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# Playing Back the Nation: *Waria*, Indonesian Transvestites

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## The Toilets of Taman Remaja

Taman Remaja Surabaya (Surabaya Youth Park) can be found on a downtown thoroughfare next to the Surabaya Mall.<sup>1</sup> It is nighttime 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 colored lights and glittering disco balls, looking out over a seating area with rows of wooden benches. Behind the benches lay some public toilets. To the right of the stage is a permanent sign about two meters high by three meters wide: “*Waria* Night with Live Band, Thursday Nights.”

The band is warming up before the promised performance, and by 8:30, the seating area is jammed. Perhaps 80 percent of the audience is made up of men between 15 and 30 years old; flip-flop plastic sandals and well-worn clothes mark their blue-collar, low-income status. Cleared of benches, the first 20 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 *waria* 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 waria 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 waria. 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.

Although the Thursday night waria show at Taman Remaja is a well-known showcase for waria in eastern Java (e.g., Plummer and Porter 1997:43–45), waria 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 throughout the article to underscore that they are Indonesian terms, not identical to the English terms “lesbian” and “gay,” and I do the same for the Indonesian term *normal*, which is not identical to English “normal.”) Waria 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), waria have received little attention in the scholarly literature. This article, part of a larger project on nonnormative genders and sexualities in Indonesia, represents one step toward a more sustained exploration of waria life. Like much anthropological writing, which tacks between the universal and particular (C. Geertz 1983:68), I use ethnographic material on waria to reflect on Western 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 “ethnocartographic” 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 contemporary waria subjectivities. In place of the concept of “identity,” I distinguish between subject positions, as socially recognized categories of selfhood, and subjectivities, how individuals inhabit a subject position but in ways that always exceed and transform its logic, even while being powerfully shaped by that logic.<sup>3</sup>

Within the scope of a single article I cannot present a comprehensive portrait of waria or delve into every dimension of these Indonesians’ rich and diverse lives. Instead I focus my analysis on vignettes that exemplify certain aspects of waria life so that I might center my analysis on two key areas in which the “tendency to reify and idealize ‘traditional’ forms of transgenderism” has been particularly strong. First, although persons such as waria live in postcolonial nation-states, analyses often frame them in terms of locality, tradition, and ritual (e.g., Andaya 2000; Plummer and Porter 1997:43). This analysis will instead illustrate how waria emphasize a sense of belonging to (and exclusion from) national society and popular culture. 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 tendency has been to construe persons such as waria as belonging to a “third gender” (e.g., Andaya 2000). Although there are instances in various parts of the world that could arguably be seen as third genders, the third-gender concept is often overemployed and poorly defined. I argue that waria are not a “third gender” but a male femininity. This interpretation is suggested by, of all things, Taman Remaja’s toilets. There are two toilets, not three, and since at least 1992, the sign on one of these toilets reads “wanita” (women), whereas the sign on the other reads “pria/waria” (men/waria). Why are waria grouped with men rather than women and not given a third toilet, since it would not be expensive to build? My analysis will show how the concept “waria” operates within the orbit of male gendering.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, I argue that the position of waria 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 and argue that 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 below.<sup>5</sup> This poses a

problem regarding pronouns, since Indonesian (like most Austronesian languages) uses a single term (*dia*) for third-person singular reference (“she,” “he,” and “it”). Following Blackwood (1998), I will employ a coined pronoun, however the one I use is “s/he” (“her/his” for possessive and indirect reference).

Three sources of possible confusion for non-waria (including both anthropological analysts and “normal” Indonesians) stem from the rich terminological and sexual landscape in which waria 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.<sup>6</sup> But since *banci* can also mean “effeminate male,” it can sometimes distinguish men from waria; one can say “I saw a man who was very effeminate, a *banci* not a waria.”<sup>7</sup> For this reason, and due to the derisive tone with which it is typically deployed, many waria find *banci* offensive. The preferred term *waria* originates not in tradition but government dictate and dates from 1978.<sup>8</sup> 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 *keḍi* (Javanese and Balinese, but also found in Sulawesi), *kawe-kawe* (Makassarese, but also used by many Buginese), *wandu* (Javanese, but also found in Sulawesi) and *calabai’* (Buginese, but also found in Kalimantan, possibly due to Bugis migration).<sup>9</sup> 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 waria 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 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 subdivisions and subtleties which are quite irrelevant with regard to actual conditions. [Malinowski 1922:176–177]

A third source of misunderstanding is that in many parts of Indonesia there have been (and still are) what I term “ethnolocalized professional homosexual and transvestite subject positions” or ETPs. I use this terminology to avoid referring to these as “traditional” or “indigenous” homosexualities or transgenderisms, because I do not want to assume which kinds of sexualities are authentic in contemporary Indonesia. The best-known of these are *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*). In the case of ETPs, therefore, homosexuality or transgenderism is secondary to a specialized 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 (although *waria* can become *bissu* with proper training).

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.<sup>10</sup> 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 such as Thailand (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 *gay*. In the case of *waria*, 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 ritual texts. Nor is there much colonial documentation on any form of transgenderism or homosexuality during the 350-year Dutch period.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, while ETPs such as *warok* and *bissu* appear in travelers’ accounts and local histories as early as the 14th century (Andaya 2000:39; Pelras 1996:166; Wilson 1999), it appears that the *waria* subject position has a recognizable continuity going back only to the early 1800s.<sup>12</sup> 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 to petty commodity trading, lowbrow entertainment, and sex work. Employment 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 that 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.<sup>13</sup>

From the beginning *waria* do not appear to have been seen as limited to any one ethnic group or locality. By the 1830s, the dances of the “Bantji Batavia” (literally, Batavian Transvestite) could be interpreted as “a typical manifestation of Batavian [Jakartan] 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” (Abeyasekere 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. [Covarrubias 1937:144]

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 *waria* (note Covarrubias’s language of “gods” with reference to predominantly Hindu Bali), the subject position had a broader scope from its beginnings.<sup>14</sup>

[Such a] commodified transgender [sexuality] differed from any traditional transgender sexualities 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. [Drucker 1996:77]

By the 1960s *waria* had become well known for their presence in markets and as sex workers, as well as for their roles in lowbrow performing arts. The best-known example of this is the Javanese dramatic genre known as *ludruk*: the first recorded performance of *ludruk* dates from 1822 and included “transvestite performers” (Peacock 1968:29).<sup>15</sup> One 70-year-old *waria* from rural southern Sulawesi noted that when s/he was young, “*waria* almost never went out during the day. Those who did would be called names by the kids; men would hit us and scream blasphemies at us. *Waria* just slept at home [during the day] under cold cream.” Several *waria* 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.<sup>16</sup> 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 24 hours a day, but they were effeminate all the time in the way they walked and carried themselves.

The lives of *waria* in Peacock’s 1960s Surabaya do not appear markedly different from those of Covarrubias’s Bali or Hirschfeld’s Batavia of the 1930s, or those of the earliest known accounts of *waria* 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 *waria*. Some *waria* 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 waria (c.f. Wieringa 1999), but did lead to a virtual abandonment of the public and market spaces where waria found community and employment. As Eddy's narrative indicates, 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 waria 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.<sup>17</sup> It also appears to be at this point that salon work became the prototypical waria employment. 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.

### Childhood Dreams and Adult Transformations

For those visiting Indonesia since the 1980s, the social salience of waria seems utterly different from the Western situation. Although 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.<sup>18</sup> If you were Indonesian, you would expect to find waria 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 waria, and at night you might see waria looking for men near the town square. Waria seem to fall into three economic classes: those who own salons or some other business (and can be quite wealthy), those who work in salons, and those who neither own nor work in salons and usually make a living as sex workers. Waria occasionally "pass" as women to coworkers in a salon, or even to sex-work clients (hiding their penis between their legs if the client wishes to penetrate them anally). Waria 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 waria appear on television sitcoms and advertisements, as well as news reports in the print media. In 2000, a commercial for Bayer Aspirin on national television featured an apparent waria.<sup>19</sup>

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 others. Unlike *gay* men, waria never speak of "opening themselves" (*membuka diri*) in terms of revealing who they are; indeed they often discover who they are because others point it out to them. Although there are occasional cases of Indonesians becoming waria later in life, most waria 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. A desire for men is



not the genesis of waria subjectivity (as it is for *gay* subjectivity); almost all waria come to see themselves as waria while children and do not recall an attraction to men as key to this early development.<sup>20</sup>

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 waria are intersexed. All narratives of waria selfhood are driven by movement away from normative masculinity. Most waria engage in play atypical for their gender as children. One waria recalled, “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 jump rope, played with dolls.” Some waria 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 had “the soul of a woman since birth,” as one waria put it. Such an interpretation is common among waria who grew up in environments where gender play was actively discouraged.<sup>21</sup> Although waria 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 had lived in Makassar for 14 years when interviewed, recalled:

In my village there aren't waria; they don't understand about waria. There, even though our movements may be effeminate, we cannot dress up like women. We can become *banci*,<sup>22</sup> 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 waria are not accepted by their families, at least initially. Young waria 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. Many waria are acknowledged as such while small children. 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*.” Waria 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 waria also hope to be accepted by society.

Although many waria struggle with a sense of sin, by adulthood most have made some kind of peace with their religious beliefs. In caring for family members or even saving for years to send a parent on the pilgrimage to Mecca, waria say they hope to wipe away the sins they have caused their family (*menghapus dosa*). Good deeds can compensate for their being waria, even as many waria say that being waria is a divine decree (*takdir*). As one waria recalled,

“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.” When my waria interlocutors speak of sin they tend to speak of things waria do (particularly promiscuity and sex work) rather than the state of being waria itself, which is often seen as God’s wish (*kemauan atas*). Waria have formed Christian prayer organizations and Muslim prayer rooms (*musala*) where they wear women’s garments (*mukenah*) while at prayer.<sup>23</sup> Some Muslim waria have made the pilgrimage to Mecca (*haj*) as men, others as women (some as many as nine times) without the knowledge of their fellow pilgrims.<sup>24</sup> 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 waria take their inability to change as evidence that God wishes them to be waria. Although the quotation above seems to imply an understanding of the waria subject position as a third gender, when waria wrestle with the question of sin they typically conclude not that God created three genders, but that they were created with a feminine soul.<sup>25</sup>

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, waria come to know that they have the soul (*jiwa*) of a woman, or at least a soul that is more woman than man. Waria also speak of having the temperament (*sifat*) or feelings (*perasaan*) 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 waria. Although waria do sometimes fool people into thinking they are women, 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 waria think of themselves as waria (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 is that waria 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. Even waria who go to the pilgrimage in female clothing see themselves as created male. 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—soul and clothing—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; Sedgwick 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 waria 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, reflecting a widespread assumption in Southeast Asia that internal state and external presentation naturally align with each other (Errington 1989:76–77).

This assumption might explain why it is that among waria there is no consensus as to whether looking like a woman or having a woman's soul is causally prior. Probably most waria 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 90 percent of the matter.” Yet many see the soul as shaped by external practices: waria sometimes claim they were infected (*ketularan*) because of wearing women's clothes for entertainment or because they played with waria when they were children. To occupy the waria subject position is seen to encompass sexuality as well as gender: waria typically have sex with men, according to waria and to other Indonesians. What is significant is that the waria subject position is not founded in a sexual orientation: waria usually assume their desire for men flows causally from a prior mismatching of soul and body.<sup>26</sup> Whereas *gay* male desire is usually understood in terms of “desiring the same” and could thus be roughly translated as “homosexuality,” a waria's desire for men is understood as the desire of femininity for masculinity, that is, as heterosexual desire. As a language of *homoseks* and *heteroseks* becomes better known in Indonesia, many waria regard themselves as heterosexual, not homosexual. Their feminine souls and bodily presentations mean that while male-waria sex is understood abstractly as a form of homosexuality, it is distinguishable from sex “between two men.”

By adulthood most waria have a clear sense that they are unalterably waria for the rest of their lives. They have usually identified as waria for many years, and in contrast to *gay* men, their social interlocutors have also identified them as waria. Women's clothing, makeup, and hairstyling are the important external markers of contemporary adult waria subjectivity, although a few waria dress as men during the day or while on public transport to avoid being teased, and some mix articles of women's and men's clothing. This clothing is usually in a modern 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 waria stress moving “like women” when walking, gesturing, lifting objects, sitting down, or dancing. The goal is a refined, coy, slow grace—to be *halus* (cf. C. Geertz 1983:61). In terms of speech, the ideal is a high, melodious tone and rhythm at a soft volume. Non-waria Indonesians

interviewing waria for news stories typically comment on 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 waria with ongoing transformation that makes them seen as ideally suited to work in salons where they can transform others (cf. Cannell 1999; Johnson 1997).

However, waria 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 waria amalgamate a woman’s soul to a man’s body, or the term *waria* amalgamates “male” and “female.” Waria 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. Waria are often said to be stronger than men and capable of extremely rude speech and obscene gestures. *Gay* men frequently observe that waria can be more “man” than themselves. As one *gay* man put it in a conversation with some street youth asking about waria, “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.” 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 Sita, another waria, who like many waria 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 tweezers and a 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?” “No,” he replied, “I’m a man.” “Then what is Vera?” I asked. Vera, back to shaving her/his legs, deadpanned without even looking up: “I’m a *cewok*” (cf. Blackwood 1999). 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*).

Waria and non-waria 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 waria, 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 a waria without injections, but if you never wear women’s clothes you will not be viewed as a waria. From oral history data it appears that before the 1970s waria would modify their bodies in two primary ways: drinking “traditional” medicines (*jamu*) said to make the body more feminine, and inserting objects (balloons filled with salt water, a rubber ball cut in half) under a blouse to create breasts. Inserting objects under clothing is rare nowadays and in its place are three main types of more permanent body modification. Although I know of no survey research that could provide a definitive distribution of these procedures, the most common of these seems to be consuming massive doses of female hormones by taking birth control pills or by injection. Rita has large breasts of which s/he is very proud: “When I was around 14 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.”<sup>27</sup> For waria 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.<sup>28</sup> 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 waria who have sex-change operations. However, although these operations have been available for almost thirty years, few waria have them.<sup>29</sup> While beyond the financial horizon of many waria, the relative lack of waria who undergo them cannot be explained in financial terms.<sup>30</sup> The pilgrimage to Mecca, for instance, costs about four times as much as a sex-change operation, yet some waria perform the pilgrimage or pay for a family member to participate. A second reason is the fear

of a loss of sensation or that the operation “can have mental effects.” A third reason is because they see themselves as, on some level, men. As a waria in Makassar put it, “that thing has a function for me.” Sometimes this is phrased in terms of religious belief, as in the case of a Muslim waria who said: “We just have to thank God for what we already have.” I have heard waria speak of a waria who has undergone a sex-change operation as “becoming a woman” (*jadi perempuan*), and in the media, postoperative waria are described as considering themselves women.<sup>31</sup> But from my ethnographic work and that of others, it seems clear that such persons are still considered waria socially, even if they can become women in a legal sense (Oetomo 1996). Unlike some transgender subjectivities (e.g., see Cohen 1995; Nanda 1990 for *hijra* in India), genital alteration is not central to being waria. How, then, does male femininity operate in waria’s understanding of themselves and their place in Indonesian society?

### Playback

I think the answer began to dawn on me the day the low-slung wooden ferry from Makassar, belching fumes, pulled up to the Isle of Heaven (*Pulau Kayangan*). “Heaven” was a small place: no more than one hundred yards on a side, this tiny islet is one of many off Makassar’s waterfront; covered entirely in cement, it sits in tin-roofed shadow as a getaway for city dwellers interested in picnics, fishing, and swimming. Walking off the pier, I passed a sign reading “Today’s Event: Waria Playback Contest [*lomba waria playback*].” After passing several small restaurants and tiny hotels, I came to a stage at the center of the island and open to the sea on three sides. The benches were packed with a couple hundred city dwellers, mostly young couples with infants, toddlers, and young children, as well as a few *gay* men who were there to support waria friends. Inside dressing rooms to one side of the stage at least 30 waria were frantically applying makeup, rearranging miniskirts, or practicing dance steps. Exiting one dressing room was Siska, a Bugis waria who ran a small salon in Makassar in the house s/he shared with her/his family. S/he wore a white Indian sari with jewelry to match. Her/His braided wig, entwined with flowers, fell to the small of her/his back.

A middle-aged professionally attired woman took center stage as emcee; behind her was a large poster that read “Isle of Heaven Waria Playback Singing Contest.” Introducing the three-member jury composed of local entertainment personalities, the emcee explained that each of the 20 waria contestants would perform *playback* (lip-synching to prerecorded cassette music). An eruption of hooting and hollering greeted the first waria as she took the stage in a black top and flowing red dress, performing “My Heart Will Go On” from the *Titanic* soundtrack. One *gay* man yelled angrily at the stage manager when he kept referring to the performers as *béncong*. The second waria also performed to “My Heart Will Go On;” indeed, about half the performers used Western music (including Miami Sound Machine, Debbie Gibson, and Toni Braxton); the others used popular Indonesian songs. Near the end of the competition,

Siska took the stage to a well-known Bombay show tune, and suddenly the island was filled with echoes of Indian tabla drums. No one knew the words, but Siska's playback was enthusiastic, complete with twirling head movements and tinkling ankle bells. Finally, it was time to announce the winners, and first place went to Siska. "S/he won because s/he was *unik* [unique]," said one of the *gay* men to nods of agreement, "and because her/his movements were so good."

Here, in a nutshell, is a central distinction between *waria* and *gay* subjectivity. *Waria* have performed Indian dances for many years; for instance, they performed Indian dances at Taman Remaja in the late 1970s (Moerthiko 1980:86). But such performers do not imagine themselves performing as Indian male-to-female transgenders or hijras (Cohen 1995; Nanda 1990). A few *waria* have encountered Australian, European, or Southeast Asian transgenders during travels outside Indonesia, or they have friends or relatives who have done so, and some mass-mediated images of transgenders outside Indonesia make their way into the archipelago, but for the most part *waria* do not see themselves as linked to a global network. This is in contrast to *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians, whose subject positions presuppose the existence of lesbian and gay Westerners with whom they share a "desire for the same." How do *waria* understand their place in Indonesia, as symbolized by Siska's victory and the toilets of Taman Remaja?

The answer to this question perhaps lies in the Indonesian term *playback*, often used to designate *waria* performances. Playback (lip-synching) is when someone performs a song to a recorded soundtrack. It is akin to yet distinct from dubbing, which is when someone overlays their own voice to recorded images (Boellstorff 2003). In dubbing, mouth and speech do not match up. In playback they do; but it is person and persona that do not. The *waria* singing playback is not "singing" herself, but neither were Celine Dion or Diana Ross in the videos from which *waria* get inspiration for costumes and poses.

Playback is a kind of performative *déndong*, a "making up" that lies between authentic and inauthentic, natural and artificial. Like dubbing, playback is a productive theoretical concept because of the central position authenticity (*asli*) holds both in Indonesian understandings of ethnoculturalized tradition and modern nation. The opposition between authentic and false is key to Indonesia's encounter with modernity (Siegel 1998:52–65); colonial rule is deemed false; the postcolonial state is deemed authentic. *Asli* is a complex term, a loanword in its own right (from Sanskrit) and difficult to translate into English. Echols and Shadily's dictionary *Kamus Indonesia Inggris* gives its meaning as "original, genuine, authentic, indigenous, native, autochthonous, aboriginal, primitive, innate, inborn." Someone who is from a place, rather than an immigrant, is *asli Bali*, *asli Indonesia*, or *asli Amerika*. Someone will speak of a lake or well as *asli* water in comparison to piped water. An adopted child can sometimes be distinguished from an *asli* child. For *waria*, *asli* is a cultural keyword through which gender is reconfigured. For instance, one night at Taman

Ramaja, a *gay* man pointed to a tall waria in black standing nearby and whispered, “s/he’s never had an operation—s/he’s asli.”

Successful playback involves not authenticity but haunting (for instance, playing back Celine Dion through an appropriately made-up, glamorous body moving lips in 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 asli and palsu, authentic and false, 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. Waria are, in a certain sense, *aspal*, “real-but-false” (Siegel 1998:54); they playback femininity in a manner that genders them and also stakes a claim to national belonging. This is how the waria Chenny Han could say that any waria who had a sex-change operation would be “an *aspal* woman, authentic but false [*perempuan aspal, asli tapi palsu*]” (Soentoro 1996:207), yet Cindy could proudly say on one occasion “I’m authentically waria [*saya asli waria*].”

### Sex and Romance with Men

A dichotomy prevails in the Indonesian public’s perception of waria sexuality. On one hand is the belief that waria “are sexually impotent and/or have abnormally small or even shriveled genitals” (Oetomo 1996:261). Other Indonesians (including waria themselves) believe waria normally have sex with men rather than women or other waria.<sup>32</sup> Waria sexuality has long been linked to money, and indeed many (but by no means all) waria engage in some form of sex work.<sup>33</sup> The most common practice during sex work is receptive oral sex. Anal receptive sex is also common and sometimes carried out in public locations (usually behind a bush or tarp). However, some men ask to suck the waria’s penis or to be penetrated anally by the waria (see Oetomo 1996:263).

During my 1998 fieldwork, Renon was an undeveloped field the size of a city block near the Governor’s office in the Balinese provincial capital of Denpasar. The ground at Renon was swampy and overgrown with weeds, save a few dirt paths traversing its expanse. Warias would find their clients among the men passing by on motorcycle or foot, and sex would take place right there in the grass. Many waria visited Donna’s house in the afternoons before heading off to 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, it was a step above what most waria could afford on their own. One afternoon, I was talking to a few waria at Donna’s house and I asked Tina, a sex worker at Renon, if her/his clients ever ask to be anally penetrated. Tina 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 waria at Renon to have had a sex-change operation, Tina carried a dildo to



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 school kids. 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*].”

What interests me here is that I have never heard a waria question a man’s masculinity because of a desire to be anally penetrated. Indeed, many waria enjoy penetrating men. A waria in Makassar emphasized how s/he likes to penetrate because “After all, I have the body of a man!” Should a man consistently wish for waria to penetrate him, gossip about his masculinity might ensue; however, the relevant point is that soul and bodily presentation, not just sex, secure gender in Indonesia. 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 (see Kulick 1998). 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. Another reason waria rarely have sex-change operations is that *normal* men expect them to possess penises.

*Normal* men who have sex with waria either do not know the term *gay* or do not find it applicable to them: “they form a nameless category” (Oetomo 1996:263). However, as noted by Malinowski, cultural concepts (including subject positions) are not always lexicalized: it is not the case that these men stand outside culture. “Surya” is a small half-abandoned plaza next to Taman Remaja; during my fieldwork it was completely dark at night. On Thursday nights after the waria show, waria and lower-class men would make their way there to meet for sex. One night at Surya I sat down beside a group of young men as scores of other men and waria milled around the plaza. In the course of our conversation, I had, when asked, revealed that I was *gay*. “Oh!” one young man replied. Pointing to a man sitting next to him, he said “This guy likes guys too. He probably likes you.” The man in question looked up calmly but was silent. I asked the men if they liked waria. A third man replied amid the shrugs of the others: “No, but they do this,” and stuck a finger into his mouth as a gesture for oral sex.

Neither waria nor the mostly blue-collar unmarried men who spend time here would term themselves *gay*. Yet these are not simply “men who have sex with men;” this is not sex without sexuality. An interpretation that explains these men’s practices in terms of obtaining a substitute for women—an interpretation expressed by my interlocutor at Surya—could not address why some men who know of Surya do not go there; nor could it explain why men who do go to Surya do not go to inexpensive female sex workers, why some ask to be anally penetrated, or why some enter into long-term romantic relationships with waria. It is not that these men have a “situational” homosexuality opposed to the “innate” sexuality of waria. There is a colonial history of bifurcating

homosexuality into innate and situational variants and then claiming that situational homosexualities are ephemeral, unlinked to subjectivity, and inauthentic (Bleys 1995). Subject positions like *waria* and *gay* are situational as well as innate in that they are linked to specific places and times.

Men who have sex with *waria* do not define their attraction solely in terms of a desire for specific sex acts but also in terms of gendered bodies. I saw this demonstrated one Saturday night when I was out with three *gay* men in the city of Singaraja in north Bali. It was late but the park was still busy, with a mix of *gay* men, *waria*, and *normal* men. I was sitting at a bus stop with several *waria* and three *normal* men. My friend Made sat with Danny on his lap. They were a *gay* couple and their caresses were visible to all who drove or walked by. After a few moments one of the *normal* men, with long hair and a stocky, athletic body, sat down beside me and introduced himself as Gus. Gesturing toward a *waria* standing near the street, he said: "That one is pretty, like a *normal* woman." I asked "Do you like to have sex with *waria*?" Gus replied, "Yeah, sure, it's normal [*biasa*], because there is passion [*gairah*]." Then I pointed to Made, who was embracing Danny at the other bench, and asked "Would you like a man like that, who isn't made up?" Gus shrugged and said "No, no, thank you! I couldn't do that, because there is no passion to have sex with someone like that. If he's not in drag [*dandan*], there's no desire." Gus's reaction was not homophobic (Boellstorff 2004a); his desire for *waria* was not paired with an emotional repugnance toward *gay* men; he was not offended by Made and Danny, and he did not find my question insulting. What Gus sought was not authenticity but the playback of femininity.

Although most *gay* men marry women, this is usually incompatible with *waria* subjectivity. As one *waria* in Makassar put it, "Everyone agrees that if someone doesn't want to get married, that means they're 100 percent *banci*." Occasionally a *waria*'s family will suggest (or insist) they marry a woman. Most families, however, release *waria* from the imperative to marry. *Waria* are perhaps the only class of persons in contemporary Indonesian society other than the disabled who are typically not expected to marry. Instead of heterosexual marriage, most *waria* 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. Although these relationships are not formalized, they are in all likelihood as old as the subject position itself.<sup>34</sup> As is the case for female-to-male transgenders in other parts of the world (Kulick 1998), one way *waria* hold onto male partners is by supporting them financially. Many *waria* share the feelings of one of my *waria* interlocutors who complained that:

Men always want money. If that's all they want, then eventually we let them go. But if they give us care and affection [*kasih sayang*], we'll take care of them. . . . My husband is brave [*berani*] enough to hug and kiss me in the open, to take me to a movie when I'm dressed as a woman and ignore what people say. And that's what we *bancis* really want—a man who will give us care and affection. But in the end it all comes down to money.

This statement reveals a key dynamic of waria subjectivity. For Brazilian travesti, the goal is to have a “man in the house” who secures their transgender subjectivity by penetrating them (Kulick 1998). Indonesian waria, however, emphasize having a man who will take them out of the house and into the public sphere—who will act as the conduit to secure their recognition by *normal* society (see, e.g., Soentoro 1996:217).

For waria with an unmarried boyfriend, a major concern is retaining the boyfriend after they are married to a woman. Since most waria assume that all *normal* men eventually marry (and often feel this is best for them), the goal is to sustain the relationship after marriage, with or without the wife’s knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes a waria and her/his partner live together as a conjugal couple, and the man rejects heterosexual marriage altogether. Even though waria are rarely confused with women, their gender presentation is such that male partners are sometimes supported by their families in their decision not to marry. Such couples are accepted by neighbors, and in some cases, they may also raise children who may be adopted or from either party’s previous marriage to a woman. The relationships between waria and their boyfriends illustrate not only important moments of romance, affection, and sex, but a linkage between the waria subject position and what *gay* men and waria term general society (*masyarakat umum*) or the normal world (*dunia normal*).

### Waria in National Society

One evening in Makassar, we are headed to the Family Planning Foundation office for an event to celebrate a new United Nations Development Fund-sponsored program to help waria sex workers learn salon work. Cindy, a well-known waria, is the guest of honor. The audience includes members of the program’s first class, as well as owners of salons where the apprenticeships will take place, staff members from the HIV-prevention organization that is administering the program, and well-wishers like myself. Cindy and the director of the HIV-prevention organization speak before the crowd about the need for discipline and cleanliness. The director claims, “Waria are needed by society because they have skills.” At the end of the ceremony, Cindy motions to a waria apprentice who then rises and moves to the front of the room. As cameras flash, Cindy hands over with great solemnity a bag containing scissors, shampoo, hairspray, and other items and the event comes to an end.

Waria and their social interlocutors do not see them as exclusive to Balinese culture or Javanese culture or Ambonese culture; waria are seen to be, and see themselves as, elements of national culture. Since waria can be found in rural areas, this is not simply due to an 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.<sup>36</sup> 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 rather than 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 1986:18). Sadikin’s phrasing reflects how my waria interlocutors 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 waria of Himpunan Wadam Jakarta themselves. Waria are now familiar figures in the political sphere: they perform at party rallies, express preferences for candidates, and occasionally run for office themselves.<sup>37</sup> Waria 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 waria, because 90 percent of all salon people are waria”—and the audience clapped in response.<sup>38</sup> The acknowledgment of waria 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.

Waria 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 knew several bissu. When I asked Tri how waria 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.<sup>39</sup> 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 a national twist. When I asked, “Were any waria scattered to Malaysia or the Philippines?” Tri hesitated: “I don’t know, because I have never been to those places.” But although 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.

The waria 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, although waria have been performing in ludruk theater since at least the 1920s, after independence in 1945 waria 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 1968:208–209).

Waria will spontaneously ruminate on their place in society (rather than solely in the family or their immediate social environs) and interpret daily events such as catcalls from a neighbor or the organizing of a successful beauty pageant as indicators of a shifting state of being accepted (*diterima*) by society. At such 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. Waria in all three of my major fieldsites and throughout Indonesia emphasize recognition; it is a desire joining everyday belonging to national belonging through the performance of good deeds or accomplishments (sometimes called *prestasi*) (see Boellstorff 2004b). Like *gay* men, waria almost never say they should be respected just because they are waria (as the status-based language of Western human rights discourse might lead one to expect) but in terms of good deeds: “We’ve got prestasi too [*kita punya prestasi juga*].” Sometimes good deeds lead to greater acceptance from the family: “When I was young my brother hit me, but I followed my heart until one day when I won a beauty contest, and then they not only accepted me but supported me!” But the good deeds that really matter to waria are performed not on behalf of other waria or one’s family, but on behalf of society (*masyarakat*). Frequent turns of phrase are that the acceptance of waria is up to each waria (*tergantung dari waria sendiri*) or that waria must become high quality (*jadi waria yang berkualitas*), “high quality” referring both to beauty and good deeds. In this line of thinking, waria who are not accepted have brought this on themselves by not being smart at presenting themselves (*tidak pintar menetapkan diri*). Good deeds include self-presentation: Cindy once lectured some young waria at her/his salon about how “it depends on how we treat others. We must dress cleanly and be polite so that we can be valued (*dihargai*).” Her/his comments suggest a performative theory of recognition.

The most significant prestasi performed by waria is their work in salons, “making people up.” The ultimate expression of this salon work is wedding makeup and hairstyling, where the groom but especially the bride are “made up” as prototypes of the true Indonesian, the idealized citizen-subject. In line with the national motto of “unity in diversity,” the bride and groom are usually made up twice, once in modern garb (a white dress for the bride, a suit for the groom) and once in traditional ethnic garb. Waria create and manage ethnicity; a poor woman in rural Java or southern Sulawesi becomes a Javanese or Buginese princess. Even the ethnographer and his partner can be made up in such an ethnoculturalized fashion, as when I became a Buginese maiden for an entertainment event in Makassar (see Figure 1 below). One can playback not just gender, but ethnicity and national belonging. Salon work can thus encapsulate a national imaginary akin to the theme-park-ization of national culture (Pember-ton 1994), where local culture, which is by definition nonmodern, takes form and meaning through the prism of the national. The waria Chenny Han notes as one of her/his greatest prestasi that s/he memorized how to do hair buns (*sanggul*)



Figure 1

The author and his partner, made up as a “traditional” Buginese heterosexual couple by a waria in Makassar.

both in the *modern* style and in the traditional style of each of Indonesia’s then-27 provinces (Soentoro 1996:34, 112). A different waria, in discussing the good things waria do, noted proudly that during the 1997–1998 economic crisis “salons beat the banks” [*salon mengalahkan bank*] because they stayed open and continued to serve society. “The banks lost society’s money [*merugikan masyarakat*] but not the salons.”

Good deeds can also be produced at smaller events. 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 waria put finishing touches on their outfits. Marina was splendid in a traditional-looking outfit with batik skirt (*kebaya*),

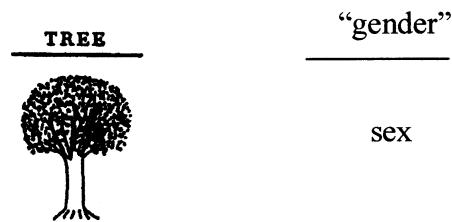
lacy blouse, and cloth thrown over her/his shoulders; s/he explained the outfit was not Makassarese but mixed (*campuran*). We headed to the north side of town where the wedding celebration was underway—a typical affair in which a tarp on tall bamboo posts forms an impromptu roof over a neighborhood street cordoned off and filled with hundreds of guests. After the obligatory greeting of the bride and groom, we made our way toward the stage at the far end of the street where a band played. The area was filled with waria and *gay* men while family members, neighbors, and well-wishers sat on the periphery. The *gay* men along with the other guests were spectators as the waria (who came 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, older waria (*waria nostalgia*), and many others. Endi was one of the two waria making the presentations, and s/he 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 waria. In this era of reform [*era reformasi*], there should be a place for waria, because waria have organizations and do good things in society.”

### **Waria, Authenticity, and Playback**

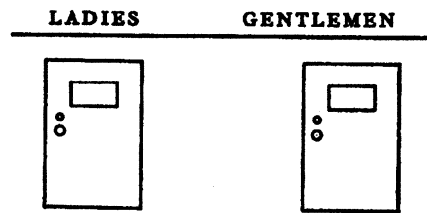
In moments such as these, waria talk explicitly about belonging to national—not local—society. In this concluding section, I explore the underlying cultural logics that shape both the gendering of waria and their included-but-marginalized place in the nation.

At the toilets of Taman Remaja, as I have shown, waria are grouped with men. I have indicated at several points in this article that although some might argue that the waria subject position is a third gender,<sup>40</sup> the designation seems inappropriate overall, and it is not clear what “gender” would mean in such an expression. Understanding waria as a third gender would position it as equidistant from “male” and “female,” eliding the fact that waria begin life as men and tend to see themselves as feminine men throughout their lives. Likewise, a growing number of scholars have difficulty with Marjorie Garber’s claim 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 1997:62), noting how it actually “tends to stabilize” conceptions of male and female (Halberstam 1998:261). Third-gender suggests that individuals so identified who “do not fit the male-female binary fall outside it and transcend it, rather than disturb it, blur it, or reconfigure it. . . . Third-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 often used in speaking of Native American transgenders (e.g., *berdache*) or transgenders found outside the West, sissies, tomboys, and drag queens in the United States are rarely cast as third genders. Although third-gender language might appear to disrupt the isomorphism between gender and sex (three or more genders cannot 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):



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).

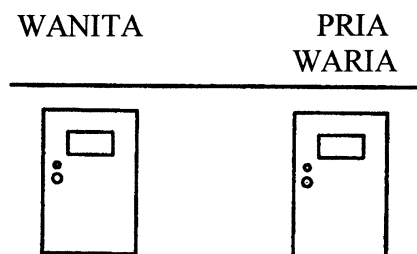


Here male and female gain meaning not through reference to physicality (toilet doors need not use images of genitalia), but in relation to each other, sign to sign. Lacan saw this not only as an illustration of semiosis, but as a foundational moment in human subjectivity: “These are the only possible [two] definitions of the share called man, or else woman, for anyone who finds themselves in the position of inhabiting language” (Lacan 1985:150).

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 many radical conceptions of transgenderism, whether MTF (male-to-female) or FTM (female-to-male), do retain F and M in some fashion. This is one factor making “third gender” language so unfocused and proscriptive (calling for transcending binarisms), rather than reflecting any actual system of gendered meaning. It is, therefore, ultimately rehabilitative of gender binarism. There is no a priori reason that a third, fourth, or *n*th gender could not exist, but I find more theoretically



compelling the assumption in much of the literature on gender and sexuality that this binarism is, by definition and independent of any real-world context, limiting and oppressive. It might be more productive to ask under what circumstances the male-female binarism is oppressive, the various ways such oppressions operate, and under what circumstances it is not oppressive at all. Consider, for instance, how the toilets at Taman Remaja differ from Lacan's image.



As before, (wanita) are on one side and gentlemen (pria) on the other. But below pria is that government-invented but now everyday term *waria*—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, as also exemplified by the “male (waria)” identity cards that were issued for a time in East Java.<sup>41</sup>

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 waria can be identified by sight alone, because this is typically true for Indonesian men and women as well. Most waria carry identity cards marking them as male, and even a “male (waria)” identity card makes waria a subtype of male. If both the identity card and the toilet signs are signifiers, then what exactly do they signify? The 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: the gendering of waria, and 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 relation of abjection to the male, a movement toward a male femininity that is, in the eyes of dominant gender norms, a movement toward failure. It seems the waria subject position 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: although waria often take female hormones or inject silicone, no waria 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 . . . [is] the limit that would permit one to identify the political” (Derrida 1994:50–51).

What, then, is the key to the performativity of waria gendered subjectivity? It is not the waria show at Taman Remaja; not all waria “perform” in this manner, and those who do are still waria when not performing. The true waria performance is *déndong*; their subjectivity is “produced by the regulation of attributes along culturally established lines of coherence” (Butler 1990:24). “Making oneself up” (Hacking 1992) is the performance that makes a waria, that makes up the very thing it makes up. And the exact same activity, *déndong*, is the prototypical *prestasi* or “good deed” that—in the eyes of waria and in the eyes of Indonesians more generally—makes waria worthy of belonging to society. *Déndong* “makes up” waria as a haunting presence as it also “makes up” (i.e., compensates) for their failure as masculine men. Waria 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. Waria 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 womanhood and manhood, without which what the state terms its family principle of governance (*azas kekeluargaan*) would not be intelligible.<sup>42</sup>

But no matter how good the makeup, waria 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 a gendered subject position haunting maleness. In subjectivity as in sex, the prototypical waria has a penis. Both the gendering of waria and their marginal place in Indonesian society are effects of this haunted condition of existence; this is where these two issues come together. I am not making a structuralist argument here: were waria a true third gender they might still be marginalized. I am claiming that the haunting 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*). To be crafted through human action (i.e., through *prestasi*) renders things *palsu* (false): un-*asli*, inauthentic, colonially contaminated. The status of the authentic, the *asli*, is self-evident; it does not have to be performed. Now consider once again how waria base claims for belonging *and* establish gendered subjectivity through *déndong*, the good deed of making up, rather than status-based claims to “tradition.” *Gay* men also talk about *prestasi* and authenticity. But for *gay* men the *prestasi* that could lead society to accept them (working in an orphanage, publishing a magazine, or even behaving politely) are not the same things that establish their gendered and sexual subjectivity.

Waria 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), whereas 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 in a context where belonging is understood in terms of uncrafted authenticity? How do waria hope to gain national belonging through performing *prestasi* when authenticity lies beyond *prestasi*'s limit, evaporates at *prestasi*'s very touch? How can you playback cultural citizenship?

This claim to belonging remains unanswered. As compared with transgendered persons in many parts of the world, waria are accepted, but their acceptance is incomplete. As Indonesia moves further into the uncharted waters of its era of reform, the visibility of waria 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 waria 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. This material draws from ethnographic work and HIV prevention activism with waria in three urban fieldsites (Surabaya; Makassar, South Sulawesi; and southern Bali) and several additional urban and rural fieldsites. Altogether I have spent 21 months in these fieldsites during seven visits to Indonesia (1992, 1993, 1995, 1997–98, 2000, 2001, and 2002).

4. This parallels Rosalind Morris' interpretation of Thai kathoey male-to-female transgendered subjectivity as a "feminized maleness" that "has been contained within" and "has indeed been the containment of" maleness (Morris 1997:62).

5. This is also the approximation waria use in my experience. When asking if there are waria in the West, "transvestite" is the word they consistently choose. Since few waria 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 waria may encounter "transvestite" in a dictionary, it provides an insightful gloss on the waria subject position.

6. Panky Kenthut, the former head of PERWAKOS (Persatuan Waria Kotamadya Surabaya or Surabaya Municipal Waria Union; see below), believed *banci* originates from the Javanese *bandule cilik* (Indonesian *bandul kecil*, small testicles) (Kenthut n.d.). The suffix *-ong* is one of the most productive in Indonesian *gay* language, and may pre-date *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*, that are entering vernacular Indonesian to various degrees. See Boellstorff 2004c.

7. 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).

8. The first nonderogatory term for *banci* appears to have been *wadam*; its appearance in the 1960s was linked to the greater social visibility and protection given to waria 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*. Another etymology by the early 1970s was *haWA-aDAM* or “eve-adam” (“Dua Dunia yang Belum Sudah,” *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. 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, Alamsyah, who was the Minister of Religion at the time, coined the term *waria*, a decision apparently supported by President Soeharto and made official when published in the newspaper *Kompas* on June 7, 1978 (Budiman 1982:1). News of the decision appears to have spread quickly across the archipelago, as evidenced by the national ubiquity of the term *waria* today, and the decision is still remembered by some older waria.

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

10. I draw mainly on published (and usually fragmentary reports). Additionally, I 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. This underscores how Dutch civil law, derived from the Napoleonic Code, paid little attention to (and rarely prosecuted) sodomy. 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 toward sexual assault and sex below the age of consent. To my knowledge this law was never enforced before the late 1930s. It also reflects how heterosexual miscegenation dominated colonial thinking on sex and race, because 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” (1995:96).

12. For instance, the term *banci* does not appear once in early 19th-century versions of the Javanese chronicle *Serat Tjentini* (Anderson 2001:xiv).

13. This may reflect the colonial regime's emphasis on dress as a status marker (Nordholt 1998). 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 waria 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, and Soentoro 1996.

14. For instance, the Dutch lexicographer H. C. Klinkert mentions *kedī* as a Malay term in 1869 (Bleys 1995:179), whereas Vickers discusses *kedī* as emphatically Balinese, noting they were punished in the Balinese version of purgatory in the *Kerta Gosa* law court paintings of Klungkung, East Bali (n.d.:14). Vickers cites Van der Tuuk (1897–1912) as providing *bantut*, *bantjih* (*banci*), and *wandhu* as synonyms for *kedī*: in the contemporary period *bantut* is the term for a male transgender subject position in the southern Philippines (Johnson 1997), whereas *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 *wandhu* 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: “Known as *tjelebei* . . . 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) Malay transvestites would gather “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. . . . 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” (Kennedy 1953:213–214). In the late 1940s, Chabot provided observations on a waria (*kawekawe*) living in a village near Makassar who rarely worked in the rice fields but spent 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” (Chabot 1996:192).

15. Many of the ludruk dramas investigated by Peacock were performed in a “People’s Amusement Park” that may well be the contemporary Taman Remaja. As in my experience, 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). While never using the term *banci* (perhaps because of its derogatory tone) it is clear that Peacock’s performers were transvestite off-stage. 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 (1968:168, 170, 203–204). He notes that these performers were effeminate from childhood and were teased by family and neighbors; they worked in small business environments identified with *waria*, and wore women's clothes "at home, sometimes in public" (1968:207). They also pasted "pictures of themselves—made-up as women—on their mirrors" (1968:207).

16. Panky Kenthut (n.d.) asserted that prior to the 1960s, entertainment genres such as *ludruk* were the only context in which *waria* could dress as women.

17. This shift probably began in the cities of Jakarta and Medan (in Sumatra), spreading throughout the archipelago by the late 1970s. Certainly some *waria* dressed as women most of the time prior to the 1960s, as evidenced by oral history interlocutors 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" (1968:206).

18. The preferred term *waria* is less well known.

19. Tessie, the "waria" appearing in the Bayer Aspirin commercial, claimed in interviews to be a man who dressed as a woman only for entertainment. In Makassar in 2000, *waria* were unsure if Tessie was telling the truth, but they did not seem to mind, since via Tessie the image of *waria* further entered society (*citra waria masuk*), and this was seen to be good in itself. In 2003, a *waria* ran for mayor of the city of Malang in East Java (Perlez 2003:4).

20. Everyone in Atmojo's sample of 194 *waria* in Jakarta started feeling like *waria* before 20 years of age (Atmojo 1986:34). *Waria* themselves say that besides becoming *waria* because of being born that way or due to environmental influence, some people become *waria* because a woman broke their heart (*putus asa dengan cewek*); this third etiology assumes the person to have been at least an adolescent.

21. This environment of gender play is shaped by a strong dichomization of male and female in contemporary Indonesia, 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," such as 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 that *waria* rework and redeploy.

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

23. See "Sebuah Masala buat Banci," *Tempo*, August 10, 1985.

24. In 1988, H. Maya Rissa claimed to have made the haj nine times and the lesser pilgrimage (*umroh*) four times, all as a woman ("Bab Pakaian Ihram untuk Waria," *Tempo*, January 16, 1988:83). In 1988, K. H. Hasan Basri, head of the Central Jakarta Ulama's Union, stipulated that *waria* should attend the haj as men, "Waria 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 *waria* could decide themselves if

they wished to undertake the pilgrimage as men or women (“Bab Pakaian Ihram untuk Waria,” *Tempo*, January 16, 1988:82).

25. Thus one waria believed s/he was sinful “because there are only two kinds of people, men and women,” yet concluded that “waria are born as a man with the temperament of a woman, and temperament is given by God [*sifat diberikan Tuhan*]. We are lying to ourselves if we do not live as waria. God has written the script, and we are just the artists.” One waria explained in an editorial that “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, then what kind of creation am I? There’s a third creation?” (“Waria: Mana Hukum yang Bisa Dipegang?,” *Tempo*, February 6, 1988:17.) Many non-waria do see waria as sinful; some Muslims link this to the Quranic concept of the in-between gender *khunṣa* (*hunṣa*) (see Oetomo 1996:263; “Bab Pakaian Ihram untuk Waria,” *Tempo*, 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.”

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

27. The waria Chenny Han claims to have consumed seven to eight birth control pills a day for six months, with side effects including a pounding heartbeat, lethargy, and an inability to have erections (Soentoro 1996:182).

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

29. The first case of such an operation to gain notoriety concerned Vivian Rubianty Iskandar (formerly Iwan Rubianto Iskandar), whose operation was performed in Singapore on January 8, 1973. On November 14, 1973, s/he applied to the Court of West and South Jakarta to change her/his gender and name (Moerthiko 1980:16); s/he was represented in court by the well-known lawyer Adnan Buyung Nasution when s/he had her/his gender legally changed, and s/he claimed that Soeharto had invited her/him to a party on behalf of Tutut, one of his daughters (“Dua Dunia yang Belum Sudah,” *Tempo*, October 6, 1973:46). The case led to press coverage and even seminars on transgenderism bringing together doctors, lawyers, and religious experts (see “Dua Dunia yang Belum Sudah,” *Tempo*, October 6, 1973, and “Dorce di Surabaya, Sally di Mesir,” *Tempo*, 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, Vivian/Iwan’s lawyer during the proceedings, 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 her/his soul without end for as long as s/he lives, and this is clearly at odds with the philosophy and goals of the law” (Moerthiko 1980:17; see also “Dua Dunia yang Belum Sudah,” *Tempo*, October 6, 1973:46–50). I have no statistics on the current frequency of sex-change operations on waria, but it appears to be under ten percent. In a 1997 interview, a prominent Surabaya waria knew of only about ten waria in Surabaya who had undergone the operation.

30. The cost of these procedures had risen to four to six million rupiah in 1997 (500–700 US dollars) from 350,000–1,000,000 rupiah in the late 1970s. Waria sometimes travel to Singapore or other destinations outside Indonesia for operations, but only

waria 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 waria 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 ("Dorce di Surabaya, Sally di Mesir," *Tempo*, December 24, 1988:79; "SK [Surat Keputusan] Menteri untuk Waria," *Tempo*, April 22 1989:82).

32. Although waria do have sex with each other on occasion, they tend to regard this as strange, and they joke good-naturedly that it is "like a woman sleeping with a woman." Waria usually assume that waria have sex with women only if heterosexually married. At least three waria 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 at night and permitted it as long as the husband took care of the family. In other cases, waria dress as men at home and manage to hide their waria-ness from their wives. Such waria usually either came to waria subjectivity late in life without their family's knowledge, or the family may be complicit in hiding the waria's waria-ness from the wife. I have also encountered cases in Bali and Sulawesi (and I assume there are others elsewhere in Indonesia) where waria marry or carry on sexual relationships with tomboi, the waria finding attractive a masculine woman and the woman finding attractive a feminine man. It is said that tomboi have become pregnant from these unions.

33. This can range from an occasional "date" supplementing wage labor to a sole source of income. Beyond financial benefits, waria 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 waria wishing to solicit in a certain area have an identity card provided by the organization. In the sex-work market, waria are in competition with female sex workers. Even though these women are often coerced into sex work, they are, in comparison to waria, better organized and more often officially registered. Many also 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 also have small brothels. Being forced to solicit and engage in sex acts in public places such as parks and roadsides places waria at risk not only of social opprobrium but physical violence at the hands of disgruntled or drunk clients, or even random passersby. Their most common clients are unmarried and unemployed men, often still in secondary school, some as young as thirteen or fourteen years old. Older clients of waria are usually unemployed or in low-paying occupations, such as driving pedicabs, that put them in frequent contact with waria. Another unattractive aspect of sex work 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 their unwillingness to be examined by a doctor who might make fun of them.



34. In 1949, one of Raymond Kennedy's male informants in rural south Sulawesi claimed that "many men go for [waria]. . . . 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" (1953:112). See also Peacock 1968:207.

35. 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 also possible, albeit trickier, for wives to carry on illicit sexual relationships with women or men). Although I was not able to interview in any depth wives of men partnered with waria, it appears that wives who know of their husband's relationship with a waria accept the matter because waria 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 and no fear of illegitimate children; and this arrangement 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 other women for that matter (see Brenner 1998).

36. 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 waria imagine there are only men and women in the rest of the world. Most assume the existence of "transvestites" elsewhere. However, waria 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 waria have seen images of non-Indonesian transgenders (for instance, by renting *The Crying Game* on DVD), 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 is transgenderism outside Indonesia 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 ("Dorce di Surabaya, Sally di Mesir," *Tempo*, December 24, 1988:78–79). Very few waria 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).

37. 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.

38. In 1949, Chabot found that in Makassar "the environment accepts a kawekawek [waria] as he [*sic*] is. People do not have the idea that it is his fault that he is the way he is" (Chabot 1996:207).

39. 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.

40. 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 kawekawek [waria]" (Chabot 1996:189). Occasionally waria will be termed a "class of their own" (*kelas tersendiri*) or "special type" (*jenis khas*) ("Sebuah Masala buat Banci," *Tempo*, August 10, 1985:59).

41. 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).

42. The family principle holds that the nation is made up not of individuals but families, and that governance is to be modeled on the ostensibly benign rule of a father over the family rather than an emphasis on legal measures deemed to promote conflict. The principle is directly espoused by the state and also operationalized through family planning programs. See, for instance, Dwyer 2000, Robinson 1989, and Suryakusuma 1996.

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ABSTRACT *Waria* (better known as *banci* or *béncong*), who can be provisionally defined as male-to-female transvestites, are well-known members of contemporary Indonesian society. *Waria* are best understood not as a third gender but a male femininity. By exploring how *waria* reconfigure concepts of authenticity, I address the relationship between the *waria* subject position and Indonesian national culture. [Indonesia, transgender, transvestite, national culture, authenticity]