reflecting any actual system of gendered meaning, and ultimately rehabilitative of gender binarism. There is no a priori reason that a third, fourth, or nth gender could not exist, but I find more theoretically compelling the “flourishing existence” of the male-female binarism—and above all the popular assumption that this binarism is, by definition and independent of any real-world context, limiting and oppressive (rather than asking under what circumstances it is oppressive, the various ways such oppressions operate, and under what circumstances it is not oppressive at all). The toilets at Taman Remaja differ from Lacan’s image:



As before, on one side “ladies” (*wanita*) and on the other “gentlemen” (*pria*). But here, below *pria*, is that government-invented but now everyday term *waria*—a term combining “ladies” and “gentlemen,” but categorized under only one of them. *Waria* appears not as a third term, but

part of a secondary binarism within maleness, just like the “male (waria)” identity cards that were issued for a time in East Java. This exemplifies how “the same axes that divide and distinguish male from female (and indeed rank male over female) also cross-cut the gender categories, producing internal distinctions and gradations within them” (Ortner and Whitehead 1981:9).

Speaking of identity cards: why was the waria who climbed the stage at Taman Remaja not asked to show one? It cannot simply be that warias can be identified by sight alone, since this is typically true for Indonesian men and women as well. While “male (waria)” identity cards were issued for a time in East Java, most warias carry identity cards marking them as male, and even a “male (waria)” identity card makes warias a subtype of male. Both the identity card and the toilet signs are signifiers; what do they signify? That answer is simple: they signify “waria.” But more importantly, what is the ontology of this “waria” that is signified; what is its status of existence? This is the issue that unites the two key questions under discussion: 1) the gendering of warias, and 2) their place in national society. At the Taman Remaja toilets, “waria” does not have an independent ontological status: it appears subsumed within “male.” Waria narratives of personal history are also animated by a relationship of abjection to the male, a movement towards a male femininity that is, in the eyes of dominant gender norms, a movement towards failure. The waria subject position, it seems, exists as a kind of ghost in the machine of the male. Traditional ontology cannot explain this kind of presence that literally, through makeup (*déndong*), “makes itself up” as it goes along. (Makeup is key here: while warias also often take female hormones or inject silicone, no waria, it seems, would do such things without also making themselves up). This is a case of what Derrida terms “hauntology:” the waria subject position haunts maleness. Derrida develops this concept in the context of thinking through how performativity—a concept that has played a powerful role in gender theory—plays out in the context of politics and recognition:

the act that consists in swearing, taking an oath, therefore promising, deciding, taking a *responsibility*, in short, committing oneself in a performative fashion... the limit that would permit one to identify the political. And if this important frontier is being displaced [by media], this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes... It requires, then, what we call, to save time and space rather than just to make up a word, *hauntology* (Derrida 1994:50-51).

Derrida adds that the hauntological is not simply due to mass media; it is “the dimension of performative interpretation, that is, of an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets” (51). What, then, is the key to the performativity of waria gendered subjectivity? It is not events like the waria show at Taman Remaja; not all warias “perform” in this manner, and those who do are still waria when not performing. The true waria performance—in the eyes of warias themselves, and in the eyes of Indonesians more generally—is *déndong*. “Making oneself up” (Hacking 1992) is the performance in everyday life that makes a waria socially waria, that makes up the very thing it makes up. And the exact same activity, *déndong*, is the prototypical *prestasi* or “good deed” (Boellstorff 2003b) that, once again in the eyes of warias and in the eyes of Indonesians more generally, makes warias worthy of belonging to society. *Déndong* “makes up” warias’ haunting presence and “makes up” for their failure as masculine men. It seems warias are unique in Indonesia in that the thing that they do to themselves is the same thing they prototypically do to others, but with radically different consequences. Warias signify their gender by making themselves up, but when they make up Indonesian women (or cut the hair of Indonesian men), they “make them up” as better representatives of proper modern Indonesian manhood and womanhood, without which what the state terms its family principle of governance (*azas kekeluargaan*) would not be intelligible.

But no matter how good the makeup, warias cannot make themselves up as women (nor would they want to do so in most cases). Nor are they representatives of a third gender. “Waria” is instead a gendered subject position haunting maleness; in subjectivity as in sex, the prototypical waria has a penis. Both the gendering of warias and their marginal place in Indonesian society are effects of this hauntological condition of existence; this is where these two issues come together. I am not making a structuralist argument here: were warias a true third gender they might still be marginalized. I am claiming that the hauntological form their marginalization takes is of a piece with the dynamics of their gendering.

And if there is one thing that the hauntological cannot be, it is authentic (*asli*). I have discussed elsewhere the importance of authenticity in contemporary Indonesian society (Boellstorff 2003c). Postcolonial states typically justify their sovereignty by claiming an organic link to their citizenry that the colonial power did not possess, even as they take up virtually unchanged the physical boundaries of that regime. *Asli* is, in contemporary Indonesia, understood as a status: things (documents, persons, objects) are authentic or they are not. To be crafted through human action (i.e., through *prestasi*) renders things un-*asli*, inauthentic, *palsu* (false). This opposition between authentic and false is key to Indonesia’s encounter with modernity (Siegel 1998:52-65). The status of the authentic, the *asli*, is self-evident; it does not have to be performed. Now consider once again how warias base claims for belonging *and* establish gendered subjectivity through *déndong*, the action of making up, not status-based claims to “tradition.” It is perhaps due to this wide range of ethnocultural understandings of transgenderism in Indonesia, as well as the performative character of the waria subject position—constituted so powerfully through making up self and others—that when making claims for acceptance warias usually emphasize their *prestasi* to society, not status or tradition. *Gay* men also talk about *prestasi* and authenticity (Boellstorff 2003b). But for *gay* men the *prestasi* that, it is imagined, could lead

society to accept them (good deeds like working in an orphanage, publishing a magazine, or even behaving politely) are not the same things that establish their gendered and sexual subjectivity.

Warias themselves, as well as Indonesian society more generally, view waria gender in terms of performance, not status: this is why it was unnecessary at Taman Remaja to ask the waria contestant for her/his identity card. It is probably also not coincidental that the man and woman were called—hailed in Althusserian parlance—on the basis of status (place of residence) while the waria was hailed on the basis of braided hair: *déndong*. How to understand a claim to belonging that is framed not in terms of the status-based rights discourse familiar to “Western” sexual rights movements, but in terms of the performance of good deeds? And how to understand the special tension between a claim to belonging based on performance on the one hand, and a societal context where belonging is understood in terms of authenticity? How do warias hope to gain national belonging through performing good deeds or *prestasi* when authenticity lies beyond *prestasi*’s limit, evaporates at *prestasi*’s very touch?

One way to answer this question lies in an Indonesian term used quite often with regard to waria performance: *playback*. Playback, roughly “lip-synching,” is when someone performs a song to a recorded soundtrack. It is the opposite of dubbing, which is when someone overlays their own voice to recorded images. I have discussed elsewhere how dubbing can be used to illuminate the dynamics of *gay* men’s relationship to globalizing processes (Boellstorff 2003a); playback; however, better illustrates waria subjectivity. Successful playback involves not authenticity but haunting (for instance, “playing back” Celine Dion through an appropriately made-up, glamorous body moving lips in near-imitation). Playback does not aim for authenticity, nor is it deceptively false. Playback is spectral in a contemporary Indonesian context where the boundary between the original and inauthentic is so fractured that “there is a neologism, *aspal*, stemming from an acronym, to designate it” (Siegel 1998:54). *Aspal* means “asphalt” in standard Indonesian but brings together authentic and false, *asli* and *palsu*, just like waria brings together

female and male, wanita and pria. Aspal permits successful performativity like asphalt enables movement: what distinguishes the aspal diploma from the simply palsu diploma is that the former can get you a job. Warias are, in a certain sense, aspal, “real-but-false” (54); they playback femininity in a manner that genders them and also stakes a claim to national belonging.

This claim to belonging remains unanswered; compared to transgendered persons in many parts of the world, warias are accepted, but their acceptance is incomplete. As Indonesia moves further into the uncharted waters of its era of reform, the visibility of warias appears to be increasing, but true social acceptance remains an open question. I end, then, with words of hope, spoken in 2000 by a young waria in Makassar, transforming the “Year of Living Dangerously” phrase famously uttered by Indonesia’s first president and thereby locating warias once more on the stage of national belonging: “this is the Year of the Awakening of Waria [*Tahun Kebangkitan Waria*]!”

Notes

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¹ With a population of about five million, Surabaya (on the island of Java) is the second largest city in Indonesia, which is the fourth largest nation by population and home to more Muslims than any other country.

² This scene took place in 1997; by 2002 the entrance fee was 3,000 rupiah. In U.S. dollar terms the fee has remained relatively steady at between 30 and 50 cents.

³ I have spent 21 months in these fieldsites during seven visits to Indonesia (1992, 1993, 1995, 1997-8, 2000, 2001, and 2002).

⁴ This is also the approximation warias use in my experience. When asking if there are warias in the West, “transvestite” is the word they consistently choose. Since few warias speak English (Indonesia was a Dutch colony), I first assumed they encountered the term in a worn Indonesian-English dictionary and took it up because of ignorance concerning the more recent term “transgender.” I came to realize that while warias may encounter “transvestite” in a dictionary, it provides an insightful gloss on the waria subject position.

⁵ Panky Kenthut, the former head of PERWAKOS (see below), believed *banci* originates from the Javanese *bandule cilik* (Indonesian *bandul kecil*), meaning “small testicles” (Report of the Discussion for the Emancipation of Waria, Gay Men, and Lesbians in Indonesia, Surabaya, June 25, 1999). *-ong* is one of the most productive derivational suffixes in Indonesian *gay* language, and may predate *gay* language itself (Oetomo 2001). In addition to *béncong*, there are several other *gay* language terms for waria, including *mak cik* (normally meaning “youngest aunt”), *binan*, *bénces*, and *bés*, which are entering vernacular Indonesian to various degrees. See Boellstorff 2003c.

⁶ For instance, children use it to taunt boys perceived as effeminate, or parents employ it when a son plays with dolls (Oetomo 1996:261). Girls who act in a manner perceived as masculine—excelling in sports or climbing trees, for instance—are sometimes taunted with *banci* as well, and some *lesbi* women recall being called *banci*. Additionally, *banci* is occasionally used for gender-nonconforming (i.e. masculine) women or women in traditionally male professions such as taxi drivers and athletes (Oetomo 1996:291).

⁷ Another etymology by the early 1970s was *haWA-aDAM* or “eve-adam” (*Tempo*, October 6, 1973:46); it speaks to the national character of the subject position that some persons in Makassar in 2002 also used that etymology.

⁸ A folk etymology amongst some of my Bugis-speaking interlocutors is that *calabai*’ means “wrong penetration” (*salah tusuk*) in Indonesian).

⁹ Thus “Not all Bugis *bissu* were *calabai*’, and only some of the *calabai*’ became *bissu*... Now that the genuine *bissu* have nearly disappeared, many of the ordinary *calabai*’ have taken on aspects of their former role in the organization and celebration of weddings” (Pelras 1996:165-167).

¹⁰ I draw mainly upon published (and usually fragmentary reports). Additionally, have worked with my colleague Dédé Oetomo as part of a research team conducting oral histories with waria elders. I thank the Ford Foundation Jakarta for their support, with special thanks to Meiwita Budiharsana, Terrence Hull, and Iwu Utomo.

¹¹ Homosexuality appears in the Dutch colonial penal code (*Wetboek van Strafrecht*), Article 292 (which remains Article 292 in the Indonesian penal code), but is oriented towards sexual assault and sex below the age of consent. To my knowledge this law was never enforced before the late 1930s.

¹² It is unclear to what extent the early identification of waria with performances and markets is simply a consequence of the fact that these are the places travelers (the primary sources of these accounts) encountered them. I know of no autobiographical narratives from warias from any historical period right up to the present, with the exception of short interviews in *gay/lesbi* zines and mass media beginning in the 1990s.

¹³ For instance, the Dutch lexicographer H. C. Klinkert mentions *ked*i as a Malay term in 1869 (Bleys 1995:179), while Vickers discusses *ked*i as emphatically Balinese, noting they were punished in the Balinese version of purgatory in the *Kerta Gosa* law court paintings of Klungkung, East Bali (unp:14). Vickers cites Van der Tuuk (1897-1912) as providing *bantut*, *bantjih* (banci), and *wandhu* as synonyms for *ked*i: in the contemporary period *bantut* is the term for a male transgender subject position in the southern Philippines (Johnson 1997), while *wandhu* is seen as a Javanese term (cognate to Madurese *bandhu*) that has now entered colloquial Indonesian and is, for instance, common in southern Sulawesi. This has been the case for some time: the earliest mention of *wandhu* to my knowledge is by P. C. J. Van Brero in 1905 (“Young boys or *wandhu*, whom [Van Brero] saw on the island of Java... showed [according to Van Brero] signs of physical effeminacy from early childhood” (Bleys 1995:180)). This is with reference to Java, but by the 1940s Kennedy could find that “as for the *bissu*, which is the name given them when they are state officials... the

homosexual ones are called *wandu* or *tjalabai*” (Kennedy 1953:112). C. Von de Wall, writing on “effeminate men” in Buginese communities living on the eastern coast of Borneo (Kalimantan) in the 1840s, claimed that: “known as *tjelebei*, their masculine power had remained undeveloped... They looked rather weak and have a hoarse voice. ‘Though impotent,’ they felt attracted to younger men, whom they showered with affection. A fairly high number among them were actual hermaphrodites and known among the Bugi[s] as *kedie*” (Bleys 1995:117). Hirschfeld noted that in the Moldenfliet neighborhood of Jakarta (then Batavia) “there are houses where a number of Malay transvestites live together and go out in swarms at night. Toward midnight one can see them in good-sized crowds on and near a bridge where they go partly for purposes of prostitution, but chiefly to meet and disburden themselves to companions in sorrow” (Hirschfeld 1935:139). In Sulawesi, Kennedy recalled how an informant “went on and on about the scandalous behavior of the ordinary [non-*bissu*] homosexuals (*tjalabai*) [*calabai*’]. They dress and act like women and are found everywhere. There are many in Watampone. They swish and flirt and stick rolled up handkerchiefs in their blouses to imitate breasts... many men are crazy about them and spend lots of time and money to have sex with them. He was surprised that I had seen none. I do remember at the *pasar malam* [night market] that I had seen a ‘girl’ in a bright red blouse (*kabaya*), and a well painted face. ‘She’ had looked boldly at me, unlike most women here... it may have been a homosexual. I know I was impressed by the frank stare and thought I noticed something a bit odd about the person” (Kennedy 1953:213-4). In the late 1940s, Chabot provided observations on Taking, a *waria* (*kawe-kawe*) living in a village near Makassar, who “was thirty-five years old and lived with a married brother. They were a poor household, but only when it was absolutely necessary did Taking work in the *sawah* [rice fields]. Usually he preferred to spend his time in the back part of the house with the women. In his manner of sitting and speaking and in clothing he was scarcely distinguishable from them” (Chabot 1996:190). In the city of Makassar he found that similar persons “now populate the marketplaces as male prostitutes” (192). An interesting question that lies beyond the scope of this paper is why these political economic conditions did not lead to the rise of publicly recognized female-to-male commodified transgender subjectivities, given the active role of women in economic life in the archipelago.

¹⁴ Many of the ludruk dramas investigated by Peacock (discussed in the following section) were performed in a “People’s Amusement Park” that may well be the contemporary Taman Remaja: as is the case at present, the performance was “placed in a back corner, next to the toilets” (Peacock 1968:33). Moerthiko speaks in 1980 of the Taman Remaja waria show as having existed “for several years” (Moerthiko 1980:82).

¹⁵ Peacock, personal communication, and in Peacock 1968, where Peacock emphasizes that ludruk transvestite performers paid more attention to their appearance than necessary for performance (such as wearing perfume that the audience could not smell) and acted in an effeminate manner during their daily lives (168, 170, 203-4). He notes these performers were effeminate from childhood and were teased by family and neighbors; worked in the small business environments long identified with warias, and wore women’s clothes “at home, sometimes in public” (207). They also pasted “pictures of themselves—made-up as women—on their mirrors” (207).

¹⁶ Panky Kenthut asserted that prior to the 1960s entertainment genres like ludruk were the only context in which warias could dress as women (Report of the Discussion for the Emancipation of Waria, Gay Men, and Lesbians in Indonesia, Surabaya, June 25, 1999).

¹⁷ The preferred term *waria* is less well-known.

¹⁸ The “waria” appearing in the Bayer Aspirin commercial, Tessie, claimed in interviews to be a man who dressed as a woman only for entertainment. In Makassar in 2000, warias were unsure if Tessie was telling the truth, but didn’t seem to mind, since via Tessie the “image of warias entered” further entered society [*citra waria masuk*], and that was seen to be good in itself.

¹⁹ Everyone in Atmojo’s sample of 194 warias in Jakarta started feeling like waria before twenty years of age (Atmojo 1986:34).

²⁰ Here is a case where *banci* distinguishes a different class of persons than *waria*.

²¹ See *Tempo* No. 24, Tahun 15, August 10, 1985.

²² In 1988, H. Maya Rissa claimed to have made the haj nine times and the lesser pilgrimage (*umroh*) four times, all as a woman (*Tempo* No. 46, Tahun 17, January 16, 1988:83). In 1988, K.H. Hasan Basri,

head of the Central Jakarta Ulama's Union, stipulated that warias should attend the haj as man, because "Warias are in truth (*pada hakikatnya*) men." Some of those in agreement with Basri quoted the *hadith* "I have applied the law in order with your birth" (*Aku menerapkan hukum menurut lahiriahnya*). Other religious leaders, however, said that warias could decide themselves if they wished to undertake the pilgrimage as men or women (*Tempo* No. 46, Tahun 17, January 16, 1988:82).

²³ *Tempo* No. 49, Tahun 17, February 6, 1988:17. Many non-warias do see warias as sinful; some Muslims link this to the Quranic concept of the in-between gender *khunṭsa* (*hunṭsa*) (see Oetomo 1996:263; *Tempo* No. 46, Tahun 17, January 16, 1988:82,83). For instance, when I asked if her family's rejection of her in Lombok stemmed from religion or custom, Ita replied "It's because of Islam. They are anti waria. So they're against men who have long hair or dress like women."

²⁴ Blackwood (1998) argues that a similar precedence of desire over the body prevails for tomboi.

²⁵ Compare with C. Geertz 1983:61.

²⁶ Compare with Cannell 1999; Johnson 1997.

²⁷ Compare with Blackwood 1998:184-188.

²⁸ This appears to have begun in the 1990s; in his discussion of plastic surgery among warias in Jakarta, Atmojo 1986 makes no mention of silicone injections (Atmojo 1986:39). Silicone injections are usually performed on the nose, chin, cheeks, and breasts; it appears that silicone is injected in the buttocks less frequently; compare with Kulick 1998.

²⁹ The first case of such an operation made the cover of *Tempo* magazine in October 1973; the waria was represented in court by the well-known lawyer Adnan Buyung Nasution when s/he had hem gender legally changed, and s/he claimed that Soeharto had invited hem to a party on behalf of Tutut, one of his daughters (*Tempo*, October 6, 1973:46). While the earliest report of a waria operation concerned H. Maya Rissa, who apparently had breast implants (but not a full sex change operation) in 1968 (*Tempo* No. 46, Tahun 17, January 16, 1988:83), the first case involving a sex-change operation concerned Vivian Rubianty Iskandar (formerly Iwan Rubianto Iskandar), whose operation was performed in Singapore on January 8, 1973. Two warias from Surabaya had sex-change operations before Vivan (*Tempo*, October 6, 1973:47), but

hems was the first case to gain notoriety, when on November 14, 1973, s/he applied to the Court of West and South Jakarta to change hem gender and name (Moerthiko 1980:16); the case led to press coverage and even seminars on transgenderism bringing together doctors, lawyers, and religious experts (see *Tempo*, October 6 1973, and No. 43, Thn. 18, December 24, 1988:78). Vivian's request was approved by the court, and in its wake there developed a general legal, political, and religious consensus permitting sex change operations in Indonesia. Adnan Buyung Nasution, a well-known lawyer, argued on behalf of Vivian/Iwan during the proceedings. At one point he is reputed to have said that "Laws are not to torture people, but to give them happiness and keep the legal system clear. If the judge refuses [Iwan's request], this means that we burden Iwan with misery and oppress hem soul without end for as long as he lives, and this is clearly at odds with the philosophy and goals of the law" (Moerthiko 1980:17; see also *Tempo*, October 6, 1973:5,46-50). The first documented sex-change operation within Indonesia was performed on Netty Irawaty (formerly Benny Runtuwene) at the RSTM hospital in Jakarta on June 6, 1975 (Moerthiko 1980:21). In an oral history, Henriette Soekotjo (born May 24, 1948) notes that her sex-change operation, performed by Dr. Johansyah Marzuki in Surabaya on March 6, 1978, cost 350,000 rupiah and took 3 ½ hours to perform; other plastic surgeons charged as much as 1,000,000 rupiah for the operation (Moerthiko 1980:55). A sex-change operation in Singapore in the mid-1970s was said to have cost 10 million rupiah (*Tempo* No. 43, Tahun 18, December 24, 1988:78). On April 12, 1989, the Ministry of Health issued a decree identifying six hospitals across Indonesia that would "provide sex change services, particularly for warias who want to become complete women" (*Tempo* No. 8 Tahun 19, April 22 1989:82). At this time a "VIP" package for the sex change operation cost around 3,000,000 rupiah, but it was claimed that the operation could provide the service for free in some cases (ibid). One of the surgeons involved in this initiative, Djohansjah Marzoeki at the Dr. Soetomo hospital in Surabaya, defined warias as "women with the body of men" (ibid). This hospital provided sex change operations to only 12 warias in the period 1979-1989. I have no statistics on the current frequency of sex-change operations on warias, but it appears to be under ten percent. In a 1997 interview, a prominent Surabaya waria knew of only about ten warias in Surabaya who had undergone the operation.

³⁰ Four to six million rupiah in 1997 (five to seven hundred US dollars), from 350,000-1,000,000 rupiah in the late 1970s. Warias sometimes travel to Singapore or other destinations outside Indonesia for operations, but only warias with independent sources of wealth, a successful business, or who have saved carefully for many years, can afford this option.

³¹ As one waria put it, “my friendships with warias have continued unabated after my operation, even though... my status is no longer waria” (Moerthiko 1980:59). Benedict Anderson gives the example of “Dorce, a transsexual who in the mid-1980s made a successful career as a TV talk show hostess. Before her sex-change operation [but not after] he [sic] was known as a vehement spokesperson for the banci community” (Anderson 1996:285). Dorce, whose original name was Dedi Yuliardi, had her sex change operation in Surabaya on May 3, 1988 (*Tempo* No. 43 Tahun 18, December 24, 1988:79; No. 8 Tahun 19, April 22 1989:82).

³² For instance, Oetomo, personal communication.

³³ While warias do have sex with each other on occasion, they tend to regard this as strange; they joke good-naturedly that it is “like a woman sleeping with a woman.” Warias usually assume that warias have sex with women only if heterosexually married. At least three warias who worked as sex workers at Makassar’s Karebosi park in the 1990s worked during the day as male pedicab drivers [*tukang becak*] and had wives and children. According to friends of one of these waria, the wife knew of her husband’s dressing as a woman a night and permitted it as long as the husband took care of the family. In other cases, warias dress as a men at home and manage to hide their waria-ness from their wives: such warias usually either came to waria subjectivity late in life without their family’s knowledge, or the family is complicit in hiding the waria’s waria-ness from their wife. I have also encountered cases in Bali and Sulawesi (and I assume there are others elsewhere in Indonesia) where warias marry or carry on sexual relationships with tombois, the warias finding attractive a masculine woman and the woman finding attractive a feminine man. It is said that tombois have become pregnant from these unions.

³⁴ See Kulick 1998.

³⁵ In 1949 one of Raymond Kennedy's male informants in rural south Sulawesi claimed that "many men go for [waria] and are willing to pay as much as a f. 100 a night for them. He said a man might get so infatuated that he would sell his rice fields and everything to give to a loved *wandu*. He personally was revolted by this idea" (Kennedy 1953:112). See also Peacock 1968:207.

³⁶ Wives are often unaware that their husbands are continuing a previous relationship with a waria, or beginning one after marriage—in the same way that, given the pattern for separate socializing between husbands and wives in much of Indonesia, it is possible for husbands to carry on sexual relationships with other women or with men (and possible, albeit trickier, for wives to carry on illicit sexual relationships with women or men). While I was not able to interview in any depth wives of men partnered with warias, it appears that wives who know of their husband's relationship with a waria accept the matter because warias are more likely to give the husband money than the other way around, there is no chance of the waria being taken on as a second wife, there is no fear of illegitimate children, and it is relatively easy to hide from one's neighbors. These are the same reasons wives give for accepting their husbands' affairs with *gay* men, or with women for that matter (see Brenner 1998).

³⁷ Despite these links to the national, the waria subject position—unlike the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions—has hitherto not been linked to globalizing discourses of gender and sexuality. This does not mean that warias imagine there are only men and women in the rest of the world. Most assume the existence of "transvestites" elsewhere. However, warias imagine these transvestite Others in the most general terms, in the same way an Indonesian imagines there are "trees," "men," or "lunchtime" in other places: a roughly equivalent semantic category, but not a subject position linked to their own across space. To date, the waria subject position does not evoke transnational community. Some warias have seen images of non-Indonesian transgenders (for instance, by renting *The Crying Game* on laserdisc), but these images are still difficult to obtain: waria subjectivity, unlike *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivity, is at present poorly linked to transnational print and electronic media. Rarely, transgenderism outside Indonesia is covered in Indonesian media, as in a *Tempo* article that compared the sex change operation of Dorce in 1998 (see above) to a similar operation that year in Egypt (*Tempo* No. 43 Tahun 18, December 24, 1988:78-9). A very few warias

have traveled to other countries and met transgenders there, or have learned of such transgenders indirectly through “Westerners” visiting Indonesia. One of the most famous cases is Chenny Han (Soentoro 1996).

³⁸ In July 1999, PERWAKOS appeared in national print media supporting the presidential candidacy of Megawati Soekarnoputri, daughter of Indonesia’s first president who took the Presidency in 2001.

³⁹ In 1949, Chabot found that in Makassar “the environment accepts a kawekawe [waria] as he is. People do not have the idea that it is his fault that he is the way he is” (Chabot 1996:207).

⁴⁰ This may be a reference to the Permesta rebellion of the 1950s (see Harvey 1977), during which the fundamentalist Muslim leaders of the rebellion tried to ban transgenderism of any form.

⁴¹ There is historical data that could be interpreted in this way, as when Chabot claimed in the 1950s that “The Makassarese divide people, as they say, into men, women, and kawekawe [waria]” (Chabot 1996:189). Occasionally warias will be termed a “class of their own” (*kelas tersendiri*) or “special type” (*jenis khas*) (*Tempo* No. 24, Tahun 15, August 10, 1985:59).

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