
Benjamin Daniel Hegarty

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Benjamin Daniel Hegarty
School of Archaeology and Anthropology
College of Arts and Social Sciences
Australian National University
Acknowledgements

This thesis has involved a tremendous amount of collective work which cannot be adequately conveyed here. I dedicate this thesis to Eka and Tuti, two waria who did not live to see its completion. I acknowledge their creativity, humour and interest in this project by dedicating this thesis to them.

My engagement with Indonesia comes from a range of sources. However, most notable are my early recollection of listening to stories told by my mother. With her talent for richly textured ethnographic observation and story-telling far greater than my own, she described the kinds of people that she observed there and the conditions in which they found themselves. It was really her interest that prompted my initial stay in Jakarta in 2010 and subsequently enrol in postgraduate studies at Monash University as a way to commence research. Matt Tomlinson and Julian Millie have offered guidance and interest since this time. It was chiefly the friends that I met in Indonesia and their encouragement for my own interest in Indonesia’s culture, history and politics, that made a lasting impression. Nova Ruth and Roy Thaniago deserve special mention. Later on, when both of my parents travelled and later on moved to Indonesia, their depth of interest meant that they became the best interlocutors that I could have hoped for. They will see themselves on every page.

The academic environment at the ANU, and of anthropology in particular, fundamentally shaped the direction of this thesis. I am grateful for the generous institutional and financial support offered by both an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship, a Prime Minister’s Australia Asia Endeavour Scholarship and the ANU. Michelle Antoinette provided early support and interest. My cohort of students threw up new lines of flight for the research, and particular thanks goes to the patience and loyalty of Charlotte van Tongeren and Shiori Shakuto. Annie McCarthy’s combination of warm generosity and intellect serves as a guiding influence from the day I started my thesis to present. At ANU I was fortunate to have sources of intellectual stimulation beyond my own school and academic panel. Peter Jackson, Margaret Jolly, Phillip Taylor, Ariel Heryanto and Gavin Smith have each provided inspiration and support in their own way. The advisors on my panel, Ken George and Kirin Narayan, offered inspiration above and beyond their engagement with this research. My greatest gratitude and source of inspiration goes to my thesis supervisor, Christine Helliwell. Her formidable intellect, straightforward questions, humour, and ability to teach are qualities that I aspire to. I look forward to many more years working together.

I finished this thesis in Melbourne. At the University of Melbourne, Ana Dragojlovic has provided her unwavering support and interest, and seeing her each week helped my ideas to breath. Martha McIntyre and Kalissa Alexeyeff’s ethnographic acumen helped me in the final phase of editing. My students in various courses at the ANU and the University of Melbourne remind me to communicate myself better. I have been lucky to have engaged with academic and activist sources of inspiration in a number of places at different moments in the research. There are more sources of academic inspiration in this thesis than I can list here. In the study of gender and sexuality, I would especially
like to acknowledge Tom Boellstorff, Dédé Oetomo, Ed Green, Sharyn Davies, Aren Aizura, Dredge Käng and Hoang Nguyen.

Initial institutional support in Indonesia was provided by Samsul Maarif at the Centre for Cross-Cultural and Religious Studies, and later on by Prof. Sunarto and Wika Hartanti at the Centre for Bioethics and Medical Humanities in the Faculty of Medicine at Gadjah Madah University. I learned enormous amounts about the complexities at the intersection of class, gender, sexuality and health from my discussions with Gambit and Dr Yanri Subranto. Sandeep Nanwani lives his principles through an unwavering commitment to social justice and has become one of my closest friends and steadfast collaborators. Ferdiansyah Thajib’s incisive intellect and keen ethnographic eye always suggests better perspectives on my work. In Yogyakarta, Paige, Malcolm, Jimmy, Mulyana, Ardi, Aditya, Edwina, Antariksa and Kunci offered me sustenance during fieldwork. The Makcik Project, by Jimmy Ong, Ferial Afiff and Grace Samboh offers a superb template for representing *waria* lives through artistic and ethnographic practice. Holy Rafika provided superb research assistance, locating many historical sources that I otherwise would not have been able to locate.

Both *waria* and other Indonesians are the stars of this thesis. Although I cannot name all of them here, I hope that the finished product honours their tireless efforts and labour. The title of the thesis came out of a discussion with Ibu Lenni in Jakarta, whose suggestion of “The Moon That Never Shined (Bulan Yang Tidak Pernah Cahaya)” served as inspiration for the present title and overall conceptual direction. Also in Jakarta, Ibu Nancy, Catur, Jane, Hartoyo, Chenny Han and Erman deserve special thanks. In Yogyakarta, I thank Mami Vinolia and Kebaya in particular, and all of the *waria* in Badran and Kricak. I also thank my “wife,” who and kept me fed and entertained. For each and every *waria* in Indonesia, I hope that this thesis and the research that it contains serves as a form of *prestasi*: that it both demonstrates *waria*’s remarkable history of accomplishments and indicates how impoverished Indonesia would be without them.

Those close to me offered endless patience and necessary distance from my research. Thank you to my brother Kieran and sister Frances, their partners, family and friends in Australia and around the world. Ben Wright’s curiosity inspires my own and I am forever grateful for his generosity. I gain inspiration for doing this work from my boyfriend and closest friend Jack. His courage and love means that in the course of my research I have subjected him to discomfort and placed him in peculiar predicaments which he has suffered with good humour. His unselfish commitment to approach human problems with the greatest care is the thread that weaves this thesis, and our relationship, together.
Abstract

This PhD thesis describes the ways that the gendered body is experienced across the life course and within its historical context. It does so by describing, in dialogue with ethnographic and historical data, transformations in understandings and experiences of male-bodied femininity during New Order Indonesia (1967–1998). The main focus of this thesis are waria, and the closely related but separate term banci. Both waria and banci are Indonesian terms which refer to diverse forms of gendered embodiment and social practices. Waria practice a broad range of femininities depending on their audience, and challenge the universality of Western categories of gender and sexual diversity.

Notably, both terms — but especially banci — have negative connotations of deviance through a relationship to transactional sex, public sexuality and flamboyant femininity.

Given that embodiment and selfhood are understood by waria to be shaped by those with whom one interacts, a primary concern of this thesis is kin and social relations among waria. My chief finding is that waria of this generation see their gender presentation as a product of relationships of intimacy and dependency. Waria describe these understandings of intimacy and forms of self-making as a process they call “becoming (waria jadi).” Waria narrate their own subjectivity and that of other waria in terms of beginning as “banci kaléng (empty banci)” before becoming more visible over time.

I highlight how waria’s gender performances are performed with specific audiences in mind, paying attention to various audiences and their relationship to the gender performance in question. This suggests that, while there is no stable embodiment to which waria ascribe, their gender performances are shaped by highly specific aesthetic and social scripts within their historical and cultural context.

The thesis is based on long-term fieldwork conducted in 2014 and 2015 in the Indonesian cities of Yogyakarta and Jakarta. As such, this thesis offers an ethnographic account of everyday life among mostly elderly, lower class waria in the context of their social worlds. I also provide historical contextualisation of the globalisation of Western discourse, both through expert knowledge and the mass media. I do so to describe how this discourse interacts with regional understandings of personhood to produce specific forms of intelligible gendered embodiment in Indonesia. The thesis builds on a growing literature in transgender studies alongside feminist anthropology to develop theoretical innovations in how the body is implicated in projects of capitalist modernity, emphasising the voices of waria themselves in that process. The major theoretical contribution of the thesis is a detailed description of waria’s understanding of gender, which calls into question the naturalisation of masculinity or femininity as enduring and stable aspects of an individual body which emanate from an inner self.
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## Glossary

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banci (bewnętr)</td>
<td>Often derogatory term used to describe transgender women or feminine men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banci kaléng</td>
<td>Literally an “empty banci,” a person thought likely to turn into a waria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bapak</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brondong</td>
<td>Term used to describe young, often adolescent boys or men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandan (dèndong)</td>
<td>Practices involved with cultivating embodied femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay (hémong)</td>
<td>Masculine gay man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genit (ngondhek)</td>
<td>Performance of femininity by men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibu</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istri</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiwa perempuan</td>
<td>A woman’s soul or mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kucing</td>
<td>Literally a “cat,” a male sex worker who is often a brondong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malu</td>
<td>A socially perceived sense of shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyébong</td>
<td>Social settings where waria partake in both transactional and unpaid sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestasi</td>
<td>The performances of good deeds or accomplishments by an individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suami</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadam</td>
<td>Transgender woman (no longer in use, originated in 1968)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waria</td>
<td>Transgender woman (currently used, originated in 1978)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: “We Waria Have Value Too”
– An Introduction

It is a rainy evening in February as I arrive at a fifty-year-old informant’s house in Yogyakarta to observe the filming of one of many documentaries I have seen produced for foreign and Indonesian audiences about waria. After greeting my waria friends I take a seat, as usual, at the back of the room — the best place to catch up on local gossip and joke around. This particular documentary is being made by a German journalist for a European audience. It is representative in a number of respects; the rushed production process, the lack of participation by waria in imagining the content, and the clichéd, Western understandings of what the journalist calls “transgender” as a mismatch between body and mind. The journalist asks the waria — already done up in six foot heels, a purple mini-skirt and thick make-up — to pretend to apply foundation in front of a mirror. After the lights are on and camera rolling, the journalist asks about their process of “coming out.” He responds to their blank stares with the following question: “Do you want to have a sex change?”

Waria do not seem interested in his questions, which reflect a fairly uninformed Western perspective with little relevance to their lives, but furnish him with perfunctory responses. The journalist continues, “you know, like Thai ladyboys?” His comparison with “Thai ladyboys” makes more sense and the waria respond; many I met during fieldwork did consider Thailand an unparalleled centre for transgender and gay culture. Yet, regrettably the journalist’s questions do not stem from a keen
interest in waria’s everyday lives and concerns. Rather, as he later clarifies to me, they arise from the hope that one day Indonesian waria will access the quality gender reassignment surgery and surgical beautification available to Thai ladyboys. In his view, waria are on a developmental scale in which they are inferior. And it is a fairly interesting to add that most waria would tend to agree with him — although not interested in gender reassignment surgery, they too see themselves as occupying an ambiguous temporal state, one shaped by imaginaries of capitalist development refracted through Indonesian national modernity.

Although waria are by no means shaped only through interaction with transgender via the Western mass media, this initial anecdote usefully captures the myriad ways that experiences in the field shaped my research. Having arrived in Indonesia with an interest in critiquing precisely such a universalising and restrictive narrative of “transgender,” I was deeply sceptical of the many journalists and researchers that I met during fieldwork in urban Java. However, in this and other encounters, my own positionality marked me as more similar to those I preferred to see as interlopers, like the journalist mentioned earlier, than I was usually comfortable with. Furthermore, waria usually enjoyed these kinds of events, for which they projected a reflexively inspired, often amusing version of themselves. It was through participating in these kinds of interactions that I also discovered the ways in which waria, the journalists and I were all engaging in the work required to draw some people and practices — but not others — into an emergent global imaginary related to the category transgender.

As a result of this process, I too was often drawn in to the scene as the anthropologist-expert, and so, when the journalist asked me to define waria, I answered him. I explained that waria and its less polite cognate term banci refer to diverse manifestations of male-bodied femininity in Indonesia, but that they both have an association with street-based transactional sex (nyébong) and glamorous comportment (dëndong). I added that waria have been widely known throughout Indonesia since the 1960s and that they excel in the fields of fashion design, salon work and performance. In these and other settings, I was forced to contemplate the complexity of different spaces, technologies, and modes of narrativisation through which waria bodies are made visible and legible. This and other moments during fieldwork stimulated a deep ambiguity about my own role, but I was above all compelled to recognise the stakes that waria themselves have in this process. This initial anecdote thus serves to convey one of the key tensions that animate this thesis, and introduces the question at the heart of my research: How are waria understandings of subjectivity and the gendered body shaped by the resources and technologies that have become available over the past fifty or so years, as shaped by Indonesian national modernity?

1 One waria interlocutor suggested both “transvestite” and “trans woman” as possible English translations, but most of my waria informants seemed to agree that “feminine men” was a better terminological fit (see Davies 2010; Boellstorff 2007, Chapter 2 for a discussion of problems related to terminology). I use the Indonesian term waria throughout this thesis given the inadequacies and clumsiness of the English equivalents, and because it is a more formal option than the alternatives banci and béncong. Most importantly, waria is a better suited term for the genre and intended audiences for this thesis.
This thesis responds to this question about waria performances of gender based on long term, multi-sited fieldwork in Indonesia. Each chapter in turn considers the history of practices concerned with gender performance for a variety of audiences: for the state, for other waria, in the course of visible forms of work, and in relation to intimacy. The ethnographic descriptions traverse numerous sites and spaces but remains attuned to contextualising the “structures of feeling” (Williams 1978, 128–35) of Indonesian national modernity. I do so by articulating the diverse modes through which waria performances of the self serve to sustain “bonds of reciprocal dependence” (Goffman 1952, 51) evoked through specific kinds of performances undertaken in particular locations. In doing so, I engage Erving Goffman’s (1952, 152) insight that self-presentation, including gender, is fundamentally structured by the “team of performers” of which an individual is a part. I also engage with wider debates in anthropology and transgender studies by reflecting on the way in which waria’s performances of gender and understandings of “good conduct” (ibid., 50) can only be understood in reference to the audiences to whom their performances are addressed. I describe the meanings of performances of femininity among waria, as shaped by the conditions of Indonesian national modernity, in the pages and chapters that follow.

Raymond Williams (1978) describes “structures of feeling” as affective transformations which occur across time, harnessing broad historical transformations to subjective experiences. Rather than separating gender normativity out from non-normativity, I attend instead to “forming and formative processes” (ibid., 128) which influence gender performances in authoritarian and post-authoritarian Indonesia. Theoretical approaches which describe transgender femininity in terms of “anatomical artifice” (Baudrillard 2002, 9) have long been problematised by anthropologists who assert the ways that it reflects sociological transformations in sex, gender and sexuality (Valentine 2007; Kulick 1998). As a result, a related aim of this thesis is to chart the embodied experience of “aging as a career” (Myerhoff 1979, 251) among a group of elderly waria in Indonesia, describing the ways in which gender performances shift in intersection with age. I chart the historical contingencies through which individuals come to understand themselves as thinking about gender in relation to the self in the first place, or, using the term favoured by my waria informants, move through a series of professions (profesi) within their historical milieu. This aspect of the thesis can be understood as offering a perspective on the history of masculinity and femininity in modern Indonesia. This thread of my research asks: How do performances of femininity surface as a central discursive practice

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2 A primary methodological concern of this thesis is to suggest that transgender femininity must be analysed alongside cisgender (or female-bodied) femininity, in Indonesia as elsewhere (see also Ochoa 2014, 205). That they are separated out from one another in scholarly research reflects the presumed universality of Western understandings of “natural” biological sex and gender normativity.

3 Most research about gender and sexuality often relates to youth and young bodies. For example, Don Kulick (1998, 43) describes transgender-identified travesti in Brazil as an “individualistic youth culture, generated through the practices of individuals who either are young or want to remain young.” As a result, there are few studies which describe the experiences of ageing or of the life course among transgender-identified individuals, a lacuna that this thesis seeks to address.
through which national modernity is understood and sustained in Indonesia? What role have waria played in this process?

The waria that I introduce in this thesis routinely described their own subjectivity and that of those around them in terms of “becoming waria (jadi waria).” My informants reflected on becoming waria as a process that begins in childhood, starting with recognition of what are interpreted as signs of being a feminine boy (Indonesian, genit, ngondhek) or that they are a waria by neighbours and close kin (see also Boellstorff 2007, 87). Some informants reflected on their belief that if relatives had not encouraged such behaviour, they would not have become waria in the first place. It follows from this understanding of subjectivity — one which is born out of the commentary and actions of others — that waria see the process of attaining a more feminine gender presentation as hastened through interaction with others like them.

Central to this understanding of gender is the work that oneself and others do to attain recognition as more masculine or more feminine over time, ideal understandings of which are shaped by the social and cultural setting in which they are located. Thus, as an ethnographic account of waria social life, I seek to trace the unfinished relationships between bodies, selves, media and capital, reflecting on the “processes and practices that produce that body as part of the social process of becoming” (Ochoa 2014, 169). I draw upon waria’s descriptions of “becoming waria (jadi waria)” in dialogue with feminist perspectives on bodily becoming as the central organising theme of this thesis. Throughout, I illustrate how this offers a productive vantage point on gender as a sociological process in Indonesia more broadly, extending well beyond the commonly used conceptual vocabulary implied by “gender” and “sexuality” or even the possibility of an intersection between them.

A consistently reiterated desire to wear make-up and women’s clothes in the company of others on a daily basis is perhaps the most crucial step in becoming waria. The word that waria use for these practices is dêndong (standard Indonesian, dandan) which are temporary corporeal modifications performed by waria on a daily basis (Boellstorff 2007, 93). Among both waria and gay men, dêndong describes bodily transformations including the use of make-up with cosmetics, wearing women’s clothing and breast prosthetics. Dêndong is commonly associated with a stylised, glamorous global femininity (see also Davies 2010, 143). When used in everyday parlance to refer to grooming, dandan connotes the process of improving an already inherent quality in a person (Siegel 1997, 73).

This understanding is also reflected in the way that waria commonly claim that their gender presentation is the culmination of consistently reiterated improvement work undertaken throughout their lives. Waria also frequently use passive terms when describing the self, including “characteristics which are brought [out] (pembawaan)” and “to be influenced (terpengaruhi).”

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4 My understanding of becoming as a process of corporeal transformation that takes place across the life course and in relation to a broad array of resources bears parallels with diverse strands of feminist literature. I have benefited primarily from drawing together Donna Haraway’s (1991) concept of gendered embodiment always already technologised, and Simone de Beauvoir’s (1997) classic understanding of femininity as the product of significant work achieved throughout the life course.
Finally, *waria* will frequently explain these corporeal transformations as occurring because they possessed a “woman’s soul (*jiwa perempuan*)” in the first place (see also Boellstorff 2007, 91). It is this relationship between *waria* narratives of subjectivity and embodiment as becoming and my interpretation of it as the “*work* that discursive practices perform” (Mahmood 2005, 188) that I describe in the pages and chapters that follow. I do so by arguing that *waria*’s gender presentation is not an individualised practice that can be isolated out from broader definitions of what it is to be a man or a woman in Indonesia. Rather than a distinct kind of individual who can tell us something about gender alone, *waria* provide rich insights into processes usually described as normative or a naturally occurring effect of gender, such as dominant notions of reproductive motherhood.

The research for this thesis is based on fifteen months of fieldwork among *waria* who live primarily in two Indonesian cities on the island of Java. The primary field site was Yogyakarta, a city in the central part of Java famous for its universities and tourist sites and the major centre of a region with a population of approximately 4 million people. The secondary site was the large capital city Jakarta, a popular destination for rural migrants and centre of a sprawling metropolitan area with a population of approximately 30 million people. I also visited a number of smaller cities and towns during fieldwork, either accompanying *waria* informants or going there to visit other *waria* (see Figure 1.2).
Given the historical focus of this thesis, the waria that I undertook participant observation with were for the most part elderly. This is a relative term that I use to mean that my informants are aged between their late thirties and early seventies, and to whom younger waria referred in terms of seniority. This perspective suggests that it is better to describe my informants’ profile in generational rather than absolute terms of biological age, given that all were adults during some or part of the period of authoritarian government and developmentalist economics known as the New Order (1967–1998). The way that waria themselves refer to one another in generational terms appears modelled on the link between kinship and generations (angkatan) observed more broadly in Indonesia, frequently used for political purposes and for exhorting rhetorical links to national independence (Anderson 1990, 185). This thesis can thus be understood as an ethnography of three generations of waria: the first generation born prior to Indonesian independence during the 1930s and 1940s; the second generation born during the reign of first president Sukarno during the 1950s and 1960s (or as general Suharto became the second president during a period of unrest between 1965 and 1970), and the third generation born during the height of the New Order between the 1970s and the 1990s. Waria

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5 The president of Indonesia for the length of the New Order was a military general called Suharto. Suharto come to power in a violent coup and suppression of communism in 1965, became the acting president in 1967 and was officially appointed in that role in 1968. Suharto only resigned in May 1998 after a period of sustained social and economic unrest.
performances of gender have been shaped by their specific generational experience informed by its historical moment.

For the most part, my waria informants were relatively poor, living in crowded neighbourhoods in the central parts of the city in which they lived. I say relatively because often a number of waria in these neighbourhoods did command a degree of material wealth, with some making a considerable profit from interest on loaned money. These waria appeared wealthier than their neighbours. Almost all lived alone in small one-room apartments (kost) with shared bathrooms and kitchen facilities, but usually in complexes and neighbourhoods which housed dozens of other waria (Figure 1.2).

This image is only available in the print version of this thesis, available at the Australian National University.

Figure 1.3: Waria in the doorway of a friend's room as she prepares to go out to busk.

Most of my primary informants maintained some degree of contact with their natal family, entailing weekly telephone calls or visits. The most prominent experience all of my informants shared was the extraordinary level of migration and mobility that they had undertaken throughout their lives (see Figure 1.4). For example, I met dozens of waria who lived in Yogyakarta but were originally from Sumatra, but also waria from other parts of Java, Bali, Sulawesi, Papua and even East Timor. In Jakarta, I met waria who had migrated from every part of the country. Like many Indonesians, waria are exceptionally mobile: I was often amazed at the distance that they covered in the course of a lifetime, or even a matter of a few days. On a more practical note, this meant that sometimes waria informants who I had spent time with for some months would suddenly disappear overnight, their room cleared of possessions. Given that my fieldwork was primarily based in Yogyakarta, I developed the strongest relationships in that city, and many of the key insights are indebted to
participant observation conducted there. I spent a great deal of time with waria from Jakarta in Yogyakarta and vice versa, and so I rarely describe the research in geographically bounded terms throughout the thesis.

The majority of the research is based on fifteen key informants with whom I spent hundreds of hours in homes, travelling between cities, and hanging out more generally. This group of primary informants led me to engage with a group of secondary informants. I mostly spent time with this much larger group, approximately one hundred over the entire course of fieldwork, at special events, meetings and in the homes of primary informants. Both primary and secondary groups of informants share a profile of being socioeconomically disadvantaged, earning at most between 50,000 Indonesian rupiah (US$5) and 100,000 Indonesian rupiah (US$10) a day. Most did not have stable employment, and seemed to subsist off the permanent circulation of small loans and community lotteries. The majority worked as street singers (ngamén) and informal businesses run from home, slightly fewer worked in small restaurants owned by other people, and a minority worked part-time as salon workers. All made varying degrees of money through transactional sex (nyébong).6 Lastly, while all of my primary informants are waria, I also focused on intimate, nurturing relationships with the adolescent boys and young men that waria call brondong, from whom most of my informants obtained a great deal of enjoyment. While I did not ascertain the exact ages of brondong, I estimate

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6 While I use the term nyébong to refer to one meaning of transactional sex here, it has a far more nuanced and important meaning to waria. I reflect on nyébong and its relationship to waria subjectivity in Chapter 3.
that they are aged approximately from late teens to mid-twenties. While some waria did mention husbands (suami), I did not in fact meet any such figures, who remained somewhat distant.

Given the profile of my informants, an important caveat of this thesis is that not all waria share the kinds of experiences that I describe. As a result, my data is limited to a specific range of experiences and individuals who share certain characteristics. It may seem as though I am using waria to refer to a profile of an individual who is generally lower class, elderly and frequently migrates between cities, characteristics which not all those who identify as waria always share. However, my data has the strength of offering important insights on the important and underexplored intersection between class and gender performance in Indonesia. The very meaning of the national category waria, as I will suggest, has been historically been shaped by its relationship to flamboyance, lower class status, public visibility, transactional sex, and a certain degree of shamelessness. Furthermore, given the consistency of my experiences across each of my field sites and its corroboration with historical sources, it is possible to generalise some of the more fundamental findings of this thesis to reflect on shifting understandings of gender in relation to modernity since the late 1960s in Indonesia.
The First Generation of Waria

While I refer to my informants as waria both for ease and out of the desire to articulate respect, there are in fact a number of terms used for male-bodied femininity in Indonesia, each with its own history and connotations. Banci (referred to in waria and gay language as béncong) is a widespread (and often derogatory) term which refers to a diverse range of individuals and practices in Indonesia. Both are commonly used to refer to waria, gay men, cross-gender play, or behaviour which is understood to be at odds with an individual’s perceived sex. Male-bodied feminine and female-bodied masculine individuals alike are referred to using the term banci, although over the past thirty years the term banci has come to have a close association with the glamorous visibility of waria more than it does those who are now referred to as tombois (see Blackwood 2010; Wieringa 2007). Banci and béncong are also terms which often used by waria and gay men in everyday life to refer to one another and themselves.

The term banci possibly dates from the middle of the 19th century, during which time it became linked to “lowlbrow entertainment, petty commodity trading, and sex work” (Boellstorff 2005, 47–57). However, sources are not entirely clear on the matter, and other accounts suggest that the use of banci to specifically refer to the male-bodied femininity of waria only dates from after Indonesian independence in 1945 (Howard 1996, 339–40; van der Kroef 1954). I found the latter to be the case, with waria commonly suggesting that there were no banci as late as the 1960s. On the other hand,
many waria used the term banci to distinguish themselves from previous socially outcast forms of male-bodied femininity that failed to uphold modern standards of feminine beauty. Waria, by contrast, are able to transform themselves to become as beautiful as women. One waria from Sumatra explained that this was enabled by migration: “When we came back from Jakarta [to our village], we were beautiful, our hair was long and we wore makeup (dendong). We looked like women (dendong seperti perempuan).” Some waria framed this in terms of a capacity to contribute to society through the cultivation of specific skills in the fields of salon work and fashion. Dominant New Order notions of economic development are thus entwined with waria’s understanding of their newfound capacity to accomplish modern femininity.

According to elderly waria, the term wadam (from hawa and adam, the Indonesian terms for Adam and Eve) dates from the earliest part of the New Order, and was established by waria themselves around 1968. Waria say that they introduced the term wadam to replace béncong, which prior to the 1960s was often used to hurt their feelings as a form of public admonishment. While little known in contemporary Indonesia, wadam was a term which was used widely to refer to those now known as waria in the mass media until the late 1970s. This was also the term used for the first local and national organisations for waria (Perhimpunan Wadam Jakarta and Perhimpunan Wadam Indonesia), founded in the 1970s in Jakarta. The establishment of the term wadam, which connoted a relationship to globally circulating ideas linking transsexuality and modern femininity during the 1970s, was one way that waria say they claimed credibility and respectability. The more modern term wadam also served to successfully distance male-bodied femininity from the pejorative and more situational meanings connoted by banci and béncong.

Wadam was superseded in official discourse by the term waria in 1978 (Boellstorff 2007, 83). One newspaper article (Kompas 1978) reports that the change was precipitated by a religious organisation’s protest over the use of the name of a Prophet (Adam). It is certainly possible that protest from Islamic organisations did influence this change, especially considering long-standing disapproval of waria by devout followers of Islam (santri) from the late 19th century at least (Peacock 1978, 126–27). However, I suggest that a more likely explanation for this change in the late 1970s was growing rigidity and scientific clarity in state definitions of femininity and masculinity in increasingly binarised and heteronormative terms (see Chapter 2). Waria is a respectful term used among waria to refer to one another and to public audiences, retaining a much higher degree of respectability than banci. While waria has certainly been influenced by a relationship to the the terms it superseded, it seems to have lost the meanings associating wadam with a global transsexual imaginary linked to medical and psychological explanations.

Scholarly and popular representations of waria as an exemplary figure of gender diversity in Indonesia are common. They are subject to various accurate interpretations: as one aspect of a theatrical response to modernisation (Hatley 1971; Peacock 1968), vestiges of Southeast Asian ritual tradition (Peletz 2009), or a subjectivity born of Indonesian national modernity (Boellstorff 2007, 78–
Far from unreflexively imagining themselves as timeless figures existing in a historical vacuum, however, my waria informants had a profound sense of their own emergence. Some of the oldest, aged in their seventies, even insisted that waria did not exist at all prior to the 1960s. The legendary Jakarta-based waria activist Mami Maya Puspa, who I introduce in detail in Chapter 2, recalled that although there were people “like them” prior to the 1960s, these figures were not as visible as the waria who came later (Figure 1.5). The vast majority of waria I met agreed — there may have been a prior generation of unsightly and dishevelled proto-waris prior to the 1960s, but these were radically different to themselves.

The period that waria commonly refer to as their golden age (zaman emas) spans a period stretching from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. The timing is notable as the beginning of the New Order, which was characterised by episodic violence and the imposition of authoritarian control. A relentless commitment to the ideology of development (pembangunan) also resulted in the expansion of a consumer capitalist economy (Robison 1996) which in turn led to anxious proclamations of moral decay often centred on gender and sexuality (Brenner 1999; Anderson 1990; Siegel 1986). It may seem odd that waria understand a period during which a murderous dictator presided over a state which strictly enforced heteronormativity as their golden age. However, the very definitions and descriptions of gender and sexuality intended to normalise and naturalise understandings of men and women also facilitated a new vocabulary by which waria could understand themselves and one another. More generally, the new urban environments and spaces of leisure and work encouraged to promote economic growth — dance halls, cafés, theatres and hairdressing salons — provided new opportunities for waria to come together and develop alternative forms of intimacy.
From the beginning of the New Order, development and social control were unified through the assertion of narrow roles and forms of embodiment described in terms of idealised forms of masculinity and femininity (Dwyer 2002; Suryakusuma 2011). From the late 1960s, the Indonesian state took its cue from modernist definitions of men and women in terms of narrow, biological reproductive functions within the family: masculinity and femininity contained within one body to the exclusion of the other (Figure 1.6). New Order gender ideology took specific care to define “women as appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society — in that order” (Suryakusuma 1996, 101). The obligation to marry heterosexually, with the additional stage of reproduction and childrearing for women, are essential to becoming a “national and economic subject” (Boellstorff 1999, 492). The nuclear family and gender normativity implied by it are strongly implicated in understandings of national belonging and a collective desire for development.

Although ideals associated with gender roles of the middle class family have proven tenacious in Indonesia, numerous ethnographic accounts have described degrees of agency with which individuals engage with its powerful moral force. Diane Wolf (1992, 260) has described how the emergence of a “new territory” in the life course of young female factory workers during the New Order did not release them from a “web of obligations” towards family, but rather intensified and complicated the need to meet these obligations. Tom Boellstorff (1999, 492) explains the “mystery” of gay men’s
desire to marry heterosexually as stemming from the requirement to choose marriage and the nuclear family in order to choose national belonging. More recently, Johan Lindquist (2009, 92, 150) notes how the gap between underclass and middle class is animated primarily from the desire to meet the family ideal. In each of these accounts, the reproductive nuclear family is harnessed firmly to national progress and development, even as individuals find themselves at odds with the possibility of living up to it. The waria golden age thus unfolded at precisely the same time at which individuals came to find themselves ambiguously defined in relation to what the press reported as “perfect women” and “complete men” for the first time.

Waria define themselves with reference historical emergence of these New Order ideologies of gender, which I explore from two interrelated perspectives throughout this thesis. First, a more elaborate commitment to heteronormativity enabled the opportunity for waria to situate themselves in reference to a femininity which is the property of the individual self, rather than a practice that follows from various social relationships or roles. What I refer to as “the self” in this thesis is an analytical term used to refer to an Indonesian genealogy of the globalised, Western self as a central organising concept for a range of practices, narrative strategies and subjective experiences structured around a given individual’s progression through social time (Najmabadi 2014, 276; Boellstorff 2005, 119).7 In reference to gay men in Indonesia, Tom Boellstorff (2005, 119) has described how the confluence of middle class consumerism, national heteronormativity and desire as love has given rise to “personhood-as-career” through which “the self becomes the self’s profession… a story that the self tells to itself about itself.” However, while ostensibly gender normative gay men can and do secure essential aspects of the modern self (most notably through heterosexual marriage) waria are usually understood to be excluded from such possibilities. As a result, the historical record of the relationship between waria and globalised understandings of selfhood is fragmentary. Understandings of selfhood among waria are commonly described as “disjuncture (between male body and female soul, between a desire to wear women’s clothes and a male body)” (Boellstorff 2007, 171), which bears superficial but notable similarities with the “wrong body” discourse in Western popular and medical renditions of transgender-identification (Meyerowitz 2002, 136).

I consider how the New Order stress on defining universal heteronormativity has shaped waria’s understandings selfhood; part of a “transnational conversation” (Najmabadi 2014, 294) through which narrative modes related to gender have shaped waria’s relationship to national modernity. For example, I reflect on the common narrative among waria that they have a “woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan)” as one aspect of the globalisation of Western theories of gender and sexuality in the following chapter. I also describe the notable differences between this understanding of selfhood and

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7 A possible translation for this understanding of the self in Indonesian is diri or pribadi, which Indonesians often use in reference to concepts that imply an individual self; such as self confidence (percaya diri) and self control (kontrol diri). However, I stop short of translating it in this way, considering that this was not the dominant way that my informants used it in everyday life. Rather, expression of the self among waria in my field sites took a far more diverse array of narrative strategies: ranging from a “woman’s soul” to becoming waria.
the discursive work that *waria* perform to articulate a relationship to modern gender presentation. While at times “becoming *waria* (jadi *waria*)” does refer to an individual self, I have found that it more commonly rests on the possibilities afforded by social relationships, particularly those with other *waria*. This is why I refer to becoming as a form of subjectivity influenced by global understandings of the self, albeit with a closer relationship to embodiment than the concept of subjectivity usually implies. This theoretical interest in becoming clarifies the ways in which *waria* see their subjectivity as something that emerges through changing bodily presentation over the course of their lives. Throughout, I reflect on these affective and embodied aspects of gender normativity in the context of the biopolitics of heteronormativity in modern Indonesia. This history of the self among *waria* suggests the ways that specific moments shape the conditions for who one might become, equally as who one might not.

*Histories of Gender in Indonesia*

In this section I introduce the range of practices and terms that constitute what I gloss as male-bodied femininity in Indonesia. The phrasing that I use — male-bodied femininity — is insufficient, especially given the general lack of importance *waria* and other Indonesians place on biological sex as shaping gender. However, I use male-bodied femininity rather than other possible terms to draw attention to the myriad ways that embodiment is shaped by its social setting (Valentine 2007, 27). The connotations of the term male-bodied (and a penis that comes with it) and femininity (as a frivolous physical exteriority) should not be seen as suggesting a prior or original sex or gender from which *waria* are estranged. Rather, I use it to emphasise that male-bodiedness is certainly one aspect of how *waria* understand themselves as gendered. Referring to *waria* as a form of male-bodied femininity also serves as a reminder that such a form of embodiment must be understood as intelligible as female-bodied femininity, and should therefore be captured in the same analytical frame.

Given significant historical and cross-cultural variation, I use femininity and masculinity as analytical terms that are not relevant across all historical periods and cultural contexts. Whereas the dominant Western view stresses a binary understanding of gender predicated on heteronormativity, such an understanding in Indonesia appears to have more recent origins. Indeed, regional understandings of gender have famously been described in terms of “complementarity” (Errington 1990, 1) between men and women. While acknowledging that specific cultural understandings that pertain to men’s and women’s bodies relate to broader cosmological beliefs in Indonesia, I also assert that practices of gender require concerted contextualisation in light of contradictory practices and competing ideologies (see Brenner 1995). This is all the more important given significant regional and

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8 My meaning here is relatively close to Tom Boellstorff’s (2005, 10–11) conceptualisation of “subject positions” as “multiply inhabitable” and “extant categories of selfhood,” but with a greater emphasis on the ways that subjectivity changes through the life course.
transnational influences on historical understandings of gender in Indonesia during the period that I describe.

The importance that waria attribute to embodied practices such as déndong are derived not only from globalised discourses, but also from the meanings attached to femininity and masculinity which are constitutive of longer regional histories. While complex academic debates have outlined anxieties about “essentialized, cross-cultural and transhistorical transgender identity” (Blackwood 2005, 250; see also Towle and Morgan 2002) my interest in this history is in part derived from my informants’ own descriptions of comparisons of themselves as waria with figures from past times. Waria often described past figures in disparaging tones. Even as they declared themselves to be the first generation (generasi pertama), waria of this age group referred to historically prior “banci” who did not déndong as rough (kasar) and inelegant (tidak halus). They frequently located themselves ambiguously in relation to male-bodied “béncong” from their childhoods who would déndong when in public without understanding themselves as women. Waria therefore understand femininity (peminim, keperempuanan) as a product of modernity.

The ethnographic and historical record of the region of Southeast Asia is replete with descriptions of male-bodied individuals who are defined somewhat awkwardly as embodying the characteristics of women (for reviews of this literature see Blackwood 2005; Peletz 2006). With regards to male-bodied femininity, Benedict Anderson (1972, 14) clarifies an important difference between Javanese and Western understandings of gender:

In ancient Javanese art this combination [male and female] does not take the form of the hermaphrodite of the Hellenistic world, an ambiguous transitional being between the sexes, but rather the form of a being in whom masculine and feminine characteristics are sharply juxtaposed.

More broadly speaking, gender normativity has itself long been observed as a far from universal fact in the Indonesian case: powerful men in Javanese mythology may in fact “be graceful and slight of build” and even “strike Westerners as effeminate” (Errington 1990, 6). However, scholarly descriptions such as this also reflect long histories of problematic racialised representations that frame Asian masculinity in always already feminised — and thus compromised — terms (Nguyen 2014; Lim 2014). Given these theoretical concerns, I contribute to a longstanding interest in anthropology in problematising the meanings of femininity and masculinity and the understanding of sexuality on which these concepts rest (Whitehead 1981).9 With reference to history, Asfaneh Najmabadi (2006) stresses a similar concern with assuming the universality of modern, gendered, heterosexualised objects of desire. To ascribe universality to modern ideas of masculinity and femininity is both to

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9 Anthropologists have repeatedly shown how the presumption of heterosexuality and kinship underwrites, at almost every level, Western theoretical understandings of social reproduction and exchange (Rubin 2011b; Ortner 1972). Although Harriet Whitehead’s (1981, 107) research does not account for either historical context or globalisation, her explanation for male-bodied women in diverse cultural contexts as reflecting a social division of labour bears parallels with the Indonesian case.
obscure the relevance of other kinds of practices and subjectivities, and to ignore the history of Western ideas that has established it as universal standard in the first place.

While “inner state and bodily manifestation have an intrinsic connection” (Errington 1989, 76) in Southeast Asia, this does not necessarily extend to the relationship between gender presentation and an inner sense of oneself as feminine or masculine. Rather, waria’s gender performances appear to reflect regional understandings of the body that see it as “public in the sense that one’s body stance does not express one’s interiority… Rather, it registers the status of the person to whom it is oriented” (Errington 1989, 155; see also Jones 2010, 274). In Java, personhood is consistently observed to be understood as porous and vulnerable to outside influences, and able to be transformed through corporeal effort (Kroeger 2003; Keeler 1988; Geertz 1976, 97). This is most evident in the way that waria almost always consider their desire to dèndong to have resulted from external influences, particularly “the reaction and commentaries of others” (Boellstorff 2007, 88). This understanding of personhood also explains the frequent assertion in Indonesia that gender and sexuality are shaped by forces beyond the individual body.10

Femininity and masculinity should therefore be understood as imprecise, socially situated practices which have transformed rapidly during the course of my informants’ lives, but which have nevertheless shaped the lived experience of the modern self. This serves to clarify the fact that while practices of femininity and “becoming waria” may at times overlap, these two concepts are not the same thing. While no two waria are quite the same, I observed waria define practices of femininity in two key ways. The first is the youthful, glamorous and often eroticised beauty characterised by dèndong, the main outcome of which is not becoming a woman, but rather preparing the body to participate in social settings with other waria. The second way that waria describe femininity is via its relationship to the aspiration for the “refined (halus)” and demure behaviour that appears to be inspired by modern understandings of heteronormativity introduced at the beginning of the New Order. In both cases, modern femininity can only be achieved through significant effort. Both understandings of femininity are also unified by the central stress that waria place on the cultivation of the body. Attending to the practices that make up waria femininity in turn contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between gender and national modernity in Indonesia.

Practices of Male-Bodied Femininity in Indonesia

While dèndong is a term that is used by waria and gay men, it is derived from the standard Indonesian word dandan, which commonly means to “make up” or “dress up” (Boellstorff 2005, 167). James Siegel (1997, 73), writes that “berdandan” (the prefix ber- transforms a noun into a verb) bears the meaning “to bring out a quality that is somehow inherent in whatever is completed.” This stress on

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10 This was recently made apparent in the moral panic surrounding LGBT since February 2016 in Indonesia, in which a consistent view espoused by state experts and popular opinion alike suggested that homosexuality in particular is something which can penetrate from the outside. This is also apparent in the common assertion among gay men in particular that their sexuality is a “sickness (penyakit)” that they have been “infected (bertular)” with.
practices that draw a person to completion is instructive, especially given the historical and ethnographic understandings of masculinity and femininity introduced earlier. While gay men also dêndong, usually within the context of circumscribed events in the form of performance (Boellstorff 2005, 135), they usually embody a particular type of femininity called ngondhek. As the “outer limit of ngondhek” (ibid., 166), the practice of dêndong among waria reflects an understanding of gender as both cumulative and processual. Most waria that I interacted with did not describe themselves as ngondhek, however, given that they practised a form of femininity on a daily basis. This illustrates a key characteristic of ngondhek as understood by waria: it is a defining characteristic of gay men or banci kaléng and thus an early step in the processes of becoming waria. For waria, opportunities to dêndong (and its external visibility) define the waria subject position in relation to a perceived gender normativity (and invisibility) of gay men.

Waria in each of my field sites understood dêndong as a practice associated with particular locations, audiences and historical periods. While appearing as early as the 1950s, the common aesthetic of dêndong as stylised glamour among waria emerged from late 1960s onwards when glamorous events for waria began to be held in large cities around the country. This was also the period when the mass media and visual culture began to have a profound influence on everyday life more broadly (on photography see Strassler 2010, 51; on television see Sen and Hill 2006, 110; on communication technology see Barker 2005, 718–19; on cinema see Sen 1994). These early years of the New Order in the late 1960s have been described in terms of a shift towards “televisuality,” a term which aptly invokes not only the new presence of mass media technologies but their inculcation into everyday life (Strassler 2009, 75; Shiraishi 1997, 91). Representations of waria became commonplace in film, advertising and television (Murtagh 2013; Blackwood 2010, 172, 2005, 849). Many informants had personal experiences of working as extras in Indonesian soap operas (sinetron). Waria often stress that increased “public acceptance (penerimaan)” and “knowledge (pengetahuan)” of them occurred because of this mass media exposure.¹¹ Indeed, this was precisely the moment when waria say that they became able to safely wear women’s clothes and make-up in public (see also Boellstorff 2005, 57).

I suggest that the primacy of the mass media to waria means that dêndong must be understood not only to have been influenced, but fundamentally structured by, mass media images and its technologies. A relationship to the mass media is also reflected in the way that waria of this generation select the names of Indonesian media: I encountered waria who had adopted the names of

¹¹ Scholars have tended to lament the common depiction of banci on television as “inept larrikins” (Davies 2010, 105). While sympathetic to these concerns, waria themselves remarked how much they enjoy these depictions, suggesting that it presented their humour as a special skill. It also suggests that waria (and the broader Indonesian public) can do separate waria as individuals from these situational performances. The best example of a much loved performer was Olga Syahputra, who consistently drew the ire of the Indonesian broadcasting commission. When he died at the age of 32 in 2015, I was amazed at the overwhelming solemn grieving and respect shown to a character more known for his frivolity and humour. Waria’s enjoyment of these representations makes a ban on representations of “banci” particularly lamentable (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia ( Indonesian Broadcasting Commission) 2016, 2008).
pop singer Yuni Shara, rock singer Yosie Lucky, and soap opera actress Luna Maya. The adoption of names was often understood in highly embodied and mimetic terms. For example, Mami Maya referred to herself as a “double” for the Indonesian actress Tuti Suprapto. She explained that people on the street would frequently mistake her for the film star, and if she appeared on screen as her nobody would notice the difference. In Maya and other waria’s view, she not only became like Tuti Suprapto, but became Tuti Suprapto.

While my focus in this thesis shifts between the waria golden age during the New Order (1967–1998) and the present day, a relationship between appearances and the mass media reflect longer histories related to the experiences of colonisation and the emergence of nationalism. In the colonial Dutch East Indies, new technologies of film and photography transformed a nascent nationalist identity, conjuring up new possibilities for connecting Indonesia with the world (Siegel 1997). Reflecting on the impact of film, James Siegel (1997, 70) writes, “It is not that the camera sees what the eye sees. In seeing, it transforms ordinary cloth into silk and in so doing, it makes this ordinary cloth seem more like silk on the screen than silk itself might seem.” I argue that a similar transformative power linked to modern mass media technologies is invoked when waria stress the importance of dèndong in public locations; recognition through communication technologies is one way that waria secure an understanding of themselves as feminine.

Although dèndong is certainly an important practice among waria, I observed other kinds of gendered practices to be even more important as they aged. Indeed, I found that focusing only on the spectacular visibility of dèndong perhaps obscures the ways that waria’s “accomplishment of femininity” (Ochoa 2014, 159–61; Garfinkel 2006) takes place in other realms. Waria of the generations described in this thesis tended to emphasise mother-like care and nurturance for the young adolescent brondong even more than they emphasise dèndong (Chapter 5). Viewed in line with the dominant ideological emphasis during the New Order on gender as a product of family roles, waria intimacy with brondong reflects a rearticulation of dominant “kin time” (Stack and Burton 1994) which set the temporal rhythm of the life course and the roles that individuals are expected to perform during it. The strong ideological emphasis linking masculinity and femininity with biological reproduction alone in Indonesia renders invisible the “kin work” (ibid.) that seems increasingly important to waria as they grow older. The two practices through which waria practice femininity — dèndong and intimacy with brondong — reflect how their experiences cannot be completely explained by the Western theoretical focus on gender or sexuality alone.

**Transgender Studies and Anthropology**

I locate this ethnography within the history of cross-cultural perspectives on gender and sexuality. However, rather than using transgender as a descriptive or discrete identity category, this thesis engages it as a mode of analysis. This serves to further problematise the use of gender and sexuality as “essentialized categories of identity” and the potential that their reification might “obscure the
cross-cutting nature of social experience and identification” (Valentine 2003, 125). In this way, my use of “transgender” throughout this thesis should be understood as comparable with the use of “queer” insomuch as I engage it to both exceed and complicate extant theoretical categories and possibilities encountered in the course of ethnography.

This is not my concern alone, but also that of the emergent field of transgender studies, which explores “contemporary personhood in a manner that facilitates a deeply historical analysis of the utter contingency and fraught conditions of intelligibility of all embodied subjectivity” (Stryker and Currah 2014, 8). I am particularly interested in the field’s largely unexplored shared interest the “political economy of sex” (Rubin 2011b) derived from earlier anthropological and feminist approaches to gender and sexuality. I see this particular intersection between transgender and anthropology as an especially productive way to untangle culturally specific embodied and affective dimensions of power, as well as how political-economic shifts have “rewired” (Rubin 2011b, 37) masculinity and femininity as historical artefacts globally. In attending to the specificities of the transgender body in New Order Indonesia, this research both engages with and problematises Western-centric theories of the relationship between gender, sexuality and modernity (Jackson 2009; Wilson 2004; D’Emilio 1997).

Research at the intersection of gender and sexuality has long been conducted in anthropology, mostly framed in reference to functionalist-inspired frameworks that mapped the sexual division of labour onto the presumed universality of biological sex (Blackwood 1984; Whitehead 1981; Wikan 1977; Evans-Pritchard 1970). With some exceptions (see in particular Newton 1979), research that was critical of heteronormativity remained sidelined within anthropology until the 1990s (Rubin 2011a, 341–42). The theoretical horizons opened up by Judith Butler’s (1990) approach to gender performativity and the much-needed criticism of the prior “ethnocartography of homosexuality” (Weston 1993) heralded diverse possibilities for the field.

Numerous superb ethnographic accounts in a range of settings globally (Kulick 1998; Donham 1998; Johnson 1997; Besnier 1996) served to both clarify and separate out meanings of gender and sexuality, experiences which had otherwise been considered indistinct (see Valentine 2007; Towle and Morgan 2002). This understanding of sexuality intersects with racialised models of globalisation as linear development, facilitating theoretical models which explain male-bodied femininity as a stage in progression to gender normative homosexuality (Altman 1997). Tom Boellstorff’s (2005) pathbreaking research on the national context for gay, lesbian and waria subjectivities in Indonesia is one example of ethnographic research that successfully problematises this universalising tendency in Western theory. Another impressive body of research to challenge this view has explored gendered embodiment and same-sex desire among female-bodied individuals, including in Indonesia (Blackwood 2010; Wieringa 2007).
A number of recent accounts have called into question the use of transgender as a merely descriptive category, critiquing the failure of earlier approaches to question why it is understood as related to a category of experience called gender in the first place (Besnier and Alexeyeff 2014; Valentine 2007). Most notably, David Valentine (2007, 52) charts how processes of categorisation and separation entail a “claim to invisibility” reflected in the assertion of a natural, self-evident relationship between homosexuality and gender normativity in the United States.12 This recent claim, he argues, relies to a large degree on the displacement of publicly transgressive practices (and their associations with non-white and lower-class status) formerly associated with homosexuality onto the category transgender.

This thesis engages with this literature to assert that neither transgender nor gender normativity can be understood as universal categories; rather, they form “part of a broader reshaping of self-making” (Valentine 2007, 19) within specific historical, cultural and economic contexts. The cross-cultural relevance of this approach is illustrated by Asfaneh Najmabadi’s (2014) Professing Selves, which combines historical and ethnographic research to question transsexuality and homosexuality as distinct yet related biopolitical categories in Iran. Tracing these categories and the lives that they make liveable leads her to discover a particular, Iranian genealogy of modern selfhood, underpinned by a familiar “conceptual divide between female/woman/feminine and male/man/masculinity into a global grid” (ibid., 192). Her assertion serves as an important reminder that heterosexual and binary understandings of gender and desire are the product of a particular kinds of histories and disciplinary work, rather than simply following from sexual difference.

Also combining historical and ethnographic approaches, Marcia Ochoa (2014) has focused ethnographic attention on the inadequacies of interpreting transgender-identified individuals in relation to an individual identity that follows from its discursive framing. Drawing on ethnographic research in Venezuela, Ochoa productively highlights how all individuals accomplish gender “with similar symbolic resources, in dialogue with shared discourses, and employing similar kinds of techniques and technologies” (ibid., 5). Ochoa (ibid.) criticises the overarching tendency in Western scholarship and activism to see gender and sexuality as separate parts of an individual self, in this case with reference to Venezuelan beauty queens and transformistas within the shared conceptual framework of “spectacular femininity.” However, Ochoa (ibid., 166) moves beyond discourse to suggest the centrality of the body to projects of self-fashioning in modernity, focusing rather on the “carnalities enfleshed in… relations of power.” In critiquing the “universalizing, first-world tendency in gender performativity and embodiment frameworks,” Ochoa (ibid., 158) draws attention to the way that a focus on performativity alone tends to frame gender as the property of an individual who is shaped by their social setting.

12 David Valentine (2007) suggests that a complex set of late 20th century cultural transformations in the United States led to a growing emphasis in expert and activist knowledge in the West on sexuality as a private concern, which relies on the clarification of gender as a separate aspect of personhood.
I also draw on what I see as a shared interest in feminist anthropology to examine the relationship between bodies, gender and work. Drawing theoretical inspiration from recent scholarship at the intersection of these concerns, I interpret the transformations that waria undertake to their bodies as both laborious and pleasurable efforts to accomplish femininity (Ochoa 2014; Bailey 2013; Butler 1993b). Thus, this thesis is concerned with placing the longstanding preoccupation with what constitutes women’s work in dialogue with recent approaches to the body from transgender studies. When informed by historical and ethnographic descriptions of lived experience, such an approach offers ways to understand the weight of everyday investments in shaping bodies and selves towards projects of “perfection” in modernity, while accounting for the practices that they involve.

While early feminist engagement with transgender is limited by its reliance on theoretical emphasis on the sexual division of labour, it serves as a productive reminder of the importance of the relational forms of discursive work that makes gender legible as a primary symbol of difference in capitalist modernity. For example, Jane Atkinson (1990, 92) describes the “mixed gender status” of male-bodied bante in Sulawesi in terms of “dress or work,” inasmuch it reflected a “preference for female work over more strenuous male labor.” Marilyn Strathern (1993, 43) also problematises Western understandings of social “completion” through which a person secures an “unequivocal gender” as an adult male or adult female. Based on Melanesian ethnographic material, Strathern describes gender as a process which “brings out of the person the social relations of which he or she is composed” (ibid., 48). Similarly, waria subjectivity cannot be understood to stem from a discourse that shapes the body, but rather is the product of intersubjective and embodied work that translates masculinity and femininity into meaningful markers of experience gathered around a coherent notion of the self.

What makes the Indonesian case especially interesting is that male-bodied femininity does not hold the same degree of stigma as it does in the West — despite their visibility, waria are in some ways more socially accepted than gender normative gay men (see Boellstorff 2004). Similarly, butch and femme couplings among women in Indonesia are socially accepted so long as they adhere to strict heteronormative roles, resulting in the interesting possibility that these individuals can be “proud and out, but not as lesbians” (Wieringa 2007, 75). In this context, gender appears not so much a process of being initiated into a social role that is the property of an individual body, as the symbolic activation or deactivation of different social relations throughout time. This thesis thus advances intersubjective and phenomenological perspectives on performativity, revealing gender to be an embodied process which one works on and others work upon, effecting a being in the world that is always in progress and never quite complete.

In short, I seek to reinvigorate ethnographic interest in the social and economic forces that shape gendered embodiment in conversation with the recent analytical possibilities offered by transgender studies. Rather than seeing gender as the property of an individual, this thesis reflects on the concrete practices involved in accomplishing femininity and masculinity undertaken across a lifetime. As a result, it contributes a detailed ethnographic account of waria subjectivity, as well as resisting the
naturalisation of gender normativity: becoming waria calls into question the near hegemonic view that masculinity and femininity are qualities possessed by and contained within one type of body to the exclusion of the other.

**Waria Visibility and Gendered Subjectivity**

My understanding of waria subjectivity builds on the anthropological insight that gender is not only the product of individuals but is also produced through social relationships. More specifically, I argue that forms of intimacy and dependency are pivotal to the process of becoming waria. My informants described becoming waria as a process which commences in childhood, often related to the recognition of embodied signs of femininity by neighbours and kin. In this way waria gradually come to understand their subjectivity not only out of identifying as feminine in some way, but through active nurturance and recognition of that identification. Later on, waria say, their becoming is hastened through interaction with similar others, most commonly in salons. A relationship between certain forms of employment and the resulting transformation of subjectivity is reflected in the common reference among waria to gender presentation as akin to a profession (profesi). This reflects how waria emerge via social interactions shaped by certain occupations, which are in turn generally understood to elicit greater visibility (nampak) over time. The term banci kaléng is commonly used to describe those who have “not yet become waria (belum jadi waria),” which is to say those who have not fully accomplished a feminine gendered subjectivity. Somewhat feminine men who describe themselves as gay who occasionally dèndong, for instance, are referred to by waria as banci kaléng. Most often, however, banci kaléng is used by waria to describe a stage that individuals pass through in the process of becoming waria. It is interesting to note that, although older waria rarely practice dèndong or participate in nyébong, they do not return to being a banci kaléng again in old age. In fact, older waria made much of the fact that they no longer wore women’s clothes or had any corporeal signs of femininity, instead stressing that it is an inner state (di dalamnya) that makes them waria. This suggests that once one has already been a waria or banci over a sustained period of time, one retains that subjectivity for life, regardless of physical presentation.

Given that becoming appears to be a relational practice, it follows that wearing makeup and women’s clothes on a consistent basis (dèndong) is centrally concerned with the specific audience to whom it is addressed. As mentioned, this is commonly the social worlds of transactional sex (nyébong) and salon work. Participation in these forms of work and the consistent practice of bodily transformations is what completes the process of becoming waria. Most accounts gloss nyébong as either “cruising” (Oetomo 2000, 53) or “sex work” (Boellstorff 2007, 98) and dèndong as related to the desire for feminine gender presentation. By contrast, I want to suggest the intersecting relationship between these practices is far more central to waria subjectivity than either of these English-language terms can possibly convey. The importance of relational practices is clarified by waria’s positive evaluation
of their subjectivity as a source of comfort (nyaman). I initially found this expression surprising, considering the high moral value placed on gender normativity in Indonesia, and the fact that many senior waria described (their own) embodiment as something unpleasant. Some even said that, if they could be born again (lahir kembali), they would prefer not to become waria.

Noni, one my key informants, stressed that although she had adopted a range of gender presentations throughout her life, becoming waria offered her the greatest degree of comfort. She described this comfort based on her experience with different forms of gender presentation throughout her life, reiterating how it stemmed from the reactions of others. Noni explained:

I have not been purely (pure) in the waria world (dunia waria). I have experienced lots of worlds. I have also been a man [in the style of a man] too, I have hung out with gays (hémong hémong). If I wanted to, I wore a wig when I went out to nyébong. I have Ben, my hair has been short. If I wanted to nyébong I wore a wig. I have tried out a variety of different professions (profesi), but I am more comfortable (nyaman) in the waria world.

A concern for visibility, rather than simply sexuality, is similarly reflected in Noni’s favourable evaluation of waria in comparison to gay men: “We are brave, we show ourselves in public, in front of lots of people.” As waria themselves point out, it would be possible to wear a wig if all that male-bodied individuals want to do is occasionally participate in nyébong or to effect “a mimicry of male–female relations” (Hekma 1996, 236). Rather, it is a more pervasive sense of comfort that appears to animate becoming waria, reflected in significant and visible forms of gender performance.

This emphasis on a relationship between the body and one’s subjectivity correlates with long regional histories about the relationship between interior and exterior parts of the self. Clifford Geertz (1976, 232), for example, defines the distinction between poles of “lair (outer)” and “batin (inner)” and “alus (refined)” and “kasar” as a defining feature of personhood in Java. Batin is “the inner realm of human experience” and lair “the outer realm of human behaviour.” Alus means “pure, refined, polished, polite, exquisite, ethereal, subtle, civilized, smooth,” and kasar means “impolite, rough uncivilized” (ibid., 232). It is the integration of both of these poles of behaviour and states of subjectivity that an individual’s status is both accumulated and measured in Javanese culture. Geertz’s description of the relationship between these states provides useful insights into waria’s gender performance:

Lair behavior, of which language (as well as music, dance, and drama) is a part, masks the batin; and thus only those who study the lair patiently and in orderly fashion are able to sort it out and get the “feeling” that is subtly suffused through it. (ibid., 232)

A person’s inner state, thus understood, relies to large degree on “greater and greater formal control over the external aspects of individual actions, transforming them into art or near-art” (ibid., 233). Notable here is the parallel idea that it is constantly reiterated social actions or bodily practices permeate subjectivity, rather than an inner core of identity (see Butler 1997, 14). This also offers one potential explanation as to why, in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, waria were described as able to perform a “super-womanly” (Peacock 1968, 206) femininity as well as, or perhaps better than,
female-bodied women in Indonesia (see also Besnier 1996 for a similar observation in the Pacific). A person who reiterates particular forms of embodied action, including gender, is understood to have transformed their inner state.

Noni’s description of appearing as a man or a woman should thus be understood not in terms of gender identity but in terms of the affective state associated with it: a comfort of a becoming which is always already recognised by intimate others.13 This is why waria say that they find comfort in the externalisation of a latent femininity, contrasting the masculinity of gay men and banci kaléng as always at risk of being “shattered by very minor mishaps” (Goffman 1952, 36). Perhaps most striking is Noni’s insistence that she used to wear male clothes, as if to do so is completely unbelievable. Noni exclaimed: “I have had my hair short Ben. I didn’t have breasts yet. So I still wore male clothes. Sometimes I used to wear male clothes, Ben. Gay, like a gay! Like a gay!” Saba Mahmood’s (2005, 157) suggestion that it is “the sequence of practices and actions one is engaged in that determines one’s desires and emotions” provides a useful perspective on the relationship between waria subjectivity and embodiment as a form of comfort. Waria frequently explain this comfort in terms of bodily conduct sustained in the company of others: this means that they literally come to feel uncomfortable when they are not wearing women’s clothing because it denies them the possibility of certain relationships. Following Mahmood (ibid., 166) I understand the “body [not] as sign of the self’s interiority but as a means of developing the self’s potentiality.”

A sense of comfort upon becoming waria stems from the fact that Noni is “a banci, they already know.” She also reflected on encounters with ostensibly straight men as a source of considerable anxiety: “When I was gay, and I flirted with men, I was afraid I would be slapped, or more, that’s how it felt.” She explained: “But if my hair was long, if I already was wearing a skirt, wearing a bra and all the rest [makeup], there’s no need to be like that, right? People can’t get mad, right?” This explains why waria separate out occasions when they merely dress as women from the more profound transformational experience of becoming waria. When Noni wears a wig, she is able to do nyébong but remains within the gay world: it lacks the iterative force and relational undertaking that becoming waria entails. Waria’s experiences therefore serve to reiterate how movement through time entails moving through different affective and corporeal states of becoming.

13 Noni’s description of becoming as comfort of the possibility of recognition in the other shares similarities with Levinas’s (1987) and Judith Butler’s (2005) attempts to articulate a more relational formulation of subjectivity.
Entering the Field

The central objective of this thesis to problematise any universal notion of personhood, and notions of sexual difference that underpin it, was shaped by my own presence in the field. My understanding of myself as a fairly, but not extremely, masculine-presenting, white, gay man around the age of thirty did not necessarily translate to any particular shared political commitments or special understanding of my informants. Although I did develop good relationships during fieldwork, in retrospect this involved a slow process of graduating into forms of knowledge, crucially dependent on my ability to speak not only Indonesian but the style of Indonesian spoken by waria and gay men, commonly referred to as bahasa binan or bahasa waria. In many respects, my induction into the waria world resembled the practice of “becoming waria” already introduced. Indeed, over the course of fieldwork my primary waria informants referred to me as a banci kaléng, and even agreed on the name Benita for me to describe my transformation (Figure 1.7). They began to see things in me that I had not known were there: I had commenced becoming waria. The process that waria undertook to emplace me in their social world in turn facilitated new perspectives on theirs. And it was my own experience of vulnerability and dependency that in part informs my understanding of becoming waria.

Before arriving in Indonesia, I was acutely aware of queer critiques concerned with positionality, intersectionality and the colonising effects of knowledge production in anthropology, and so approached fieldwork with a certain trepidation (Ochoa 2014; Reddy 2005; Manalansan 2003). An entirely different set of problems awaited me in the field, introduced earlier as stemming from the fact
that *waria* as a group were so much in the limelight but yet who seemed routinely to be portrayed in a one-dimensional fashion. Having spent some time working and studying in Indonesia, and guided by a theoretical interest in personhood and embodiment, I developed a topic working with elderly *waria*, planning to conduct research in a single location. I thought that this would be a good way to review historical transformations of gender and sexuality in Indonesia, and from this perspective the research was illuminating.

Upon reflection, however, my research was rooted in a set of problematic assumptions that I could not have anticipated. This was first made clear in the way that *waria* understandably saw me at first as an outsider no different from the journalists, hordes of Indonesian undergraduate student researchers, and the occasional graduate level researcher who came to interview them. As crude as it sounds, this meant that I felt as though *waria* initially saw me as a potential source of income. This feeling was especially pronounced because Yogyakarta and Jakarta are also the cities most commonly visited by journalists and researchers too seeking *waria*, and my own role was shaped by the presence of these fairly mercenary mass media and academic representations. Indonesian media and researchers were numerically the largest group, but at least two foreign journalists visited every month during the entire length of my fieldwork.

One hot morning in April 2014, I walked down a small alleyway in Jakarta, towards the salon of a charismatic and well-known *waria* activist. Waiting in front of the salon I was struck by how new, and unused, the salon equipment inside it looked. The *waria* started our conversation by noting the need for donations. After an interview, which consisted mostly of sad, tearful stories of discrimination, we hailed a taxi and headed towards an NGO. After arriving at a far-flung suburb of Jakarta a handful of *waria* dolefully conveyed tales of the difficulties of everyday life and the ways that they make ends meet. They shed tears while recounting stories of violence and family separation. I was encouraged to take photographs of them together and in groups, of *waria* who were sleeping, eating, talking to others over the course of a few hours. I felt far more uncomfortable with this intrusion than they appeared to be. A number of Indonesian students appeared and disappeared during the course of the visit to complete short interviews, each handing over a small white envelope. When I visited the same activist’s salon the following day, she was visibly annoyed. She let forth her complaints: I had only made a small contribution to her NGO and a small contribution towards lunch. “You do not value (*menghargai*) *waria*!” she shouted. I protested meekly and shrank in embarrassment. She snapped: “in Indonesia you pay for research.” I said I was sorry: it was a misunderstanding and I had learned from it. I counted out a bundle of notes and handed them across to her.

While I was eventually able to distinguish myself from temporary visitors because of my more constant presence in informants’ lives, experiences like these flagged a practical problem. First, it was clear early on that conducting fieldwork in a single location with a group that was the target of such sustained journalistic attention would yield only limited kinds of data. I saw both researchers and
Journalists do this and watched as the same events were repeatedly staged for their benefit. I found these exchanges fascinating, mostly as performative aspects of an emergent global transgender imaginary shaped by waria’s own desire for national belonging (Chapter 4). However, the actual events and narratives that unfolded within these sites — staged to reiterate an impression of waria as both marginal and without agency — offered little in terms of my interest in the history of waria during the New Order. The commodification of relationships also foreshadowed the texture of my fieldwork. I became aware that money mediated almost all forms of intimacy that I maintained, and that waria consistently evaluated both the value and costs of almost all social relationships.

This anxiety surfaced many times during fieldwork, shaping my relationship to my informants; when I was asked for small loans, when I joined an arisan (encompassing rotating lottery and community credit) with a waria community, when I borrowed money, when I both bought and was bought lunch, when I paid for karaoke, when I gave money in times of sickness and difficulty. The relationship between intimacy and money — and the complexity of the economic asymmetry between me and my informants — was laid emotionally bare when I unsuccessfully tried to give money to a waria friend who I thought was in desperate need towards the end of fieldwork. This friend was even more upset with me for trying to give her money than the activist mentioned earlier who had chided me for not coughing up more. My friend resented my offer, I later understood, because I had made it out of pity. Since she was hosting me as her friend she found this to be outrageously disrespectful. “I don’t want it Ben! In any other case, I’d pay for everything, your flights, your lunch here. I’m not like them.” She did not talk to me for a number of hours afterwards. This suggests the complex ways that forms of intimacy are influenced by the capitalist market in Indonesia. It also suggests the complex ethical terrain traversed by an ethnographic account of waria in terms of transgender such as this.

Given the complexities of my particular field, I rented a house in a neighbourhood in the central part of Yogyakarta near where other waria lived, and worked as a volunteer within a waria-run organisation. While by no means significant in itself in terms of waria history, Yogyakarta was a useful base because it was considered a place where older waria of around forty years old and above tended to settle, a demographic profile that served my own research interests. Some waria explained that this is because they considered Yogyakarta a quieter and more tolerant atmosphere than that found in other cities, and because waria activists had secured healthcare access via complex bureaucratic wrangling. Given my interest, it made no sense to isolate myself from the aforementioned journalists, researchers and students. I took a concerted interest in their work in order to learn more about how they were representing waria and to better understand what waria thought of them.

This turned out to be a good decision because waria looked forward to visits by journalists — partially because of the promise of payment — and would insist that I attend as part of the group. I also decided to spend approximately one week a month in Jakarta, enabling access to senior waria and nightclubs and other locations described by my informants. Almost every waria that I spoke to
had spent a significant amount of time in the capital and their memories of the New Order served as a guide to the overall direction of my historical research. It was there that I came to understand the emphasis that waria place on migration. The overall emphasis on migration and movement that characterises waria life also serves to explain my methodological emphasis on following narratives and individual life trajectories, rather than attempt to fix them to a particular place.

Given this context, my conceptualisation of the field covers a broad scope of historical time and geographical space, but it maintains the broad and very Java-centric national outline of Indonesia during the political period known as the New Order (1967–1998). Unless stated otherwise, this is the period during which the informants introduced became waria (jadi waria). This is the period in which this generation had migrated from smaller towns and villages to larger ones, came into contact with other waria and started to dëndong. This focus allows me to trace complex transformations in personhood within a fixed historical period in Indonesia. In developing my understanding of the field, I have benefited from the now established concept of “multi-sited” ethnography (Marcus 1995; Boellstorff 2005). Most notably, Tom Boellstorff (2002, 25) has extrapolated this concept in the Indonesian context, convincingly arguing that “the nation… constitute[s] a ‘native point of view’ amenable to fieldwork.” This is especially pertinent in understanding waria who, “throughout Indonesia emphasize recognition; it is a desire joining everyday belonging to national belonging through the performance of good deeds or accomplishments” (Boellstorff 2007, 105). Even when waria travel abroad to Malaysia and Singapore for sex work, which they frequently do, they maintain an understanding of themselves as Indonesian.

David Valentine’s (2007) description of his field of research as the category transgender itself has also shaped my understandings of the location of my research. Through ethnographic fieldwork with people identified (but who may not identify themselves) as transgender in New York City, he examines “the idea of transgender itself and how it is setting the terms by which people come to identify themselves and others” (ibid., 21). While Indonesia has a very different history to the United States, waria are nevertheless shaped by specific and equally complex cosmologies relating to personhood and the body. As a result, I understand my field of study as both the emergence of particular modes of subjectivity framed as male-bodied femininity and the historical period of the New Order within the geographical space of Indonesia that has primarily shaped it.

**Methodology**

This thesis is based on approximately fifteen months of fieldwork undertaken between the beginning of 2014 and the middle of 2015. As introduced earlier, I spent the initial weeks and months of fieldwork visiting various waria communities, NGOs and activists. By no means all of these visits were as jolting as the first. Having learned of my interest, an Indonesian student suggested that I speak to the legendary founder and leader of the Yogyakarta-based NGO, Mami Vinolia Wakijo. Mami Fin, as she is more commonly and affectionately known, is a fascinating character whose life
could be the topic of an entire dissertation. She has worked as a volunteer in various fields, most notably for the large NGO PKBI (*Perkumpulan Keluarga Berancana Indonesia*) for over a decade in the 1990s. She is a tireless advocate not only for *waria* but for various other marginalised communities, particularly the homeless and street children, both in the city and nationally. She founded a *waria* NGO, Kebaya (*Keluarga Besar Waria Yogyakarta*), which serves as an organisation dedicated to HIV prevention and more recently has received limited support from the provincial government to operate as a shelter for people with AIDS. Apart from this, Mami Fin maintains an active presence as a guest lecturer in higher education, and is often called to various universities in Yogyakarta to share her insights on the topic of *waria* identity.

One of her (and my) favourite ways to explain *waria* identity to naïve, middle class undergraduate students is to stress, through word play, that the purpose of genitals is “pleasure and children (*enak dan anak*).” This pithily describes a very common but rarely acknowledged social fact in Indonesia — genital morphology or sex does not define sexuality or gender expression. Scholars have commented on anxiety over establishing proper expertise in the face of diminishing state authority in post-authoritarian Indonesia (Jones 2010). I observed a similar anxiety about the establishment of scientific “facts” in universities, where I was frequently dismayed by the use of pseudoscientific and outdated Western psychological explanations for sex/gender/sexuality, commonly overlaid with a rationalised form of Islamic morality (see Rudnyckyj 2010). In this context, Mami Fin’s life experience and catchy theorisation served as an important reminder to teachers and students that these are more complex matters than can be completely explained by either biology or religion.

Based in the centre of Yogyakarta, I mostly conducted my daily activities around Kebaya. Much of my fieldwork was spent assisting and observing daily tasks there and hanging out with *waria* who would drop in during the course of the day and night. While I spent a great deal of time volunteering at the NGO, the material collected there does not form the majority of the data included in this thesis. More often, when there were no tasks at Kebaya or nobody was around, I would spend time visiting *waria* friends in one of the neighbourhoods where many *waria* lived. I joined a *waria* organisation in one of these neighbourhoods which enabled me to attend frequent meetings. As fieldwork progressed, I was increasingly trusted by and grew close to *waria*, establishing kin-like ties with them.

Apart from Mami, I also had older sisters (*kakak*) and a wife (*istri*). As mentioned, I came to be included in *waria* events on a frequent basis, including one occasion where I was “dressed up” (*didéndongin*) in their company for a ball in Semarang. This was a pivotal moment which confirmed my informants’ suspicions that I was not a gay man at all but in fact a *banci kalêng* in early stages of becoming *waria* (*jadi waria*). As a result, I was able to maintain a constant presence in the lives of my primary informants in Yogyakarta, and in the latter part of fieldwork established contact with *waria* in Jakarta, where I spent time with *waria* informants, such as Mami Maya and Ibu Nancy. Most of the data in this thesis is therefore gleaned from participant observation with *waria* friends in the course of
their everyday lives in a range of settings, in either one of these or other cities, and sometimes between them.

My approach to fieldwork was also shaped by an interest in the historical context in which my informants’ lives unfolded. What surprised me was the great interest waria showed in this part of the project. Because of their age, and because they spent most of their time at home, older waria seemed to enjoy my visits. Rather than arriving with firm questions that needed answering, I usually let them talk about whatever they wanted to talk about in the flow of our conversations. This was time-consuming, but it yielded much more interesting data than the formal interviews that I had observed among other researchers, for which waria’s answers seemed rehearsed and to adhere to a certain formula. While I did try to record narratives and oral histories (some successful, the majority not), the most interesting stories were jotted down over informal conversations that stretched long into the night, on long bus or motorbike trips, or else at life cycle events. As it turned out I ended up spending hundreds of hours at friends’ houses and local NGOs, listening to the chatter of waria friends, or watching television and catching up on local gossip.

An important exception to this are the narratives and photographs contained in Chapter 5 that describe my close informant Mak (Aunty) Shirley. Shirley is a seventy-year-old waria often described as the oldest waria in Yogyakarta. Mami Fin, who is in her mid-fifties, described Shirley in generational terms as her own waria “mother,” suggesting that she might be a good source of information about waria history. Shirley owns a marvellous collection of vivid colour photographs, the majority of which were taken between 1980 and 1986, which she gave me permission to scan and reproduce in this thesis (see Figure 1.1). These photographs constitute an extremely valuable archive of waria history — a history that for the most part has not been written down and is fast being forgotten. I include these photographs throughout the thesis in order to illustrate waria embodiment during the height of the New Order.

I draw on Shirley’s photographs throughout the thesis, but especially in Chapter 3, to analyse and interpret aspects of waria understandings of the body. Increasingly aware of my own limited knowledge about the New Order, and wanting to shed light on the period during which waria emerged, I supplemented participant observation with archival research, looking at newspaper and magazine articles, expert texts, legal documents and photographs. These mostly date from between 1967 and 1998, with occasional sources from outside of this period. I also explored early research about “banci” conducted by Indonesian psychologists published in Indonesian psychiatric and medical journals during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Given that my research data blurs boundaries between ethnographic and historical research, I have decided to adopt the following conventions. Where waria are well known figures (such as Mami

14 Both my research assistant Holy Rafika and I undertook this research at the archives of the national newspaper Kompas, the Indonesian National Library in Jakarta, the National Library of Australia and the Australian National University library.
Vinolia and Mami Maya) or are providing historical data (Shirley) I have used their real names in this thesis. For data collected during participant observation I have followed anthropological convention and used pseudonyms, as agreed to with my informants. Scholars working on gender and sexuality in Indonesia have tended to pay significant attention to pronoun-usage out of concern for gender identification, with different outcomes (Davies 2010, 9; Boellstorff 2007, 82–83). While sympathetic to these debates (and recognising that they reflect Western political anxieties around representation of queer-identified subjects) I suggest that they encourage a misreading of the meaning of gender when introduced into Indonesian and other contexts. For example, gender is significant in terms of address even though the Indonesian pronoun “you (dia)” is gender neutral. As in many Southeast Asian contexts, the pronoun “you (dia)” is in fact rarely used; rather, relational (and gendered) terms like “Mbak (sister)” or “Mas (brother),” or “Adik (younger sibling)” and “Kakak (older sibling)” are almost always used in everyday contexts (see also Peletz 1996, 203). This is the case for waria, who are usually referred to and refer to one another using female terms of address. This is why I use the pronoun “she” when referring to waria and consider it to be a relatively straightforward fit.

Writing Transgender in Contemporary Indonesia

As I write this dissertation, I read with sadness the news that waria, gay and lesbian Indonesians are subject to persistent attacks from the national media and their own government. Since the beginning of 2016, Indonesia has witnessed an enormous growth in egregious commentary about non-heteronormative practices and bodies, usually framed in terms of the acronym “LGBT.” This was unthinkable when I started my fieldwork in 2014. It is important to note that waria have been spared (but have not been immune) from the most spectacular condemnation, which has largely focused on gay-identified men. Especially lamentable is the arrest of dozens of gay men in Surabaya and hundreds in Jakarta for attending gay parties or venues, and the meting out of corporal punishment to two men in Aceh, the first for homosexual acts under that Province’s interpretation of shari’a law.

Such individuals are increasingly being cornered by impossible choices: they must either choose to adhere to an extremely narrow and proscriptive idea of what constitutes being Indonesian via gender normative heterosexuality, or they can adopt, at their peril, a Western discourse of LGBT rights. Neither option is possible for most of my informants, and in any case neither are choices that most Indonesians could easily make. The linearity of the life course demanded here stands at a distance from the practices and forms of subjectivity present in Indonesia; whether conceptualised in terms of an “archipelago” (Boellstorff 2005, 206) among gay men or as “becoming” among waria, as introduced in this thesis. Given that these political conditions hold sway as I finish this thesis, it is

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15 While this was foreshadowed by earlier events such as violence directed at gay men when making political claims (Boellstorff 2004), the passing of a pornography law (Bellows 2011), and the intensification of the employment of shame as a disciplining force (Bennett and Davies 2015, 13–14) what occurred in early 2016 was a remarkable escalation. A Human Rights Watch report on the events that precipitated the attacks on LGBT at that time provides a sense of its immediate aftermath (Knight and Harsono 2016). Tom Boellstorff’s (2016), and my own and Ferdiansyah Thajib’s (2016) essays, provide an overview and preliminary analysis of these events.
particularly important that I carefully contextualise how I represent *waria* in this ethnography with regards to transgender.

There is an impressive body of literature that addresses transgender-identified individuals, and subsequent discussion of such experiences and the suitability of Western categories to describe them, in diverse cultural contexts (Valentine 2007; Towle and Morgan 2002). At the same time, frustration with the circularity of Western debates about appropriate language has recently led Niko Besnier and Kalissa Alexeyeff (2014, 9), in their edited volume on transgender and same-sex sexuality in the Pacific, to assert that “ad nauseam debates about whether categories are similar or different, or assertions to the effect that a term is in and others are out, are unproductive.” While I share this sentiment, I am also respectful of the very personal and important stake that politics of language hold for those so objectified by the colonising effects of knowledge in particular. I extend these and other claims to insist that, while aware of the many insights that Western queer and transgender studies might bring, it is important to acknowledge that we cannot transpose Western political debates onto the representation of *waria* in Indonesia without running the risk of significant distortion.16

A concern for categories is frequently based on the desire to show respect to those identified by them. This is a desire that I share, and which I believe can be successfully translated to different cultural contexts. This is obvious in the difference between *waria* and *banci*, which I treat as distinct categories throughout this thesis. Yet adequately translating those categories to practices within specific cultural and historical contexts is another matter entirely. As should be clear from this introduction, *waria* do not see their sexual or gender identity as the property of individual persons but as a process of becoming, rendering the concept of “identity” especially inappropriate (Boellstorff 2005, 10). I follow Besnier and Alexeyeff’s (2014, 6) call for “a focus on relationships” seeing this as facilitating an understanding of “how identities and categories emerge out of practice rather than the reverse” (see also Valentine 2007). This is a perspective demonstrated elegantly by Marlon Bailey (2013, 98), who writes about the concept of ballroom “housework” as a form of community creation for Black LGBT individuals in the United States which “exists within the social relations of the members and emphasizes the activity of creating kin without relying on a fixed space.” Similarly, I suggest that practices that might otherwise be mistaken for the expression of gender identity, such as *dendong*, are better understood as forms of labour which emerge in the context of social relationships.

During the course of my own research, the importance of practices was illuminated through the most personal of experiences — through my growing realisation of how *waria* understood me. From the point of view of my *waria* informants, they were participating in the process of Ben becoming Benita. The crowning moment in this process was when my “older sister” (*kakak*) made me up in a glamorous

16 There are parallels with earlier discussion among anthropologists about the use of the categories “man” and “woman” among feminist theorists. Notable among these critiques is that by Marilyn Strathern (1980, 179) who suggests that man and woman (and famously, individual) are too Western, “as though through them we could read other people’s messages, and not just feedback from our own inputs.”
ball gown one afternoon for a trip to the port city of Semarang. What struck me was the labour involved: it took around three hours to properly make me up (didéndongin), using thick foundation, blush, mascara, eye shadow, and eyelashes, before helping me with my gown and wig. I did the same for her, holding the mirror, chatting and making cups of tea while we prepared ourselves. This also serves to highlight the important but little recognised role that waria play in transferring and perpetuating these skills: older and more skilful waria train younger, less skilful waria in stable and presentable forms of bodily comportment. My ethnographic approach is defined by its attention to the role of practices and relationships, including my own, in understanding waria.

If waria are generous enough to use dèndong to transform me into a banci kaleng, and make an adolescent brondong into a man through mothering, we also need to understand their engagement with the self not as potentialities foreclosed but as always already constituted through social relationships located within their historical moment. I conclude this chapter by suggesting the two methodological aims of this thesis. The first is to establish a perspective on understandings of embodiment and personhood as waria grow old within a range of multiply inhabitable subjectivities. Second is to reflect on how the labour associated with femininity that waria undertake is constitutive of wider forms of crucially important yet devalued investments in others. As my informants commonly assert: “We waria have value too.” This serves as a useful way to reflect on the fact that, despite the attention given over to gender among waria as a valuable symbol of public recognition, older waria often reflected that it ultimately matters little. “They know what I really am inside,” they say. I have found that the process of becoming waria is made up of the social relationships that have sustained and nurtured them. I suggest that concerted forms of care for others is the “value” to which waria refer, and it is this which I hold as the ethnographic focus of this thesis. It is also this form of value that I hope serves to illustrate the possibility for a different kind of political vocabulary for imagining social life in Indonesia, which appears so fractured and volatile in the contemporary moment.

Structure of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2 I describe the historical context that shaped waria during the New Order. I take as my starting point the claim among elderly waria that there were no waria prior to their own generation. I describe waria in the context of the emergence of descriptions of complete men (laki-laki komplit) and perfect women (perempuan sempurna) in definitions promulgated by the state and in the press during the 1970s in particular. Reflecting on this period is a useful way to contextualise understandings of waria, but also to suggest the role that male-bodied femininity — described variously as “transvestites,” “transsexuals,” “intersex” and less commonly “homosexuals” — played in introducing transnational ideals of heteronormative gendering in Indonesia. I reflect on the historical transformation involved in the growing and largely unquestioned emphasis on gender normativity as an essential aspect of heterosexual reproduction in Indonesia. The state’s invasive interest in “less than perfect (kurang sempurna)” bodies, coupled with the heterosexualisation of
gender and sexual identity during this period had the effect that waria could not be recognised as women. However, a pleasant coincidence of these discourses was the growing visibility and popularity of waria, whose articulation of self both draws on and exceeds transnational, national and local conceptualisations of the self.

Chapter 3 returns to explore more closely the relationship between embodiment and personhood involved in the process of becoming waria, chiefly through the embodied practice of déndong. This chapter is inspired by the common expression among waria that they enjoy being visible, illustrating the embodied process of becoming waria as it takes place in reference to specific sites and audiences. This serves to show that performances of gender among waria, chiefly referred to as déndong, escape any narrow conceptualisation as stable femininity. The chapter largely focuses on Mak Shirley and her photographic archive of waria life from the early to mid 1980s. This chapter reveals that the meanings of déndong are not mere frivolity or a performance which can be traced to sexual or gender identity, but rather might be understood as an embodied reflection of collective forms of community. I suggest that a focus on déndong as symbolic of a relationship to an inner identity has obscured the ways that the practice is important in this way as the reflection of social relations. Understood in terms of the common waria expression of becoming as a process, déndong reflects how gender is a process that unfolds throughout the life course in reference to specific audiences and events.

Chapter 4 continues to contextualise understandings of becoming waria by unpacking the specific kinds of affective labour that waria do to obtain public recognition. I reflect on the relationship between waria’s performance of a cultivated femininity in reference to a broader set of economic transformations during the New Order. I detail the historical emergence of specific kinds of work — salon and performance — and the way that these contributed to forming waria’s understanding of femininity. These spaces offer the opportunity for certain kinds of national recognition via morally worthy good deeds (prestasi). I reflect on this history in light of the recent growth, partially related to the global category transgender, in representations made by foreign journalists. These often take the form of documentaries and other visual features. Waria understand these representations in terms of their historical relationship to forms of mass media, and affective labour, that emerged during the New Order. As a result, and in spite of the fact that these representations frame waria primarily as the victims of violence, waria understand their participation in them as prestasi.

Chapter 5 reflects on the form of intimacy that waria desire the most — that with the adolescent, or liminal, masculinity of brondong. I argue that brondong are liminal because they are betwixt and between stages in the life course, which is the very reason that waria say that they find them attractive. For waria, as for all Indonesians, the life course and temporal stress on reproduction through marriage and family, crystallises anxieties about recognition. This chapter focuses on a different kind of labour: that which waria perform in order to draw out the masculinity from their brondong, not unlike the way that they describe their own understanding of selfhood as a process of becoming. Overall, this means that waria intimacy with brondong cannot be understood in terms of a
heteronormative, binarised model of desire or identity. Most poignantly, waria are unanimous in their desire that their brondong should get married heterosexually even though this often marks the end of a relationship, after which a brondong is no longer attractive anyway. This labour of love is the primary method through which waria secure a sense of themselves as feminine. However, while brondong will ideally marry around the age of twenty, these young men are increasingly finding that their value in erotic economies contrasts with this life course goal.

In Chapter 6, the conclusion, I point to the ways in which “becoming waria” offers an opportunity to consider how gender and sexuality are fundamentally located within relationships. I suggest that the forms of discursive work through which waria sustain their gender performances are indebted to a historically and culturally specific experience of Indonesian national modernity. I frame this historically specific understanding of gender performance among waria as a way to consider the unruly vulnerabilities that human relationships entail; not only in interactions with other individuals, but in terms of engagement with the state. I reflect on the value of visibility to waria, suggesting that approaches framed in terms of transgender studies are valuable when they engage with the lived experience of those subject to expert and popular knowledge. Such a framing enables a move away from perspectives framed in terms of resistance and oppression, towards a better consideration of the forms of dependency that personhood entails. Yet, any consideration of these forms of dependency must remain grounded in the ethnographic texture of waria social life.
Waría activist Ibu Nancy Iskandar, born in Bandung in 1949, is one of the busiest people I know. On a cool weekend morning in June, I walk up to her at a busy train station in central Jakarta. She has agreed to accompany me to visit the oldest waría activist in Jakarta, Mami Maya Puspa, the legendary eighty-year-old member of the first generation of waría introduced in the previous chapter. Amidst the dense bustle of Jakarta’s urban life, I spot Ibu Nancy reading quietly in a corner. When I ask her what she is reading, she responds that it is about cooking healthy and nutritious food. “You have to take every opportunity to improve yourself,” she explains. “And at sixty years I’m not getting any younger!”

As we ride the train together, she lists her responsibilities past and present: she has been a core member of the famous dance troupe Fantastic Dolls, a magician, she runs a wedding makeup and hair business and works in HIV prevention and care. The achievement of which she is proudest is her position at the Jakarta municipal Department of Social Affairs, from which she is now retired. She proudly shows me a picture of herself in a women’s New Order-era civil service uniform. I had met many of Ibu Nancy’s former students in different parts of Indonesia, who told me somewhat fearfully of her faith in the role of strict discipline to improve the position of waría in society. This meant, for example, that she instituted a strict system of punitive fines for waría who ran even five minutes late...
for her training sessions. Or, hitting me firmly but playfully on the back, Nancy suggested that what especially misbehaved *waria* need is a good old-fashioned slap.

Having arrived at our station, Ibu Nancy and I emerge from a railway station in a cramped and run-down suburb in the western part of Jakarta. I follow her gingerly as we work our way across three sets of railway lines, taking care not to trip on the large stones or bags of rubbish discarded onto the tracks. We pass a group of young *waria* perched on benches overlooking the railway tracks. They wear heavy eye shadow, foundation and bright red lipstick, and very scant clothing. Ibu Nancy remarks that they are in the final stages of preparing for a night of walking from store to store and singing for money (*ngamén*) common among *waria*. I watch them for a moment as they fiddle with the dials on the small speaker boxes that *waria* often carry for this task, setting the volume so loud that the song is distorted beyond recognition. Pressing on, we enter a small alleyway, the entrance to which is flooded after heavy rain earlier in the day. Deep at the end of the alleyway, we arrive at a two-story building decorated with a sign “Maya Bridal Makeup and Fashion Salon” (*Maya Rias Pengantin dan Sanggar Busana*).¹

¹ I use salon as a term that encompasses both bridal studios and more everyday salons that one finds around Indonesia. Frequently *waria* will do both — that is, specialist make up and hair for weddings, as well as haircuts — however, some especially small salons will only do haircuts. Bridal make-up (*rias penggantin*) is considered an important speciality for experienced *waria*. 

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This image is only available in the print version of this thesis, available at the Australian National University.

*Figure 2.2: Mami Maya Pu spa behind her desk at her office in Jakarta, June 2015.*
Once a lively centre for waria social life, Mami Maya’s salon is now close to overflowing with paperwork and dusty wedding gowns covered in plastic covers (Figure 2.2). Nevertheless, Ibu Nancy proudly introduces Mami Maya as a glamorous waria who provided inspiration as one of the first well-known professional performers of her era, setting the scene for warias’ claims to respectability. Mami Maya’s specialty, she explains soon after we have been introduced, was snake dancing (penari ular), the inspiration for which she received from Elizabeth Taylor’s role in the 1963 film Cleopatra. Mami Maya also became an expert in film make-up, eventually working for a well-known Indonesian film star. Cultivating this expertise was especially prescient, she explains, given that with age and decreased beauty waria are no longer able to exploit their beauty and body. Speaking for all waria, she pronounces that it is rather skills and service to society in the form of respectable work are crucial to gaining both social acceptance and longevity.

As a member of the “first generation (angkatan pertama),” Mami Maya Puspa was among the first waria to be “cultivated (pembinaan)” by the early New Order state. She explained, “At that time, there was no one to accompany us (nemanin), no one to protect us (lindungi).” Waria of this age agreed that the period prior to around 1968 was a wilderness of intolerance and discrimination. Waria recounted appalling stories of being insulted by children who shouted out “béncong, béncong!” and threw rocks at them. From all accounts, something fairly dramatic took place at the end of the 1960s. As Mami Maya recalled:

Starting with that [government support in 1969], waria began to gather together, given an education, given skills — sewing, salon and bridal make-up (encan). Now, there’s a saying, which is also my principle, “if a dog barks, the convoy keeps on going” (anjing menggonggong, kafilah berlalu). So even if they sometimes said “waria aren’t normal,” we kept on going.

This rapid transformation is also reflected in the way that elderly waria single out the late 1960s as the moment when a most dramatic change occurred: waria began to freely wear women’s clothing during the day (see also Boellstorff 2007, 86, 2005, 57). Most waria who remembered the 1950s, 1960s and even early 1970s told me that they did not practice dêndong in public at all at that time: “Before the 1960s, there was no such thing as banci,” Mami Maya explained, emphasising that, “we didn’t even exist.” Surprised at this remark, I looked at Ibu Nancy, who added that prior to this time “banci were too afraid to show themselves.” While there may have been no waria who looked like women, there were indeed individuals who hung out in parks to attract men.

Mami Maya admitted that these individuals were related to waria; it was only that they had not yet “become (belum jadi).” She stressed that they were both distinct from gender normative gay men who emerged in the 1980s and visible waria in the late 1960s. She described these historical forerunners to waria using the term banci kalêng — waria whose latent signs had not yet manifest — first introduced in the previous chapter, suggesting a temporal dimension relating individuals to their historical epoch. Waria’s description of their individual process of becoming is in many respects metonymic of the wider historical context associated with modernity during this period. The
emergence of this “first generation” of waria was made possible through an ambiguous process of state recognition around 1968, along with the capacity to accomplish a glamorous femininity through various technologies of modernity. It is no surprise that this is the year that marks the beginning of the period that waria refer to as their “golden age (zaman emas).”

This chapter presents the historical context of the period during which waria say that they emerged. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, and coinciding with the beginning of the New Order (1967–1998), expert and popular sources began to describe male-bodied individuals with a woman’s soul or mind (jiwa) and a feminine comportment (dendong). The first account that I have found of a “banci” describing herself as possessing a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” is in a newspaper report from 1967. The report describes a “banci” at a court appearance wearing a “dress shirt and pants,” who speaks with the “accented voice of a woman,” and “plays with her hair with long-nailed fingers” (Kompas 1967). When asked to explain herself, she states confidently to the judge: “I am a man, but I have a woman’s soul, and I always associate with women” (ibid.).

Expressions such as possessing a “woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan)” suggest an individualised and interior identity because the process through which waria have been incorporated into Indonesian national modernity relies on globalised networks of knowledge. This relationship to Western knowledge about gender and sexuality explains why the dominant narrative of a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” among waria resembles similar narratives found around the world (see Stone 1992). However, it also highlights key differences: for example, the common narrative of becoming waria eschews individual interiority for a stress on both individual and collective work.

A stress on individual and collective work also informs key strategies endorsed by waria to obtain social acceptance. Specifically, the performance of morally worthy “good deeds” (Boellstorff 2007, 105–12) known as prestasi has been key to waria’s efforts to conform to New Order national modernity. Prestasi involves the performance of citizenship through visible forms of embodied self-cultivation. Tom Boellstorff (ibid., 105) provides the seminal definition of understandings of prestasi among waria as a “performativ theory of recognition” through which waria link everyday practices to the possibility to be fully accepted in Indonesian national society. Among waria in my field sites, prestasi includes forms of community and volunteer work, as well as any efforts to avoid less reputable forms of informal work in favour of recognisable, skilled labour in salons. For example, Ibu Nancy’s pride in her visible civil servant’s uniform, and Mami Maya’s emphasis on sewing, salon and bridal make-up as “skills (ketrampilan)” both amount to prestasi. Mami Vinolia, introduced in Chapter 1, has a wall of enormous trophies, certificates and newspaper articles in the guest room of her NGO, which is also visible from the street. And waria with no claim to fame and fortune at all

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2 The Indonesian term jiwa is commonly translated as soul, but it is also commonly used in state and medical settings to refer to the mind. I interrogate the slippage between these meanings later in this chapter. However, I refer to it as a “women’s soul (jiwa)” throughout for ease of reading.
stress that acceptance by families and neighbours amounts to \textit{prestasi}. \textit{Prestasi} reflects how \textit{waria} see their bodies as oriented chiefly towards an audience to whom they are visible.

The relationship between \textit{prestasi} and citizenship among \textit{waria} reflects a close relationship to forms of self-cultivation and national modernity since the beginning of the New Order (see Chapter 4). \textit{Waria} beauty contests emerged as early as 1968, and the first generation of \textit{waria} pioneered efforts to “cultivate (\textit{membina})” \textit{waria} through training in the creative professions associated with global norms of feminine beauty. These everyday efforts, recognisably associated with \textit{waria} since the late 1960s, have enabled some \textit{waria} to secure an unlikely relationship to middle class ideals of productivity and national belonging. Indeed, these efforts at “development-in-miniature” (Boellstorff 2005, 212) among \textit{waria} appear to have foreshadowed the extraordinary growth in efforts to cultivate the body according to expert knowledge in post-authoritarian Indonesia (Jones 2010; Long 2007). However, \textit{prestasi} among \textit{waria} is not always considered in collective terms, but rather is often seen as reflecting an individual \textit{waria}'s own personal accomplishments. Echoing Nicholas Long’s (ibid., 111) observations, \textit{prestasi} among \textit{waria} operates to “increase one’s agency in the social world.” In this sense, \textit{prestasi} might be understood as a fraught way for \textit{waria} to obtain economic capital and upward mobility in the context of competing regimes of value and emergent forms of self-governance.

The efforts of \textit{waria} to accomplish New Order modernity through \textit{prestasi} is important, but it does not entirely account for the historical context within which they emerged. To better contextualise \textit{waria}’s desires for self-transformation in later chapters, this chapter addresses the various ways that the New Order state attempted to understand male-bodied femininity, and the kinds of knowledge disseminated in both popular and expert realms as a result. I have found that the state did so by localising globalised ideas of Western understandings of gender and sexuality, mostly via psychological and medical techniques primarily designed to harness heteronormative marriage and the nuclear family to national development (see also Boellstorff 2005, 198). From the 1970s onwards, increasing interest in transsexuality globally transformed understandings of both male-bodied femininity and female-bodied masculinity in Indonesia. These new areas of interest also played a role in refining state expertise about what gender normative masculinity and femininity means and how it might best be achieved. This chapter introduces the concrete ways that national modernity has influenced \textit{waria} subjectivity, in turn opening new perspectives on the modern history of gender and sexuality in Indonesia.

Tracing the global history of national understandings of gender and sexuality in Indonesia illustrates the effort that the New Order state expended on securing boundaries of masculinity and femininity. I argue that the presumption of natural gender normativity based on biological, reproductive capacities undergirds disciplinary projects related to the body in Indonesian national modernity. Rather than being marginal, the transnational circulation of knowledge about transgender embodiment thus emerges as a “critical political site” (Stoler 2002, 210) where masculinity, femininity and the linking of behaviours and bodies to those categories has been worked out. Male-bodied femininity has been a
key discursive site where what constitutes “natural” masculinity and femininity has been both clarified and contested: the product of the history of a dense constellation of racial, class and national normativity that characterises Indonesia’s experience of modernity.

**Gender in the New Order**

During the New Order, the Indonesian state directed enormous attention towards defining men and women in terms of a relationship of binarised opposition, understood according to a gendered division of labour between masculine production and feminine reproduction (Dwyer 2002; Brenner 1999; Suryakusuma 1996). A related feature of Indonesian state discourse from the late 1960s was also a stress on “scientific medicine [as] an important technique of development and nation-building” (Ferzacca 2002, 36). Arming itself with “seemingly universal technical facts” (Jones 2010, 275), the Indonesian state refracted Western ideals of the nuclear family to articulate what it saw as natural forms of femininity and masculinity.

The process through which gender came to be transformed over the course of the New Order bears similarities with what Timothy Mitchell (2000) characterises as the “distinctive apprehension of the real” in the context of modernity. I concur with Mitchell’s characterisation of modernity as an affective sensibility which requires a “universalism that repeatedly makes its realization incomplete” (ibid., xiii). In the Indonesian case, I suggest, this “incomplete universal” (ibid., 24) was nowhere so greatly felt as in gender normative masculinity and femininity, the chief method through which individuals sought to cultivate themselves in relation to state expertise. “Perfect women” and “complete men” became idioms through which not only waria, but all Indonesians, came to understand themselves as related to national modernity. In this way, the dense entanglement of heteronormativity and modernity in Indonesia might be characterised as an affective state through which people have come to understand themselves as incomplete.

In the context of the mobilisation of state expertise to define gender normativity, it is no surprise that unruly “banci” drew the interest and ire of state officials and the media, who deployed a variety of Western psychological and medical terms in an attempt to both explain and contain them. It was this entanglement of a concern for morality and a will to know that stimulated early government support for waria organisations. The Jakarta Governor Sadikin implored that “every citizen should help to overcome the problem [of banci] (menanggulangi masalah itu)” (Kompas 1968) and in 1969 a police officer stressed his concern for wadam’s relationship to visible prostitution. He explained: “they create an unpleasant view (pemandangan yang tidak baik), especially for foreign guests” (Kompas 1969). Rather than marking the emergence of state acceptance, I understand early interest in waria as part of a broader campaign seeking to instil middle class values amidst a growing “underclass”

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3 The Indonesian marriage act, for example, defines men and women in terms of this division of labour: men are the “head of the household (kepala rumah tangga)” and women are the “housewife (ibu rumah tangga)” (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 Tentang Perkawinan 1974).
(Kusno 2010, 282; Simone 2014, 38) of which “banci” were a part. This reflects how the newfound visibility of waria was more commonly considered a problem of class-related anxieties about social order than one of inclusion at the time.

A concern for defining gender normative masculinity and femininity condensed a range of anxieties, as state officials and psychologists expressed concern for the lower classes as particularly impressionable to moral deviation. These links were clarified by recourse to Western theories of deviance. While a number of terms were introduced in popular and expert publications, the Western concept of “transvestite” came to prominence. In a series of articles devoted to the “prevention (pemecahan)” of “banci,” the Jakarta municipal government called on Western psychological knowledge about gender and sexuality to define male-bodied femininity:

Transvestite = a man who is physically a man, but with the psyche of a woman. She does the work of a woman and wears women’s clothing because of the force of her jiwa (Transvestite = Laki2 yang setjara fisik laki2, tapi psychis wanita. Dia megerdjakan pekerdjaan wanita dan mengenganakan pakaiannya karena dorongan djiva). (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b, 10)

In the 1970s, national interest in a global discourse of transsexuality channelled interest in waria towards the genitals, albeit with a significant focus on reproductive capacity. Definitions of waria in terms of the desire to appear as women because of an inner part of the self described as a “soul (jiwa)” (note the slippage between jiwa and the English-derived psychis, or psyche in the source above) provides insights into how new ways of relating to the self were made possible because of the historical contingencies of this period.

The dominant translation of the Indonesian term jiwa among anthropologists when describing waria, gay men and lesbian women’s subjective understandings of selfhood is most often soul or spirit (see Blackwood 2010, 101). However, its use by the New Order state to describe male-bodied femininity via Western theories of gender and sexuality suggests the influence of other, transnational forms of knowledge on the term. I reflect on its relationship to a broader suite of techniques dating from the New Order in order to define individuals as the subjects of rationalised scientific knowledge (Rudnyckyj 2010; Jones 2010). This is reflected primarily in the use of jiwa as a concept in psychiatry used to refer to the mind (Pols 2006).

The relationship between jiwa and this modern medical meaning is present in various guises. It appears in the name of the professional organisation of Indonesian psychiatrists, founded in 1972, Ikatan Ahli Jiwa Indonesia (Pols 2006, 366), and Djiwa was the title of the first Indonesian psychiatric journal established in 1968 (ibid., 367). Indeed, one of the earliest issues of this new journal contained detailed case studies about “banci” based on investigations conducted by

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4 The common narrative recorded among waria is that their feminine bodily presentation stems from having a “woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan)” (see also Davies 2010, 36; Boellstorff 2007, 99). Tom Boellstorff (2007, 99) surmises that, “Soul and bodily presentation, not just sex, secure gender in Indonesia.” As Boellstorff (ibid., 90) clarifies, the English translation of jiwa as “soul” suggests a particularly problematic Christian connotation of interiority (Taylor 1989).
psychiatrists and psychologists (Masdani 1968). As a result, I suggest that the term *jiwa* might be interpreted as having a more secular and scientific meaning than its common translation as “soul” suggests. This is particularly important in light of the overwhelming commitment to autocratic and scientific forms of knowledge during the New Order.

Numerous scholars have attended to the narratives of transgender-identified individuals, particularly in the form of medicalised case histories (Garfinkel 2006) and autobiographies (Aizura 2011b; Prosser 1998). These offer rich resources for considering the emergence and globalisation of the modern self (see also Stryker and Currah 2014; Najmabadi 2014). The “one-way narrative of transgender movement” (Aizura 2011b, 140) might be understood to exemplify the ideal of a Western self that is durable even as it moves through time and space. While this discourse of gender and sexuality has globalised rapidly via a range of means, and is undoubtedly a powerful shaping force, I am also struck by its divergence with how *waria* articulate themselves in everyday life. Despite certain superficial similarities, the expression of “becoming *waria*” eschews the individualism observed in Aren Aizura’s (2011b) account of Western transgender travel narratives. Rather, *waria* assert firmly the actions of and dependency on others. Rather than the deep interiority of the Western self understood in terms of linear movement, *waria* subjectivity does not stress a clear beginning and end, more commonly described as a process of coming to one’s embodiment through social relationships.

The remainder of this chapter considers how a stress on gender as a universal attribute of the self during the New Order facilitated new modes of narrating and performing gender. I focus on sources concerning male-bodied femininity to ask how, and in what ways, certain aspects of the Western self have taken root as an aspect of national modernity in Indonesia. By foregrounding how *waria* have made sense of rapidly shifting understandings of the self and ideals of gender performance during the New Order, this thesis moves beyond any straightforward description of *waria* as “transgender.” Rather, I argue that the process of adopting various, disparate, threads of the self is precisely what enables *waria* to emerge as tenable figures within Indonesian society. I reflect on the history of this discourse by exploring the concrete and creative modes, technologies and narrative strategies that *waria* draw upon to describe, influence and make sense of the self.

**A Woman’s Soul**

The way in which *waria* understand themselves is no doubt influenced by the relationship between older regional histories and transnational networks of knowledge and power. Colonial networks provided the initial mode of transport for scientific assertions of heteronormativity as the supreme measure of civilisational status (Locher-Scholten 2000; Stoler 1995). It is certainly likely that understanding oneself as homosexual was shaped in some way “from the Western sexological and psychiatric literatures that were beginning to circulate through the colonial world” (Boellstorff 2005, 50). I also speculate that this was not a one-way flow: it is likely that knowledge about gender
diversity in colonial Indonesia served as raw data for the establishment of the emergent establishment of psychological studies of gender and sexuality in the West (see Palmer 2014 on the French colonial context). While this may have been the case, what did these globalised forms of Western science in fact mean by homosexuality or when referring to individuals who experienced same-sex desire? How did colonial and postcolonial governments import theories of gender and sexuality into the Indonesian context during this period?

Ann Stoler (2002, 210) describes colonial power as “a gendered grid of contained and contested tasks that produced a politics of compassion, compliance, and coercion that differently positioned women and men.” During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the intersection of gender and race emerged as a pivotal site for colonial biopolitics (Stoler 2002, 202). As Ann Stoler (ibid., 46) writes: “The demasculinisation of colonized men and the hypermasculinity of European males are understood as key elements in the assertion of white supremacy.” The concern shown by colonial authorities to secure the moral superiority of European masculinity is perhaps nowhere more evident than the homosexual “vice scandal” in the colonial Dutch East Indies, which saw the arrest of 225 men between 1938 and 1939 (Bloembergen 2011). Colonial anxiety about European masculinity, however, also relied on defining its relationship to Indonesian masculinity. In this case, the difference in the treatment of young Indonesian men compared to Europeans is notable: while the Western men were the subject of intense disciplinary measures, the Indonesians were sent for psychiatric assessment and rehabilitation (ibid., 138). Indeed, the “young men (pemuda)” — a patronising colonial-era term used to refer to all Indonesian men — were defined explicitly not as homosexuals driven by desire, but as a class of sex workers driven by economic need (ibid., 138). The subtext here is that Indonesian masculinity is always already feminised, impressionable and childlike on account of race.

It is also important to note that, for most of the colonial period, theoretical efforts to understand sexuality did not clarify it as separate from gendered subjectivity and embodiment as is the case today. Famous European experts of this period, like Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis, articulated homosexuality in gendered terms. Common descriptions of male-bodied homosexuality in Europe, first by experts but also by homosexuals themselves, explained same-sex desire in terms of “a female soul enclosed in a male body” (Hekma 1996, 219). Both scientific and popular definitions of homosexuality in the West focused on “non-normative gender expression” (Valentine 2007, 41), relying on psychological definitions which saw homosexual men as unable to repress their internal feminine gender. Rather than a gender normative masculine individual desiring the same, “male-bodied people… are erotically drawn to other male-bodied people as the result of a feminine soul, psyche, biology, or the result of aberrant psychosexual development” (Valentine 2007, 236). This perspective is apparent in the anxiety over European homosexuals arrested during the vice scandal in

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5 It is interesting to note the role that data and observations collected from colonial settings in Southeast Asia and elsewhere played in the emergent discipline of sexology (Bleys 1996). Magnus Hirschfeld, for example, travelled to what is now Jakarta in the early 20th century, and observed there those that he referred to as “transvestites” (Edgar Bauer 2006).
the Dutch East Indies as “not particularly firm nor vigorous” (Bloembergen 2011, 135), predicated on the concern that homosexuals are “weak in character” (ibid., 140). When addressing the globalisation of Western biopolitics, it is therefore important to bear in mind that the scientific basis for sexuality in Indonesia has not only been concerned with inner essence, but also with outer appearances.

The centrality of appearances to national modernity in Indonesia is well documented in the guise of colonial alarm about the integrity of racial distinctions (Stoler 2002; Siegel 1997, Chap. 6). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Indonesia, male-bodied individuals who wore European clothes provoked considerable anxiety, manifesting in colonial anxieties for the racial boundaries of heteronormativity (Mrázek, 129–160). In the late colonial period, concern was also expressed over the sexual improprieties — framed as the transgression of racial boundaries — that might follow not being able to recognise a person’s identity: “An Indo-European girl is accosted in the street by a smartly dressed Indonesian who makes an indecent proposal” (Hesselink 1987, 211; see also Stoler 2002, 25). In Indonesia, appearances have never been a superficial matter, but rather might better be understood as a conduit for new modes of subjectivity and recognition (Schulte Nordholt 1997, 31; Siegel 1997, 86; Brenner 1996). In parallel fashion, I reflect on the way that the previously unremarkable fact of male-bodied individuals wearing women’s clothes began to provoke disquiet about the “nature” of things in post-independence Indonesia. Viewed from this perspective, shifting understandings of what has been accepted as “natural” gender normativity emanating from an inner part of the self must be subjected to further historical and cultural contextualisation.

The scientific approaches that established the basis for gender during the colonial period, closely tied to race and class, provided the foundations for the attention in post-independence Indonesia given to establishing proper standards of masculinity and femininity. Thus, Indonesian national modernity is fundamentally structured by a heteronormativity made meaningful through visible signs of gender. This helps to explain why, so soon after independence, the otherwise familiar male-bodied femininity of “banci” quickly emerged as a figure who consolidated anxieties about the modern meanings of gender in Indonesia.
No Indonesian Homosexuals: Banci in Urban Spaces

Despite the development of a colonial and postcolonial biopolitics of gender and sexuality in Indonesia, it was neither monolithic or all-encompassing. Indeed, long regional histories of gender hold that masculinity and femininity are performances defined primarily in terms of social roles and embodied practices. For example, waria in Indonesia understand themselves to be first identified as such by neighbours and family while they are children, rather than as “opening themselves” (Boellstorff 2005, 126, 2007, 88) in the way that gay men and lesbian women commonly articulate their subjectivity. Waria commonly speak of a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” not in terms of interiority but rather say that it is “pushed upon (dorongan),” “called out (panggilan),” or that it is derived from an “outside feeling (terasa).” It follows that the Indonesian understandings of male-bodied femininity in terms of a “female mind (jiwa perempuan),” itself quite possibly a long-established discourse, was altered as it encountered various translations of emergent Western and psychological models. This section attends to slippages in the use of the concept of a gendered “soul (jiwa)” in reference to “banci” as a way to better understand the incomplete project of establishing heteronormativity as a central pillar of national modernity in Indonesia.

The enormous effort directed at defining gender normativity in the post-independence period is suggested not only by accounts from my waria informants, but by newspaper articles, government publications, laws and expert commentary. A notable aspect of mass media and later expert accounts is the description of “banci” in relation to visible prostitution, echoing accounts of the emergence of
urban homosexual subcultures elsewhere (see Weeks 1981). For example, a popular account of waria in Jakarta written by the journalist Kemala Atmojo (1987) includes first-hand accounts from waria born in the 1920s. They recalled the historical presence of waria sex workers in the city, especially in front of the Hotel Indonesia in the late 1950s (ibid., 17–18). This and other popular accounts (see especially Hamka 1981) suggests that waria have a long historical relationship to a visibility associated with lower class urban life. The common acceptance of waria by the lower classes in Jakarta and other cities appears to have surfaced as a cause for interest and concern soon after Indonesian independence; in the early 1950s, for example, “banca” in lower class Jakarta neighbourhoods are, “asked to perform (main), for example at marriage celebrations and other events. In the theatre troupe, they most enjoy playing the role of women, according to the talent and calling of their soul (panggilan jiwa)” (Siasat, 1951; for a similar description of Surabaya see Peacock 1968). During the 1950s and 1960s, expert and popular media alike increasingly described waria both as a role shaped by visible practices associated with lower class status, and in the 1970s in particular as the product of an individual self with a capacity for improvement.

The first mention of “banca” in the national mass media in Indonesia is an article published in the popular Jakarta-based weekly magazine Siasat in 1951. In an article, replete with racy photographs, a group of brazenly public “banca” are introduced as a new kind of urban problem (Figure 2.3). Echoing elderly waria’s descriptions of the 1950s as a decade characterised by negative attitudes, the article sensationaly reveals: “These women are, in fact, ‘men’” (ibid.). The central focus of the story is a group of eight “banca” detained in the context of sex work in the affluent suburb of Menteng in central Jakarta. The author writes that possessing a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” is the reason why these “banca” present themselves as women (ibid.). Unlike in later decades, however, having a “women’s soul” is not introduced as the grounds for a degree of tolerance or acceptance. Indeed, the main concern is not the fact that they are prostituting themselves, or having sex with men (although both are certainly moral transgressions), but that the “banca” has “deceived (menipu) [men] because they are wearing a woman’s clothes (berbaju perempuan)” (ibid.). Given the specific reference to “deception (menipu),” the legal transgression alluded to might be traced to colonial-era concern about wearing clothing appropriate to one’s ethnicity, instituted in the context of attempts to secure failing racial boundaries (Siegel 1997, 86). A concern for gender normativity, which crystallised around the figure of the “banca,” appears to have become a new kind of problem from the earliest moments of Indonesian national modernity.

Race surfaces as a salient categorical distinction in defining same-sex desire at this time. The “banca” apparently gather in this particular location because of the large number of Dutch soldiers based there,

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6 Writing about a novel published in 1904, James Siegel (1997, 86) describes how deception in the Dutch East Indies reflected a narrow concern for national identity based on racial characteristics. He writes: “At issue is being in public and how one looks. Then, Tirtho cites a Dutch expert who explains that what is at stake is crossing lines of nationality. It is not merely a question of dressing as someone else but also of deceiving ‘the public,’ that is, those whom one does not know.” Notable for my account is that Siegel adds that: “Sexual cross-dressing is not discussed.”
the only men who admire them: “The Dutch military posted in Jakarta are, for banci, a vision of heaven (masa surga)” (ibid.). Refracting the attitudes of observers in the Dutch East Indies in the 1930s, same-sex desire between two masculine individuals is described as Western; a “perverse lechery” (Bloembergen 2011, 141) foreign to Indonesia’s national culture. The author writes that the relationship between race and desire is animated by other factors, such as age and the direction of payment. The author defines “banci aktief (active banci)” or “homosexuals (homosexueelen)” as older, masculine, Dutch men who pay for sex (Siasat 1951). Feminine “bantji passief (passive banci)” are younger, poor Indonesians who are paid for sex (ibid.). Foreshadowing a discourse that became increasingly established in later decades, “banci” may be Indonesian, but they are labouring under a genuine understanding that they are women (jiwa perempuan), and can thus be distinguished from Western “homosexuals” on that basis. Sexuality in this view might be interpreted as one practice that follows from gender: “In terms of the banci mentioned earlier, their feminine properties (sifat-sifat perempuan) are far greater than their male traits (which are latent), so that as a man they are impotent (i.e. cannot have heterosexual sex) and so they become female banci. In so doing they seek out other male partners” (ibid.). It follows that — given that there are no Indonesian homosexuals — apart from Dutch soldiers, the only “young men (pemuda)” who consort with “banci” do so because they mistakenly understand them to be women. Both Indonesian “banci” and “pemuda” are therefore responding to a “natural” heterosexuality, established via an emergent emphasis on heteronormative gender presentation as a measure of national modernity.

The claim that there are “no Indonesian homosexuals” in post-independence Indonesia reflects an incipient national ideal of natural heteronormative masculinity, as well as highlights an anxiety concerning a less than complete national masculinity. The amenability of certain aspects of Western theories of gender and sexuality to the Indonesian context surfaces at different points, but is perhaps most evident in explanations for male-bodied femininity as the result of childhood as a developmental stage. “Most of these banci said that they felt (terasa) their banci-ness (kebancian) from the time that they were children. This is why they say that they have never known what it feels like to be a man” (ibid.). Explanations offered for “banci” thus appear to reflect Western theories of sexuality which stress “the soul, not the body” (Hekma 1996, 220) and emergent perspectives in psychology linking childhood development to the new concept of “gender identity.” Both of these theoretical notions seem to have been accommodated comfortably by the dominant stress on personhood as the product of social influence widely observed throughout Indonesia. Indeed, state and popular concern for male-bodied femininity until the present day remains animated primarily by anxieties about children becoming “banci” (or indeed gay) as the result of social influence.

7 A number of United States psychologists and physicians were central to redefining the psychological meanings of gender from the 1950s onwards, often doing so in reference to the related fields of intersex and transsexuality (Meyerowitz 2002, 115). It is notable to my analysis that Robert Stoller refined John Money’s concept of gender identity (which dates from 1957) to produce concrete clinical definitions of masculinity and femininity in 1968 (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 58).
I am also keen not to overstate the emphasis of transnational discourse. The emergence of a specifically national definition of gender in Indonesia is most clearly reflected in the fact that descriptions of waria fail to link their gender presentation to biological sex at all. Rather, femininity and masculinity are described in terms of practices expressed through the physical body within its social context; much is made of the fact that “banci wear ankle bracelets,” or “walk or ride bicycles wearing women’s shoes” (Siasat 1951). What is interesting here is that concern also appears not to emanate from the close association between male-bodied femininity and homosexuality observed in the West (Newton, 1979). Rather, the unease about “deception (menipu)” instead appears related to the historical anxieties about national identity linked to race and class introduced earlier. I therefore interpret the early identification of “banci” as a problem in state and popular sources because they do not adhere to emergent standards of binary, heteronormative gendering so important to sustaining the project of national modernity. This concern, the author of the Siasat article writes, applies to all Indonesians:

As far as is known to be the case, every human being (whether a man or a woman) contains [within them] male and female characteristics, whether it be in relations of the household between husband and wife, or within wider society. It is no surprise that many romantic novels are based on the concept that both femininity and masculinity reside within one individual. (Siasat 1951)

This suggests that understandings of masculinity and femininity were transformed via discourses linking gender normativity more closely to aspirations for Indonesian national modernity.

It was in this context that modernity is put forward as both the cause of male-bodied femininity, as well as its potential solution through the application of scientific expertise: “psychological issues (soal-soal psikologis) which cause the appearance of complicated problems” (ibid.). This also reflects how “banci” have been shaped by competing transnational discourses of gender and sexuality. For example, in a popular book written in the early 1960s, Islamic scholar Buya Hamka condemned banci on the basis of their equivalence with homosexuals in Europe (Hamka 1981). Of particularly grave concern was their visibility: “prostituting themselves in full view of passing traffic” (melacurkan diri di hadapan mata orang yang lalu lintas)” (ibid., 270–271). Concern for establishing the boundaries of gender normativity closely linked to national identity appears to have persisted throughout the 1960s, reflecting an emergent relationship linking national “progress (maju)” to an affect of “shame (malu)” attached to and experienced by individuals.

Accounts from the period elaborate on the way that previously tolerated practices among male-bodied individuals, including long hair and embodied femininity, came to be identified as a source of

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8 Buya Hamka (b. 1908 d. 1981) was a popular Indonesian scholar who combined reformist Islam with Sufi teachings, and later in life became the first of Indonesia’s teleevangelists (Howell 2010). He was also the first head of Indonesia’s government-backed Council of Islamic Scholars (Majelis Ulema Indonesia). His famous five volume Tafsir (first published in 1965) includes one passage which mentions banci in relation to the condemnation of homosexuality. The abridged version I cite here was published in 1981 [1975] but contains contents from the original version; references from the text indicate that this passage refers to Hamka’s observations in the late 1960s. In 1973, Hamka was reported in a newspaper article as in favour of “sex change surgery” as a technological solution in the context of the famous case about Vivian Rubianti, described later in this chapter (Kompas 1973b).
embarrassment (Peacock 1968). Notably, James Peacock (1968, 206–7) refers to male-bodied, feminine \textit{ludruk} performers in Surabaya in the early 1960s as recounting traumatic experiences of being forced to cut their long hair as part of a broader effort to enforce their femininity as part of an on-stage performance, rather than deviating from gender normative masculinity in everyday life. This corroborates numerous elderly \textit{waria}'s description of the period between the early 1950s and late 1960s as one of profound difficulty.

What seems to have changed between this period and the beginning of \textit{waria}'s “golden age” in the late 1960s was, paradoxically, the consolidation of concepts from Western psychology by Indonesian state experts and the popular media. I suggest that an understanding that \textit{waria} have a “woman’s soul (\textit{jiwa})” is what partially facilitated an abrupt shift towards greater tolerance; \textit{waria} are no longer to be understood as “deceiving (\textit{menipu})” men but rather to be expressing a gendered subjectivity that is the product of familial and social influence. They cannot help who they have become. The state drew upon this language as an effort to prevent the emergence of “banci” and to better establish the grounds for gender normativity. However, the incorporation of this idea into the Indonesian context also resulted in male-bodied femininity becoming closely associated with their propensity for certain skills. This would prove an invaluable platform for advocacy through \textit{prestasi} from the very beginning of the New Order (Chapter 4). From the late 1960s in the West, a claim to invisibility predicated on gender normativity increasingly characterised both common expressions of subjectivity and political struggles for acceptance both among middle class gay men and transsexuals (Valentine 2007). In Indonesia during the same period by contrast it was a different discourse of public visibility and the possibility of an audience for it, somewhat paradoxically informed by lower class status, which came to define \textit{waria}'s claims for national belonging.

\textit{Wadam as Transvestites}

At the beginning of this chapter I introduced Mami Maya and Ibu Nancy, who both refer to the period from 1968 onwards as a “golden age (\textit{zaman emas}).” They explained how, during this period at the very beginning of the New Order, official organisations and events involving \textit{waria} emerged for the first time as part of a project to gain “acceptance from society (\textit{penerimaan masyarakat})” (see also Boellstorff 2007, 103). Many older \textit{waria} explained that this was the moment that the government started to develop (\textit{membina}) them through forms of training such as salon and beauty work. This took place in the context of what, by all accounts, were severe levels of intolerance. Mami Maya explained how: “At that time, \textit{waria} were completely exiled (\textit{kucilkan}). They thought we were insane (\textit{tidak waras}).” Although not entirely positive, almost every \textit{waria} I met agreed that this period of government intervention from 1968 onwards was one during which a number of agreeable changes took place.

It was also around 1968 that state concern to better define gender normative masculinity and femininity as the property of individuals arose more generally. In October and November 1968, the
Jakarta municipal government magazine Mingguan Jaya announced a two-month long series of articles on the topic of the “prevention of banci.” The justification for this publicity and move towards greater understanding was explicit: “to prevent an increase in the number of bencong” (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968a). A municipal government magazine located ambiguously between expert knowledge and popular interest, Mingguan Jaya was distributed among civil servants of the middle classes. Drawing on an established Western sexological and psychological discourse, the authors describe “permanent transvestites (bencong abadi)” as the most common type of “transvestite” in Jakarta (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968c). Jakarta’s “banci” are “permanent transvestites” because they “dress in women’s clothing and make-up during the day and at night because of their female jiwa (jiwa perempuan).”

The Western psychological term “transvestite” is therefore introduced as the most fitting translation for “banci” in Indonesia, justified because they are:

… men who are physically (secara fisik) men, but who have the psyche (psychis) of women. They do women’s work and wear women’s clothing because of their mind (dorongan jiwa). (ibid.)

The concept “transvestite” is accordingly translated into the Indonesian setting from Western psychological discourse with remarkable stability, as a deep-seated desire to wear the clothes of the opposite sex:

‘Trans’ means ‘opposite’ and ‘vestitus’ means clothes ‘pakaian.’ Put simply: a person who likes to dress in clothes of the opposite sex. (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b)

While certainly intended to stigmatise, this state-sanctioned definition served to consolidate the two dominant claims among waria that has facilitated a degree of acceptance for their visibility. The first is that possessing a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” as a primary factor means that physical manifestations of femininity cannot be repressed. The second is the emphasis placed on separating out male-bodied femininity from gender normative homosexuality, an idea that appears to have been more readily accepted in Indonesia than it has been in the West (Valentine 2007, 41).

Although appearing to settle on “transvestite” as an adequate description (and possibly drawing on expertise from foreign anthropological texts) authors also introduced other concepts from Western medical discourse to define “banci.” These terms included “hermaphrodite,” “homosexual” (defined here as those who only wear women’s clothing to attract men), and “bisexual” (defined here as men who wear women’s clothes for sexual satisfaction) (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b). The translation of this constellation of medical and psychological categories into Indonesian reflects the

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9 Mingguan Jaya uses the term bencong alongside banci. Bencong appears to have developed at the same time and has come to have a more derogatory connotation. Shifting the last part of the words to “-ong” is common in waria and gay language, suggesting that bencong refers to banci (Boellstorff 2005, 177–82). I am thus inclined to think that it was a term originally used by waria themselves and was then appropriated as a derogatory term in mainstream society. This is also corroborated by an account dating from 1968 which writes that “bencong is a term that comes from them” (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b, 4). In this account, bencong is described as less hurtful than banci and thus their preferred term to describe themselves; the editors of the magazine use bencong for the entire series for this reason (ibid.).
emphasis on Western scientific and medical knowledge from the start of the New Order. However, the most common explanation for banci and wadam depended on a somewhat hybrid formulation: they are “transvestites” with a “permanent female jiwa” (ibid.). Far from signalling a celebration of gender diversity, however, the state called on parents to use this knowledge to recognise signs of “banci-ness” in children and prevent it where possible. The justification for this interest was presented thus: “In showing this problem as it is, we hope to bring an awareness to parents to be more careful, because as far as we can see most potential transvestites (calon transvestit) become full transvestites because of the failure or negligence of their parents” (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968a). By placing the burden of surveillance onto the family unit, the New Order provided the clearest indication to date of gender normativity as a precondition for national modernity.

The state considered male-bodied femininity a serious enough concern to announce the allocation of resources towards research to both “tackle this complex problem” and “measure their abnormality” (ibid.). 10 I suggest that the language of science and medicine was crucial to the establishment of the heteronormative character of Indonesian national modernity. Through scientific knowledge, gender became more firmly established as belonging to the realm of representation; idealised versions of modern “perfect” women and “complete” men eliciting growing anxiety as to whether an original could ever possibly exist (Mitchell 2000). As Timothy Mitchell (2000, 23) has suggested, “Every act of staging or representation is open to the possibility of misrepresentation, or at least a parody or misreading.” While I resist describing waria as “parody,” I do interpret these later understandings of male-bodied femininity as the product of the introduction of Western scientific ideas with their basis in biological sex and psychological gender into a context where those concepts were themselves not established beyond doubt.

It is possible that this combination of state intervention and growing media concern led to the emergence of the new term “wadam” in 1969. 11 Senior waria told me that “wadam” was a term decided on by senior waria themselves, and media reports around this time use “banci” and “wadam” interchangeably. Although the existing Indonesian term “banci” had been placed in conversation with transnational psychology from an early period (Siasat 1951), later inflections of that term connoted pejorative forms of situational male-bodied femininity related to performance and transactional sex. By contrast, the new term wadam connoted respectable visibility, permanence and scientific credibility. The scholar Arief Budiman heralded the arrival of wadam on the front page of the popular national daily newspaper Kompas. He drew on scientific language to define wadam, echoing earlier definitions used by state publications including, significantly, the stress on a distinction between “transvestites” and “homosexuals” (Budiman 1969). Writing in the pages of the same newspaper,

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10 I believe that this reference in Mingguan Djaja is a reference to what was referred to as the “Banci Research Project” (Indonesian Department of Health 1973). I learned through scant firsthand accounts of this event that waria were requested to go to the Jakarta municipal government for an event, which turned out to be a series of psychological and physical examinations. Part of this study was published in the psychiatric journal Djawa (Masdani 1968).

11 As mentioned in the introduction, the term wadam replaced waria due to protests over its use in the late 1970s.
another Indonesian psychologist wrote that such behaviours reflected a broader problem concerning the development of effeminate boys. He wrote, “It is just that they (wadam) are experiencing the consequences of psychosexual development most likely encountered during their childhood” (Darmadji 1969). In these accounts, wadam appears to have been established not only in reference to problematic practices, but becomes what Foucault (1978, 43) called a “species” — a distinct figure centrally implicated in New Order biopolitics.

While a properly gender normative upbringing produces gender normative adults — and every effort should be made to ensure that this is the case — a remarkably broad consensus emerged early on that for adult wadam it was too late. Wadam are described as “people who have developed in the wrong direction” who could not be returned to a “normal track” (penyaluran normal) (Darmadji 1969). Wadam thus come to be seen as a permanent type of male-bodied femininity encouraged by misguided family and neighbours, an example of a socially induced subjectivity which is a barrier to the attainment of the closely related ideals of national belonging and progress. While these understandings are undoubtedly pathologising, and cannot be mistaken for widespread acceptance, it was precisely this description that provided a degree of tolerance for wadam. Foreshadowing later emphases on prestasi as a route to belonging by waria themselves (Boellstorff 2007, 103), the state concluded ambiguously that society should not ostracise waria completely. Rather than cut their hair or enforce masculine embodiment, as had been the case in the 1950s, even apparently unsympathetic commentators wrote: “It is enough to provide them opportunities to work, consistent with their desires and abilities” (Darmadji 1969). Some even identified that “wadam” should be encouraged to do “women’s work, like sewing, cooking and the like” (ibid.). The success of this policy is evident insomuch as these professions remain closely related to a sense of identification as waria, and as attributes associated with middle class femininity in Indonesia, until the present day.

The reasons for these transformations in the late 1960s, which in the short term at least facilitated a more tolerant environment for waria, are complex, and elude any firm conclusions. However, I speculate that the degree of acceptance for male-bodied femininity at this time reflects the successful incorporation of some Western psychologised understandings of personhood (which offered legitimacy) and pre-existing understandings of gender as the product of social relations. It is also possible that efforts by the state to incorporate consumer capitalism during this period produced new, national audiences for global norms of feminine beauty. In this context, it is somewhat unsurprising that definitions of waria rested on their capacity for gendered forms of work, considering the emphasis placed on economic development at this time. What is certain, however, is that waria’s own efforts were central in leveraging this period of rapid transformation to their advantage.

For waria, the “body learning and body sense” (Mahmood 2005, 158) that informs subjectivity too became articulated in relation to work. Part of the theoretical justification for work as a route to self-improvement also appears to have come from pre-existing forms of male-bodied femininity: these played a role in weddings (Siasat 1951) or at harvest festivals (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968d).
even in parts of Jakarta. For example, Darmadj (1969) noted that throughout Indonesia, “there are some tribes that still have specific rituals for wadam as designated members of the female group.” These specifically Indonesian cultural ideas provided part of the acceptable vocabulary for the state, and later waria themselves, linking possibilities for “developing (membina)” the self in accordance with one’s gender as a role undertaken as part of a nationally defined social whole.

This image is only available in the print version of this thesis, available at the Australian National University.

Figure 2.4: “Proportions of Women’s Bodies,” Varia Magazine, 1969.

A related concern during this period was the rapid transformation in meanings of men and women more broadly, reflected in the contradictory mass media images of modern women circulating widely by the early 1970s (Brenner 1999, 17–18). In the late 1960s, and along with widespread interest in “spectacular femininity” (C.f. Ochoa 2014) such as beauty pageants, articles emerged in the popular press with didactic titles like “What Are Women?” and “Women and Men Are Actually Different” (Mutiara 1967). The timing of these transformations indicate that male-bodied femininity played a role in determining the state’s relationship to consumer capitalist femininity (Figure 2.4).

At the same time, waria were not just unwitting agents of state control, but rather have continuously adopted ideals of femininity linked to self-improvement and used it to carve out a space. This view emerges in the state press as early as 1968, in which a waria representative implores readers for “acceptance (penerimaan)” and for the government to provide “a place of respite, for me and my kind, a factory or somewhere where bencéng can work, lest we end up prostituting ourselves” (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968c). She even suggested specific professions: “A store for perming hair in the latest fashions, a place to sell beauty products, and at night this could become a bar or dancing
hail” (ibid). This waria would be proud of Ibu Nancy and Mami Maya’s achievements; waria’s efforts have successfully translated into national belonging. During the 1970s, however, a combination of popular interest in transsexuality and new stress on gender normativity led to a new set of questions which focused attention directly on the relationship between the “mind (jiwa)” and the body more directly.

Global Transsexuality in Indonesia

In this section I turn to the relationship between waria and national modernity from the beginning of the 1970s onwards. The 1970s was significant because of a growing emphasis on Western scientific and medical discourses, which were in turn used to shape modern meanings of femininity and masculinity. In a context where genital morphology and social roles had not previously been understood as necessarily related (Boellstorff 2007, 95; Helliwell 2000, 797), the boundaries of gender normativity took significant state intervention to secure. This is reflected in the fact that, up until the contemporary moment, biological sex alone does not provide a clear basis for gender normativity as is commonly held to be the case in the West. The early 1970s, during which waria consolidated their visibility, also coincided with the period when New Order government institutions came to take form more generally. It was also a period that saw the establishment of an aggressive and technocratic intervention in birth control by the Indonesian state, facilitated in part by defining men and women narrowly in terms of roles in the nuclear family.12

The 1970s in many respects was a period of a rapid transformation in terms of how different kinds of bodies, variously understood in terms of masculinity or femininity, should both appear and behave. One unexplored aspect of the rapid transformation in definitions of gender in Indonesia during this period is its relationship to popular interest in “male-to-female transsexuality” globally, which was itself shaped by emergent reproductive technologies and psychological techniques (Meyerowitz 2002; Stone 1992). In a different context, Asfaneh Najmabadi (2014, 58) observes how the dissemination of scientific and other expert knowledge through the popular press forms a “traffic between various spaces of production of knowledge about sex/gender/sexuality.” I argue that the meanings of the Indonesian understandings of male-bodied femininity has similarly been influenced by the translation of knowledge between popular and expert realms. It was this traffic that reshaped the relationship between gender and national modernity in Indonesia within a relatively short period of time, with profound consequences for waria.

As mentioned in the previous section, Indonesian commentators had long drawn on the language of Western science and medicine to describe male-bodied femininity. Whereas “banci” had a pejorative and old-fashioned ring to it, the new term “wadam” (1968) represented a respectable relationship to Indonesian national modernity. This relationship to “futurity itself” (Halberstam 2005, 18) was

12 The New Order had remarkable successes in this field, and was lauded as a global success: the national birth rate declined from 5 births per woman in 1961 to 2.7 per woman by the end of the New Order in 1998 (Niehof and Lubis 2003).
secured through translating wadam as “transsexuals” in popular and expert sources. By the end of the decade in 1978, the blurred boundaries of what Western science and medicine holds as the concerns of intersex and transsexuality were articulated squarely as concerns of state medicine (Indonesian Ministry of Health 1979). Unlike gender normative homosexuality, consistently interpreted as foreign to (and therefore absent from) Indonesia, the national media discussed “transsexuals” and “transvestites” in frank and open terms during this period. An amenability to discussions of transsexuality on Indonesian terms was possibly based on the existing discourse of male-bodied femininity that had developed in relation to wadam and “banci.” While earlier discourse had comfortably combined Western psychological understandings with existing regional definitions of gender, a growing emphasis on scientific methods established the reproductive capacity of the genitals as the central definition of gender normativity.

This history suggests how, from the earliest moment of their visibility, understandings of waria have been influenced by Western theories of intersex, transsexuality and homosexuality. For example, an article in the Kompas newspaper published in 1970 clarified that: “Homosexuality is not in any way the same thing as banci” (Kompas 1970). At the same time: “Banci are hermaphrodites, whose genitals are not physically able to be distinguished [whether male or female]. Banci display the symptoms of a transvestite, a symptom that is often apparent in the psyche of banci” (ibid.). In turn drawing on a definition more appropriate to “transvestites” than “hermaphrodites” the author describes how they “wear make-up (berdandan) as [though they are] women and singing as women” (ibid.) The author concludes by stressing that whereas male-bodied femininity marks the “mental state of banci (keadaan jiwa kaum banci),” homosexuality has no such physical symptoms. Homosexuality is not “displayed in a physical strangeness (memperlihatkan keanehan dalam bentuk fisik)” (ibid.). While this combination of Western theories of gender and sexuality had completely missed questions of the body’s reproductive functions in the 1950s and 1960s, by the late 1970s this was presented as a central concern. While this ultimately shifted popular understandings of waria towards an abject (and thus morally dubious) masculinity, one corollary was that it served to consolidate the vexed relationship between male-bodied femininity and Indonesian national modernity.

More liberal commentators remarked proudly that the acceptance of wadam reflected Indonesia’s position at the forefront of modern understandings of masculinity and femininity. Such commentators adopted modern theories of gender which made thinkable daring technological transformations (Kompas 1973e; Brouwer 1971). For example, upon encountering wadam during a night out in Jakarta, popular public intellectual M.A.W. Brouwer wrote that: “Indonesia really is modern, in Amsterdam or London such a thing would make quite a scene” (Brouwer 1971). On the one hand, increasing popular understanding of wadam as “modern” became a sentiment echoed by waria themselves, serving as a basis for new articulations of their subjectivity and growing assertions of

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13 Brouwer was a Dutch-born, Indonesian resident who published in the fields of psychology, cultural studies and literature throughout the 1970s and 1980s
their capability for national belonging. On the other, it led to more intensive speculation as to their compatibility with the moral attributes of an increasingly gendered national identity based on reproductive capacity. The question remains then as to why the state took such a concerted interest in gender reassignment surgery during this period if a person’s genitals did not necessarily matter. What does the translation of wadam in terms of theories of transsexuality and intersex reveal about shifting representations of gender and the meanings attributed to men and women during this period of the New Order?

“The Perfect Woman”

Interest in wadam reached a crescendo during the first widely publicised case of gender reassignment surgery by an Indonesian citizen (see also Murtagh 2013, Chap. 2). Vivian Rubianti’s case can be usefully contrasted with that of Christine Jorgenson some decades earlier in the United States, given the parallel of voyeuristic interest in “male-to-female transsexuality” in terms of the “admiration for the power of science and the wizardry of technology” (Meyerowitz 2002, 41). Vivian gained attention in the national media after requesting a Jakarta district court to change her gender identity to “female” in 1973. A well-known hairdresser and stylist, her reason for doing so was practical: she had undergone gender reassignment surgery in Singapore and wanted the correct gender listed in her passport to avoid confusion when travelling (Tempo 1973a). Intensive media interest in Vivian followed her court case, which was settled on 14 November 1973 in her favour (ibid.). This was a remarkable turn of events that had the positive consequence of setting a precedent for Indonesians wishing to change their gender identity, albeit through an extremely complicated bureaucratic process (and court case).

Of chief concern in the popular commentary surrounding Vivian’s case was that Indonesian “law must go along with the developments of the era (mengikuti perkembangan jaman)” in order to “facilitate and assist development (pembangunan)” (ibid.). Thus, just as the New Order regime invested in projects such as “the first toll road… [a] strip of high-rises, large dams… and the national aircraft industry” (Barker 2005, 709), transsexuality held the possibility to reflect a commitment to development. In this sense, interest in transsexuality is somewhat comparable to Indonesia’s much greater investment in family planning technologies during the New Order as a way to manufacture suitably gendered bodies (Dwyer 2002).

Newspaper reports of Vivian’s case report on the judge’s final verdict as a combination of social justice and the triumph of science: “as someone with a mental affliction (menderita jiwa) the law must

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14 Ben Murtagh’s (2013, 36–44) account is based on textual and historical analysis of a 1978 film based on the events of Vivian’s life (and starring Vivian herself). The film includes extended scenes of interaction with psychologists and doctors, as well as medical definitions of wadam (ibid., 41). Whereas Murtagh (ibid., 23) theorises Vivian Rubianti’s (and other waria’s) media appearance as reflecting in part “a celebration of gender diversity, and of public tolerance of such difference” (ibid., 41), I focus on its relationship to broader transformations of gender entailing a greater stress on heteronormativity.

15 I collected 17 media items published between 12 September and 1 December 1973 in major Jakarta newspaper Kompas and magazine Tempo describing Vivian’s court case.
help Vivian… because the law must uphold welfare (kesejahteraan) and justice (keadilan)” (Kompas 1973e). It is notable in light of the history introduced earlier in this chapter that the legal case rested on reference to psychological discourse of transsexuality via the established Indonesian term “jiwa”; given Vivian’s “woman’s mind (jiwa perempuan),” judges and doctors reasoned, her male body could be altered with the latest technological innovations to reflect it. Given its commitment to technological innovation the Indonesian state — initially at least — agreed with this proposition.

Press reports indicate the ways in which Vivian was thought to belong to the outer limit of the category woman at the time. Media interest, which often noted Vivian’s desire to be recognised as a woman, stressed that part of the reason why she underwent the operation was because she was “insulted by being referred to as a banci, which troubled (menyiksa) her mind (jiwa)” (Kompas 1973a). This perhaps reflects her class position: as a productive and respectable member of society, she wished to distance herself from the common association between “banci” and public sexuality. Vivian’s international reputation and glamorous appearance managed to attract quite a following, including reported visits from President Suharto and his wife Ibu Tien Suharto who wanted to “have a look” (Tempo 1973a). However, a more serious consequence of interest in Vivian’s case was greater clarification of the previously indistinct relationship between sex, gender and sexuality, made possible by the significant mobilisation of resources in women’s reproduction at the time. It was this relationship that meant that rather than expand possibilities for gender transgression, popular and state interest in transsexuality operated as a way to reiterate the relationship between gender normativity and Indonesia’s national development and progress.

Discussions of gender during this period in expert and popular realms had begun to narrowly define categories of woman and femininity in terms of reproduction and the social role of motherhood. At the same time, an ambiguous attitude towards the relationship between the genitals and gender surfaces stubbornly time and time again. This is reflected in some of the reports of Vivian’s court case, during which the judge noted that even though she was “less than perfect” (i.e. she could not give birth) she could legally be considered a woman. The judge in Vivian’s case justified sensibly: “Among women there are those who may be born perfect (sempurna), but there are also those who do not have a womb (peranakan) or ovaries, but they are nonetheless called women” (Tempo 1973e). Nevertheless, in this and other accounts, the meaning of the “perfect woman” was clarified beyond doubt: one with the capacity for heterosexual reproduction. I suggest that medical and legal references to global discourses of transsexuality at this time emerged as one site for establishing a biopolitics of gender, constitutive of a national imaginary structured narrowly around reproduction and the nuclear family.

The popular reformist Islamic scholar Buya Hamka offered his support for transsexuality soon after Vivian’s story was first reported (Kompas 1973b). Relating transsexuality to a national commitment to scientific progress in the service of human development, he described Vivian in terms of a problem of “mental suffering (tekanan jiwa)” because she belongs to a type of individual he refers to as
“khuntsa.”16 This makes sense in light of Hamka’s overall emphasis on cultivating a “spiritual practice (latihan jiwa)” through an invigorated Islam more able to meet the “new demands of societies that are increasingly driven by science-based technological achievements” (Howell 2010, 1039). Considering his earlier admonishment of the appearance of “banci” in Jakarta as morally deviant homosexuals in the early 1960s (Hamka 1981), his support for transsexuality is notable:

Basically, this is a person who doesn’t know who they should be: they are not a man, and also are not a woman! People who are like this, who experience a long period of mental anguish (tekanan jiwa) are often teased by others, so their mind is a mess. They are a man. However, their behaviour, comportment, and even their mind (jiwa) is that of a woman. In the modern era, there is an operation which releases them from their anguish. If wadam then decide to obtain gender reassignment, then so be it! (Kompas 1973b)

Hamka’s comments reflect a more general consensus of sympathy for wadam, albeit here through an ambiguous relationship linking the Islamic concept of khunsa, usually translated as intersex, and the possibilities of modern medicine. What matters again here is that, given that both male-bodied feminine individuals (and female-bodied masculine individuals) are suffering from a medical condition, they should be able to access modern science and technology in order to alleviate it.

In 1974 one commentator even reported in celebratory tones that Indonesia is “more liberated (merdeka) when compared to Holland, and more flexible towards the development of a society which continues to develop” (Lim 1974). This report compared Vivian’s experiences with a case settled in the Netherlands where a “man with the identity (dirinya) of a woman” requested that her post-operative gender be recognised for documentation (ibid.). Unlike in Indonesia, where judges had adjudicated precisely the same issue in Vivian’s favour, the Dutch court decided against the plaintiff: it was not possible to change civil registry details to reflect a person’s changed gender status, given “the appearance of gender as an abiding interior depth” (Butler 1997, 14) in Western medical and legal discourse.17 This author summed up a liberal interpretation of the sentiment of the day in Indonesia: “The implementation and application of laws must be adapted to the development and new needs of a dynamic society, taking into account the suitability of regulations, many of which are archaic and obsolete” (Lim 1974). This is one reflection of the way that male-bodied femininity was considered not only an Indonesian concern, but also a scientific and humanistic one that extended beyond its borders.18

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16 The use khuntsa in Indonesia is usefully compared with Iran, where the equivalent term (khunṣā) has also been used to describe both transsexuals and intersex individuals (Najmabadi 2014, 180). In the Indonesian context khuntsa has been used to describe a category of person who hegemonic Islamic and legal discourse states may be operated on in order to correct their sex (see Indonesian Ministry of Health 1989; Majelis Ulemah Indonesia (Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars) 1980). In Iran, this understanding was later clarified and transformed into state support for gender reassignment surgery for transsexuals (Najmabadi 2014, 180). In Indonesia, by contrast, the state later struggled to clarify its position as only supporting surgery for intersex individuals (Majalah Kesehatan 1978).

17 The Netherlands introduced legislation in its Civil Code in 1985 to grant legal recognition of gender identity, albeit with a number of strict conditions.

18 I have also been able to locate a number of other media accounts that refer to transsexuality in the West during this period, including a translation of the well-known autobiography of Jan Morris (Intisari 1974). The Mingguan Djaja series of articles
It was between 1972 and 1974 that media depictions of transsexuality began to describe the meanings of masculinity and femininity began to draw on a discourse of “perfection” and “completeness” in earnest. The definition of femininity almost solely in terms of a woman’s reproductive capacities had profound consequences. For example, the capacity for Vivian and others like her to bear children was raised obsessively as an issue of concern, emerging as the paramount practice through which gender normativity could be defined. For example, the head of the Jakarta municipal department of health claimed that the success of “a result of an operation creating perfect genitals,” could only be measured against the criteria of whether it had provided “the capacity to later have children” (Kompas 1973c). While this might appear to exclude wadam unequivocally, this state officer obediently conveyed his complete faith in scientific progress, conveying the far-fetched idea that future scientific progress would yield such possibilities as to transplant a “womb (rahim).” Conflating Western theories of intersex and transsexuality, he added that such operations were already possible in Jakarta, where a large hospital had recently conducted an operation on a “wadam” to “change (merubah) genitals which were ‘half and half’ to that of a man” (ibid.). The process of translation between ideas of transsexuality and intersex, and their “traffic” (Najmabadi 2014, 58) between expert and popular domains via the figure of waria, served as one way to collapse the meanings of gendered roles almost entirely onto practices of reproduction.

This particular interpretation of transsexuality reflects the rapid redefinition of the social meanings ascribed to masculinity and femininity underway around the same time. The organisation for the wives of civil servants and Indonesia’s revised marriage law — key routes through which women’s ideal roles as mothers was popularised during the New Order — were both established in the mid-1970s (see Suryakusuma 1996). Both were key to the authoritarian government propagating “a conforming society, built around the nuclear family, instrumental to state power” (Suryakusuma 1996, 101). Suzanne Brenner (1999, 14) goes so far as to suggest that “women and the family became the focus of national narratives of development and modernization in the New Order.” However, state interest in transsexuality at this time suggests an even more fundamental concern. It was not only that women were the focus of these efforts, but that the meanings of femininity itself required clarification. The state’s redefinition of women in this period thus rested not only on an ideological rearrangement of existing roles but by shifting the material constitution of gender itself.

Understandings of gender normativity in New Order Indonesia emerged at the intersection of national histories of racial, class and national normativity and material investment in scientific discourses of transsexuality and intersex. This offers a vantage point on how the “biological” meaning of femininity in Indonesia, as Julia Suryakusuma (1996, 101) writes, came to rest almost singularly on a relationship to reproduction and motherhood. These “facts” of femininity required significant state effort to secure. Whereas heterosexuality and marriage have long been defining features of Indonesian

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correcting “banci” also includes a translation of a story written by a “transvestite” from the United States (Mingguan Djaja 1968d).
social life, the 1970s was arguably the first time in Indonesian history that the burden of conforming to these roles was seen to stem from within individual bodies rather than as the effect of the practices and roles that those bodies undertook. This was particularly acute for women, whose capacity for childbirth predisposed them to the new role of “housewife (ibu rumah tangga)” beyond political participation (C.F. Nakano Glenn 1994; Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987). In effect, the body’s biological capacity for reproduction was refracted through social roles defined in reference to modern familial ties.

Since at least the New Order in Indonesia, those citizens who are not able to unite the capacity for reproduction with the appropriate performance of kinship roles understand themselves as unable to adequately enter into modernity and development (see Lindquist 2009, 7). In this respect, the ladrak transvestite performers in the early 1960s forced to cut their hair and present themselves as men off-stage (Peacock 1968, 207) appear to have been among the first to express the entanglement of shame (malu) and progress (maju) that characterises the gendered experience of Indonesian national modernity to the present period. Similarly, discourse about transsexuality during the middle of the 1970s served as a way to articulate how “natural” gender normativity could only be secured through the application of modern technological methods. Yet, while this had broad implications for women in particular — who bore much of the burden of needing to be “perfect” — for most waria, state discourse about transsexuality had little impact on their everyday lives. While male-bodied femininity was ostensibly the primary motivation for popular and scientific interest, I suggest that the focus on social roles, reproduction and psychological attributes of individuals reflects rather the culmination of a broader effort to redefine gender, a central aspect of entering the “stage of modernity” (Mitchell 2000) during the New Order.

*Intersex and “The Mind’s Sex”*

I continue my description of efforts to secure gender normativity in Indonesia, tracing the shifting relationship between genital morphology and gender in the context of increasing state interest during the 1970s. While figures such as Vivian were rarely referred to as “banci” or “wadam,” popular interest in transsexuality had influenced subtle transformations in understandings of male-bodied femininity within Indonesian society since the late 1960s. As early as 1969, popular accounts in Indonesia had described “banci” and “wadam” in terms of identification with the “opposite (berlawanan) sex” (for example Budiman 1969; Kompas 1979a). The increasingly common description of gender on these terms appears to be a translation of globalised discourses which emphasise a “a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification” (Stone 1992, 156). However, while happy to define Indonesian forms of male-bodied femininity in psychological terms — those “whose mind (jiwanya) is in conflict (berlawanan) with their body (jasmaninya)” (Karsono 1973) — state interest in gender reassignment surgery was far more ambivalent.
Numerous commentator’s judgement rested on globalised understandings of gender linking the biological facts of sex more firmly to social roles, drawing on Western theories to establish their scientific credibility. In 1973, for example, an essay in the Indonesian Department of Health journal drew directly on translations of the American psychologist Robert Stoller’s influential theory of “gender identity” (identitas gender) as “an individual’s consciousness or understanding of their own sex based on their genitals” to describe “banci” (Karsono 1973). In the West, Stoller’s work had been pivotal for establishing an understanding of gender which both linked it to biological sex and “more clearly differentiated the subjective sense of self from the behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity” (Meyerowitz 2002, 115).

Stoller’s theories played a role in securing Indonesian explanations of gender transgression as the result of early childhood influences; for example, waria appear as they do because they were encouraged to behave like girls when they were children (Karsono 1973). This account defines “sex,” directly translating Robert Stoller’s research, as “an attribute of each person, the expression of feelings, ideas and behaviour that displays the characteristics of masculinity (kepriaan) and for women, femininity (kewanitaaan)” (ibid.). This emphasis on the psychological and embodied aspects of “sex” rather than genital morphology is perhaps why, despite broad interest in transsexuality, state doctors and psychologists mostly described gender reassignment surgery as an ineffective strategy for “banci” (ibid.). Definitions of “banci” thus incorporated certain aspects of emergent Western theories of gender, as well as served as a conduit for more detailed scientific descriptions of the basis for Indonesian heteronormativity.

By the mid-1970s, reports emerged in the national press of individuals who reported uncannily similar narratives Western discourses of transsexuality. While none acquired the celebrity status of Vivian, the Indonesian national press followed a number of other national cases that straddled the boundary between transsexuality and made-bodied femininity. In 1974, the newspaper Kompas reported on a “wadam” named Susan, a resident of the island of Lombok just east of Bali (Kompas 1974). She wished to “follow in Vivian’s footsteps” in seeking to undertake surgical transition in Singapore, because her boyfriend had promised to marry her (ibid.). Susan was reported in terms of a now familiar narrative in the Indonesian media, explaining that she had felt a “mental difference (kelainan jiwa)” since the age of seven or eight, which had only grown in severity from when she was fifteen years old (ibid.). In this regard, she was introduced in terms that might easily be applied to contemporary waria: “At this age other symptoms (gejela) began to appear in the form of a fondness for women’s habits, such as wearing make-up (berdandan)” (ibid.). What differs, however, is that she was also reported as possessing both a “womb (rahim)” and male genitals. This account is one example of the increasing emphasis on reproductive capacity as a defining attribute of gender from

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19 Indonesian psychologists, biologists and physicians were central to this process of translation. The Indonesian term “mental sex (sex kejiwaan)” appeared at this time, both with reference to transsexuality (Kompas 1973d) as well as a way to relate men and women’s social roles to both psychological and biological explanations (Majalah Kesehatan 1973). The slippage between popular understandings of jiwa as “soul” and its new relationship to “mind” surfaces here too.
the mid-1970s onwards. That accounts such as that of Susan attracted attention in the national press reflect how globalised medical understandings of gender and sexuality, including medical developments in the fields of transsexuality and intersex, shaped existing understandings of male-bodied femininity in Indonesia.

Despite initial excitement over Vivian’s and other cases, interest in gender reassignment surgery waned as the 1970s went on. Arguably, the event that marked the peak of enthusiasm for transsexuality was the first gender reassignment surgery undertaken by Indonesian doctors, which took place in Jakarta in June 1975 (Kompas 1975a, Tempo 1975a, Tempo 1975b). State support for transsexuality in Indonesia, while certainly never widespread, emerged at this point as an unlikely yardstick for measuring Indonesia’s national scientific progress. In this respect, it shares similarities with Iran, where improved surgical techniques for intersex and transsexual individuals articulated “national pride and celebration of Iranian scientific progress” (Najmabadi 2014, 38).

The first Indonesian patient, Benny Runtuwene, was reported to have become “complete in every sense (benar-benar komplit)” as Netty Irawati after undergoing “genital refinement surgery (penghalusan kelamin).” Undertaken by surgeons in Jakarta, the surgery was reported to have not only been faster, but “more artistic” than similar surgery completed in other countries (Kompas 1975b). Indonesian accounts referred to Netty by drawing on the now well-known understanding of a “woman’s soul (jiwa).” As in other cases, Netty had experienced “psychological suffering” (penderitaan jiwa) and “felt like she was a woman since she was a child” (Kompas 1975a). Similar to Vivian’s case some years earlier, Netty was reported to have said, “I hate being called a banci! Won’t I be a woman [after the operation]?” (ibid.). Her case was the subject of significant attention; the national magazine Tempo closely followed her case, and the newspaper Kompas successfully solicited readers (including members of the political elite) to contribute financial support for her post-operative hormonal treatment (ibid.).

After the operation, which was heralded a success for Indonesian science and medicine, Netty was proclaimed to have been “liberated from feelings of depression, indecision, fear, low self-esteem because of the people around her who mocked her constantly” (Kompas 1975b). She said: “I feel as though my self-esteem has risen and I can become a proper person (menjadi orang wajar).” Doctors described how she had been “released from the pressures on her mind (tekanan-tekanan batin) experienced as the result of being an imperfect man (pria yang tak sempurna)” (Kompas 1975b). However, casting a shadow of the success of the operation was Netty’s post-operative capacity to bear children (Tempo 1975b, Kompas 1975b). This reflects how, although the language used bears

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20 A few older waria in Jakarta spoke about Benny. Mami Maya recalled that she had heard the operation had failed, and that Netty was something of a “test guinea pig (kelinci ujioba)” for doctors at the hospital. She also mentioned she thought that Benny was gay (hemong), which is also alluded to in one of the articles. Benny initially came to the attention of one of the medical team (Hamifa Wiknyosastro) because he was in the neurology department of the hospital to receive “electric currents (aliran listrik)” for the “disease (penyakit)” of “liking to hang around at night (gemar ngeluyur malam)” (Tempo 1975a). This seems to infer punitive measures for Benny’s homosexuality.
parallels with depictions of transsexuality in the United States, the meanings of a successful performance of gender normativity in Indonesia rested on other aspects of the body. In Indonesia, state support for gender reassignment surgery emerged at the very moment that a successful performance of femininity was linked more closely to a capacity to have children. The reported motivation for tentative state support — to provide a route to becoming a “proper person” and “complete woman” — thus collided with the apparent scientific fact that gender reassignment surgery could not enable male-bodied individuals to bear children.

In a belated response to five years of popular interest in the topic, in March 1978 the Indonesian Department of Health held a seminar on the subject of “sex change surgery (operasi penggantian kelamin)” (Seminar Operasi Penggantian Kelamin) (Majalah Kesehatan 1978). The seminar, which resulted in a decree designating certain rules and hospitals where gender reassignment surgery could be undertaken, approached “sex change” as a “complex and difficult problem… and an increasing reality in the midst of society” (Majalah Kesehatan 1978; see also Indonesian Ministry of Health 1979). The seminar organisers, comprising mostly doctors who were also prominent in the burgeoning field of reproductive health, stressed the guiding principle for their decisions was not only the law and secular psychology but also religion, given that “human beings are created by God as man and woman” (Majalah Kesehatan 1978).

Professor Kusumanto, who had conducted psychiatric assessments for both Vivian and Netty, announced his support at the beginning of the seminar (Majalah Kesehatan 1978). In sympathetic tones, he announced: “As time goes on, a feeling of psychological contradiction with genitals (jenis kelamin) which differ from their psyche (mental) grows stronger” (ibid.). A patient was presented during the seminar: “A young woman who wishes to have her genitals (kelamin) operated on to adjust them with the desires of their mind (jiwa)” (ibid.). Professor Kusumanto stressed the gravity of the issues that the seminar was to discuss. Gender identity, he said, “is not only relevant as far as the private self (diri pribadi) is concerned, but also of legal importance in its broad meaning, related to family (keluarga), society (masyarakat) and to the nation (negara)” (ibid.). Such cases of transgression from gender normativity thus served as a way to clarify the relationship between a person’s genitals and their social role more broadly as an Indonesian citizen.

As I have mentioned, the category of intersex had been virtually indistinguishable from transsexuality in both popular and scientific accounts in Indonesia throughout the decade of the 1970s. The “sex change surgery” seminar held in 1978 seems to mark a moment when the state grasped for greater clarification of concepts and categories related to gender and sexuality that had otherwise remain indistinct. The seminar gathered together an illustrious panel of experts to provide opinion and guidance to state authorities on the matter, including representatives from legal, religious and medical institutions.21 From the reports that I have gathered, experts focused not only on defining the

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21 Among the 90 participants reported to have attended were representatives from the Department of Religion, the Department of Justice, The Council of Ulema, Council of Churches in Indonesia, the Council of Catholic Churches of Indonesia, the
parameters for “sex change surgery” but on seeking clear scientific definitions of masculine and feminine gender normativity. Drawing on scientific terms preoccupied with the reproductive capacity of male and female bodies, the seminar strove to clarify a decade’s worth of anxieties about the meanings of gender. Experts reaffirmed their understanding of gender as an inner psychological identity which is linked to reproductive capabilities. They concluded that those unable to conform to this limited definition fell outside of the parameters of the moral parameters of the “normal” and should be assisted by the state to accomplish gender normativity. Globalised scientific discourses of gender and sexuality, travelling through popular and state interest in transsexuality, thus contributed to defining Indonesian definitions of gender normativity shaped fundamentally by the reproductive dyad and the nuclear family.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the seminar marked an abrupt end to medical and political support for “sex change surgery” on the basis of psychological gender identity (sex kejiwaan). Biologists argued that the latest scientific definitions of masculinity and femininity does not rely on physical appearance and function of the genitals alone, but must also be measured in terms of genetic and chromosomal make-up (Majalah Kesehatan 1978). In line with this logic, the seminar concluded alarmingly that the “mind (psychis)” of gender transgressive individuals (such as waria) should, in fact, be “treated (obati)” with psychotherapy so that it reflected their biological sex (ibid.). As a result, Vivian’s and Netty’s “sex change operations” were both denounced; these had not made them women, but only men who appeared to look like women (Indonesian Department of Health 1978). As a result, the focus on transsexuality shifted towards intersex patients. Three months following the seminar on gender reassignment surgery, the term “wandam” was changed to waria (Kompas 1978). Although difficult to reach any firm conclusions, I speculate that these events are linked: wandam had developed an association with earlier government support for “sex change surgery” that quickly needed to be forgotten.

Yet, even as expert opinion approached a consensus on the matter, understandings of transsexuality and intersex remained hopelessly blurred. The seminar concluded curiously that “transsexuality,” translated as the Arabic-derived “huntsa musykilah” (translated as intersex), should be legally permissible (see Indonesian Ministry of Health 1979). Reiterating this lack of clarity, the Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars (Majelah Umelah Indonesia) issued an equally confusing declaration (fatwa) in 1980. It declared that “to change the genitals of a male-bodied person into a woman or the reverse is against the [Islamic] law” but “a khuntsa (banci) whose masculinity (kelaki-lakian) is not clear may have their masculinity perfected (disempurnakan)” (Majelis Ulemah Indonesia [Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars] 1980).
In 1979, the Department of Health issued a decree entitled “instructions on sex change surgery” which conflated the diagnosis and treatment of transsexuals with the operating procedures for intersex children (ibid.). In 1989, the original state decree was annulled and replaced with another entitled “operation to adapt (penyesuaian) genitals” (Indonesian Ministry of Health 1989). However, this subtle distinction (from “change” to “adapt”) — an apparent attempt to exclude transsexuals once and for all — was not followed through with substantial changes: the body of the law remained identical. Regardless, by the end of the Suharto period in 1998, interest in gender reassignment surgery among experts and popular interest in waria through transsexuality had dissipated. However, the Indonesian state continues to conflate the physical medical management of intersex and the psychological treatment of transsexuality, reflecting just how difficult it has been for the state to unite an individual’s reproductive function and dominant understandings of gender identity in Indonesia.

The hegemonic interpretation during the period of my fieldwork among the Indonesian medical profession, gathered through informal conversations with doctors and scientists, is that this revised decree of 1989 refers to operations for intersex children rather than gender reassignment surgery for transsexual patients. This history is reflected in mass media accounts that describe intersex as a condition that both requires medical intervention and has a relationship to psychological identity and social roles as men and women. Given its conflation in expert realms, it is not surprising that popular understandings of all forms of gender transgression remain considered pejoratively along similar lines. Indeed, both media and ethnographic accounts of intersex children describe that it is neighbour’s taunts of “banci” as the source of shame (malu) that leads them to request medical assistance for their problem in the first place (Wieringa 2015, 169).

**Becoming Incomplete**

This chapter has described the process through which waria became a recognised social category throughout the course of Indonesia’s New Order. It is interesting to again reflect on the fact that elderly waria recalled the 1950s as characterised by a lack of tolerance, before the “golden age” that unfolded from 1968 onwards. Mami Maya’s assertion that “there was no such thing as banci” prior to the 1960s perhaps most vividly articulates how the femininity associated with waria came to mean something quite different in the context of Indonesian national modernity. The history I have presented reveals the ways that global discourses transformed understandings of male-bodied femininity and gender normativity during the New Order.

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22 I interviewed intersex expert, Professor Sultana, at Dr. Kariadi Hospital in Semarang (3 June 2015) and perhaps the only expert in gender reassignment surgery for transsexuals in Indonesia, Dr Djohansyah, at his private clinic in Surabaya (2 April 2015). Both suggested that Dr. Kariadi Hospital had played an important role since 1979 in providing surgery both for transsexuals and intersex children. However, today the hospital only offers assistance to intersex children (Wieringa 2015). The hospital continues to receive requests, that it has not fulfilled since 1989, from transsexual men and women for assistance with hormonal therapy and surgical transition. Dr Djohansyah continues to provide gender reassignment surgery, mostly to transsexual women, albeit in a legal grey area.
Waria emerged as a key discursive figure through which globally circulating knowledge about gender and sexuality has been drawn upon to articulate the state’s capacity to adjust and improve individuals using at times wondrous scientific and technological techniques. Waria were of such interest to the New Order state perhaps because they successfully reconciled understandings of gender as both a matter of bodily appearance, susceptible to social influence, and as the product of an individual mind that could be subject to improvement. And, waria strive to reconcile this understanding of the self, in spite of considerable state effort to define gender normativity on increasingly narrow terms. From this moment onwards, waria have been publicly visible and have used that visibility to claim recognition and respect, even in spite being defined in pathologising terms.

From its inception, the New Order state’s anxieties about who could and who could not be women crystallised appears to have been displaced onto male-bodied femininity. One result of this effort was to draw existing figures “banci” and “wadam,” into the orbit of a new scientific language of intersex and transsexuality, usually maintained as distinct from homosexuality. The relationship between a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” and psychological theories was one route through which Western understandings of gender normativity became pivotal to Indonesian national modernity. At the same time, the state increasingly defined heterosexual reproduction and the psychological characteristics of gender as two sides of the same coin.

Growing state interest and brief support for transsexuality was therefore preoccupied centrally with the “incomplete universal” (Mitchell 2000, 24) of idealised gender normativity for women as a moral status linked to reproductive capacity. While popular and expert opinion was stirred by the possibility of modern science making perfect what nature had left incomplete, this was abandoned when it was established that there was no operation which would enable waria to give birth. While moving waria out of the orbit of respectable femininity, one result of this interpretation and its popularisation in the mass media entrenched a key understanding of them that persists until today: their imperfection is not a fault of their own but a psychological condition from which they “suffer (menderita jiwa)” for life. This double-edged definition is partially what has enabled tolerance of them in a relentlessly heteronormative and at times explicitly hostile state.

As an authoritarian and technocratic regime, the New Order state held that both femininity and masculinity could be manufactured as representations of modernity. However, the discursive and material possibilities for gender normativity in Indonesia are considerably different from those found in the West, even as it draws upon a shared vocabulary. A key difference has been that access to medical knowledge and technologies in Indonesia has always been uneven, and science and medicine an entirely government affair based on a top-down model. The result, as I have shown in this chapter, was the emergence of an understanding of “complete men” and “perfect women” which rested on the contradictory logic of gender as the natural product of certain bodies that requires an immense amount of state expertise to accomplish. Interest in transsexuality throughout the 1970s is an exemplary site where this tension concerning the proper, “natural” form of gendered bodies manifested.
This and later chapters reflect on waria’s relationship to the distinct textures of national heteronormativity, a defining feature of Indonesian national modernity. In the course of everyday life among waria, I observed how descriptions of possessing a “woman’s soul (jiwa)” does appear to be influenced by the popularisation of psychologised understandings of an interior self during the New Order. However, the use of an expression to have a “woman’s soul jiwa” among waria in everyday life does not refer to an individual self as its psychologised meaning might suggest, but in fact articulates a feminine embodiment accomplished through the actions of others. In the following chapter, I introduce waria’s description of femininity as a process of “becoming (jadi),” whereby gendered embodiment is cultivated through social interactions accumulated over time. Accordingly, my focus moves from historical perspectives to ethnographic observations of the everyday understandings of this subjectivity among waria who grew up during the New Order.
Shirley was my primary guide to the history of waria social life through the late 1970s and the mid-1980s. She lived alone in a small house in Yogyakarta built among chicken coups close to her sister and her sister’s husband. Born in 1946, Shirley had lived in the city for her entire life. While she was young, she was employed in the catering department of the Indonesian state railway company. As a result, she frequently travelled to other large cities in Java, especially the capital Jakarta. She retired from her position in the railway in the mid-2000s and since then works a number of odd jobs in local warung (food stalls). When I visited, she would appear in the dark doorway of her bamboo house in a singlet, pair of shorts and slippers, and we would sit perched on vinyl chairs and gossip for hours over sickly sweet cups of coffee.

At almost seventy-years of age when we first met, Shirley rarely practiced dêndong, the often glamorous femininity that waria perform on a daily basis for public audiences. Neither did she go to the railway tracks not far from her house that transformed each night into a tempat nyébong, a location where waria engage in public, transactional forms of sex involving intensive social interactions. However, Shirley repeatedly insisted that she had performed both of these frequently in the past. She explained that even though she no longer practiced these quintessential waria activities, she had an underlying and enduring “quality (sifat)” that remained regardless of her present outer
appearance. This quality, she explained, is reflected in her love of appearing in women’s makeup and clothes, and dancing and singing in the company of others. Shirley’s stress on the importance of visibility supplemented many observations I had made about waria’s emphasis on the importance of an audience for their femininity during the course of fieldwork. It was thus a pleasant surprise when Shirley excitedly showed me an invitation to another waria’s birthday party. She showed me proudly the dress that she would wear, a respectable but glamorous sequined black one piece which contrasted significantly with her usual everyday attire (see Figure 3.1).

In addition to the oral history interviews we conducted, Shirley also shared her significant collection of photographs with me. In this chapter I draw upon these photographs as a way to extend understandings derived from the ethnographic and historical data introduced so far. Taken during the 1980s, Shirley’s photographs offer a much needed historicisation of the practice of dėndong and the meaning of femininity among waria during the New Order. Her collection of photographs also serves to focus attention on the broad significance of dėndong to the process of becoming waria. Indeed, Shirley explained that the reason why she shared her photographs with me was because it offered the possibility to make her own narratives more visible; in a sense extending her visibility, via mass media technologies, to audiences elsewhere. The photographs thus serve as a way to both understand the dėndong that waria have practiced since the 1980s, as well as to facilitate the widely cited importance of visibility to waria.

Shirley, like the majority of waria I met, identified the seminal practice involved in becoming waria as dėndong. Insisting that you have a “women’s soul (jiwa)” and speaking with the campiest style possible (ngondhek) is not enough: you will, like me, forever remain a banci kalėng if you do not dėndong on a frequent basis. In Chapter 1, I introduced a definition of dėndong as a practice which includes a range of daily bodily transformations undertaken to accomplish femininity, including wearing women’s clothing, makeup, breast prosthetics and wigs. One older waria in Yogyakarta used socks to fill her bra to effect the appearance of breasts on a daily basis, removing it at the end of the day when she arrived home. A related concern is the way that waria often reflect on dėndong as a practice that ensures visibility, a pivotal aspect of claims for national belonging framed in terms of morally worthy good deeds that waria call prestasi (Boellstorff 2007, 105). This not only applies to waria’s individual practices of dėndong but of making others legible according to modern ideals of gender normativity through their work in salons in particular. In this and other settings, dėndong appears to be oriented towards the rather distant audience of the nation.

Interpreting dėndong from this perspective helps to account for the link that waria make between respectable, middle class spaces such as the salon and the accomplishment of national belonging. During the course of fieldwork, however, I came to understand that dėndong also has an important

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1 The quotations from Shirley in this chapter are all taken from recorded interviews which I transcribed and translated from Indonesian. There are occasions when I have paraphrased for clarity. With Shirley’s permission I scanned a total of 200 photographs, some of which are reproduced in this chapter and in the two interludes.
historical relationship to the street corners where waria combine transactional sex and socialising (nyébong). I have found that nyébong is in some ways comparable to tempat ngeber (cruising spots) for gay men: “places of gay geography forged within spaces of modern Indonesia, places to find friendship, sex, and love” (Boellstorff 2005, 128). Although no English-language terms suffice, the frequency of transactional sex during nyébong means that it differs from tempat ngeber, and resembles locations for sex work or prostitution. Nyébong is understood (ideally at least) as the exclusive social domain of waria and straight men who are paying for sex. Unlike the emphasis in the “gay geography” (ibid., 128) on egalitarian love, all forms of sex at nyébong should involve monetary transactions. This is so even if the amount is small and tokenistic. Given that participation is based primarily on self-presentation through dèndong it is perhaps more accurate to describe nyébong as open to all male-bodied individuals who dèndong; this means primarily those who waria identify as banci kaléng may also spend time there. For these individuals interaction with other waria in the course of nyébong, and committing to transactional rather than egalitarian forms of intimacy, that emerge as key conduits through which they begin to commit to a sustained practice of dèndong on a daily basis. This, in turn, marks a key moment in the process of “becoming waria (jadi waria).”

The stress on accomplishing visibility at tempat nyébong links the dèndong of waria to lower class status and public sexuality in fundamental ways. As a result, the category waria as I encountered it — both as it is used among most waria and the wider Indonesian public — appears defined by both class and gender presentation. This facilitates an important perspective on why waria’s claims to citizenship have, since the late 1960s, been so fundamentally oriented towards self-improvement in the eyes of a national audience. This is also why senior waria activists commonly assess the feminine comportment of younger waria in negative terms: it is a visibility that hinders national belonging. In their view, dèndong can facilitate national belonging only if it can be harnessed to the moral attributes of middle class status. Sex work on street corners, by contrast, does not serve this purpose. The desire among senior waria activists to establish certain forms of dèndong as respectable is an important and productive perspective and an entirely understandable political strategy. However, it fails to account for the fact that for the vast majority of waria, dèndong bears a close relationship to the pejorative visibility that aspirations to middle class status and national belonging does not entirely account for. This is especially important to consider in light of the contradictory claim among waria that they desire a restrained, subtle form of femininity while gaining immense pleasure from the unique visibility that is possible through the practice of dèndong.

I maintain throughout this chapter that dèndong is a form of glamour that cannot easily be equated with femininity without significant contextualisation. For example, dèndong cannot be entirely

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2 In the case of Yogyakarta and Jakarta, I was told that at least until the 1990s there was greater interaction between waria and gay worlds. There are also tempat ngeber that are more or less entirely spaces for transactional sex for male-bodied masculine individuals and brondong who are referred to as kucing. The relationship between these locations and their relationship to economic aspects of intimacy is an important topic for future research.
explained by theories of performativity that consider “the repeated stylization of the body” (Butler 1990, 33) in terms of efforts to produce a stable and coherent identity. These perspectives derive from Western understandings that male-bodied femininity, fundamentally linked to homosexuality, is a liability to be limited to particular social settings and groups of individuals (Sedgwick 1991; Newton 1979). Esther Newton (1979, 32) has argued that male-bodied femininity in the West is linked to homosexuality in fundamental ways, illustrating the powerful economic imperative for middle class gay men to be “covert” by limiting their visibility only to particular situations and distancing themselves from “overt” performances of femininity. In Indonesia, the “flamboyant stylization and distinctive adaptations” (ibid., 29) of děndong among waria does not share the association with homosexual identity that it does in the West. And so, while děndong does not attract the same kinds of disapproval that it does in the West, it does have a connotation of lower class status that appears to have been shaped by Indonesian understandings of gender.

In this chapter I develop an explanation for waria’s understanding that the corporeal transformations of děndong are the culmination of the process that they call becoming waria. I move beyond perspectives which frame the visibility of waria in the context of transactional sex as a necessity born from economic hardship or a ruse to attract men. Following Marcia Ochoa (2014, 204), I interpret the “spectacularity” of waria’s performances of děndong in terms of “the investment of its spectators and participants and the meanings these practices create.” This allows me to address the concrete strategies through which waria have historically defined visibility as important to their sense of self and the reasons why this might be so. I argue that the desire for visibility among waria can be interpreted in light of the common emphasis in Indonesia that bodily performances depend primarily on the audience to whom it is oriented. This can be seen in the way that waria stress differing femininities depending on the audience. What is “correct” depends on a range of factors, but waria’s success at cultivating a close relationship to the glamorous gender performance of děndong appears informed by their historical relationship to the transformative potential of national modernity.

In this chapter I parse the diversity of aesthetic practices of děndong as a form of femininity performed with specific social audiences in mind. I am especially interested in the ways in which certain practices and behaviours associated with the body — including děndong but also “campness (genit, ngondhek)” — come to be understood as a performance of femininity, and the ways they are categorised as such. For example, the most spectacular děndong performed at nyébong is arguably not aimed at looking “like a woman” at all. Yet other forms of děndong, however, are explicitly concerned with what waria describe a more “natural (asli)” femininity. Understanding each of each of these forms of gender presentation in terms of the collective and individual “queer cultural labor”

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3 The performance of femininity has long drawn the interest of feminist theorists of the body. Iris Marion Young (1990) observes the feminine body as bearing the mark of patriarchal power: withdrawn, possessed, powerless. Susan Bartky (1990, 64–65) suggests that femininity is subject to more diverse aesthetic appropriation than docile masculinity. While both of these perspectives illustrate an extremely unequal relationship between the gendered body and social forces, later perspectives interpret transgender femininity in particular to demonstrate gender as a complex negotiation with discourse (Butler 1993a).
performed to achieve déndong helps to explain the widespread desire for visibility among waria. Marlon Bailey’s (ibid.) perspective, although derived from an ethnographic account of Black ballroom culture in the United States, serves as a reminder of the overarching concern of both this chapter and the thesis as a whole; that performances of gender among waria are relational, rather than individual, practices. Exploring the process of becoming waria facilitates an understanding of the relationship between national modernity and gender normativity which accounts for the unruly corporeal and affective states that it elicits.

**Waria Gender Performances and Visibility**

On the night of the birthday party mentioned earlier, and true to her word, Shirley arrived at the party venue wearing the sequined gown and pearls that she had proudly shown me the week before. She arrived and greeted me briefly, but moved quickly to the front part of the room — what she called the “stage (panggung)” — and proceeded to sing a number of Javanese and dangdut songs for almost a full hour. I settled in to one of the hard plastic chairs near a group of brondong, who are the young adolescents and primary objects of desire among waria that I mentioned briefly in Chapter 1 (see also Chapter 5). I watched a number of waria and women in varying stages of inebriation stumble around in front of the stage. Watching the performance, I recalled the way that Shirley had stressed the importance of such events to me many times during an interview:
At birthday parties, or at weddings we definitely déndong. If we don’t déndong we will be embarrassed (malu). For us it’s just about déndong, after all we’re called banci. If there is an event, then we déndong. For those who like to sing, well they sing (nyani). For those that like to dance, they dance (jaget). Regardless, waria have to déndong.

The party played out precisely as Shirley had explained to me. Waria came to and from the stage, dancing and singing in whatever style they felt comfortable. Waria had come dressed up in a diverse range of déndong. Shirley and a few others were elegantly attired, but the majority of waria — covering a range of ages between twenty and sixty — displayed enormous amounts of cleavage or wore tiny miniskirts.

The practice of déndong for most waria constitutes an extension of visibly flamboyant or feminine characteristics, which manifest in increasingly dramatic forms in individuals already so inclined. This is evident in light of the fact that certain aspects of déndong — as illustrated by the photographs contained in this chapter — are not necessarily representative of being “like a woman (seperti perempuan)” in any straightforward way, but rather reflect a cultivated form of glamour which is practiced with a specific audience in mind. Déndong is performed to be seen, often in conjunction with singing, dancing, transactional sex and salon work. Each of the photographs contained in this chapter illustrate the close relationship between déndong and specific sites of visibility, many of which involve economic transactions that might also be understood in terms of a close relationship to certain forms of work related to feminine beauty (Chapter 4). The relationship between déndong and waria subjectivity is complicated somewhat by the fact that, in practice, waria do not consider an everyday performance of déndong as strictly necessary to their sense of self. Nor is it always consistently performed throughout the life course. This is most evident from my observations of older waria, who often reiterate the importance of déndong, yet rarely practice it. Despite waria’s propensity for gossip, I did not once hear a suggestion that individuals who do not déndong should be excluded or shunned on that basis. For example, although the birthday party was the only occasion when I observed Shirley in déndong, I never heard any insinuations that she was not really a waria because she did not perform it on a daily basis; however, she occasionally mentioned that she did not care if others criticised her for failing to déndong or participate in social gatherings.

As they grew older, waria appeared to have adopted a significantly different gender presentation (which tended to be almost gender neutral) than when they were young. This reflects how “becoming waria (jadi waria)” is a process that mediates gender as a practice related to ageing among waria. One older waria aged in her fifties — who greeted me when I arrived to visit her in shorts or torn jeans — justified her appearance using the language of an inner sense of self that she referred to as “woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan)” or “self (diri)” as follows: “While my body is male, my jiwa is female. So even though I just wear male clothes, it doesn’t matter. It’s what is inside me (dalam diri sendiri) that matters.” I found this reference to an “inside (dalam)” somewhat independent from the outer body to be a rather common understanding of the self among waria of this generation. Older waria certainly joked about their decline, referring to themselves crassly as “old banci (banci
“tubang)” and recognising that the stylised glamour of dëndong was more appropriate for youthful bodies. However, the failure to practice dëndong on a daily basis did not make older waria any less waria as a result. This suggests an understanding of oneself of waria is marked by the performance of a more diverse set of practices than dëndong or femininity alone; and that consistently reiterated corporeal transformations might, over time, effect a transformation in subjectivity that is more than skin deep.

In reflecting on the practices and sites for dëndong I encountered in the course of fieldwork in the settings described in this chapter, I interpret such performances as staged most often by waria for one another’s benefit. In this regard, waria are usefully characterised, following Erving Goffman (1952, 152), as a “team of performers” who share the desire to project a “given definition of the situation” to their audience. This perspective is especially useful in understanding how waria’s visibility through dëndong effects the sense that they share certain characteristics; in Goffman’s (ibid., 51) terms, visibility to an audience produces “bonds of reciprocal dependence.” While not altogether surprising, the whole aim of self-presentation thus appeared to both assert a sense of collective recognition and to reiterate the kinds of work performed to achieve such a bond. Waria commonly say things to the effect of, “If one waria does something bad, we all feel the effects (satu waria kena karena kejahatan semua kena).” Furthermore, this reciprocal bond offers another explanation as to why they place such a great stress on collective performances of “good deeds (prestasi)” that waria see as a route to social acceptance and national belonging (Chapter 4). Although drawing on historically contingent symbols of modern femininity, dëndong for waria is thus a process of accruing greater visibility as they grow older, equally as it is a practice that results in a transformed subjectivity even if they no longer dëndong in old age.

This serves to illustrate that statements among waria such that dëndong is about being “like a woman (seperti perempuan)” or expressing a “woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan)” cannot be taken at face value, even if they superficially resemble transnational discourses related to transgender embodiment. As a result, understandings of dëndong require concerted contextualisation in reference to the historically and culturally specific forms of personhood to which they refer. This is not to say that waria do not draw on a “universe of symbolic resources” (Ochoa 2014, 211) in their performances and narratives of selfhood: as introduced in Chapter 2, the possibility of seeing oneself as masculine or feminine in Indonesia at all has unfolded within the context of the globalisation of Western theories of gender and sexuality, a process which intensified from the late 1960s onwards. However, the problem of interpreting dëndong as a reflection of a “woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan)” is that it can be too readily transformed into Western discourses linking identity to self-actualisation. The historical

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4 The fact that waria, who are otherwise quite vain, exhibited a fairly nonchalant attitude towards biological ageing surprised me at first. This contrasts with the situation in United States during the 1960s, where Esther Newton (1979, 49) refers to ageing as “a terrible problem for the female impersonator, both personally and professionally.”

5 This understanding of gender presentation as a catalyst for new subcultures and communities has been described in the Thai context by Megan Sinnott (2004, 63).
and ethnographic data contained in this thesis, which demonstrates how waria repeatedly emphasise the work of others, makes such a reading untenable. The remainder of this chapter contextualises the meanings of the practice of déndong to waria in relation to Indonesian national modernity during the New Order, paying attention to both its relationship to symbols of global femininity and the audiences to which these forms of femininity are oriented.

**Performances of Femininity Among Waria**

The femininity of déndong reflects a broad range of styles which intersect with the age of the waria performing it and the historical moment in which it took place. During fieldwork, I observed déndong among this generation practised both as a stylised, mass media-inspired glamour, and in terms of Javanese ideals of a demure and “stable (stabil)” femininity. However, I did not observe the kinds of déndong illustrated in Shirley’s photographs among younger waria during fieldwork, suggesting aesthetic transformations since the time the photographs were taken in the 1980s. Older informants frequently reminisced that, “back in their day,” waria made more effort and their creativity was more appreciated by wider society. While this might be dismissed as nostalgia, I did sense that there had been a general erosion of a positive environment for public performances of glamorous femininity in urban Indonesia. This, some waria said, was easily observed in the fact that whereas glamorous déndong was performed in visible locations (the street corners of major intersections) nowadays it was practiced in dark corners of the city (along the edge of railway tracks). On the other hand, many
older *waria* told me that even during the *waria* golden age of the 1970s they usually wore restrained outfits during the day, and only changed into glamorous *dêndong* at night and in the company of other *waria*. One *waria* who grew up in Bandung told me that when she was younger, *dêndong* was most often taken to refer to a practice undertaken exclusively at night and during *nyêbong*. When I asked her whether she did it during the day, she clarified: “We had *dêndong* for night time and *dêndong* for the day time. During the day, we would *dêndong* a little bit. And then at night we would have our own style (*punya gaya sendiri.*)” Younger *waria* seemed to adopt a less glamorous feminine appearance all of the time and eschewed the situational gender performances of older generations for a more concerted effort to “become a woman (*jadi perempuan.*)” While I am not entirely certain, this possibly reflects a growing stress on dichotomous understandings of gender, or a shift in understandings of the meanings of femininity for this generation of *waria*.

As illustrated by the *waria*’s comment that she “had her own style” above, *waria* tend to stress the creativity of their own *dêndong* practice as an individual trait, rather than linking it to group identity. Where *waria* do understand their gender presentation in terms of national identity, they describe its unifying characteristic as diversity and creativity. One *waria*, who had travelled to Singapore frequently when she was younger, grew to understand that:

Indonesian *waria* may not be the most beautiful like the Thais, but we are the most interesting. There are short ones and there are tall ones. There are dark ones and white ones, pretty ones and ugly ones. Old and young. Indonesian *waria* are unique (*unik*) and that’s why everyone likes them. They’re brave (*berani*).

This sense of individual creativity stressed by *waria* contrasts strongly with otherwise conformist understandings of gender performance during the New Order. An articulation of *dêndong* as “unique” by this *waria* introduces how skills in creative work are often understood in terms of individual creativity, even as they are in some way shared traits common to *waria* as a group. This suggests that, regardless of the emphasis that each *waria* places on having a uniquely “individual style (*punya gaya sendiri,*)” the performance of some kind of *dêndong* — and recognition of it by others — constitutes a form of “potentiality” (Mahmood 2005, 159) which is accomplished through the cultivation of an individual *waria*’s body.

I have described *dêndong* as a largely situational and temporary form of self-presentation. However, this does not mean that it is performed in an arbitrary way: the contexts in which *waria* engage in *dêndong* are codified, its aesthetic somewhat uniform, and the spaces in which it is condoned specified. While it often connotes a glamorous performance of femininity, particularly spectacular *dêndong* is usually limited to certain social settings. Shirley explained that many of her photographs were taken either immediately prior to, or at many events which began to be held for *waria* at the time. She explained:

At that time, Friday night at the Purowisata [a venue in Yogyakarta] was especially for *banci*. Singing at the Purowisata was a number one hobby for *banci* (*Purowisata lagunya yang hobi kan banci pertama*).
So the banci, the ones who wanted to sing, and those who wanted to dance could go, so long as they did déndong.

Waria who attended would continue on to a newly opened discotheque, Babylon, which offered free entry to waria who arrived in déndong. Shirley explained, “Initially it was like that, because banci weren’t that well known at that point.” Many of my informants described how clubs and bars in large cities during the 1970s and 1980s offered similar promotions, suggesting that it was because waria were a new and popular phenomenon at that time.

By the 1980s, the aesthetic of déndong in nyébong was firmly characterised by costume jewellery like gold earrings, pearl necklaces, and clothing covered with sequins (see Figure 3.3). Hair was heavily styled, makeup was thick, and clothing included short skirts and low-cut, sequined tops. Whereas a certain license to dress to excess had previously been acceptable in the context of performance and beauty pageants in the early 1960s and throughout the 1970s, in the 1980s it spilled out on to the street. During this period, and contrary to its authoritarian ambitions, the Indonesian state had “spawned a commercial, capitalist press rather than a state-owned press” (Robison 1996, 98). The mass media provided a way for waria to develop a taste for fashion styles, and to access items like wigs, handbags and makeup. The emergence of a relationship between waria and fields such as hairdressing and fashion design had facilitated a degree of popular acceptance since the mid-1970s: Vivian Rubianti, introduced in the previous chapter, is an early example of the importance of consumer capitalist beauty to waria. Waria explained that they achieved wide social recognition for their creativity during this period. This was also the period during which waria say that they began to feel comfortable to déndong in settings where they were visible to the wider public. It seems that it was during this period of rapid transformation in the 1970s and early 1980s that a widely cited emphasis on glamorous, visible forms of femininity came to be understood as central to waria’s understandings of self, both as individuals and in reference to a shared bond.

Despite its prominence, not all waria shared a positive assessment of the emergence of the stylised glamour of déndong described so far. Some waria lamented the passing of a time when waria achieved a softer and more mainstream femininity. Ibu Nancy, the senior waria activist introduced in Chapter 2, suggested that outlandish glamour reflects a lack of stability, measured against appearing “like a woman” (seperti perempuan) or “femininity (peminim).” She asserted that in the 1960s and 1970s:

We had to be truly women, so we protected our womanhood (keperempuanan kita di jaga). It was no problem if we got found out, but because we (waria) feel like this, we feel like we are truly women (merasa betul betul perempuan).

According to Ibu Nancy, Indonesian femininity — or more accurately “womanliness (keperempuanan)” — rests on forms of “refinement (halus)” and “politesse (sopan)” governed by
dominant Javanese understandings of etiquette. Sharing this view, a fifty-year-old waria in Yogyakarta narrated her own understanding of practicing dédông “like a real woman (seperti perempuan asli)” as requiring a toned-down outfit, and a polite, reserved manner of speaking and body language. While I found such a performance of femininity to be extremely rare among waria, what is striking about the qualities idealised here is that they in fact more closely reflect the most refined qualities of Javanese men rather than Javanese women, who are more often “dominated by their impulses and emotions… [and] never fully predictable” (Brenner 1995, 30). Waria’s reputation for excellence in financial affairs also suggests recognition of their femininity, even as this equates to being seen to occupying a low status (kasar). Given this understanding, the acceptance of waria as feminine individuals is possibly secured by the very fact that — despite a stated desire for “natural (asli)” femininity — the dédông that they actually practice and enjoy is a form of unpredictable and boisterous behaviour associated with common Javanese and Indonesian ideas about femininity.

The “theatrical structure and style” (Newton 1979, 37) of dédông among waria is especially interesting to consider, given that New Order femininity is usually considered in terms of how obediently it was performed according to state norms of motherhood. Up until the late 1960s and early 1970s, male-bodied and female-bodied individuals alike appear to have been considered able to perform a skilful modern femininity. In Indonesia, as was the case elsewhere in Southeast Asia, biological sex was not of primary importance in defining gender (C.f. Jackson 2003). This reflects how, unlike Western models of personhood where gender is considered a defining aspect of an individual’s identity, femininity in Indonesia continued to be understood in terms of recognition of the performance by an audience for it. This emphasis on social recognition remained central to understandings of the self throughout New Order Indonesia, even as individuals were compelled to cultivate themselves in line with state expertise (Chapter 2). Waria’s creative performances of femininity stem from their capacity to exploit this anxiety in state discourse concerning the extent to which gender can be understood as following as the natural product of certain bodies. It is precisely because of the state’s emphasis on heteronormativity as the product of technical knowledge that has consistently undermined the possibility for an understanding that gender is an enduring, self-evident feature of an individual body. I suggest that dédông among waria emerged at the intersection of these discourses: the acceptance of waria’s femininity within Indonesian society rests on the claim that their femininity requires the application of constant expertise to accomplish. This helps to explain both the development of its aesthetic form and ambivalent attitudes towards it.

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6 According to Ibu Nancy, this included maintaining sexual relationships with men as women, so much so that some made the claim that their partner was unaware that they were a waria. Other waria suggested that this meant being passive, and not allowing the man to be interested in their penis.

7 As Brenner (1995, 26) writes of the qualities associated with femininity: “Excessive attention to financial matters and the pursuit of wealth is said to indicate low status, lack of refinement, and a corresponding lack of spiritual potency.” She adds: “Matters of money, especially where bargaining or the open pursuit of profit are involved, are seen as kasar—unrefined, uncivilized, coarse, and of low status.”
Déndong as Glamour

In this section, I analyse Shirley’s photographs in light of historic New Order shifts in the meanings of gender to further clarify the meaning that déndong has to waria. The historical emergence of déndong during the late 1960s was prompted by new forms of community formation among waria, but it also occurred during a period when visual forms of mass media penetrated the rhythms of everyday life. In her book, Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java, Karen Strassler (2010) uncovers the profound role that images and technologies of reproduction played in shaping the subjective experiences of Indonesians. Particularly relevant to my analysis is Strassler’s interest in the profound shaping force of the dominant New Order “culture of documentation (budaya dokumentasi)” on personal memories and histories. For example, Strassler asserts that objects as mundane as identification photographs not only inform an individual’s relationship to the state, but also serves to “produce the very idea of identity as a possession that can be represented in photographic form” (ibid., 162). The important relationship between the mass media and déndong suggests that Strassler’s claim might usefully extended to the “mediation” (Ochoa 2014, 203) performed by the physical body as well. I am interested in how waria’s glamorous forms of déndong serve as a way to better understand how the “dissonances between people’s lived experiences and the narrow confines of state-defined identities became more palpably felt” (Strassler 2010, 163) during the New Order. This is especially so considering that waria’s performances of “spectacular femininity” (Ochoa 2014, 3) trouble any clear distinction between mass media and performances of gender to begin with.

Both photographs and appearances in the mass media have played a central role in shaping practices of déndong. For example, given Shirley’s employment for the state railway, she could not perform déndong while at work. This did not mean that her understanding of becoming waria was situational in the sense that she did not see herself as any less feminine or holding the potential to déndong while at work. Instead, she carried a photograph with her to “prove (membuktikan)” herself to people she met and who she wanted to inform of this fact. She explained:

In the past, I used to bring a photo in case I met a man. I always used to bring a photo, so if I saw a man I’d approach him. If I didn’t bring a photo, he might not believe me.

If anything, photographs of her in déndong seemed to amplify the capacity for her transformation, making it all the more real. Indeed, when speaking about her own collection of photographs, Shirley frequently interjected that it was photographic “evidence (buktinya),” and that I could “see for myself (bisa lihat sendiri)” that what she was saying was true. I noted the use of the language of visual technologies used to index forms of selfhood in other contexts. For example, Mami Maya stressed that she is a product of the time when photographs were in colour, as opposed to the past (zaman dulu), when they were only in “black and white.” Another waria narrated her life to me in the form of a film script, explaining that she felt more comfortable imagining her life portrayed as though she were able to be played by an actress in a film. Taken together, this suggests the extent to which narrative conventions associated with the mass media have shaped waria’s understandings of self.
I also experienced the close relationship between media technologies and the body when I was adopted as a semi-official documenter of waria social life, after my informants noticed that I was often standing around, camera in hand. Needless to say, waria only allowed me to photograph them while in dèndong, which I initially misunderstood as a reflection of their vanity. However, I discovered that the act of photographing waria in dèndong seemed to establish their femininity beyond a doubt. I took to printing out photographs and delivering them to individual waria, which they enjoyed immensely. However, I learned a crucial lesson when I decided to make a calendar for the waria community that I had been adopted into in Yogyakarta, only to be sternly criticised for leaving a large number of waria out of it. While by no means deliberate, the exclusion of images of a number of waria from the calendar, I realised, not only meant that they would not be memorialised, but was tantamount to making their capacity to dèndong less real. Adapting Karen Strassler’s (2010, 23) perspectives on photography in Indonesia, dèndong appears to be a practice through which individuals “mediate between widely shared representational forms and visual logics, and more intimate concerns.” This reveals how the narrative form made possible by mass media technologies is as important as the information distributed by them.

The importance of mass media technologies to dèndong was made most strikingly evident when Shirley shared her photographic archive with me. Each time I visited, she would take the photographs gently out of a large backpack that she clutched close to her chest, as if protecting them from the humbleness of their surrounds. She told me not to worry about putting the photographs back into their place because she enjoyed looking through them as she put them away. When I asked Shirley why she had started taking photographs in the early 1980s, she responded that it had only become affordable at that time, and once she had started she found it to be an enjoyable hobby. She also explained that she started to sell the photographs to other waria, but had stopped doing so when they turned out to be unreliable customers. As a result, she decided to keep the photographs for herself, and in this way, had inadvertently accumulated a remarkable archive of waria social history. The significance of these photographs to Shirley is underscored by the considerable material and affective resources that she has invested in them.

Significantly, very few of the photographs are candid shots of everyday life, and the majority are posed in an almost ritualised manner. I initially sought to interview Shirley about her photographs in order to ascertain a chronological and historical order, seeking to unpack the kinds of events for which dèndong had been practiced, the times of day in which it had been performed and the kinds of audiences anticipated for it. This proved futile. Shirley barely remembered the context for the photographs, but she did remember the names and some information about the waria in them. I then made an effort to contact waria that we could identify and who were still alive, and present them with copies of their photographs. However, when I presented waria with these photographs and asked them about the event for which it had been taken, they usually did not remember either. They simply recalled that “back then (dulu)” waria occupied more visible spaces, and were more readily seen as...
beautiful women, “even more beautiful than women themselves (lebih perempuan daripada perempuan).” Unsurprisingly, they expressed delight at how wonderful they looked, and told me to note down how much more beautiful waria back then were than the young ones are these days.

The historian Stephen Gundle (2008, 10) writes that glamour emerged out of a Western bourgeois culture concerned primarily with “image-making, of masks and appearances.” Albeit in the Indonesian setting, more glamorous performances of dèndong among waria indeed draw attention to the body as a “project or canvas on which a variety of socially significant meanings may be inscribed” (ibid., 12). As a form of glamour, dèndong enchants its audience while disguising aspects of gender performance that are less than glamorous (C.f. Gundle 2008, 16). This suggests how, as Marcia Ochoa (2014, 89) notes in the Venezuelan context, “glamour allows its practitioners to draw down extralocal authority, to conjure a contingent space of being and belonging” as a critique of material scarcity or underdevelopment. Although these descriptions of glamour are derived from outside of the Indonesian context, the significant effort expended on the dèndong in Shirley’s photographs echoes the historical record on the visibility of waria in Indonesia: “precisely because the transvestite is stylized, unlike any particular real woman, she is super-womanly” (Peacock 1968, 206). Thus understood, dèndong’s relationship to the transformative power of modern technologies also bears parallels with even earlier historical periods of Indonesian modernity (Siegel 1997, 70). Shirley’s camera — and narratives of selfhood among waria that draw on visual idioms — demonstrate how the glamorous femininity of photographs can be even more real than the original itself.

In the bulk of the photographs, taken between 1980 and 1986, the creativity of dèndong is striking: waria draw on globalised technologies to effect a unique type of “super-womanly” (Peacock 1968, 206) national modernity premised on a distinctively transnational glamour. In each photograph that I have included in the pages that follow, the subject is keenly aware of the camera. Regardless of the backdrop for it — whether a grimy street corner (Figure 3.4) or a studio of lush tropical foliage (Figure 3.6) — each photograph invokes a shared vocabulary of glamour as “a way of reordering time and space around oneself for purposes of enchanting” (Ochoa 2014, 88). Thus understood, dèndong is a practice which both draws on globalised aesthetics with “talismanic” (Gundle 2008, 2) force, and suggests that the subjective state of “becoming waria (jadi waria)” is inseparable from the historical emergence of visual forms of mass media. This is made most explicit from the other images visible in the photograph, as with the waria whose flowing red dress and exposed leg is in unison with the photograph on the wall (Figure 3.13) or the calendar that stands upright beside her (Figure 3.15).

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8 This description of glamour also brings to mind the metaphor of the mask in classic interpretations of personhood in Java and elsewhere in the region (Errington 1989; Geertz 1976). In this view, appearances are as much a “screen on which signs play” (Strassler 2009, 76; see also Florida 1995, 276) as they are a route to an inner identity, a sense that there is something beyond what is immediately apparent (Anderson 1990; Siegel 1986; Anderson 1972).
Figure 3.4: Waria at tempat nyêbong with a gold handbag, Yogyakarta, estimated date 1980.

Figure 3.5: A young waria strikes a pose for the camera, Yogyakarta, December 1985.
Figure 3.6: Waria poses for a studio shot, Yogyakarta, estimated date mid-1980s.
Figure 3.7: Shirley and another waria pose at an event, Yogyakarta, estimated date mid-1980s.

This image is only available in the print version of this thesis, available at the Australian National University.

Figure 3.8: A waria does a curtsy in déndong, Yogyakarta, December 1985.

This image is only available in the print version of this thesis, available at the Australian National University.

Figure 3.9: A waria outside of a house, holding an umbrella. Yogyakarta, December 1985.
Figure 3.10: A waria poses for a studio shot. Yogyakarta, September 1987.

Figure 3.11: A waria poses in front of a car. Yogyakarta, estimated date 1980.
Figure 3.12: Waria together in a salon. Yogyakarta, March 1987.

This image is only available in the print version of this thesis, available at the Australian National University.
Figure 3.13: A waria poses on a lounge. Yogyakarta, estimated date 1980.

Figure 3.14: A waria poses beside a Christmas tree. Yogyakarta, December 1985.
In Figure 3.4, a waria stands on a street corner staring into the camera. Her gold handbag is the most glamorous feature of what is an otherwise restrained outfit, contrasting with her insalubrious surroundings. By contrast, the sparkling gold sequined dress of the waria in Figure 3.11 directs attention towards a sports car as an obvious symbol of material wealth and modernity. The gaze of the waria in Figure 3.5, with her manicured hair and makeup, is similarly oriented away from the camera. In each of these photographs, I am interested in where the gaze of the waria in these photographs is oriented. Most notably, Tom Boellstorff’s (2007, 104) analysis of waria gender performances suggests that both the practice and performance of děndong are primarily concerned with articulating a commitment to national belonging. While this certainly reflects some of the sites and practices associated with waria gender performance, I am interested in how the performances of děndong here cannot be understood as a metaphor for the desire for national belonging alone. As the photographs and narratives contained in this chapter suggest, waria also find immense pleasure in the idiosyncratic aspects of crafting both themselves and one another into modern subjects.

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested how the visibility of the waria world offers an unlikely sense of “comfort (nyaman)” through the extended social networks that it makes possible. Given this notion of comfort, in interpreting the photographs of the waria who look outside of the frame in Figures 3.11 and 3.5, I suggest that děndong has a more immediate aim of catching the eye of a more intimate audience. In appearing in glamorous děndong on street corners, which is in turn refracted
through photographs, waria attest to the way that mass media images and technologies trigger personal registers and possibilities for social relations, and for more idiosyncratic formulations of selfhood than an analysis too indebted to official state grammar allows. The photograph of two waria sitting together in a salon (3.12) best sum up my interpretation of déndong as primarily concerned with cultivating shared bonds of reciprocity. As “forms of cultural work on which… community formation depends” (Bailey 2013, 17) déndong might be understood as a practice through which waria have exploited the dissonances of New Order heteronormativity and in doing so have exceeded its narrow possibilities. This is best illustrated by the fact that most of the photographs in Shirley’s collection are not taken at events for official audiences, but are of déndong at the locations for transactional sex or salon work for which waria are very well known (Figure 3.12).

In this regard, the cultivation of waria femininity and social life takes place well outside of middle class, heteronormative gender ideals of ideal men and perfect women: the social worlds which revolve around transactional sex that waria call nyébong. Nyébong usually involves a large gathering of waria made up in glamorous déndong in a public setting such as a street corner or on railway tracks very late at night, with considerable concentrations in large cities. Waria participate in nyébong throughout the week, but most intensively on the weekends and especially on Saturday nights (malam minggu). Older waria usually say the close relationship between nyébong and waria visibility became especially pronounced starting in the late 1960s and peaking at some point in the 1980s. Given this historical relationship, waria usually describe their ultimate decision to perform déndong as taking place in the context of making themselves visible at nyébong; it is integral to their gendered subjectivity.

When I asked the senior waria activist Mami Maya why waria started to both increase in number and become more visible from the late 1960s onwards, she answered quite bluntly that it was driven by a need for sex with men. Furthermore, almost every waria that I met stated that attracting men at nyébong was their primary aim. This apparent stress on meeting men is intriguing, given that it appears to confirm a simplistic view that waria posed as women to “attract men from outside the subculture or a mimicry of male-female relations” (Hekma 1996, 236). However, to stop the analysis here would be to overlook the relationship between déndong and waria’s more general desire for forms of visibility, mediated by economic exchanges which take place in public settings. While nyébong certainly has an important relationship to transactional sex, the transactions are not conducted in the same way that they are in Western contexts, in which market exchanges that concern sex situate the seller as a feminine object of risk and subordination. This particular view does not seem to characterise how sexuality always intersects with economic exchanges in Indonesia; for example, many waria see themselves to be in a relatively powerful position vis-à-vis their clients, and consider the fact that they command a price to reflect that they “have value (berharga).” The comfort experienced in inhabiting the femininity of déndong cannot therefore be understood in terms of
sexuality structured along an axis of heteronormative desire alone, but rather must account the sense of collective self-worth that waria derive from intimacy developed in such settings.

**Waria and Public Sexuality**

While waria usually concur that the number that participate in nyébong in Jakarta and other large cities has decreased since a peak in the 1990s, significant numbers of waria and men continue to congregate most nights of the week to drink alcohol and meet men. One reason for this decline is the emergence of urban renewal policies which combine the politics of middle class morality and integration into the global economy. Another reason for declining numbers at nyébong is the possibility to engage in transactional sex through location-based online applications via mobile phone, which is shaping the sites and practices associated with waria performances of femininity in new ways. Nevertheless, some — but by no means all waria — attend nyébong for the purposes of transactional sex, which varies in price according to attractiveness (usually measured by age), the sexual act performed and the negotiating skills of the customer. While all interactions take place under the guise of transactional sex, I came to understand the social context that nyébong unfolded within as equally as important as economic gains, especially for older waria. Given high rates of migration, the social world of nyébong is very porous, with new waria appearing and disappearing frequently.

The tempat nyébong in the city of Yogyakarta serve to illustrate the general geographies of nyébong found widely throughout Indonesia. There are two significant sites for nyébong in Yogyakarta: behind the railway tracks near the main railway station Tugu, and a more visible location on the corner of the main Malioboro Street in the centre of the city. I also visited a number of smaller sites, including near the airport, as well as a lively seasonal nyébong which takes place approximately once a month near the beach resort of Parangtritis approximately fifteen kilometres south of Yogyakarta. At the dark railway tracks, a ten-minute walk from my house, approximately forty, mostly older waria aged between mid-thirties and mid-sixties gathered each night. In the case of these waria, I observed that nyébong involved “unpaid sex (grétongan)” as often as it did paid sex. On occasion, I observed transactions in which waria would pay men, particularly if they were a young and attractive brondong. A loosely policed condition of attending nyébong as a waria is the requirement to appear

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9 The politics of public space in Indonesia is transforming rapidly in the context of a shift from legal processes centralised in the nation-state to those enacted at a provincial and municipal level. For example, Yogyakarta enacted a law prohibiting “busking and begging” in the province in 2014 (which coincided with a boom in the construction of hotels in the city). This environment also means that well-known locations associated with lower class entertainment (which includes waria performances) such as Taman Remaja in the centre of Surabaya (Boellstorff 2007, 79) have recently been closed, the valuable inner-city land to be redeveloped as malls or hotels. The politics of space and sexuality in relation to class in Indonesian cities is an important topic for future research.

10 The fee for receptive oral sex during the time I conducted fieldwork between 2014 and 2015 was 50,000 Indonesian rupiah (US$5) although waria usually employed a number of strategies to relieve clients of a few more dollars to supplement this small amount. In other larger and more prosperous cities, particularly Jakarta, waria charged much greater amounts of up to 1,000,000 Indonesian rupiah (US$100) and were organised into groups headed by powerful older waria “Mothers” (Mami-mami) who strictly managed their “children” (anak buah).
in déndong, and waria would frequently spend a number of hours beforehand drinking alcohol and socialising as they made themselves up to attend.

While the visibility associated with déndong in this setting has clear financial incentives, many waria considered the social relationships forged in this context to be of equal value to the income that it generated. For example, one waria shared her strategy for making money at nyébong as a staged series of complicated negotiations, which illustrated to me that it involves a different kind of interaction than is implied by the term sex work. She described at length:

You have to be nice to him. First, you strike up a conversation. Then I say, let’s have a cigarette Mas, so he gives me 10,000Rp (US$0.75). I already have cigarettes so I pocket that. I give him one. Then I ask what he wants. He will usually say, how much do you charge.

I would then say 100,000Rp (US$7.50). Then he will say oh no, how about 25,000Rp (US$2). Then I say no Mas, I thought that you would offer 75,000Rp (US$6). Then I say, all right, 50,000Rp (US$3.75) is all right. However, I will also need 10,000rp (US$0.75) for a room. The real amount is 5000Rp (US$0.35) so I take the remainder. Then we will go into the room and I start to massage him.

Then he gets excited, you see, I get him excited and he’ll almost ejaculate. Then I hold off and say that because he is generous he will give me more money, so he says sure. Then I will make him come.

Then I will say I am thirsty and ask for a bottle of water, so he will give me 5000Rp (US$0.35). I have brought water from home so I take that money. He’ll end up giving me 60,000Rp (US$4.50) and with the extra 20,000Rp (US$1.50) from the water, the cigarettes, the room, I can make 80,000Rp (US$7) just from that one time.

This same waria would occasionally receive text messages from a long-term customer asking her to meet him at nyébong. She explained that he had sustained her with gifts of money over some decades, and that she considered him as much a friend as a customer. Yet other waria explained that they had an absolute rule of charging clients for money, but that for a cute brondong the price would plummet to a remarkably affordable 2000 Indonesian rupiah (US$0.20). The emphasis on transactional sex seemed to be a rule (although unpaid sex was fairly common) and waria described payment, no matter how small, as an essential aspect of nyébong. In other respects, the relationship of transactional sex and possibilities for sexual intimacy with men seemed almost tangential compared to the strong bonds developed between waria in those settings. It is notable that waria in each of my field sites use kin terms to refer to those that they encountered at nyébong. Waria describe their relationships in terms of either “sepupu (cousin)” and English-language “sister” if they are the same age, or “aunty (bunda)” and “mother (mami)” as terms of address for older waria.

Accomplishing a feminine appearance through déndong during nyébong is essential to becoming waria. However, this visibility has meanings which exceed a narrow relationship implied by the common translation of nyébong as a form of sex work and waria as sex workers. Both implies the operation of logics of heteronormativity and commodity-based transactions (waria sex workers and male clients) which does not adequately describe waria’s participation in nyébong. This emphasis on the importance of sustaining social bonds with other waria through nyébong was most clearly demonstrated when I joined a group of waria for a night at the seasonal location near Parangtritis.
beach, south of Yogyakarta. My waria informant was hosting two much younger waria in their early twenties from Jakarta, and they decided that they wanted to go to nyébong. While partially motivated by the desire to make some money before returning home to Jakarta, our trip had more of the character of holiday sightseeing than it did prostitution or sex work. We discussed the local foods that we might eat, and talked about the local temples that we might be able to see on the way. The attractiveness of local men was described as a point of interest. I had experienced this almost touristic delight among other waria from Jakarta who had occasionally visited Yogyakarta, who enjoyed making themselves up for nyébong but seemed comparatively disinterested in the prospect of sex with men for money or otherwise.

Later in the same evening, we set out by motorbike for the thirty-minute ride to the beach from the city. The two younger waria were made up in a highly eroticised déndong: one wearing a skirt that left nothing to the imagination, the other dressed in a tiny black dress that left her breasts completely exposed. Soon after we arrived, the older waria and I found a hotel room for the night, during which time ten other older waria from Yogyakarta had pulled up in a car outside. They had rented the car for the night, and similarly were chatting excitedly about the evening ahead, joking and asking where they might be able to buy alcohol. Thus, although transactional sex was ostensibly the reason why all of these waria had gathered at nyébong, the idea that it might be work appeared fairly distant from everybody’s mind. As the night wore on, our younger friends disappeared into the dunes near the beach, and we remained with our older waria friends, who were sitting in a large group that was fairly menacing to an outsider and getting progressively drunker, seeking unsuccessfully to entice men by shouting at them if they came near. I only observed one or two successful interactions involving transactional sex by waria from this group. As the night wore on, heavy rain set in, and my older waria friend and I returned to our hotel at about three in the morning, before riding back to Yogyakarta together in the morning.

Shirley also consistently reiterated the fact that the social aspects of nyébong exceeded its financial motivations when she participated in the 1980s and 1990s, even as payment fundamentally structured the forms of intimacy forged there. She recalled fondly her time “under the light” on the railway track, remembering in detail the spatial details of tempat nyébong even though many years had passed since she had spent any time there:

Yes, in the past we [waria] had our own location. The women (pewong) were here. Then, there was a ditch over there. Then, over there, were the banci. Banci were right at the back, and I was at the far end [of them]. I didn’t want to be in the dark. I have to be in the light (Mesti tempat terang).

Shirley explained her need to be “in the light” as not shared with the majority of waria, who were willing to engage in furtive sexual encounters in the dark. She claimed that she was only interested in sex with men who she was attracted to, and that although money certainly changed hands, financial gain was not her primary motivation for nyébong. She recounted a number of humorous tales of close shaves with drunk men, including one instance when a man who tried to accost her sat on an ant’s
nest and ran off with his pants around his ankles. When men would attempt to force themselves on her, or accuse her of being too “precious (sombong)” about the price, she would retort: “banci have value too you know (banci juga berhaga lho!)” Shirley also described visiting the seasonal nyébong at the beach south of Yogyakarta with a group of waria from Ambassador Salon during the 1980s, where they would pitch a tent and stay the night (Figure 3.16). As is illustrated by her photographs, Shirley also emphasised nyébong in this context as something that they did for fun, or in the style of a holiday as mentioned earlier: meeting men at night, and cooking, swimming and going for walks during the day.

Figure 3.16: Waria set up a tent before nyébong, Parangritis, estimated date 1980. Note the sign on the left-hand side: “Parking for Men (Parkir Cowok).”

Shirley stressed the importance of déndong to facilitating possibilities for meeting men comfortably. The emphasis on the affective state of comfort articulated here suggests that waria feel a deep attachment to the practice of déndong, whatever other difficulties their gender presentation brings in wider society. As Shirley explained:

If [we] déndong, it is to make it easier for us to look for men (lekong). If we don’t déndong, and if we approach men, it’s difficult. Afterwards they won’t speak to us nicely (tidak enak). ‘A man likes another man!’ They’ll say that. If we déndong then they know. If we don’t déndong, we don’t approach men.

Shirley is a somewhat unique individual, but her description of nyébong bears parallels with understandings among waria more broadly. In Chapter 1, I introduced forty-eight-year-old Noni, who described becoming waria as a form of comfort because it facilitated ways to meet men safely and
without criticism. To recall, Noni explained how she preferred the “comfort (nyaman)” of spending time waria than either gay, normal or salon banci because, “that’s a banci, they [men] already know.”

Over time, however, Shirley introduced the possibility that dèndong was not always strictly necessary to access sexual encounters with men. This was especially so with the emergence of men identifying as gay seeking out other masculine men in public spaces during the 1980s. The emergence of gay men in public settings led to a complex set of fraught negotiations to understand the difference between gay men and waria; the main problem, it appeared, was that gay men did not charge money for sex. Up until the early 1980s, a number of waria explained that feminine body movements and speaking styles (ngondhek) in public settings were enough to indicate sexual desire for men as part of nyébong. Waria described how the appearance of gender normative gay men was a moment of confusion for them at the time. Shirley explained how she initially considered them to be the same as waria, and somewhat similar to banci kaléng. She explained:

If we approached them, they really know we [waría] are men. Besides, in the town square (alun-alun) we didn’t always dèndong. But [unlike gay men] we were feminine (genit), on the street [in public]. We were genit, especially when we used bahasa waria (the waria language). After a while men knew what we wanted, even if we didn’t dèndong.

The chief difference as it emerged from waria’s perspective appears to have been that gay men did not perform a situational femininity (ngondhek) in order to attract men in the same way that waria did. Rather, ngondhek for gay men was only performed in the company of other gay men; they were able to switch between masculine and feminine body presentation and, as a result, were able to participate in norms of middle class Indonesian life. Waria, on the other hand, are always visible to their audience regardless of the setting. This experience suggests the complexity of historical transformations stemming from new kinds of gender and sexual subjectivities: for waria, one result of the emergence of gay men was that they distinguished themselves by placing a greater stress on the visibility of dèndong, which in turn came to signal the requirement of payment at nyèbong. Placed in this historical perspective, becoming waria — effected through the performance of dèndong and its relationship to nyébong — cannot be understood in terms of a stable connection linking gender to sexual desire alone.

As suggested by early confusion among waria about gay men, the relationship between waria’s gender performance and public sexuality was consolidated in the context of changing formulations of the relationship between gender, class and public space during the New Order. During the 1980s in particular, public spaces associated with the street came to be seen primarily as a potential source of lawlessness and sporadic violence (Siegel 1998). Middle class spaces based on consumption, such as the suburbs and the mall, relied on this “outside” in order to be defined as spaces where “nothing happened” (van Leeuwen 2011). Considering that it was against this backdrop that the most

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11 Waria also described the emergence of gender normative men who charged money for sex, or kucing, at the same time as gay men in the early 1980s. I discuss this in the next chapter in terms of waria’s relationships with brondong.
glamorous forms of dêndong emerged during the early to mid-1980s, waria might also be understood as a discursive figure against which middle class understandings of private sexuality and gender normativity were negotiated and defined. In the following section, I return to consider becoming waria in terms of these negotiations between visibility and the audience for whom it is performed in the context of transformations at the height of the New Order.

**Becoming Waria**

In Chapter 1, I introduced “becoming waria (jadi waria)” as a cumulative process that commences in childhood through which signs of femininity are cultivated by external actors. One informant offered a lucid explanation of the process by comparing it to the externalisation of visible signs, using the metaphor of an empty vessel being filled up over time. Citing the importance of “visibility (nampak),” her description focused on the process of coming to particular practices. She explained: “We start out as gay (hémong), and then we become banci kaléng [empty (as in a glass or bottle) banci]. We only become fully banci when we [participate in] nyébong and [practice] dêndong.” This shares similarities with expressions of selfhood observed elsewhere in Indonesia. For example, writing about the female-bodied masculinity of toomboi in Sumatra, Evelyn Blackwood (2010, 101) writes, “In this sense jiwa laki-laki refers to a set of attributes and a masculine way of being that develops over time, rather than something that is part of one’s nature from the beginning.” In this section I expand on the process of becoming waria introduced in Chapter 1, focusing on the temporal progression of increasing visibility which culminates in dêndong.

Many waria believe that, given enough social influence, the masculinity of any gay man might potentially unravel to reveal their feminine core. This is most often the case among the men that waria describe as banci kaléng; best exemplified by men that call themselves gay, but who dêndong on occasion or visibly ngondhek in public. Waria say that these banci kaléng have embarked on an irreversible process of becoming waria which will “finish (jadi)” with the person practicing dêndong every day. In Chapter 1, I explained my own positionality in terms of waria who consider me Benita; a banci kaléng whose signs of femininity suggest that she has the possibility to transform turn into a waria. However, the emphasis on a clear boundary between the meanings of banci kaléng and waria (and of gay men) suggests that these are distinct positions that hinge on to whom, and in what ways, the performance of dêndong is revealed (see Boellstorff 2005, 177). Boellstorff (ibid., 205) usefully characterises gay men in Indonesia as “actors playing different roles” (ibid., 205), contrasting their situational femininity with waria, who are consistent across all social settings. Indeed, this accords with waria’s frank assessment that the primary difference between themselves and the purported gender normativity of gay men is the latter’s lack of visibility, which at times they pejoratively refer to as a form of “hypocrisy (munafik).”

Waria see their emphatic rejection of marriage as the clearest factor distinguishing them from banci kaléng. Waria are thus extremely unique in Indonesian society, as they are among the very few
individuals released from the imperative to marry and have children. For example, gender normative gay men see heterosexual marriage as an enjoyable (if vexed) experience linked to the attainment of adulthood and national citizenship (Boellstorff 1999). However, gay men do not see their decision to marry as a choice which impinges on their capacity to participate in the gay world, which may include the kinds of situational femininity that makes them most definitely banci kalèng in the eyes of waria (Boellstorff 2005, 102–107). I do not personally know any waria who have married (that is, to women), and almost each of my informants lived alone in one room apartments close to other waria. A waria who cannot marry is considered acceptable whereas a gay man who chooses not to marry is considered somewhat preposterous. It is waria’s lack of ability to choose marriage that offers them considerable agency to craft the kinds of lives that they see attractive to them. At the same time, I do not want to paint an overly optimistic picture: while this releases waria from the awkward social situations entailed by marriage for those who would rather not, it is also one reason why they never attain complete personhood in Indonesian society.12

The fact that waria do not marry appears to be closely linked to their gender presentation, given that male-bodied individuals who are able to adequately perform a broad range of masculinities can and do participate in heterosexual marriage and normative family life regardless of their sexuality. By contrast, waria who ëndong frequently assert that marriage to a woman is simply not possible, and those few who did so were considered extremely unusual. Such an understanding also seems to rest on the fact that waria are socially recognised as incapable of love-based marriage; indeed, the only kinds of relationships that waria are considered able to sustain are those that involve some kind of blatant economic exchange. The impossibility of love for waria was succinctly described by Shirley, who offered an extended story about a waria who did marry a woman to illustrate her disdain. She explained:

They have three children! They have a wife! When the wedding was planned I got an invitation, but I didn’t want to go. I was ashamed (maulu). When this waria was getting married, she gave out invitations to all of her waria friends. Some wanted to go, but most didn’t. Those who wanted to go, wouldn’t they be ashamed (maulu)? In front of everybody (pandangan umum), in public, they’ll think, that we [waria] too can marry women. As for me, no way. Usually it is like this. If there is a waria who likes a woman, it is usually just because she is being pressured to do it (terpengaruhi). It is quite another thing, our nature (pembawaannya). Being forced to do something, and our nature from when we are children onwards, these are different things. As for our nature, from when we are children, to the moment we die, we’ll always be banci.

Shirley’s contrasting use of the terms “characteristic (pembawaan)” and to be “influenced (terpengaruhi)” here further insights into the shaping power of social audiences on gender presentation among waria. Pembawaan is derived from the root word “bring (bawa).” As such, it has a connotation of a characteristic which has been brought from elsewhere, or by another person; a

12 The history introduced in Chapter 2 suggests that male-bodied woman has been until recently a thinkable proposition according to national concepts of gender and personhood in Indonesia, and that two male-bodied or female-bodied individuals (so long as they presented appropriate heteronormative gender ideals) might publicly express their intimacy (Wieringa 2007). What has since caused male-bodied women to be an unacceptable category, however, are the “facts” of an incapacity for biological reproduction that were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Chapter 2).
sense conveyed by the English term “hereditary.” A waria who succumbs to social pressure and marries heterosexually has been “influenced (terpengaruhi).” A notion of the “public view (pandangan umum)” — how waria are expected to behave according to wider society — animates waria’s firm understanding that they cannot marry because this anonymous “public” holds this to be the case. It is this visibility in the public view that makes becoming waria a more or less permanent state (with some variation across the life course). Unlike the gay men mentioned earlier, waria cannot choose to marry heterosexually and continue to participate in the gay world. It appears that this is because, in spite of a widespread understanding that they are male-bodied, waria’s gender performance links them to lower class public sexuality characterised by a relationship to market, rather than love-based intimacy.

Becoming waria, and its culmination in déndong, partially reflects the dominant heteronormative symbolic order of gender and sexuality in New Order Indonesia. What appears most important in becoming waria, however, is the sociality that has developed around nyébong: this excludes waria from normative middle class social life which is fundamentally based on heteronormative marriage and reproduction. As a result, the narratives that I introduce in the following sections do not suggest a causal link between the desire to meet men through nyébong and an expression of a deep interior self. Expanding on the affective state of “comfort” as a primary aspect becoming waria, becoming waria appears to be not invested in arriving at a stable sense of who one is, reflected in a relationship between masculine object choice and feminine gender presentation. Rather, the stress on the affective state of comfort among waria suggests instead that becoming waria is a subjectivity which is not concerned with consistency, but one that emerges through recognition by the audience that it is performed for.
Déndong as a Social Practice

I first understood the importance of déndong as a publicly performed practice through the way that waria consistently reiterated that it must be learned in explicit ways. A sense of self as waria might be a latent “characteristic (pembawaan),” but one’s femininity needs to be recognised by others and worked on in order to be accomplished. As a result, a first meeting with other waria was a transformative moment for each of my informants. Shirley explained that the first time that she performed déndong was after meeting a group of waria at a salon, referring to how other “made her up (didéndongin)” there:

I was made up (didéndongin) for the first time. I didn’t have many waria friends yet. The only friends I had were the salon waria. When I started déndong at that time, I became a queen (jadi ratu) with them. From the first time that I did déndong, I went straight to the stage (panggung).

As a result of these interactions, she began to practice déndong at night at nyébong. She explained: “After meeting the salon waria, I started to dandan (déndong). I started dandan in the square (alun-alum).” She elaborated, “We were happy on the main intersection. As usual it was like we were on the stage (panggung).” The socially performed nature of déndong is illustrated in Figure 3.17, in which two waria appear in an especially resplendent déndong most likely for stage performance: red satin pants, silver cummerbund and yellow top with a red sequined collar. One person, not in déndong (to my eyes, a banci kaléng), applies the final touches of makeup to a waria. The laborious effort and transformative power that déndong entails — illustrated in each of the photographs in this chapter —
might be concealed if it is understood to simply follow from identification as waria. By seeking to understand what Erving Goffman (1952, 69) would call the “backstage,” it is possible to appreciate the profound importance of the labour involved in déndong as an important bond shared by waria.

Noni, born in a small village in Sumatra, similarly described her movement from being a banci kaléng to waria during the 1980s and 1990s in terms of temporal and spatial movement reflected in transformations experienced through her body. Like Shirley, she regarded the first concrete step in becoming waria as work in a waria’s salon in her village as an intern (magang) for very little pay when still in her teens. Despite its punishing nature, this experience provided the first context in which she experienced a pull towards performing déndong on a frequent basis. Noni differed from Shirley, however, in that she had migrated from her village of birth during her teens. As was common to my informants, Noni and other waria travelled to smaller nearby cities and the Indonesian capital Jakarta, but also to Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Waria cited a range of reasons behind a departure from one’s place of birth: estrangement from family, a need to make money, or simply the desire to experience life beyond the village. Regardless, it was generally in the course of migration to urban centres that many waria discovered for the first time the comfort available in becoming waria.

Noni told me a number of times that the central reasons for her own migration to Jakarta was difficulty in making money and an impeded ability to meet men in her village. These two factors surfaced frequently, suggesting how transactional sex is a shaping experience in waria’s experiences of intimacy more generally. Noni recounted a humorous story to illustrate her conundrum:

> It was so hard to meet men in the village! We had to pay them. A group of banci kaléng and I got together, gave men cigarettes and alcohol and brought them back to our place. The men excused themselves to use the bathroom. Before we knew it, the men had disappeared, having run off into the night!

These kinds of experiences, which were hurtful in spite of waria’s good-humoured responses, prompted Noni’s initial move to Jakarta with a group of other banci kaléng from her village, including some that she had met at the salon. It was upon moving to Jakarta that she began to make money through transactional sex. Noni explained:

> We all moved into a boarding house (kost) in a suburb of Jakarta. We bought a woven mat (tikar) and set up the house so we could live there. It was rice fields all around, still in the suburbs. We had to put mosquito repellent on and then we would meet men at the side of the road, and then go into the rice fields to have sex (main) on the mat.

It is notable that she was initially surprised at the fact that men would pay her for sex and not the other way around. Noni’s experiences, and those of waria more generally, serve to complicate the understanding that waria’s femininity serves as a straightforward reason why they are an object of

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13 During the 1990s when the Indonesian economy faltered it became far more profitable to reside on the island of Batam and take the short ferry ride to Singapore to earn more valuable currencies (Lindquist 2009, 75). More recently, the expansion of budget airlines (like AirAsia) has enabled greater numbers of waria (and young men) to travel to other cities in Asia for sex work from various cities in Indonesia. Waria travel to Bangkok, Thailand in particular for various forms of surgical feminisation (usually excluding gender reassignment surgery) (Cf. Aizura 2011a). Much more research is required to understand both this transnational transgender imaginary, and transnational forms of sex work as they emerge in the context of lower costs of air travel in Southeast Asia on the one hand and increasing securitisation of borders on the other.
desire in markets for transactional sex. As Noni suggests, she initially thought that waria would always have to pay men for sex, and not the other way around. It appears that during the New Order at least, waria came to learn of their attractiveness and capacity to charge money for sex, destabilising the view of a naturalised Western model of heteronormativity that frames excessive male sexual desire in relation to feminine passivity. As Holly Wardlow (2004) writes in a different context, understandings of attractiveness and the directionality of desire are subject to significant cross-cultural variation. In the highlands Papua New Guinea, “men are the epitome of beauty and that which is desired” and, as a result, the emergence of practices that involved men paying women for sex was considered to be extremely unusual (ibid., 1027). Rather than a product of natural male sexuality, Wardlow (2004, 1028) describes how men in highlands Papua New Guinea pay women for sex in order to accomplish a modern masculinity associated with a disregard for gender-related taboos and assertion of dominance. Drawing on these theoretical insights, I suggest that in charging men for sex, waria both assert their modern status and declare their worth in a context where the market is a supreme measure of value.

Noni narrated the concrete moment of her inauguration into what she called the “waria world,” however, in terms of her entrance into the infamous (and now largely defunct) location for nyêbong at Taman Lawang in the centre of Jakarta. She recounted how, “I looked around and there were hundreds of waria there, and there were just as many men.” It was this experience in particular that meant that although her friends from the village decided to return home — and remain banci kalêng — she stayed on in Jakarta. I observed that waria usually had no trouble making friends in the context of nyêbong. In this regard, visibility to one another appears to be as important as is visibility to men. I was often impressed by waria’s ability to easily recall thirty or forty names from memory. Both Shirley and Noni foregrounded these friendships when they shared their early memories of becoming waria. Presentation of the self as waria might start in nyêbong, but it is in this context that most end up living close to one another in neighbourhoods which are convenient for nyêbong as well. Some of these have been established as neighbourhoods with large numbers of waria since at least the late 1960s (see Chapter 1). The importance of these geographical clusters of waria is reflected in Noni’s narratives. For example, she easily recounted the layout of her first place of residence in this neighbourhood with reference to its occupants, even though almost two decades had passed since she had lived there. She explained:

We rented one [house] in Jakarta Ben. We rented one house with a room, a small living room, and then a bathroom inside, one room each. There we were, in the past, there was… At that house if I’m not wrong there were five doors. I was at the front. Kiki was number two, number three was Defy. Number four Oshin, number five Mira. Waria, all of them.

14 In Yogyakarta and Jakarta, waria neighbourhoods appear characterised by lower class status and heterogeneity in terms of religious belief (but with a Muslim majority). They also tend to be located close to public transport hubs and well-known red-light districts for female sex workers, which usually happen to be known as centres for the criminal activity referred to as preman.
Not all waria reported that it was easy to make friends immediately. The initial period following migration and entrance to a new location for nyébong in a large city entailed a period of adjustment, especially so given that newly arrived waria are frequently seen as a source of competition. Feby, a fifty-year-old friend of Noni, had also migrated to Jakarta from Sumatra. She recounted how, on her first night at nyébong, she had introduced herself politely to a group of waria, but one insulted her by calling her nose ugly. Feby said that she swore and retorted, calling her a “whore (pelacur umum),” prompting a physical altercation. In the fight, her clothes were torn and she was punched in the face. She recounted:

I cried and left that night, but when I got home [my friend] said to me, ‘you can’t succeed like this. You need to be tough to be a banci.’ So I went out there and I tried again and I fought with a few.

Interactions that occur at nyébong such as this — for example, a friend who associates “toughness” with “being a banci” — shape the corporeal experience of becoming waria. It appears that what constitutes the comfort of the waria world is not immediately apparent but rather needs to be learned. In this case, an otherwise difficult experience of physical violence is transformed into comfort by the fact that it consolidates recognition of becoming waria. However, while this may provide a sense of comfort while young, it appears that the relationship between becoming waria and nyébong becomes increasingly less comfortable as waria grow older; waria who were beyond thirty often reflected on relationships with waria in pejorative terms as excessively “thick (kental)” and difficult to escape from.

While I have introduced déndong as made meaningful largely via the collective gatherings of the “waria world” such as nyébong, as a form of gendered presentation it is of course visible to wider society. This visibility is also why waria understand déndong not in terms of the expression of an inner identity but as a collective bond that is shaped by the audience for whom it is performed. I mentioned earlier Shirley’s disdain for a waria who had contravened social convention by marrying heterosexually. I interpreted her irritation at this waria’s marriage as stemming from the fact that it secures a form of gender normativity linked to middle class status in fundamental ways in Indonesian society. This undesirable for waria because — despite its pitfalls — they enjoy ambiguous social recognition in terms of lower class status and public sexuality. Participation in marriage diminishes the reciprocal bonds valued highly by waria even as it excludes them from the possibility for normative middle class citizenship. By contrast, entering into relationships with other waria through salon work, migration and nyébong in turn facilitates a progressive cultivation of characteristics which are understood as already present. The déndong of waria, despite its connotation of modern eroticised femininity, does not mediate heterosexual desire, but rather constitutes a comfort experienced by recognition of oneself in others.
The Audience

The process of becoming waria introduced thus far indicates the importance of migration, involvement in nyèbong and interaction with others who recognise in banci kalèng the possibility for becoming a complete waria. From this perspective, the femininity of déndong is part of a process of graduating into forms of increased corporeal visibility. This corresponds with the fact that many waria narrate how certain behaviours and activities exhibited since childhood foreshadowed their later practice of déndong. Shirley explained how she considered her enjoyment of performances of dancing and singing from a very early age to have been signs of becoming waria. This she now understands to have been a sign that she was a banci kalèng. She explained:

I used to dance like it was a stage. Ever since I was little. I guess that’s what they call a banci. I used to do it in public (di mata masyarakat). My parents didn’t know yet, why that was in my nature (sifat). When I was little I liked to sing. When I was little, singing, dancing, they [were my] hobbies. When I was singing, it was like I was an artist (artis)! On the stage. That’s the typical experience in the life of a banci (Salah satu khas perjalanan hidup banci).

Waria of this generation also emphasise that the initial sense of becoming waria was in feelings of attraction towards boys and men during childhood and adolescence, corresponding with an understanding among waria that their increased visibility is related in some way to sexual desire. When asked when they found themselves first exhibiting the “signs of being a waria (tanda kewariaan),” most waria stated that it manifested in the form of a crush on a schoolmate, or an affair with a married teacher. Rather than seeing waria’s gender presentation as the result of an individualised understanding of sexual desire, however, I interpret it as shaped chiefly by its social reception.

Mami Maya and Ibu Nancy both suggested that waria’s visibility was the key way that their previously powerful social stigma was “eroded (terkikis).” As a result, waria expend considerable effort in cultivating their practices of déndong as appropriate according to the times and places in which they are performed. This is one reason why older waria often adopt a role of inculcating younger waria into the proper kinds of déndong in a given context. Older waria often chided younger ones fiercely for an excessively risqué outfit worn in the wrong context. One day, as I was visiting a friend, I watched a young waria climb onto the back of a motorbike wearing a very short skirt. My friend caught a glimpse of her exposed backside from inside her house, and ran outside yelling: “What kind of déndong is this! In a kampung, during the day. Oh the shame! (Déndong apa ini! Ini kampung lho. Ah malu deh).” In urban Indonesia, including both Yogyakarta and Jakarta, the kampung is considered a space which might be characterised as private; as an extension of the home. For example, it is a common sight in kampung to see women who would otherwise conform to strict rules governing modesty to walk around in their pyjamas. This stress on visibility in terms of the audience that it is performed for corresponds with the fact that I have never heard of a waria who

15 The Indonesian word artis refers to music and television personalities that most people have relationships to only through the mass media.
wishes to demás in the ways described earlier in this chapter on her own. Waria may wear a duster (a kind of nightgown commonly worn by middle aged women) or pyjamas around the house, much like women of their own age, but this is not usually referred to as a form of demás. As a result, demás appears to be understood among waria in terms of its relationship to its wider public.

Marie, a fifty-year old waria in Yogyakarta, also described the situational forms of demás in terms of its relationship to its audience. She decided to write down various experiences from her own life over the course of several months as a contribution to my thesis (Figure 3.18). In her written texts, she focused closely on the complex negotiations of the social reception of demás and the contexts in which it might occur. During one of my visits, she presented me with a story about a waria who practiced demás to busk and entertain in order to make money. Even as this fact was well known to her neighbours and family, at home “his wife and child call him Bapak.” Another similar story concerns a waria who would nyébong to support her family, a fact that was ostensibly “unknown to them.” Yet another recounted a waria whose own father would attend nyébong and partake in transactional sex, while enjoying himself as though “nothing was wrong.” In these and many other examples, demás may reflect already present “characteristics (sifat),” but these depend fundamentally on the audience to whom it is visible. This particular script perhaps suggests its most exaggerated form: an upstanding father at home, and a waria at night. Yet the father in Marie’s story is not simply acting as a waria in order to make money. Nor is his practice of demás representing an inner self that cannot fully articulate when he is with family due to repercussions. Rather, the body here might be understood as a medium that can cultivate new forms of subjectivity.17

16 We had joked that her life as she told it was so exciting that it could be made into a film script. As a result, she ended up writing down her life stories for me in English, which we agreed I would write out and make widely available in some format. I have transcribed the stories as closely as possible to the original, while paraphrasing and making corrections for clarity.

17 This bears a close resemblance with Saba Mahmood’s (2005) description of the role that the body plays in cultivating piety in the Egyptian context (see Chapter 1).
This is exemplified dramatically by those who have turned or moved away completely from the *waria* world. Given that becoming *waria* is based on recognition in social worlds such as *nyébong*, ceasing to perform *déndong* in public with other *waria* appears to make other forms of affiliation and recognition available in old age. I observed that older *waria* seemed more easily accepted by their families, who used kin-based terms of address commensurate with their age to address their *waria* relative such as “uncle (*om*),” “older brother (*kakak*)” and so on. This is not to say that such individuals are no longer considered to be *waria*, but that they are able to switch between forms of recognition depending on their audience.

Such transformations do not only take place across the span of the life course, however, but even in the course of a single day. This is illustrated by another of Marie’s stories, in which she explains the significant of a neighbour’s term of address in terms of the time of day that they would meet on the street. She wrote:

> I have a funny neighbour, in daylight she called me “Mas” [a Javanese term of address for men, literally older brother], but when the evening comes, she called me “Mbak” [Javanese term of address for women, literally older sister].

At that time, many people called me “Mbak” (from old men to kids) except for school mates and close friends, but now there are only a few who still call me “Mbak,” [because] my appearance is like what I now am (wearing casual [clothes]). I am OK [with] what anybody calls me, that real me, and [when they do] they seem [to] call me “Mbak” sincerely, and I am sure that they know what I am inside.
In this narrative, Marie’s neighbour associates the shift from evening and night with Marie’s transformation into the visible femininity of déndong, articulated here through a clever switch from the use of “mas (brother)” to “mbak (sister)” at around dusk. I speculate that while this neighbour is playing on previously seeing Marie in déndong at night when she was heading out to nyébong, it also suggests the profoundly situational nature of gendered embodiment in the Indonesian context.

The other important point in this story is that Marie’s age results in fewer people referring to her with feminine terms of address, or recognising her socially as a waria; the implication in the use of “Mas” by neighbours is social recognition of Marie’s masculinity. As mentioned earlier, less visible waria who only rarely déndong or nyébong due to their age, often place a greater stress on a femininity “inside” or narratives of past practices as more meaningful to their sense of self. In Marie’s case, when she was young she was by all accounts considered waria at “day and night, at home or in public” (Boellstorff 2005, 171). In her fifties, with only very subtle signs of physical femininity, remembering her neighbour’s play on gendered terms of address recalls both past practices of déndong and its relationship to previous participation in nyébong. Yet these memories mean that, as Marie explains, that “they know what I am.” That physical, visible signs of femininity might come and go is comfortably acknowledged both by waria and their neighbours. Thus understood, waria’s déndong reflects not only gender presentation but relate to the place, time, age and social setting in which it is performed. This helps to explain why déndong is so important to waria when they are younger, but becomes less significant as they grow older.

**Gender as Embodied Work**

In this chapter I have defined the relationship between déndong and understandings of becoming waria as practices that relate to forms of visibility for a particular audience. In particular, I have emphasised the sites and practices which are important to waria. I thus interpret déndong not as a practice that reflects a desire to articulate an inner sense of who one is — related to either gender or sexual identity, or a combination of the two — but rather as a form of embodied work that serves to reveal the potential of a given individual. Logically, it follows that each waria understands her own performance of déndong as something which is completely unique. No two waria are quite the same. What emerges is an embodiment that reflects above all the importance of bonds with other waria. I have considered both the importance of various audiences, and the different kinds of déndong that waria cultivate with reference to them. I have described how, although waria might espouse an ideal of a refined and restrained femininity, what they actually practice is a form of spectacular visibility closely associated with public and transactional sexuality with which they are widely associated in Indonesia. This relationship to public sexuality relies on transformations of class and gender that took place during the course of the New Order.

The specific understandings of gendered embodiment among waria, I contend, is the product of the relatively recent transformations linking gender normative masculinity and femininity to middle class
status into a context where the gendered body is more often thought of as the product of the work of others. The emphasis that waria place on the glamorous bodily transformations of dêndong appear superficially at least to mimic a Western concern for “masks and appearances” (Gundle 2008, 10): a concern for gender presentation as exteriority to the mind’s interiority. However, I have reflected on the glamour of dêndong as an important reflection of relationships between waria. These common, everyday practices among waria — exceeding any simple categorisation as femininity or masculinity — serve as an important reminder of just how incomplete and unruly processes of aligning gender normativity with class-based norms are. At the same time, powerful efforts to naturalise the meanings of masculinity and femininity as both enduring and dichotomous qualities of personhood have contributed to waria’s contemporary experiences of marginality in Indonesia.

I have suggested that waria understandings of the meanings of both femininity and visibility must be understood in light of the emergence of new narrative forms offered by the mass media. I illustrated this through Shirley’s photographic archive, made up almost exclusively of images of individual waria in dêndong. The interaction between the modern technologies of the camera and regional histories relating the body to its social audience plays a fundamental role in structuring the importance of visibility to waria. As a result, performances of dêndong and understandings of becoming waria correspond with understandings of personhood which see the body as liable to influence by outside forces. In suggesting the historical specificity of dêndong among waria during the New Order, I have touched on its relationship to mass media technologies, more specifically the “televisuality” (Strassler 2009, 75; Shiraishi 1997, 91) which characterised the beginning of the New Order. In the following chapter, I turn to squarely consider the relationship between femininity, work and the mass media among waria. In doing so I return to the puzzle introduced in Chapter 1 of why it is that waria insist that they only emerged in the late 1960s, and why they distance themselves from forms of male-bodied femininity that existed prior to this.
Chapter 4: The Value of Transgender
– Work and Waria Gender Performance

A common theme among the waria narratives that I have introduced so far in this thesis is the emphasis that they place on a relationship to work. Both seventy-year-old Shirley and forty-eight-year-old Noni first began to cultivate a stylised femininity only upon spending time at a waria’s salon; until that point they understood themselves only as “banci kalèng (empty banci).” A crucial aspect of “becoming waria (jadi waria)” is an experience of labour in a salon together with other waria. Both in the salon and in other contexts, I have emphasised the importance of waria’s gender performances in relation to the audience for whom it is performed. The pleasure that waria find in accomplishing femininity is closely tied to the fact that it is visible to others; whether it be an immediate audience of other waria and men at nyèbong, or the mass public of the nation beamed through television screens.

An important place where waria have found work and visibility has been the Indonesian national mass media, including in film and on television. Waria continue to be represented on television fairly consistently, albeit not always in positive or flattering terms. For example, scholars have tended to lament the common depiction of “banci” and “kebancibancian (playing banci)” on television as “inept larrikins” (Davies 2010, 105) as perpetuating negative stereotypes which results in greater stigmatisation. While sympathetic to these concerns, waria themselves often remark how much they enjoy these depictions, suggesting that it represents their humour as a special skill to a wide audience.
(see also Murtagh 2014, 36). It also suggests that waria (and the broader Indonesian public) can and do separate waria as individuals out from these situational performances, which hinges on subtle yet crucial differences in terminology between “banci” and waria. While the New Order state asserted the universal claims of science and medicine as solutions to all kinds of problems, expert knowledge never achieved an enormous level of influence on everyday Indonesian understandings of gender and sexuality. The transnational circulation of scientific knowledge about gender introduced in Chapter 2 therefore cannot account entirely for waria’s gender performances and subjective understandings of the self. Rather, both the new forms of labour available in a consumer capitalist economy and growing mass media were a crucial shaping force in waria’s everyday performances of femininity during the New Order.

The widespread “commodification of modern norms of feminine beauty” (Jackson 2009, 360) resulted in widely observed forms of transgender femininity throughout Southeast Asia from the 1960s onwards. In both Thailand and the Philippines, modern performances of male-bodied femininity have drawn on modern, Western forms of expertise to cultivate moral status at least since a period contemporary with the Indonesian New Order. Peter Jackson (2003, point 92) describes the Thai context from the 1960s onwards as follows:

The distinctive ways that power was deployed in the Thai self-civilising response to the challenges of Western imperialism have produced a society in which the surface effect of feminine beauty is valorised while the sex or body upon which that effect is realised, while not ignored or unremarked, has little impact on aesthetic appreciation. (ibid.)

In the Philippines, Fanella Cannell (1999) describes “transvestite (bakla)” as “ mediums” who channel the power of the West through the “wrapping of the body in symbols of protective status” (ibid., 223). However, in referring to bakla femininity in terms of a “capitalist task of the production of the self” (1999, 226) Cannell’s account suggest that their efforts to be modern can only be understood in terms of their isolation from mainstream society (see also Benedicto 2014, 87). Indonesia also shares with other parts of Southeast Asia the fact that male-bodied and transgender femininity has more recently been a source of national political anxiety about the suitable performance of modern masculinity (Käng 2012; Boellstorff 2004). While the Indonesian context shares some similarities with other parts of Southeast Asia, however, waria’s enduring relationship to national modernity also suggests notable differences.

Indonesia’s waria, while similarly preoccupied with bodily transformations, do not only stress a relationship to the West or individualistic self-cultivation, but also emphasise the arduous labour that they perform as a way to obtain the morally worthy good deeds known as prestasi. Although waria

1 The best example of a much loved performer was Olga Syahputra, who consistently drew the ire of the Indonesian broadcasting commission for his performances of dendong. When he died at the age of 32 in 2015, I was amazed at the overwhelming solemn grieving and respect shown to a character more known for his frivolity and humour. Waria’s own enjoyment of these performances makes the state broadcasting commission’s ban on performances of male-bodied femininity (kebancibancian) and, more recently LGBT, particularly lamentable (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia (Indonesian Broadcasting Commission) 2016, 2008).
sometimes explicitly index the centrality of national belonging (Boellstorff 2007, 105) acts of prestasi usually surface in more implicit ways. Although waria say that they have an underlying predisposition to feminine beauty because of their “woman’s soul (jiwa)” they require a good deal of “polish (permak)” to draw make it visible. For example, in a newspaper article in 1979, a waria outlined four categories of waria defined according to principles of “expertise (keahlian)” and “beauty (kecantikan).” She was reported to have said:

High class wadam, who work as designers and who have a high position, those who have enough expertise and work in salons, and as artists and so on, those who are pretty (cantik cantik) but don’t have any expertise, and those wadam who don’t have a pretty face and don’t have any skills. (Kompas 1979b)

This suggests how, from the late 1960s and intensifying in the late 1970s, the value of waria has been measured in relation to their ability to fulfil globalised norms of feminine beauty. Such a relationship to expert femininity suggests the importance of understanding waria’s willingness to “be cultivated (di bina)” into productive members of capitalist national society, as part of an effort to direct them towards an elusive “stable” gender presentation. It is this relationship between self-cultivation and largely implicit desires for national belonging via acts of prestasi in various sites that is the central focus of this chapter.

This chapter describes prestasi by observing the historical relationship between waria gender performances and forms of work related to the cultivation of feminine beauty — which frequently relate to the mass media — from the late 1960s to the present day. I draw on diverse examples, ranging from beauty contests in the late 1960s, performance groups in the 1970s and documentaries about transgender I observed during fieldwork in the 2010s. In this chapter I most forcefully bring together data collected through a range of research methods, holding together oral history, archival research and participant observation in the same frame.

This approach enables an understanding of the stress that waria place on work as a product of national histories of class aspiration, claims for citizenship, and gender performativity in Indonesia. I first introduced prestasi in Chapter 2 as the performative good deeds oriented towards claims for national belonging. As visible everyday claims for recognition, prestasi often takes place through forms of work through which waria are visibly recognisable. Forms of respectable work frequently double as prestasi more generally because of the emphasis on both productivity and consumption in discourse about citizenship in Indonesia. The historical perspective offered here suggests a number of transformations in waria’s understandings of the transformative potential of prestasi throughout the New Order and during the post-authoritarian period. I have found that although opportunities for waria to accomplish state-sanctioned prestasi are diminishing in the post-authoritarian period (after 1998), this has not reduced its importance to them. Rather, waria seek to achieve prestasi in new ways and for new audiences: not only as a way to accumulate economic capital, but with the increasingly fraught aim of a visibility that — while certainly connecting them to a global imaginary — also sustains their belonging to national society.
A more recent influence on waria gender performances, with which I opened the introduction to this thesis, has been representations made about transgender for global media markets in Indonesia.\(^2\) Appearing in the current climate of popular interest in both transgender and LGBT since the late 2000s, journalists and others travel around the world to make documentaries, photographs, and films about those whom they identify as belonging to the category. An increasing number of productions, which focus almost exclusively on waria, are made in Indonesia. This is most probably because of Indonesia’s history of visible vernacular forms of gender and sexual diversity, and greater ease of access since the end of the New Order. It also appears related to the increased visibility of transgender as a political movement globally, and the emergence of a number of regional and global organisations promoting waria’s relationship to it. My own role as a researcher working on waria placed me in an ambiguous position in the context of these media representations, a feeling that was particularly pronounced because the cities of Yogyakarta and Jakarta are also the most commonly visited by journalists and filmmakers. On average about four foreign journalists and countless Indonesian journalists visited the city each month during the period that I was there.\(^3\) While most came only once, asked a set list of questions, and then left, each was anticipated eagerly by my waria friends, who enthusiastically invited me to observe, participate, and document the productions made.

The recent growth of mass media interest in transgender rests on the labour of individuals such as waria, which results in economic exchanges and representations which are certainly exploitative and objectionable. However, the historical relationship to forms of labour related to feminine beauty — and a resemblance with historical forms of prestasi during the New Order — means that for waria, documentaries about transgender are an important way to extend claims for citizenship onto the global stage. When reflecting on their willingness to partake in documentaries for Western audiences, waria often described the following reasons: that it offers a platform to describe their existing accomplishments, it extends their visibility, and it provides a reasonable income. In short, the meaning of appearing in Western mass media about transgender to waria can only be understood in terms of their understanding of it as prestasi. Accordingly, waria understandings of the value of their labour as a form of prestasi both challenges the superficiality of some media representations and offers an insight into the emergent global effects of the category transgender. Historicising waria’s involvement in this representational landscape in terms of dominant New Order discourse about citizenship also offers a theoretical framework for considering how transgender is shaping local forms of gender and sexual diversity, both in Indonesia and elsewhere.

\(^2\) My use of transgender throughout this chapter is devoted to unpacking its meanings as understood by waria. I am not suggesting that these documentaries are in any way endorsed by transgender organisations or individuals, but rather, it is the chief discourse through which waria come to understand themselves in relation to transgender. This is because waria chiefly understand gender performances in terms of its relationship to visibility, rather than interior identity.

\(^3\) I observed in detail the filming of eight professional productions in Indonesia, informally interviewed two Western journalists, and spoke with the waria subjects of these films while filmmaking was under way and after the fact. I witnessed the production of about twenty professional and amateur films, documentaries, and photography features over hundreds of hours.
Work and *Prestasi* as Forms of Self-Cultivation

*Waria*’s stress on the visibility of *dèndong*, the performances of femininity introduced in the previous chapter, offers them the opportunity to perform the visibility that they enjoy and serves as a conduit for accomplishing *prestasi*. Ibu Nancy and Mami Maya both reiterated their firm belief that a relationship to a skilfully performed, modern femininity is what has allowed *waria* to achieve “acceptance (*penerimaan masyarakat*)” within Indonesian society. Ibu Nancy explained the desired effect of this cultivated femininity as the achievement of a “stable” gender presentation:

This is because *waria* are born as men. And to live as a woman is to live with a contradiction within your body. From your nature (*sifat*), style (*gaya*) and everything else, how on earth should we present ourselves? How should we live a worthy life like a woman? What there is, there comes a time to make yourself more feminine (*peminim*), and this is not spontaneous. And so, those *waria* who are still dressing up with a style that isn’t yet stable (*belum stabil*) like a woman, this is what becomes an issue in society (*masyarakat*).

Her emphasis on stability here suggests that an important aspect of *prestasi* is concerned with finding a route through which individual *waria* can submit themselves to state expertise. It also helps to explain the motivating logic behind *prestasi* for *waria* more generally: if they can find a way to reconcile the process of becoming *waria* with middle class norms of behaviour and self-presentation, then they might somehow achieve widespread social acceptance. In this regard, *prestasi* has been a successful strategy, and many *waria* are understood by neighbours and families to have accumulated considerable social and economic capital.

It should be clear, however, that *waria*’s gender presentation is not easily wed to Indonesian middle class standards of comportment and morality. It has required considerable disciplinary work to achieve. This is especially so given that a sense of “becoming *waria* (*jadi waria*)” relies as much on public image as it does participation in “backstage” (Goffman 1952, 69) behaviour and social relationships; historically closely associated with participation in the social settings at locations for glamorous *dèndong* and transactional sex introduced in the previous chapter (*nyébong*). This relationship to negative visibility is the reason why senior *waria* reiterate that *waria* need to cultivate a relationship with respectable forms of visibility, usually through fields related to beauty and the mass media. This strategy explains why *waria* have a long association of making claims to national belonging via individual acts of *prestasi* in fields of work related to the cultivation of modern beauty, such as salons and performance. This historical association between employment and *prestasi*, in turn, is part of why my informants see appearing in documentaries made by foreign journalists as desirable and enjoyable forms of employment — often because it is senior *waria* who organise and deploy their labour for this purpose to begin with.

Given the age of my informants, most did not in fact maintain consistent or full-time employment, and lived day-to-day on small amounts of money. In this regard, older *waria* are little different from their neighbours of around the same age in the lower class neighbourhoods that they live in, the main difference being that *waria* as a whole tend to live on their own rather than as part of a nuclear family.
Younger waria, by contrast, work long hours at nightclubs, salons or in any number of roles at local and national NGOs, and usually sustain some participation in nyébong. While waria do frequently work in these fields, skills for which they have obtained a somewhat formidable reputation, it is also common for waria to work in jobs at which they are not able to déndong; for example, my informants described how they had worked in a range of jobs, including as bakery staff, cooks and cleaners (pembantu). One waria told me that the latter kind of employment in middle class households allowed for an effeminate comportment that verged on, but was not quite, a form of déndong. It is also notable that numerous waria engage in extramarital affairs with male employers in the course of employment, suggesting the various ways in which sexuality is entangled with experiences of feminised labour.  

My interest here is in the considerable negotiation of appropriate gender performance required of waria who work in fields of employment outside of those with which they are commonly associated. This is not to say that gender presentation forms an insurmountable problem, or that employers always have the last word. Particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, it appears that waria exercised significant agency in terms of feminine dress at workplaces with otherwise strictly gendered codes of attire, a spirited defiance reflected in the common refrain among waria of this generation: “It is up to waria ourselves” (tergantung waria kita sendiri).” One sixty-year-old waria in Yogyakarta explained how, as a school teacher employed by the education department sent to a remote island in eastern Indonesia in the 1980s, she was instructed to wear a standard male uniform. She told me that she ignored these requests and travelled the island teaching the children in déndong, all the while accruing the prestasi that being a teacher entailed. And, Ibu Nancy explained how after she became an employee of the Jakarta Department of Social Affairs in the 1970s, she wore a woman’s uniform without resistance; she explained that this was because she had gained respect through the accumulation of prestasi.

Admittedly, waria who manage to enter the civil service were rare, and are by no means representative of most waria’s experiences of employment. The capacity of waria to challenge employers in the ways mentioned earlier is thus extremely limited. The majority of waria work in the fields of employment common to the lower classes mentioned earlier, and adapt their gender performance as the situation requires. This accounts for Shirley’s experience. When I asked Shirley whether she practised déndong at work, she responded that her employment in the catering department of the state railway meant that this was simply not possible. After all, her employment for the state railway, and the uniform that she wore while at work provided her with a degree of visibility and prestasi. She explained matter-of-factly that her body should be oriented towards her colleagues and customers when on the job. I initially thought that Shirley and other waria who could not practice

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4 It is interesting that forms of work related to beauty among waria commonly involve forms of paid and unpaid sexual or erotic intimacy which tend to be shrouded in euphemisms. For example, “a facial” is a euphemism for oral sex in some waria-run salons (particularly among waria from north Sumatra); and in discussions with elderly members of the dance troupe the “Fantastic Dolls” some said with a smile that their audiences (often members of the military) commonly wanted to “try (coba)” them, given that they were a “rare specialty.”
déndong in the line of work would understand this as a burden, and accordingly that it would reduce their capacity to obtain prestasi. However, for waria in this position, understanding of the relationship between visibility and prestasi accomplished through employment was considerably more complex. Shirley, for example, considered her employment for a state company as a source of considerable pride and prestasi in itself, even though she could not practice déndong at work.

At the same time, Shirley also understood the need to balance her capacity to accomplish individual prestasi with the need to articulate “bonds of reciprocal dependence” (Goffman 1952, 51) with other waria, given the central position that such sociality occupied for her. Shirley made no attempt to distance herself from the fact that she had become a waria, even as she conceded that she could not appear in déndong while she was at work. She emphasised that everybody, including her own manager, knew she was waria anyway:

At night as well, I would take my friends who worked on the railway [to show them nyëbong]. My friends who worked for the railway, they all knew. I’ve even been seen by my friends [in déndong]. Working for the railways, there were gays, there were banci as well.

After all, she asked: why would they care? Shirley’s explanation here appears to reflect widespread understandings that the body is oriented towards its audience in Indonesia, a view recently reiterated by Sharyn Davies (2010, 21). Based on research in Sulawesi, Davies writes: “the physical body is of utmost importance and cannot be superseded by quotidian practices” (see also Errington 1989, 185). As such, waria’s concern for visibility — which they see both in negative and positive terms — cannot be explained through the pejorative relationship in Western culture linking male-bodied femininity to homosexuality and a fundamentally compromised status of person (Valentine 2007; Newton 1979, 32). Rather, different kinds of déndong performed for different audiences suggests a process through which certain social relationships are activated and others deactivated. As such, glamorous forms of déndong are acceptable within certain situations, but to practice it across all settings would be to turn away from the dominant social order. Shirley did not perform déndong at work, yet stressed the importance of her work as an accomplishment of individual prestasi. At the same time, she explained that each and every colleague knew where and for what purposes she would go dressed in déndong of an evening. This reflects a considerable degree of difference between waria’s understanding of gender performance and Western models based on authenticity and interiority; waria are simply not concerned with “a discrepancy between fostered appearances and its reality” (Goffman 1952, 38). Given this understanding of gender performances among waria, the positive visibility attributed to prestasi can only be understood at the moment of its performance and the reception of that performance by its intended audience.

As a result of this common understanding among waria that their bodies are oriented towards their audiences, I expected that they would understand prestasi as to do with advancing their status as a group. However, I found that individual waria do not automatically tie their own accomplishment of prestasi to that of waria as a whole. I was initially surprised when, in spite of the emphasis that she
had placed on establishing opportunities for waria to train in certain professions during the 1960s and 1970s, Mami Maya emphasised that her success was something that reflected well on her, but not necessarily on waria as a whole. She explained: “There are lots of different waria (waria itu masing masing)! Some steal (nyolong), some live a good life (kehidupan yang baik). It all depends on the waria herself (tergantung waria diri sendiri). These are my own skills (ketrampilan saya pribadi).”

This suggests that the overall concern with respect to accomplishing prestasi among waria is the cultivation of sense of responsibility an individual requires to submit to forms of state expertise: a subject of “development-in-miniature” (Boellstorff 2005, 212).

Understanding waria as a “team of performers” (Goffman 1952, 152) in the eyes of wider society also helps to explain why, despite being fundamentally oriented towards their audience, waria see prestasi as an individualistic form of self-cultivation. In the previous chapter, I introduced Erving Goffman’s (ibid., 152) understanding of a “team of performers” as a group of individuals defined as having certain shared characteristics by a particular audience. This, in turn, results in a shared sentiment of belonging to a team. As a team in the eyes of wider Indonesian society, waria seek to project a “given definition of the situation” (ibid., 64), usually by stressing their capacity to be good citizens in relation to skilful performances of femininity. For waria, it is this visibility as a team in the eyes of wider Indonesian society that consolidates an understanding that they are bound by “bonds of reciprocal dependence” (ibid., 51). Waria frequently speak of these bonds, often in negative terms, as having an exceptionally “thick (kental)” consistency — while difficult to escape from, it also offers support in times of need. As a result, waria only see themselves as a group insomuch that they are recognised as such by an audience; this is what results in a “familiarity” characterised by an “intimacy without warmth” (ibid., 69) among them. By this I mean that waria’s relationship to one another is established not only through personal relationships, but also through a tacit sense of their shared visibility to wider Indonesian society. The possibilities for recognition are particularly complicated among waria because of the way that attempts at “impression management” (Goffman 1952, 70) through prestasi also rely on a disavowal of the very practices that make “becoming waria (jadi waria)” possible. The accomplishment of prestasi by a waria might result in positive visibility and thus recognition by national society, but in some ways it also marks a departure from team membership as waria, in the eyes of both her audience and of herself.
Retaining a sense of oneself as waria thus relies on eschewing complete submission to state expertise through prestasi, and allowing a certain amount of “backstage” (ibid., 69) behaviour to slip through and be seen by a wider audience. These everyday performances among waria resemble historical understandings of male-bodied femininity in Java which stress the juxtaposition of high and low status, and masculine and feminine gender presentation, rather than the transcendence of one over the other (Anderson 1972, 14). To this end, waria often deliberately shatter the very impression of refined, cultivated femininity that they strive so hard to foster. I often listened as waria reiterated the importance of prestasi to them, even as they reminded me of their participation in the kinds of behaviour that undid all of these efforts.

The relationship between desires for prestasi and performances which undermine it was demonstrated to at an official meeting about HIV prevention in Yogyakarta. This meeting was typical of Indonesian meetings of their kind; a stuffy formality in which the form of the event seemed more important than its content. It was at such a meeting that a waria decided, in the course of a tenuously related discussion about condom distribution, to take charge of the marker and list each and every sexual position that she knew on the board (Figure 4.2). This is not the kind of space where such matters are discussed so frankly; indeed, the extent of the vocabulary was met with surprise by those attending the meeting. However, indicating that waria are granted far more leeway than other Indonesians in matters of sexuality, this waria was in no way reprimanded, and the attending officials laughed along as she wrote the terms up with an accompanying simulation of the act. The close relationship between
“becoming waria (jadi waria)” and a deeply situational understanding of gender performance — an inability in a sense to completely align one’s gender presentation with one’s subjectivity — means that efforts towards prestasi among waria are performed in the shadow of this contradiction. In a sense, the more prestasi that an individual waria obtains and the more “stable” they become, the less she might be seen (and sees herself) as a waria at all.5

Given the overwhelming stress on normativity in Indonesia, the tolerance for waria’s visibility that emerged during the New Order can be explained by the acceptance of their pathological status and apparent willingness to submit to the will of the state. It is through the practice of striving to accomplish modern norms of feminine beauty on a daily basis that waria understand themselves as accumulating prestasi. Even if they fail to fully accomplish these norms, in trying again the next day they are able to accumulate more prestasi. This is because, in their failure, waria signal that they require yet more training and disciplining by the state. In the following section, I continue to interrogate the importance of prestasi as a means by which waria seek to obtain national belonging. I do so by describing the historical process, in the early part of the New Order, through which waria’s relationship to development became linked so closely to cultivation of the self.

Waria Beauty in the New Order

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5 The relationship between waria and class is also indicated by the fact that very famous people who at some point identified as waria, such as the celebrity Dorce Gamalama or the entrepreneur Chenny Han, find it difficult to continue to identify as waria once they have become successful. Dorce Gamalama (2005, 60) writes of her desire to no longer be understood as a waria at all. She writes: “Waria or bencong are no different from other marginalised groups, like street children, or the homeless.”
Femininity is a central site where globalised norms of beauty and civilisational status are refracted and contested in relation to shared cultural identity (Ochoa 2014; Cannell 1999; Johnson 1997; Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje 1996). Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje (1996, 2) link the widespread global emergence of beauty pageants to gendered assertions about national modernity, even as they open up “these same values and goals to interpretation and challenge.” This is the case in Southeast Asia, where a period of rapid modernisation from the 1960s onwards was met with a remarkable growth in transgender femininity and the establishment of locations for its cultivation and performance. As Peter Jackson (2003) observes in the Thai context, the sex of the person performing femininity has at times mattered very little compared with their ability to accomplish certain aesthetic standards associated with Western modernity.

Such performances of male-bodied femininity also appear to reflect long regional histories that hold that gender is considered the result of effort expended onto the body over time, rather than an identity that is secured at birth through biological sex alone.6 This resembles the view of classical Javanese understandings of personhood, in which maintaining a “refined (alus)” outer comportment (lahir) will serve to accomplish an alus inner subjectivity (batin) (Geertz 1976, 232). It is the capacity to consistently reiterate a polished self, in this view, that generates the grounds for inner transformation. This historical relationship between outer appearances and subjectivity is perhaps one reason why waria have consistently articulated claims for social acceptance based on their capacity to skilfully manufacture modern femininity. The question remains, however, how it is that these attributes, practices, states of embodiment and forms of subjectivity have come to gathered together and understood in terms of a stable sense of “gender” as characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity at all in the Indonesian context.

The emergence of a consumer capitalist culture and stress on development in the early New Order led to rapid transformations in the meanings associated with Indonesian femininity and masculinity. An increased stress on visible markers of gender in everyday life, such as uniforms for civil servants and representations within state and popular discourse (Schulte Nordholt 1997), served to strengthen the meanings linking heteronormative masculinity and femininity to circumscribed social roles. At precisely the moment when state ideology was becoming increasingly proscriptive, modern forms of entertainment and consumption served as a conduit for new possibilities for gender presentation.7 The very first waria organisations of the early 1970s onwards recognised early on the possibility that they could leverage their established relationship to modern femininity in order to win social recognition

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6 Anthropological accounts around the world have illustrated how the biological task of reproduction predicated on sex is not enough to accomplish femininity (or masculinity): other forms of work, which shift according to age and social status, are also required (Blackwood 1984; Whitehead 1981).

7 Ariel Heryanto (2008, 1999) has described the enormous impact of consumer capitalism and mass media on popular culture in Indonesia during and after the New Order.
and acceptance. Descriptions of waria, in both popular and expert realms, often made reference to their relationship to work in the beauty industry.

This is reflected in waria’s insistence that they possess unique skills which are of value to the nation: they are able to curate masculinity and femininity in line with ideals linking heteronormativity to the potential for Indonesia’s national development. Ibu Nancy explained that waria’s expertise in femininity is why “people prefer to be served by waria.” She explained:

> The work (karianya) of waria goes to greater limits (lebih limit) and is better, because we do it with taste. We love this work totally (kita mencintai pekerjaan itu dengan total). That’s why, people are really happy with the result.

Ibu Nancy emphasised that the “acceptance (pengakuan)” that waria enjoy today is the direct result of “work (karyanya kita) in society (di masyarakat) so that society knows that many waria are interested in salons, in beauty, are experts (ahli) in fields of fashion, design and others.” As a result of the early efforts of waria, knowledge about them circulated not only through a pathologising state discourse but in terms of increasingly common appearances at the intersection of modern femininity and transnational forms of mass media: cabaret, dance, film, television, commercial advertising, salon, fashion design, and weddings (Murtagh 2013; Davies 2010, 46; Boellstorff 2007, 88; 2005, 143; Blackwood 2005, 849). Thus, the mass media served as a way to draw on new symbolic resources to craft the body, refracting globalised norms of modern masculinity and femininity in line with a distinctive national modernity in the process.

At the opening of the inaugural Jakarta Fair in July 1968, President Suharto himself announced the importance of a “peoples’ recreation (rekreasi bagi masyarakat)” based on consumerism which would serve “progress and the development of the economy” (Suharto 1968). Waria emerged as visible figures associated with this new state-sanctioned consumerism: the first Jakarta Fair included waria performers, and there was a themed bar called Paradise Hall in which all the employees were waria (Varia 1968; Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b). The weekly tabloid Varia (1968) announced sensationally that: “They think of themselves as 100% women,” and “there are even banci intellectuals and academics.” It was in this context that waria performances emerged in the mass media, at times sponsored directly by government trade investment boards (Darmadi 1969; Kompas 1969, Varia 1968).

The relationship between waria and transnational modernity also facilitated the possibility for them to find employment in increasing numbers of nightclubs and bars in Jakarta, itself linked to a rapidly expanding sex work economy (Dhakidae 1976). Around 1969 the Jakarta government began to loosen previously tight restrictions on entertainment venues, legalising nightclubs, casinos, and established a number of locations where female sex work was more or less permitted by the authorities. In this

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8 By the early 1970s, a number of designated locations for sex work had been established in Jakarta (Sedyaningsih-Mamahit 1999b, 1102). Similar to waria, female sex workers have since this time been subject to police raids and moralistic rehabilitation campaigns that combine religious principles with vocational development. Sedyaningsih-Mamahit’s (1999a)
environment *waria* set up their own, more visible locations for *nyébong* on street corners and in city parks. While subject to periodic police raids, many *tempat nyébong* remain in some form in these locations to the present day (see Chapter 3). The general sentiment appears to have been that these eroticised aspects of modernity, while not necessarily desirable, were inseparable from a broader pursuit of development. The beginning of what *waria* call their “golden age” was therefore one of unprecedented growth in consumer capitalist spaces for consumption and work.

It was also in this period that both foreign and Indonesian films, and cinemas to watch them in, flourished after a period of decline (Hanan 1993, 90). Indonesian films were subject to strict state censorship from the pre-production stage but, as Krisna Sen (1993, 124) notes, the censor’s lack of interest in gender allowed “films to use female characters to express a certain amount of critical opinion.” However, the mass media did not only enable new representations of women, but for the adaptation and transformation of the symbols associated with femininity and masculinity more broadly. As early at the beginning of the 1970s, the media described gender performances as a sign of social change; common reports emerged of young people wearing “half-female costume” or simulating “sexual intercourse with a group of young transvestites” (Anderson 1990, 186–187). As Benedict Anderson (1990, 186) notes, these public expressions of gender transgression provoked powerfully felt anxieties about the national legacy of the authoritarian regime. Yet, it appears that the understanding that an individual’s gender presentation should faithfully reflect a stable identity as a man or a woman did not appear widespread even at this time early in the New Order (Chapter 2). During this period, a contradictory set of mass media images enabled diverse representations and practices of gender to emerge, well beyond the narrow possibilities usually associated with this period of Indonesian history.

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rich ethnographic account of Kramat Tunggak (in Indonesian), the largest of these locations, provides a rare historical perspective on the alignment of punishment and care in class terms in Indonesia.
The press photographs of a 1969 waria beauty contest, the “Queen of the Imitation Girls (Ratu Wadam),” indicates the role that waria played linking self-cultivation to the competent performance of gender in the early New Order. The winner of the competition clasps a large trophy, a symbol that is still associated with prensasi in Indonesia (Figure 4.3, Figure 4.4). She wears a crown and cape, evoking an American beauty pageant of the 1950s. The other contestants are equally stylishly adorned, with skilfully applied makeup, glamorous clothing and fabulously coiffed hair. The timing is notable, considering that it was only one year earlier that the official Miss Indonesia herself had participated in an international beauty contest for the first time, projecting a vision of Indonesian national modernity onto the global stage (Pausacker 2015, 275). As Helen Pausacker (ibid., 278) writes, the early Miss Indonesia reflected tensions over the suitable translation of modern femininity into the national context, resulting in a contradictory combination of “tightly fitted traditional costumes” and bare-legged bathing suits were deemed acceptable for public consumption. The period between 1968 and the mid-1970s saw an enormous growth in competitions and other sites which linked gender performances closely to forms of self-cultivation.9 In the decades that followed, a broad consensus was reached that public displays of eroticised femininity were not compatible with Indonesian national culture; this was first reflected in a 1978 government decision that Indonesian

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9 In the course of researching waria participation in beauty pageants, I noted the vast growth in different kinds of competitions for men and women more generally between 1968 and 1973. These included competitions held by universities, commercial magazines, and provincial governments. The historical relationship between these events as prensasi and national ideals of gender normativity (for men as well as waria) in Indonesia is an important topic for future research.
beauty queens should no longer attend international contests (Pausacker 2015, 280; see also Bellows 2011). As well as marking the end of the waria golden age, the late 1970s was the moment when waria beauty pageants too began to occupy a less visible role in Indonesian public culture than they had previously.

The rapid transformations in Indonesian femininity that took place during the early part of the New Order were indeed a product of a national modernity oriented towards development. However, Indonesian femininity cannot only be understood in relation to dominant notions of state ideology which aspired to fix women to reproduction and the private sphere (Brenner 1999, 1998). I suggest that waria’s capacity to skilfully cultivate forms of modern beauty from the late 1960s onwards suggests some of the more unruly possibilities offered by femininity during this period; gender as forms of corporeality that are always already shaped by a transnational “universe of symbolic resources” (Ochoa 2014, 211). Central to this focus, and a principle underpinning the thesis as a whole, is that everyday performances of gender can only be understood in terms of their relevance to those who perform it. Such a perspective, more attentive to the embodied work of gender, further refutes any assertion that the femininity performed by female-bodied persons can be held apart from the femininity of male-bodied persons; a problematic distinction which continues to be implicitly maintained in most accounts of gendered modernity in Indonesia.

Marcia Ochoa’s (2014) description of the shared symbolic resources used by Venezuelan transformistas and beauty queens to accomplish femininity offers productive insights into relationship between transnational mass media technologies and the body. In Chapter 1, I introduced Ochoa’s (ibid., 203) discussion of the gendered body as engaged in “mediation,” constitutive of a “social process of becoming.” Ochoa’s concern for gender as a relational rather than individual practice shares Erving Goffman’s (1952, 152) theoretical insight that analyses of gender performances must account for the moment of their performance and of their reception; it is waria’s understanding of themselves as a “team of performers” in the eyes of wider society that makes their desire to perform prestasi meaningful. However, theoretical perspectives such as Goffman’s can only account for gender presentation insomuch that it is meaningful to and performed for other people; as a result, my account thus far has tended to insulate waria femininity from the myriad of ways that the body is materialised by (and is never prior to) culturally and historically specific discourse (Butler 1990). In overcoming this limitation, I have found Marcia Ochoa’s (2014, 202) concept of “spectacularity” a useful way to how the gender performances of waria, like all Indonesians, are inseparable from the transnational discursive vocabulary offered by mass media, technologies, capital and labour.

Although Ochoa’s theoretical perspectives are based on research conducted in the Venezuelan context, her insights are particularly well-suited to consider Indonesian national modernity during the

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10 Readers should recall that 1978 was also the year of the “seminar on gender reassignment surgery” (Majelah Kesehatan 1978), mentioned in Chapter 2. This year appears to be significant in that it marked a shift in state policies, that established the meanings of gender in terms of biological models of sex narrowly defined in terms of reproductive capacity.
New Order. Despite many differences, the emphasis on producing a coherent national identity through femininity in Venezuela is reminiscent of the dense condensation of class and racial normality that animated early anxieties about gender normativity in Indonesia (Chapter 2). Furthermore, waria gender performances during the early New Order — including the emergence of widespread beauty pageants and the opportunities for prestasi that they fostered — were established during an era that Saya Shiraishi (1997, 91) refers to as one of “televisuality” (see also Strassler 2009, 75). This particular relationship between waria gender performances and the mass media bears parallels with the Venezuelen context, where the beauty pageant took its form in the context of the popular emergence of television in particular during the 1950s (Ochoa 2014, 25). In what follows, I describe the sites and practices of waria’s performances of femininity during the New Order, reflecting on how they are “a mode of signification and performative practice that is related to mass mediation” (ibid., 202). In doing so, I consider the relationship between waria and modernity, suggesting that they have been an important figure through which transnational modes of femininity have influenced Indonesian heteronormative modernity.

**Performance Culture and the “Fantastic Dolls”**

In the context of the shaping influence of the mass media and consumer capitalism from the late 1960s onwards — and as a result the possibly of the appearance of “banci” at the first Jakarta Fair in 1968 — waria quickly came to be associated with new forms of modern entertainment. For example, Mami Maya was not only a respectable waria leader, but a well-known snake dancer; and, according
to the tabloid magazine *Varia*, the very first in Indonesia (Figure 4.5). And Ibu Nancy assured me that she did not only achieve *prestasi* through her work as a civil servant, but was also a very accomplished dancer and magician as well. Ibu Nancy was a founding member of the “Fantastic Dolls” in the late 1970s, the most famous and long lived *waria* performance group in Jakarta (Atmojo 1987, 19; *Kompas* 1982). Ibu Nancy recalled with pride the enormous popularity, glamorous reputation and high prices that the group commanded. However, the “Fantastic Dolls” are also notable because of their longevity; although their performances were increasingly sporadic, they continued to perform up until the mid-2000s, notably outlasting the New Order regime itself.

I came to understand the “Fantastic Dolls” as especially important because *waria* across each of my field sites who had lived in Jakarta fondly recalled the group’s iconic status. Most *waria* described how the “Fantastic Dolls” were the most successful effort to date to improve their image as a group within society, which had led to greater acceptance. While *waria* performances are sometimes held at gay nightclubs in Jakarta and other cities (and have been since the 1980s), *waria* seemed especially proud of the visibility that the “Fantastic Dolls” offered to wider society. Reflecting this view, Ibu Nancy was reported to have said in a newspaper article in 1990 that such performances introduced “*waria* to society (*memasyarakatkan waria*)” (*Kompas* 1990). She explained that her desire in organising performances was to “encourage *waria* to show their *prestasi*” and to “erase society’s negative image of *waria*” (*Kompas* 1990) as a result. This article also suggests the kinds of femininity that *waria* perform, offering insights into the reception of *waria* by wider society. The author of the article writes: “It feels unbelievable that some aren’t in fact women, and their makeup and style (*gaya*) are more feminine than most women.” It adds that, “there are those among them that are made up (*dandan*) as Cher, a Hollywood actress who has won an Oscar. There are those that are in the style of Boy George, the male singer from England who often dresses up as a woman.”

As an original member of the “Fantastic Dolls,” Meifie also offered rich insights into the transformation of *waria* femininity in the decade between 1968 and the 1978. A youthful sixty-nine-year old when we first met, Meifie grew up in a middle class family and developed a reputation as a skilful tailor. Her spirited sense of adventure is reflected in the fact that she travelled to and from Singapore when she was young, travelling to Johor Road to nyébong “not for money but for fun,” wearing a Kebaya so that she would “look like Miss Indonesia.”

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11 I interviewed the following Jakarta-based *waria*: Chenny Han, Ibu Nancy Iskandar, Bunda Joyce, and Meifie. There are very few written accounts of the “Fantastic Dolls” and other *waria* performance groups, including Kemala Atmojo’s illustrative journalistic account (1987, 19).

12 Johor Road and Bugis Street in Singapore were sites where many *waria* told me that they had worked as sex workers, particularly those that commuted from the nearby island of Batam in the 1990. These locations have a longer historical association with what a 1972 special report by a Singapore newspaper described as a “transvestite community” (*Joo, Khoo, and San* 1972). More research is needed on the transnational dynamics of the formation of transgender identities in Southeast Asia during this period.
pageant for women in the late 1960s. Waria’s bodies appear to have mediated transnational technologies of both beauty and medicine as they interfaced with Indonesian national modernity.

A relationship to transnational modernity was also reflected in a relationship to foreign groups who were translated as “wadam.” The French troupe “Le Carrousel” performed at venues in Jakarta a number of times around 1973 (see also Tempo 1973b) and I was told that a Philippines performance group called the “The Paper Dolls” visited Indonesia during the mid-1970s. Yet even this was subject to regional and nationalist hierarchies of modernity: Meifie recalled that the “Paper Dolls” were not as polished as waria, but were in fact “men dressed in women’s clothing,” a distinction made on the basis that they arrived at the venue in male clothing and changed into feminine garb for the show. These, according to Meifie, were banci kaléng. This is because they did not dèndong in order to cultivate a sense of their feminine soul (jiwa) as waria do, but only as part of a performance. In Meifie’s eyes, this reflected how they were less skillful at performing modern femininity than Indonesia’s waria.

In Chapter 2 I described how, between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, male-bodied femininity was transformed into a respectable and even decidedly modern possibility in Indonesia, with state and popular sources dedicated to understanding and explaining it. It was only at the end of the 1970s that the state began to place a concerted effort in securing the boundaries of masculinity in femininity in line with its scientific and technological ambitions. Waria’s response to this discourse, which rendered them overwhelmingly in pathological terms, was to stress their desire to perform acts of prestasi in order to overcome their abject status. By the late 1970s, the “Fantastic Dolls” were publicly proclaiming a relationship visible male-bodied femininity, lower class status and public sexuality; the very reasons why they needed to show that they had prestasi in the first place. It was only in the context of a growing stress on reproductive capacity during the late 1970s that understandings of waria shifted away from the possibility that in cultivating their femininity they become more feminine, to a performance of femininity which could only ever operate “in the orbit of male gendering” (Boellstorff 2007, 82). Thus, from the late 1970s onwards the possibility for waria to obtain prestasi was increasingly understood in terms of their always already incomplete status.

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13 Meifie remembered that an article was published about the incident, but I was not able to locate it. She recalled that the article appeared in a Jakarta daily newspaper and the title was: “Jury knocked out by Meifei – the 1967 Miss Selecta is a Banci (Jury di KO sama meifei – Miss Selecta 1967 Banci).” She also explained that future events placed the following restriction on contestants: “no banci can enter (banci tidak boleh ikut).”

14 A number of waria also explained that the inspiration for the “Fantastic Dolls” was in fact the “Paper Dolls,” which is suggested by the name. “Paper Dolls” is a common expression for male-bodied femininity and transgender performance in the Philippines which has its roots in a performance group from Manila (Garcia 2009, 204). Benedicto (2015) reflects on the relationship between authoritarian architecture and transgender femininity in the Philippines, with some parallels with the Indonesian context.
The “Fantastic Dolls,” established in 1977, grew out of Mami Myrna’s original performance group “The Bambang Brothers.” Mami Myrna, who was the head of the short-lived waria organisation “Hiwad” (Perhimpunan Wadam Jakarta), was notable for her appearance in a film made about Vivian Rubianti’s life (Akulah Vivian) released in 1978 (Murtagh 2013, 40). Both the “Bambang Brothers” and the “Fantastic Dolls” are best defined as cabaret or variety acts which included a range of performance, including singing, dancing, magic, striptease and comedy. A number of waria performance groups appeared in Jakarta between the late 1960s and end of the 1970s, indicating the growth of diverse spaces and audiences for the performance of waria femininity (see Figure 4.6). The performances of waria femininity performed by the “Fantastic Dolls” are considerably different to earlier efforts of waria to achieve prestasi. For example, in 1972 and 1973 the “Bambang Brothers” had stressed that their on-stage dendong is just an act; off-stage they maintained that they perform a respectable form of gender normative masculinity (Tempo 1973d, Kompas 1972). The “Fantastic Dolls,” by contrast, seem to have reformulated the performance somewhat: they reiterate that they are indeed waria off-stage, with all of the negative connotations that it brings.

Figure 4.6: Table of waria and performance groups in Jakarta, 1967-1978.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Established</th>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Founding Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Bambang Brothers</td>
<td>Myrna Bambang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Wadam All Stars</td>
<td>Myrna Bambang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Kichi Kichi Ka</td>
<td>Meife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Fantastic Dolls</td>
<td>Myrna Bambang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Golden Lady</td>
<td>Cherry Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Blue Angel</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Silver Boy</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the “Fantastic Dolls” performed their last performance in the mid-2000s, I was not able to see them in person to confirm this interpretation. Apart from photographs, newspaper reports and interviews about the group, the most revealing source that I obtained was a video of a single performance held in August 2004 at the Millenium Hotel in Jakarta. This rare record, shared with me by Ibu Nancy, provides invaluable insights into the form and content of “Fantastic Dolls” performances. Although one of the group’s final performances, it serves to illustrate the kinds of performances and audiences that the Fantastic Dolls performed for from their inception. The audience in the video appears to be a corporate or government organisation; the only notable feature is that there is a Japanese man in the audience who one waria picks on relentlessly. Waria explained that the “Fantastic Dolls” did not only rely on the performance of a normative feminine beauty, but rather emphasised the unique character of waria as a “team of performers” (Goffman 1952, 152). The most

striking aspect of the performance in this regard is that the team relies on the highly specific, situational gender performances for which waria are well known.

The performance in the video begins with a waria whose body is made up in two parts: the left side of her body is a military general in uniform (complete with moustache and beard), and the right side of her body is wearing a glamorous dëndong similar to that introduced in the previous chapter. The waria holding the microphone moves to the front of the stage, and with the side of her body decorated as a general facing the audience, drops the pitch of her voice to a gruff growl. She introduces that the “Fantastic Dolls” will offer: “Singing [low-pitched voice], dancing [high-pitched voice], joking [low-pitched voice], without nungging (exposing your backside) [high-pitched voice].” She switches to English and announces an “all Indonesian female impersonation show,” still oscillating between a low-pitched and high-pitched voice.

As the music starts, she moves her body to conceal her masculine side and expose her feminine side, raises her voice an octave, and starts to sing. A number of dance and singing routines follow; waria emerge singing in sequined evening gowns, or prancing in Brazilian carnival costumes, or shaking their bodies in garb inspired by belly dancing. There is a performance of the Indonesian popular music dangdut, but the waria performing it wears a Japanese style kimono and holds a fan. While these performances superficially resemble the kinds of drag that play on the fact that the person performing is male-bodied, I suggest that the logic that it draws upon is in fact very different. In this respect, waria performances cannot be compared with drag performances, even as they may well draw on some of its aesthetic conventions; this is not a “routine” that will “generally reveal the body beneath the clothes” (Carole-Anne Tyler 1999, 374). The emphasis on switching between masculinity and femininity is not in order to highlight the “false disguise” (Baker 1994, 15) of femininity on a male body. Rather, the performance here more closely resembles the classic juxtapositions between high (halus) and low (kasar) status long associated with male-bodied femininity in Javanese culture (Anderson 1972, 14; Peacock 1968, 206). More recently, Tom Boellstorff (2007, 97) elaborates on waria performances in terms of “playback,” a concept which he connects to “spectral” performances of selfhood where “person and persona does not line up” (ibid., 97). In the performance in the video under analysis, however, I have found that it is the jokes that waria tell which best illustrates the audience’s delight at the “Fantastic Dolls.” In light of these jokes, waria public performances of femininity appear to reveal the vexed relationship between class and self-cultivation in Indonesia during the New Order more generally.

Two examples of the humour of the “Fantastic Dolls” serves to illustrate this point. A waria walks onto the stage and asks the audience: “What is the difference between a banci and a nun?” She responds: “A nun will be very patient (tahan lama), but a banci is long lasting (lama tahan).” She then asks another: “What is the difference between stockings worn by women and stockings worn by banci?” She answers: “For women they are for containing their modesty (aurat), but for banci they are for containing their muscles (urat).” Wordplay associating waria femininity with male-bodiedness
is certainly part of the joke here. However, more important is the stress on waria's association with lower class status and forms of public sexuality which make them a “rough spot” (Peacock 1968, 203) in Indonesian society. This suggests that waria performances of prestasi rely on juxtaposing halus/kasar behaviour and lahir/batin states, rerouting them towards, and highlighting the problem of, individual self-cultivation in modernity. In doing so, they question the viability of aligning visible markers of class, race and morality — central to Indonesian modernity — within a single body at all.

State Recognition in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia

This image is only available in the print version of this thesis.
available at the Australian National University.

Figure 4.7: A sign at a competition: “Selection of the Waria Who has Prestasi” and trophies.
Jakarta, March 2015

I have described how a modicum of state support during the New Order enabled the growth of opportunities for prestasi which reflected the “high quality” (Boellstorff 2007, 105) potential of waria. Waria cleverly extended the notion of prestasi from a performance of the moral attributes of state citizenship into realms of economic and value and worth during this period; this served as a way to generate everyday social acceptance via state recognition. In post-authoritarian Indonesia after 1998, however, the state has largely retreated from public support for waria. While there are still examples of regional-level departments of social affairs and the national level department of health sponsoring waria performances and events concerning HIV prevention in particular, these are often small-scale and ambiguous affairs attended mostly by waria themselves and a few disinterested government officials.
The yearly competition of the national organisation Waria Communication Forum (Forum Komunikasi Waria) was held at the premises of the national NGO PKBI (Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia) in Jakarta in March 2015 (Figure 4.7). It was one such event that signalled to me that profound transformations are underway in understandings of prestasi and the possibilities that it offers to achieve national belonging. The competition had been beset with difficulty from the beginning, mostly based on allegations of severe corruption, but a few days prior it was unclear whether it would be held at all. The main concern appeared to stem from threats by murky groups, located at the nexus of Islam and criminal gangs, who reject the public assembly of waria on the basis that they are incompatible with Indonesian values defined chiefly with reference to heteronormativity and Islam (see Boellstorff 2004).

Thankfully, after concern was expressed by the original hotel over security, the venue was changed at the last minute and the event went ahead relatively smoothly. The pressure felt by the state and its institutions to distance itself from support for waria events appears to be a relatively recent transformation. In the immediate post-authoritarian period, waria’s status as a recognised social category meant that they continued to assemble for the kinds of events, such as these, as they had throughout the length of the New Order. In this regard, waria contrasted with political gatherings by gay men and lesbian women which, according to Tom Boellstorff, were seen to “threaten the nation itself” (Boellstorff 2004, 479). Although the logics governing the rejection of public appearances of waria are indeed different than to attitudes to gay men, it appears that growing denunciation of waria in Indonesian public life may also be understood along similar lines: that they are not compatible with Indonesian national modernity.

The situation for waria is especially fraught because of their hard won visibility within Indonesian society. The fact that they can be immediately identified was previously seen as a route to acceptance, as attested by the growth in mass media appearances from the late 1960s onwards. However, the very visibility that waria cherish is understood as a source of national shame (malu) by the groups, institutions and individuals that oppose them. In the contemporary period, waria’s visibility appears to be seen as a problem related to Indonesia’s incomplete modernisation, in some regards bearing parallels to the ways in which waria were commonly interpreted as a problem or a rough spot during the 1950s and 1960s. Some waria detained in state institutions during my period of fieldwork told me that they were encouraged to “become normal (jadi normal)” and strongly encouraged to wear men’s clothes while they lived there, a view also expressed to me by a number of psychologists and social workers. Given these recent transformations and a growing unwillingness for the state to support anything even vaguely related to a global LGBT or transgender imaginary, the possibility for waria to have their prestasi officially recognised by the state in the post-authoritarian period is

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16 A key difference between the 1950s and the present day is the relationship between waria and a global LGBT movement linked to the category transgender. The stress on the expression of rights to gender expression linked to an individual’s identity has sadly been met with increased violent rejection of waria; for example, a number of friends and informants were attacked at a small rally for International Transgender Day of Visibility on 31 March 2015.
limited, and a number of waria quietly questioned the logic of holding them on such impeded terms at all.

In contrast to increasingly rare state-sponsored events, I have found that waria are obtaining prestasi in new ways, linked less to the state and more closely to consumerism and the capitalist market. These events, which may not necessarily be tied to prestasi in explicit ways, nevertheless serve as a performative way to present the “quality of people” and serve as “a revelation of character” (Long 2007, 111). In this sense, these opportunities serve as an extension of opportunities for waria to continuously reiterate their professional acumen, as their relationship to the beauty industry since the late 1960s attests. Given their historical association with the stage, performance continues to operate as another important conduit for prestasi, even when not conducted under the auspices of state recognition.

For example, the waria community that I was a member of in Yogyakarta was approached to take part in a Valentine’s Day event in a mall in the centre of the city. Tensions ran high as we prepared for the event, with the strong “emotional and sensory dimensions” (Long 2007, 97) associated with prestasi increasingly evident as the big day neared. We met for training on a weekly basis, and had pink tee-shirts made with the logo of the waria organisation involved, the name of the mall, and the names of each of the performers in a love heart on the back of the shirt. In spite of all of these efforts, the performance was fraught with difficulties. It was almost cancelled a few days prior, when the event organisers conveyed that they had received a complaint from another local NGO that worked more squarely on HIV-related concerns. According to the event organisers, this NGO had claimed that presenting waria solely as the face of HIV would create more problems than it would solve. Nevertheless, and with some adept behind the scenes negotiations, the event went ahead successfully and lasted almost an entire afternoon; it involved a fashion show, solo singing performances, a lipsynch performance and an information session about HIV. I set up a small stand selling books about waria life donated by an NGO in Jakarta. From my observations of the hundreds of middle class Indonesians who gathered around the centre of the mall to watch, it appeared that all had gone well.
However, while everything may have appeared to have run smoothly from the outside, tensions were running high within the group both during and after the show. At each of the weekly training sessions leading to the day, certain conventions were reiterated referring to the expectation of high standards of behaviour among participants. The public nature of this event meant that any transgression would both reflect badly on waria, especially important considering the attack that the waria had endured from the other NGO. After all, the community leaders stressed, this was an exceptionally rare opportunity for waria to accomplish prestasi by showing off their “beauty (kecantikan)” and “skills (ketrampilan).” In this way, the event and its meaning to the waria involved showed signs of the New Order-era notion of prestasi as a “desire joining everyday belonging to national belonging through the performance of good deeds or accomplishments” (Boellstorff 2007, 105). While I thought that the waria had behaved impeccably, and friends that had observed the performance were very impressed by the professionalism that they exhibited, it became clear after the event that waria were upset. They seemed certain that they had made an irrevocably bad impression.

In particular, attention soon focused on how one waria’s behaviour had threatened the whole of the group by refusing to go along with the agreed upon conventions. Back at the NGO, the disappointment was palpable. The main concern seemed to have been that this particular waria had spoken in a loud voice using characteristically crude waria language in public, that she had lit a cigarette in a taxi on the way there, and that she had loudly protested the fact that the performers had to reach the venue via the underground car park rather than the front entrance. This last point had
been something of a bone of contention among waria in the group more generally — the mall had imposed this condition arbitrarily at the last minute — but nevertheless the performers had decided to comply lest they lose the chance to perform entirely.

Seen in this light, the perceived failure to achieve prestasi among the waria involved in this case might be understood as stemming from waria’s emphasis on sustaining the separation of the “backstage” (Goffman 1952, 69) as distinct from the front area which will be observed by a wider social audience. The waria who transgressed the agreed upon boundaries of behaviour disrupts this image of unity and hence damages the reputation of the group as a whole. As Goffman writes:

A teammate is someone whose dramaturgical co-operation one is dependent upon in fostering a given definition of the situation; if such a person comes to be beyond the pale of informal sanctions and insists on giving the show away or forcing it to take a particular turn, he [sic] is none the less part of the team.

Pertinent to the situation just described, Goffman (ibid., 51) adds that: “In fact, it is just because he [sic] is part of the team that he can cause this kind of trouble.” At the same time, the absolute concern for impeccable behaviour contrasts with the kinds of performances by the “Fantastic Dolls,” for example, through being understood as waria stems directly from deliberately transgressing boundaries that are otherwise important to maintain within Indonesian society more generally. I interpret the difference in responses here in terms of the recent transformations in the meanings of prestasi described earlier. The putative failure of this event to the waria involved appears to reflect growing frustration that no matter how much prestasi individual waria accrue, they are never quite able to obtain full citizenship when appearing as waria. To this end, the perceived failure of prestasi in this case stems from something outside of waria’s control: the fact that they were not allowed to enter through the front door of the mall, but rather through the underground carpark, lest they be seen by a wider public. This serves as an important insight on prestasi for waria in post-authoritarian Indonesia. It is not that waria do not desire to obtain prestasi any longer, it is just that the tenuousness of the situations that they are able to claim prestasi in often threatens the very viability of accomplishing it at all.

Salons as Prestasi

Despite the rapid transformations that have taken place in post-authoritarian Indonesia, and decreasing arenas for waria to be publicly visible, the salon remains an important site where waria can continue to display that they have prestasi. The salon endures as a symbol of waria’s worth for a number of reasons; it is a site where waria can participate in economic development, it harnesses the continued stress on individual self-improvement in Indonesian culture, and waria are remarkably adept at adopting new styles (for example, keeping up the popularity Arab-inspired Muslim wedding make-up and costumes). As a result, the salon as served as an extremely practical and versatile location for waria to accomplish citizenship. When I conducted my research, Jakarta had hundreds of popular salons run by waria, and Yogyakarta a dozen or more; these ranged from very small and low
class shops in homes to large establishments for the rich and famous. I spent hours socialising in small salons based in waria’s homes in crowded downtown neighbourhoods late into the night, as well as visiting salons to conduct interviews with senior waria in a number of cities.

The famous waria beautician Chenny Han was introduced to me as a waria who had perhaps had the most prestasi in all of Indonesia; as such, her experience is in no way representative of waria as a whole. However, her emphasis on self-improvement and capacity to turn it into economic capital offers important insights into why waria continue to emphasise prestasi in spite of diminished opportunities for state recognition in post-authoritarian Indonesia. Chenny’s gleaming three-storey salon and bridal design store is nestled in a street that runs between the exclusive Plaza Indonesia and Grand Indonesia shopping malls in central Jakarta. Her success reflects both her disciplined attitude and personal success: transparent glass, polished concrete and the latest designer furniture. However, given the importance to waria of appearing as a “team of performers” (Goffman 1952, 152) who understand themselves linked through recognition of lower class status and need for cultivation, Chenny’s prestasi calls into question whether she might be understood as waria at all. Indeed, a number of waria questioned whether she is actually a waria, and Chenny herself avoided the topic when I met to speak with her.

Lively and intelligent, Chenny was born in Jakarta in 1963. She became a member of the “Fantastic Dolls” in the early 1980s, and established a number of other performance groups as well. Over lunch, Chenny tells me a little bit about herself in the fast-paced staccato tone, punctuated by laughter, common to hip Jakarta fashionistas and waria alike. Her eyes sparkling with success, she tells me that she is a self-made entrepreneur who studied hair styling at a well-known beauty school in 1980. She opened her first salon in Jakarta 1993, after she returned from the United States where she had won a number of beauty competitions.17 Her business has since grown from a small salon with five staff to a large enterprise with forty staff working in salon, bridal, evening wear, lingerie, photo studio, magazine, book publishing and wedding planning. The staff in her salon might be characterised in terms of the phrase “salon banci” — a kind of banci kalèng who not completely waria given that they do not partake in daily forms of dèndong or participate in nyébong on a regular basis. This is perhaps how Chenny herself is understood by a majority of waria.

Chenny admits that her life was not always easy, and comfortably recounted her relationship to the waria world. When she was a teenager, like countless other waria, she participated in the nyébong in Jakarta. In keeping with the narratives introduced in the previous chapter, she explained that she did not do so only to make money or to meet men, but mainly to meet with other waria. Chenny’s experiences are also described in a short popular book written in the style of United States

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17 In her book, Chenny describes these competitions in the United States as those “for waria.” She was a finalist or winner of Miss Gay Los Angeles (1989), Miss Asia California San Diego (1992), Queen of the Universe (transgender) in Los Angeles (1992).
motivational or self-help literature, which she wrote to inspire those who have been “discarded (terbuang).” I quote a passage about her relationship to nyébong at length:

In the beginning, I didn’t know in which direction I should go, where I should take my first steps. There was only one direction in which I could accept myself whatever form I took. I immersed myself with my friends, making myself up (berdandan) in the evening and peddled myself on the side of the road in Menteng in central Jakarta. I found myself in a world that was different, a kind of freedom that enabled me to see that I had meaning. During the day I dove into my activities as a salon worker, and at night I did different kinds of activities.

I was happy to gather together with friends in the same boat (senasib) as me [at nyébong], chat with them (bercengkrama), exchange stories, as well as seek out a suitable partner (pasangan yang cocok). The long night would pass quickly. For a moment I would forget my sadness. But without knowing it, the difficulty that I had tried to leave behind in this unique way formed a new cycle of difficulty that was no less severe. I still remember how my heart would race when there was a fight between waria. The law of the jungle is always applied on street corners, in the glitzy world under street lights. (Soentoro 2007, 32–33)

Like Noni, who I first introduced in Chapter 1, coming to nyébong enabled Chenny to feel a sense of comfort; in Saba Mahmood’s (2005, 157) terms, “action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them.” Chenny also derives prestasi from her capacity to share her success with those striving for success more generally, a point which contrasts with Mami Maya’s comment earlier that her prestasi is only her own. However, as Chenny points out in the passage above, the waria world is not always one that can easily be characterised in terms of “comfort (nyaman).” I observed first-hand waria can treat one another poorly; fights erupted over stolen money, clients and perceived threats to status. This is where the “thick (kental)” ties between waria can be a source of discomfort as much as it can be a source of comfort. Thus, over time waria often say that prestasi is a way to leave these aspects of the waria world behind; to become “independent (mandiri),” both economically and socially.

However, Chenny Han’s success marks her out as an anomaly. The majority of waria continue to rely on their “thick (kental)” social networks for various forms of survival. Such waria often maintained their own small salons — by no means as elaborate as Chenny’s — using equipment that they had obtained at the completion of state-sponsored training. Waria tended to see this state-based training as far less valuable than the privately run training offered by individual experts and companies (such as Chenny Han); it was more often seen as a way for especially poor waria to obtain a free lunch and a few dollars’ worth of money for transportation. Beyond the practical importance of salons as a way to make money, these poorer waria also stress their symbolic importance. This is reflected in the fact that many poorer waria have something that resembles a salon in their homes (see Figure 4.9). The set-up is not usually elaborate: it is often as simple as a mirror, basin for washing hair and a hairdryer. Waria commonly have framed certificates displayed, indicating that they have undertaken the state training program in hairdressing or beauty mentioned earlier.
Initially I asked waria friends about this unused equipment, and received fairly disinterested responses. I had also frequently listened to frustrated government officials, who complained that waria who completed training in sewing would receive a free sewing machine, only to sell it for cash almost immediately. Given that this was the case it would be entirely understandable if waria sold the salon equipment that they had received in the course of their training. The fact that they had kept the equipment was confusing, considering that many of these salons had clearly never been used, and waria showed little intention of getting them up and running any time soon. When I pointed this out, waria often shrugged and responded by saying: “I want to set a salon up and running here soon.” Or they would tell me: “I got these tools when I did the government training.” Waria’s disinterested responses, however, cannot entirely explain why poor waria would keep salon tools in one corner of their home. Furthermore, poorer waria were not the only ones who stressed the importance of maintaining the appearance of a salon. When I visited the salon and home of another well-known waria activist in Jakarta, I was struck by how new and unused the equipment in it looked. Even though it was clear that she no longer had time or inclination to cut hair, she still maintained what appeared to be salon.

I interpret the ongoing emphasis that waria place on the skills and symbols associated with salons as a reflection of the continuing importance of the role of expertise in authoritarian Indonesia. The salon is a potent symbol because, during the New Order, it was the infrastructure that situated waria and their customers in dialogue with Indonesian modernity; salons in towns and villages around the country.
situated waria within a national imaginary predicated on development. However, the continuing support for waria and their salons — both by waria and more generally — shows that they can continue to find a place in which they can orient themselves towards the contemporary, transnational visions of modernity that have emerged after the end of the New Order.

The post-authoritarian period has seen a transformation in understandings of expertise; most notably, away from the dominance of the state, and towards a more fragmented and privatised vision of self-improvement (Jones 2010, 276). This reflects a scepticism towards the real value of state-sanctioned social worth more generally. Writing about self-improvement courses for women in Yogyakarta, for example, Carla Jones (2010, 276) describes an emergent “commodification of expertise” in Indonesia, one which is “individuated and market based.” Given this environment, each waria who I met described their efforts at prestasi in the contemporary period with far less emphasis on the state recognition so valued during the New Order. Often, they stressed that training for professional skills in salons was not to be able to achieve national belonging but rather in order to be “independent (mandiri).” I suggest that waria’s experiences can be understood in relation to the growing emphasis on self-improvement, through which development — both its successes and its failures — increasingly fall on the shoulders of individual citizens. Given the long history in which waria have linked national belonging to an unwavering faith in state expertise, how do waria understand the meanings of self-improvement in the post-authoritarian period? How do waria position themselves in terms of an increasingly visible globalised discourse of transgender and LGBT rights? I turn to these questions, and the tensions between them, in the following section.

Producing Waria as Transgender

Given the immense difficulties waria face in obtaining prestasi in the post-authoritarian period, the recent growth of representations by the national and transnational mass media about transgender offers new opportunities for waria to “increase [their] agency in the social world” (Long 2007, 111). This means that some waria who have access to these media markets are beginning to see this as a much better way to accomplish prestasi than the kinds of group performances introduced in the previous section. In this section, I explore recent transformations in relationship between prestasi and work among waria by focusing on waria’s appearances in foreign documentaries in particular. While I also stress that the Indonesian national mass media market is important to waria, I focus mainly on a detailed reading of the shooting of a single Western documentary. This case study offers a useful way to illustrate shifting understandings of prestasi among waria in the post-authoritarian period.

Focusing on Western, rather than Indonesian, documentaries has the benefit of better understanding waria’s emergent relationship to a broader transnational discourse of LGBT and, more specifically, transgender rights as a question of visibility. As we shall see, however, the translation of national understandings of value in prestasi into globalised forms of recognition offered by transgender did not necessarily go to plan.
The recent mass media representations made by journalists, researchers, and filmmakers I describe are usually not intended for audiences in Indonesia, but most often those in the United States, Europe, and Australia. Waria rarely hear back from producers or are invited to watch the final production, and thus they are rarely able to provide input prior to the release of the films. Documentaries range in form and content. The Warias (2011), a documentary produced by Vice magazine, focuses on a range of sites where waria are marginalised and subject to violence, offering few insights into the kinds of context in which they live their everyday lives. The more recent High Heels and Hijabs (2015), produced by SBS Television in Australia, similarly focuses on the difficulties that waria place, but also introduces some of the ways in waria respond to a broad experiences of marginality in Indonesian society. Both of these documentaries focus on a limited range of experiences, linking waria to specific experiences of violence, discrimination, and suffering. However, it appears that the historical emphasis that waria place on forms of work as prestasi means that waria do not necessarily see the representations made about them as problematic in these terms. I have found that waria’s own understandings of the value of appearing in such documentaries is in fact shaped by their historical relationship to Indonesian modernity, globalised understandings of feminine beauty and prestasi as a claim to national belonging.

It is common for representations of waria for a popular audience in the West to represent transgender in terms of a narrative of victimhood. The global logics that govern representations of “racialized transgender femininity” has been described by Aren Aizura (2014, 130–131), who suggests that such
Documentaries reveal that the only worth that such subjects possess is their capacity to endure violence: “the same gender variant bodies on which violence is visited also circulate as valuable within global capital.” I observe the stress on waria as victims of violence, for instance, as focused on two aspects of victimhood. The first presents waria as a stigmatised identity category in Indonesia, and the second is the related problem of their visible participation in sex work. While perspectives such as Aren Aizura’s usefully illustrate the overall framework through which waria are represented, focusing on waria’s responses serves as a way to challenge the narrow focus on violence and victimhood, and offers a better understand the intersection between the global category transgender as it encounters local and national regimes of value.

Waria share an understanding that appearances in documentaries, which they understand as a key site where they participate in a “transgender” imaginary, are a form of paid work and thus a way for them to achieve prestasi. While well-known waria command a large individual fee for appearances, most receive a small amount paid to them directly of about 50,000 to 100,000 Indonesian rupiah (between US$5 and US$10) for short interviews. A separate and larger fee is often paid to local waria organisations who organised the waria who appear in the documentaries. Occasionally the leaders of various organisations encourage the growth of such a market by capitalising on the presence of journalists and researchers. These waria leaders are central to assembling waria labour and making it accessible to global mass media markets. While journalists of course wield a certain degree of power over the form and content of the representation, their ability to evoke desired performances is of course complicated by the perspectives of waria themselves. Having been asked similar questions repeatedly by journalists and researchers, waria have an understanding of the kinds of questions to be asked, and thus a rehearsed set of answers. Observing many such interactions over time, it became apparent that their answers were part of a shared narrative, made up of particular tropes.

I observed the filming of a documentary intended for foreign audiences at the beginning of 2015. It was made by a German journalist for a European television station. It was filmed entirely in Yogyakarta, and shooting was completed in three days. The brevity of the production process and interest in only a limited set of questions was representative of the twenty-odd films I had seen made during my fieldwork. When I asked the journalist what drew him to make a documentary about waria, he responded: “I thought it would be a good story for a film about disadvantage. My television station producers asked for something about inclusion for a weeklong series of programs about tolerance in Germany.” An interest in marginality thus preceded any knowledge of the lives of the waria subjects, shaping the focus of the representation from the outset.

On the first day of the film shoot, one waria’s house was transformed into a small television studio (Figure 4.10). I sat on the floor behind the camera, taking on an uneasy role as the interpreter. Bright lights illuminated the space, and several waria gathered there. Three additional waria arrived wearing glamorous clothing and makeup. As was common, interviews supplemented staged versions of everyday activities to present a perspective on waria for audiences unfamiliar with Indonesia. After
spending some time arranging the setting, which included getting mirrors, makeup, and wigs in frame, the journalist asked several questions. They were mostly based on familiar and problematic tropes about transgender lives in Western contexts. He also asked about the relationship between waria and sex work:

When did you become transgender?

Do you want to have a sex change?

Do you see yourself as a real woman, or a woman trapped in a man’s body?

For instance, how do you see yourself in the mirror as you do yourself up?

Why do you wear makeup?

What employment opportunities are available, if you do not do sex work?

Each waria took a turn answering these questions directly to the camera. Each spoke as an experienced interview subject who had been asked similar questions many times before. Their responses were strikingly uniform as they responded in turn:

I knew I was a waria from when I was a small child. Since I was little I have liked men and worn dresses.

I wanted to have a sex change but my family didn’t want me to. I wanted it at the time [when I was young] but now I am too old for it. Even if I were to have a sex change, I would not be a perfect woman. If there is a way to have an operation and have a child I want to do it.

I am a woman, because when I am with women and waria I feel that it is right.

Actually during the day I do not [wear makeup] but when I want to go out I put makeup on so I am seen as more beautiful and interesting. I want to change myself so that people see me as beautiful.

There has been no chance for me to stop. I would like to have a business if I could.

After this brief interview, the journalist asked the waria to hand out condoms as a staged version of HIV prevention activities. His interest moved toward a more concerted focus on sex work and was supposed to include a scene of waria at the nearby railway tracks where they participate in nyébong, but on this occasion heavy rain disrupted the plan. Just before the journalist left for the evening, I realised that he had not said when or where it would be screened. When I asked, he told me the name of the television channel and program, but avoided my offer to take his contact details and follow up with him.

What, then, does the emergent relationship with the global category transgender in settings such as these mean for waria? How does it relate to the national and local histories associating waria femininity to forms of self-cultivation and national modernity described in this chapter? The value of transgender for waria here appears oriented toward the understanding that it provides the opportunity for work and, through it, opportunities for prestasi. This particular benefit of transgender to waria suggests one example of how the category offers often unexpected “networks of resistance and transformation” (Stryker 2013, 552). Furthermore, it reveals that the global effects of the category
transgender are related to national transformations in the post-authoritarian period, which demand “a new type of ethical subject, one less dependent on state services and more invested in self-actualization through consumption” (Jones 2010, 271). I have described how waria’s willingness to participate in productions about transgender emerged in the context of an association with the national mass media, also reflected in their participation in other forms of stage performance and beauty work in Indonesia. Given this association, waria see it as entirely reasonable that people would want to make films about them and that they would be willing to pay money to do so.

I have described how waria labour for transnational mass media markets is one way that the value of transgender is produced globally. My findings are in some ways consistent with other critiques of the representation of racialised transgender femininity (Haritaworn and Snorton 2013; Aizura 2014); waria are usually represented as abject victims from the outset. Yet, the association between waria and the new category transgender is also representative of broader historical transformations in which the market economy is central to Indonesian social life. From the late 1970s onwards, performance groups like the “Fantastic Dolls” mobilised prestasi as a way to shift the meaning of waria towards productivity and the desire to work. This has consistently emphasised the importance of middle class forms of labour, most commonly salon work, which required waria to become the obedient subjects of state expertise. In the post-authoritarian period, where the state is no longer the single purveyor of expertise, it appears that prestasi as a method to achieve national belonging for waria has encountered its limit. Even as an emergent relationship to the category transgender offers new opportunities for visibility, it appears to have exposed a key limitation of prestasi; by focusing on visibility alone, waria have been largely unable to articulate more pressing concerns of access to health care, adequate housing, and safe employment. Furthermore, that a considerable component of the waria’s prestasi is now devoted to evoking experiences of victimisation in the name of transgender rights perhaps suggests the limitations at the intersection of globalised LGBT discourse and increasingly individuated modes of self-fashioning and citizenship.

The Value of Transgender in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia

In this chapter I have described the historical relationship between waria gender performances and forms of work in the context of national and transnational economic transformations. In particular, fields of work related to beauty and those closely related to the mass media are undoubtedly among the most important sites where the embodied work of becoming waria takes shape. They are also the primary sites in which waria have asserted a performative form of national belonging via the visible good deeds that they understand as prestasi. This is reflected in the stress that waria place on their passion for these forms of work. I was struck by this one day, when a middle aged waria who had worked hard her entire life lamented that she could no longer do so as the result of illness. She added that she had worked in a number of salons, decrying the long hours but suggesting that this was where she had first entered the waria world. “What’s the point of a banci who doesn’t work?” she reflected forlornly. Given the significance of the investment that waria make in these forms of labour, I suggest
that forms of body-centred mass media and consumer capitalism fundamentally structure waria’s understanding of themselves as productive subjects of national modernity.

The emphasis placed on appearances must be understood in terms of the unique relationship between authoritarianism and consumer capitalism, and the state’s overarching commitment to development during the New Order in Indonesia. A central way in which the authoritarian state articulated development from the late 1960s onwards was to emphasise scientific and technological understandings of gender normativity; aligning symbols associated with masculinity and femininity to bodies and subjectivities in new ways. However, this same period observed a marked increase in the globalisation of unruly images of femininity and masculinity in the mass media, leading to spaces for contesting an otherwise narrow state gender ideology. I am not suggesting that waria are representative of the experiences of all Indonesians; as a group, they are fairly unique in their ability to effectively harness their innate sense of self-cultivation directly to projects of national modernity. However, waria’s visibility as the first well-known experts in fields of feminine beauty in Indonesia is a notable achievement. I suggest that attainment of this role was not due to the good grace of the authoritarian state — which responded to new forms of male-bodied femininity by mostly pathologising it — but rather resulted from the hard work and astute reading of the political moment by waria themselves.

Each of the chapters introduced in this thesis has thus far has illustrated the “structures of feeling” (Williams 1978, 128–35) within which waria have established a relationship to modern norms of feminine beauty. The early New Order was characterised by the emergence of modern forms of mass media; as such, the national histories of waria and visual vocabularies of gender normativity are entwined in important ways. Prestasi must therefore be understood as a political strategy established in the context of New Order political culture; it is a “performativa theory of recognition” (Boellstorff 2007, 105) which has in mind a powerful authoritarian state as its audience. I have reflected on shifting understandings of prestasi to waria in the contemporary, post-authoritarian period, when decentralisation and the integration of the state into globalised economic markets is resulting in profound and widespread transformations. One location where I have considered this transformation among waria has been in the emergence of and their integration into an emergent global transgender imaginary. I have found that even as foreign journalists represent a limited version of globalised understandings of transgender, waria see mass media appearances in terms of its ability to show prestasi. For waria, therefore, the value of appearing in foreign forms of mass media hinges on the tension between global understandings of transgender linked to victimisation on the one hand, and national possibilities for prestasi in the form of work, on the other. These are unified, however, insomuch that waria attempts at prestasi from at least the 1970s appear to have been based on making waria visible as always already abject individuals who both require and desire to become the subjects of state expertise.
The process through which *waria* gender performances have been transformed through their relationship to the work associated with modern gender performances illustrates the “production of nation through racialization, markets, and media” (Ochoa 2014, 25) in the context of Indonesian modernity. This process might be understood as a counterpart to Benedict Anderson’s (1996) “print capitalism.” However, in contrast to “the steady onward clocking of homogeneous, empty time” (ibid., 35) of the newspaper, *waria*’s salons and the *prestasi* it reflects offers another vantage point on Indonesian national modernity, one that accounts for importance of the role that the gendered body has played in materialising it. In this respect, *waria*’s gender performances reflect the messy corporeal experimentation required to produce subjects through the kinds of technocratic and mass mediated discourses of expertise developed by the authoritarian state and which continue to haunt its afterlife.

In the following chapter, I turn from the visible work that *waria* perform for a public audience, to the more intimate realm of reproductive labour that *waria* enacted in the course of intimate or kin-like relationships. The New Order state most intensively focused on defining women’s nature in terms of certain forms of reproductive labour, rather than being concerned with the problem of either male or female homosexuality (Chapter 2). It follows that *waria*’s incomplete acceptance in Indonesian society is not only due to the fact that they represent a problematic form of masculinity, but is perhaps also due to a broader devaluation of femininity and feminine labour observed in the establishment of Indonesian national modernity during the New Order. This is nowhere better observed than in *waria*’s relationships with *brondong*, the young adolescents that are commonly their objects of desire. Rather than a relationship predicated primarily in terms of gender or sexuality alone, I describe *waria*’s intimacy with *brondong* also relation to age and temporality. The role that *waria* play in developing and sustaining relationships with *brondong* provides new insights into the forms of national temporality characterised by reproduction that emerged as a key feature of the New Order.
Chapter 5: Love’s Labour –
Gender Performance and Social Time

Figure 5.1: Brondong on railway tracks in Jakarta, estimated date mid-1980s.

Banci, they’re known for their competitiveness (*Namanya banci itu suka saing saingan*). In the past, it got so competitive that if one waria received an invitation to go to a birthday, to a wedding, she would go so far as to rent a brondong (*Itu sampai nyewa brondong*).—Shirley

Shirley’s collection of photographs, which I introduced in Chapter 3, mostly contains photographs of waria wearing makeup and glamorous clothes (*déndong*) at or prior to special events. Among the photographs, however, are also a number of handsome young men who appear little more than adolescents (Figure 5.1). When I asked her about them, Shirley smiled and reminisced how she had met them on the very street corners or at railway stations where the photographs were taken. The term that waria use to refer to these young men is *brondong*.1 As indicated by Shirley’s emphasis that waria would go so far as to “rent” one, waria understand *brondong* both as an object of desire entangled with economic transactions and a source of status. *Brondong* are a ubiquitous feature in urban Indonesian life, easily identified among the many young men that one often sees hanging around in public spaces like train stations or street corners. They are usually no older than twenty,

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1 The term *brondong* appears to have originated from *gay/waria* language (Boellstorff 2007, 126, 2005, 25). In the 1968 *Mingguan Djaja* special issue on *béncong* (see Chapter 2) the author explains that: “Even old *béncong* are attracted to the same sex. The difference is just a question of taste. There are those that like teenagers, who in *béncong* language are described as ‘fresh brondong (*brondong garing*)’ (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968a). Another common meaning of the term *brondong* is popcorn.
always unmarried, sometimes studying, and often working in poorly paid jobs in the services and informal sectors.

Each of the *brondong* that I met during fieldwork was the partner of an older *waria*. As a result of the specificities of the *brondong* that I encountered, I do not claim that my findings necessarily describe all *brondong*, or that all *waria* engage in such relationships. That said, recent representations of *brondong* in the popular media has represented them as innocent young men and adolescent boys whose desire for money and consumer goods has led to them on a path of sexual transgression and moral deviation.\(^2\) In parallel fashion, the majority of *brondong* that I encountered were engaged in forms of transactional sex for both male and *waria* clients. The word that both *waria* and gay men use refer to male-bodied persons (most often *brondong*) who sell sex is *kucing* (see also Boellstorff 2007, 126 for a brief definition). *Brondong* is not a term usually used to refer to oneself, but rather is used to refer to types of masculinity that have a relationship to economic transactions or consumerism. The term *brondong* and its use to describe a period of youthful masculinity thus contrasts with “subject positions” (Boellstorff 2005, 11), such as gay or *waria*, which generally remain somewhat consistent throughout the life course.\(^3\) It is also interesting that very few *brondong* I met identified themselves as gay, and I found that many disavowed that category explicitly.

Each chapter in this thesis has focused on the way that my informants undertake in processes of “becoming *waria* (*jadi waria*)” in the context of social relations that result in a transformed gender performance. This chapter reflects on the broader social milieu of the *waria* world and the forms of intimacy sustained within it, serving to problematise any notion that gender and sexuality remain enduring qualities of personhood throughout the life course. The focus on the masculinity of *brondong* is especially instructive because my *waria* informants were completely infatuated with them. For example, a forty-five-year-old *waria* who had recently acquired a *brondong* infantilised him. I watched aghast as she fed him bananas one by one and showered him with intensive attention whenever he needed it, much as one would an infant. She would even bathe him, swaddling him up in a towel and drying his hair afterwards. When I asked another *waria* friend who was visiting from out of town about what I saw as a very curious relationship, she smiled and asked whether I had heard the expression “cucumber child (*anak timun*).” She smiled wryly and moved her hands as though she was nursing a small baby. “First you raise it, feed it, care for it,” rocking her clasped hands from side to side, “and then you break it in two and eat it.” She gestured as though she was snapping a cucumber.

\(^2\) A popular and widely distributed film called *Arisan Brondong* was released in 2010, in which a group of teenage boys are lured into transactional sex by rich women in Jakarta by temptation of money and consumer goods. During fieldwork in 2014 a media scandal broke involving a real life *arisan brondong* (*arisan* is a rotating lottery) among rich Jakarta “aunties” (*tante*). Media reports suggested that they purchased sex with attractive young men because their “husbands didn’t pay enough attention to them” (Kompas CyberMedia 2017). Most recently, salacious media accounts have described a “*brondong* prostitution ring for gays” broken up by the police in Bogor in 2016 (Liputan6.com 2017).

\(^3\) Tom Boellstorff (2005, 10–11) refers to “subject positions” in order to make a distinction from the Western understanding of deep interiority inferred by identity or subjectivity.
in two, and then pretended to eat it, soliciting laughter from the other waria sitting on the floor around her.

This description of a “cucumber child” among waria is a useful way to illustrate how neither waria nor their brondong see each other as permanent partners, but rather in terms of an eroticised and temporary relationship of care and dependency. The aim of the care performed by waria, I have found, is to ensure that brondong accomplish adult masculinity, as defined by their heterosexual marriage. This is one way in which I came to reflect on waria-brondong intimacy as defined by dependency. In this way, it differs from the choice-based love of relationships between husband and wife, or even gay and lesbian relationships in Indonesia (Boellstorff 2005, 106). I never heard waria speak about their brondong in terms of romantic love, but rather in terms of a love of obligation. One waria illustrated the futility of love with adult men by telling me what she called a “tale of three loves (cerita tiga cinta).” She explained:

There was my love for the medicine seller, the love that was forced (terpaksa) and the true love (cinta sejati). Even my true love ended up being put under the spell of a witch (dukun) and marrying a woman. It’s just enough for waria to seek out a man. It’s hard to find your true self [as a waria] (cari jati diri susah).

Another waria recounted forlornly how much money she had spent sustaining brondong: “oh, how much money I have spent on keeping brondong. It must be millions [of Indonesian rupiah (hundreds of US dollars)]. Or even more, tens of millions [of Indonesian rupiah (thousands of US dollars)].”

Both of these seemed to be cautionary tales, suggesting that the only proper love available to a waria (and one that would enable her to find her “true self”) was a caring love for a brondong.

Other waria shared similar sentiments about the obviousness of intimacy with brondong. “That’s just the way brondong are, we have to look after them,” one waria aged in her forties in Jakarta explained, responding to my criticism that brondong take advantage of waria. An idealised “husband (suami),” on the other hand, is by contrast understood in terms of romantic love. A fifty-year-old waria contrasted her former relationship with a husband with waria’s far more common relationships with brondong as follows: “Our relationship as a husband and wife (suami istri) was based on true love (cinta sejati).” She told me that it lasted for eight years (he was already married) and that he had spoiled her, arriving each visit bearing money and gifts.

Older waria in their sixties and seventies often reminisced nostalgically that such truly chivalrous husbands, who adhered to rigid modern gender roles and allowed waria to feel like a “real (asli)” woman, existed in the 1960s and 1970s but had disappeared in the 1980s. Particularly cynical waria reflected on brondong as the only forms intimacy and masculinity available in contemporary Indonesia: an expensive labour of love that yielded few real rewards. While waria did sometimes refer to relationships with fictional husbands (both their own and those of friends), I never actually met a husband of a waria. They seemed conspicuous by their absence. Brondong who grew older and failed to mature into adulthood through heterosexual marriage sometimes became husbands of a sort,
but these relationships were fraught with anxieties, which stemmed from a perceived failure of the
brondong to achieve masculinity.

These descriptions of intimacy among waria reflect the way that historically contingent meanings of
gender normativity in Indonesia are tied closely to a person’s ability to participate in heteronormative
marriage and reproduction. In Chapter 2, I described how the characteristics of masculinity and
femininity as they were established during the early part of the New Order came to rest on the
productive or reproductive capacities of an individual depending on their gender. As well as defining
gender normativity, the affective state experienced at the juncture of reproductive capacity, marriage
and the nuclear family is what connects “capitalist ideologies of production and nationalist ideologies
of reproduction” (Boellstorff 2005, 117). The particularities of this relationship in Indonesia means
that heteronormative masculinity and femininity can only be considered in terms of the attainment of
normative life course aspirations that unfold according to biological age. While I have focused on
femininity as produced through national modernity throughout this thesis, practices at the intersection
between economic and intimate realms also shape understandings of competent modern masculinity
(see Fajardo 2011; Wardlow 2004). In the Indonesian case, to become a socially complete adult
citizen, a brondong must marry and start his own family when he is around twenty years old. At this
point, he will no longer be considered a brondong but is transformed into a husband (suami) and, if he
has children, will become a “father (bapak)” and legal “head of his household (kepala rumah
tangga).”4 In this chapter I ask: Why do waria seek the expensive and often emotionally exhausting
relationships with brondong, since a stable relationship with an older man would not be hard to
achieve? Furthermore, how do waria understand this intimacy differently to the transactional sex that
they purchase from kucing, even if there is significant slippage between the two?

In this chapter I describe intimate relations between older waria and younger brondong as
“mothering” (Nakano Glenn 1994). Drawing on longstanding sociological and anthropological
interest in the relationship between social reproduction and gender, I focus on the concrete forms of
“kin labor” (Bailey 2013, 99) and “kin work” (di Leonardo 1987), focus on centrality of labour to
waria-brondong intimacy. This has led me to interpret intimacy with brondong as a way to
accomplish gender for both parties, albeit in different ways. This reflects how, although gender
performance is a form of embodied work which unfolds unevenly throughout the life course, it does
so in relation to dominant conventions of heteronormative social time established in the course of
Indonesian modernity during the New Order.

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4 Bapak is a public term of address that is rarely used within the family and almost never to describe oneself (Shiraishi 1997, 93; Suryakusuma 1996, 95). Saya Shiraishi (notes that bapak denotes a symbolic role within Indonesian society indebted to autocratic notions of patriarchal family control, one who remains “in the background, watching and guiding them [children] from behind” (1997, 88). Kepala rumah tangga is a legal status that is acquired upon marriage, providing men with certain rights and responsibilities over their wives and families (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 Tentang Perkawinan 1974).
My interpretation has also benefited from recent interest in temporality in queer studies, even as it departs from it in key ways (Freeman 2010; Halbertsam 2005). For example, I do not suggest that waria occupy “queer time,” as Jack Halberstam (2005, 2) writes, as “the potentiality of life unscripted by conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.” Nor do I interpret waria intimacy with brondong as resistance to forms of what Elizabeth Freeman (2010, 4) calls “chrononormativity” as one aspect of a “chronobiopolitics” which assigns value only to lives which meet the reproductive scripts of marriage and childrearing. Rather than seeing waria or brondong as always already resisting or challenging normative temporal arrangements, I am interested in how queer and transgender time here suggests insights into gendered practices that emerge throughout the life course in the context of political, economic and social shifts currently underway in post-authoritarian Indonesia. I have found that experiences of queer time in contemporary Indonesia emerge at moments in the life course when anxieties about marriage and reproduction are especially heightened. This includes the moment when a brondong should get married to a woman and commence his life as a family man. More generally, such anxieties frequently surface via aspirations to accomplish modern femininity and masculinity. In considering waria-brondong intimacy, this chapter is the last to consider the relationship between intimacy, understandings of value and gender performance which serve to illustrate the “structures of feeling” (Williams 1978, 128–35) of New Order Indonesia and its afterlife.

Liminal Masculinity

Given that I had anticipated that waria would form relationships that resemble heterosexual marriage, I initially viewed every male-bodied individual that I encountered as a masculine and heterosexualised counterpart for feminine waria. I justified the age difference between waria and brondong in terms of facilitating a future role as a boyfriend or a husband.5 This understanding was corrected when I realised that rather than trying to hold on to a brondong, I found that waria were mostly preoccupied with making sure that he married a “good woman (perempuan baik)” in time. As a result, I came to understand brondong as both an age-graded and gendered term which can only be occupied during particular moments in the life course. In this regard it bears parallels with the use of “lesbi” to refer to some feminine women, which Evelyn Blackwood (2010, 136) describes as “a temporary state” in the life course based on sexual desire. Adapting Blackwood’s expression, I thus understand brondong to be a temporal state in which the fundamental transformation that marks its conclusion is heterosexual marriage. Following heterosexual marriage, brondong will no longer be a brondong but (ideally at least) is transformed into a “normal man (laki-laki normal).” It is this temporal position in social time, prior to the transformative experience of marriage, that is the reason why I describe brondong as a liminal masculinity.

5 This kind of relationship is described elsewhere in the literature on gender and sexuality, most notably in Brazil, where travesti cultivate young men to become future husbands (Kulick 1997, 142).
Liminal masculinity also emphasises that *brondong* occupy a moment betwixt and between stages in the life course. Further, it serves to acknowledge the time and work performed by *waria* in order for a *brondong* to attain gender normative masculinity. In this regard, my use of liminality is not predicated on gendered difference — for example, that I consider *brondong* to be feminised because they are less masculine — but rather seek to understand how gender is performed in relation to the temporal aspects of heteronormativity. This is particularly important in contemporary Indonesia, where youth are understood in terms of a broad range of conflicting ideals. Lyn Parker offers an extensive definition:

Adolescents in Indonesia want to experiment, to try things out. They like to imitate, and to copy—fashions, role models, their idols, new things. They are impressionable. They are not yet mature. They are easily influenced. They are curious, and want to know the truth. They are earnest (*sungguh-sungguh*). They can be *berani* (brave, bold) but also *malu* (shy, embarrassed), shameful (*malu-malu*) and rebellious (*suka berontak kalau tidak sesuai dgn keinginannya*). They want to be number one; they want attention (*ingin diperhatikan*). They are rather emotional (*agak emosi-emosi tinggi*). Adolescents often do not analyse outside values—if they see something, they just want to try it, straight away, without thinking first. Adolescents have ‘a strong family feeling.’ Adolescents are a national resource, an investment in the future, the hope of the nation and ethnic group. (Parker 2008, point 12)

These various understandings of youth in Indonesia suggest that it remains an ambiguous period in life that is oriented towards, but not yet at, reproductive adulthood. The liminal masculinity of *brondong*, understood as such in relation to gendered life course expectations is a “queer moment” (Meiu 2015) in what might otherwise be understood only in relation to the accomplishment of complete gender normativity. Following George Meiu (2015, 482), I suggest that *brondong* reflect how the “queerness of… practices of age is momentary.” I thus situate *brondong* in queer time — not in opposition to heteronormative time, but rather as constituted through expectations of the life course in Indonesia. In doing so, I challenge the oppositional mode — hegemonic versus non-hegemonic, normative versus non-normative — that continues to characterise descriptions of gender and sexuality in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Although differing from my own use of the concept, Niko Besnier’s (1996) definition of “gender liminality” and “liminal men” in the Pacific shares my concern with describing gender performance in terms of its relationship to broader processes of social and economic reproduction. Besnier (ibid., 288) argues the liminal position of “persons with male sexual attributes who adopt certain social attributes normally associated with women” is a result of their ambiguous relationship to broader processes of production and reproduction. He writes: “Gender-liminal persons are most fundamentally distinguished by the nature of their labor contribution” (ibid., 296). Besnier illustrates how male-

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6 George Meiu (2015) calls these “queer moments” to emphasise how they do not subvert or challenge normative expectations of the life course but rather seek to “facilitate arguments for the reiteration of normativity” (ibid., 487–88).

7 Lyn Parker (2008, point 12) claims that “we have the rather bizarre situation that we seem to have more explicit and sophisticated work on alternative sexualities than we do on hegemonic heterosexuality.” Linda Bennett and Sharyn Davies (2015, 3) define queer as “nonheteronormative embodiments and subjectivities.” My concern with such understandings of queerness, while sympathetic to these views, is that they unwittingly ascribe fixity to gender/sexuality and the practices that follow from them as the property of an individual, rather than attending to the fact that they are both relational and temporally inhabited experiences (Boellstorff 2005, 2007 similarly critiques the Western tendency towards binarism).
bodied feminine individuals may be unable to accomplish complete masculinity in various Pacific societies, but that they frequently excel in fields of work associated with the feminine. I extend his insights to reflect on the way that liminal masculinity occurs not in relation to a static, binary pole of femininity, but also operates in relation to shifting understandings of complete masculinity defined in economic and social terms. I do adapt this understanding of gender liminality to the Indonesian context, where social time has since the New Order been produced through gendered technological interventions oriented towards projects of national development.

Given this definition of liminal masculinity I define *brondong* in terms of their relationship to dominant expectations of “kin time” (Stack and Burton 1994, 36). Linda Stack and Carol Burton (1994, 36) describe kin time as temporal guides for the assumption of family leadership roles and caregiving responsibilities which intersect family ideology, gendered norms, and behaviours across the life course. Intimacy between *waria* and *brondong* is a particularly instructive site to understand historical shifts in kin time in Indonesia is because their relationship is one that condenses anxieties over reproduction and the labour required to produce it. While the care that *waria* provide for their *brondong* is of profound significance to them, the money that *waria* spend is also important in helping him to accomplish marriage as the first and most important marker of kin time in the attainment of masculinity. While the end of their relationship is a marker of its success, this is often overshadowed by the significant emotional attachments that *waria* develop through caring for *brondong*. For *waria*, drawing out the liminal masculinity of *brondong* thus appears to be associated with a sense of becoming a complete member of national society (Boellstorff 1999, 492). This suggests that *brondong* are not desirable to *waria* only because they are male-bodied. Rather, it is also a *brondong*’s stage in the life course prior to marriage and his subsequent need for care to accomplish adult masculinity that makes him desirable.

It is useful to compare the liminal masculinity of *brondong* to similar types of masculinity that have recently been described in Indonesia. I include among these the sex worker’s “kept husband (*bronces*)” in Batam (Lindquist 2009, 90–95) and the career woman’s “new dream man (*Pria Idaman Lain*)” (Jones 2014, 169) reported widely in the national media. Scholars of Indonesia have suggested that masculinity associated with consumption, perhaps like *brondong*, should be interpreted as feminised; a “reversal” of gendered roles in the context of social and economic instability (Lindquist 2009, 90; see also Jones 2014). For example, Carla Jones (2014, 169) asserts that “consumer desire is both feminizing and criminalizing.” While useful starting points, I contest whether such practices and bodies can only be understood in terms of a symbolic order in which femininity and masculinity are ascribed a relationship of binarised opposition. Rather, gender performances must be understood as subject to significant variation throughout the life course and in relation to national histories of social class introduced in the previous chapter.
**Gender and Social Time in Indonesia**

Marriage and childrearing have long been shaped ideals of masculinity and femininity in Indonesia and throughout Southeast Asia (Brenner 1998; Geertz, H. 1961). In Malaysia, Michael Peletz (1996, 203, 259) suggests that, “the most salient components of men’s and women’s identities are husband and father, and wife and mother.” In Indonesia, both relationships with kin and the institution of love marriage have played a key role in establishing the affective relationship linking individuals and national belonging (Siegel 2006, Boellstorff 2005). James Siegel (2006, 158) summarises that the terms father (*bapak*) and mother (*ibu*) played a central role “to bolster the authority of nationalism and weaken that of traditional kinship structures by displacing the authority of the latter from the family and from ethnic unities to the nation.”

Understandings of reproduction as a process linking individuals to a national legacy thus partially explains *waria*’s desire to participate in kin time, even in spite of the fact that they are widely considered incompatible with the heteronormativity upon which it is based.

Despite long histories linking family roles to national belonging, however, gender ideologies were subject to profound transformation during the New Order. This is the period in which that contemporary Indonesian gender ideologies were established under an overarching program of technocratic development. Julia Suryakusuma (1996) describes how the middle class family during the New Order became a means to exercise state control, naturalising women’s role as mothers in order to exclude them from the political sphere (Brenner 1998; see also Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987). A stress on development harnessed kinship to modernity, through which the nuclear family came to be a metonym for the state (Boellstorff 2005, 212; Dwyer 2002). In Indonesia, as elsewhere, to choose companionate marriage and the nuclear family is to choose to belong to the nation (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006) regardless of one’s class position or sexuality (Lindquist 2009; Boellstorff 2005). This means that from an early age, Indonesians understand social time in terms of attaining kin roles in the nuclear family associated with heterosexual reproduction (Parker 2008, point 23). Social time marked by marriage is as crucial for men as it is women in a context where the “unmarried self” is “an incomplete economic and national subject” (Boellstorff 1999, 492).

Gender in Indonesia is thus inseparable from kin time, marked most profoundly by its orientation towards heterosexual marriage. However, the attributes of femininity and masculinity and how reproduction might unfold are in fact full of “ambiguities, paradoxes, and multiple layers of meaning” (Brenner 1995, 41). As Brenner (ibid.) identifies through fieldwork in central Java, men might

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8 The emphasis on the modern family is a theme that emerges from the earliest period of Indonesian national thought in the colonial period (Siegel 2006, 158; Shiraishi 1997, 93; McVey 1967, 137). Tsuchiya (1987, 114) attributes the origins of the term *bapak* as a stern authoritarian figure to *Taman Siswa*, a reformist educational organisation which can be traced to nationalist movements in the early 20th century (McVey 1967, 130).

9 I am not suggesting that masculinity and femininity linked to marriage and reproductive roles were not powerful symbols prior to this time; rather, that they have been put to new uses in increasingly invasive and limiting ways (C.f. Najmabadi 2014; C.f. Shapiro 1988).
officially be more rational and powerful, but in reality it is women who “rule the roost” through their capacity to secure generational legacy. In this context, despite the shaping ideological emphasis on biological reproduction within the nuclear family since the colonial period, scholars have identified conflicting and ambivalent meanings of masculinity, femininity and kinship in Indonesia (Brenner 1999, 1995). Hildred Geertz (1961, 37) describes the role that “borrowed” children of kin play in connecting families and strengthening social arrangements, noting the “complete transfer of affections, accompanied by almost total acceptance of the transfer” (ibid.). And, gay men and lesbian women create kinship through the adoption of children: “In response to the need for children, gay men and lesbi women say that they will adopt the children of siblings, cousins, or other relatives (or have already done so), or will pay for their schooling to build bonds of reciprocity” (Boellstorff 2005, 123). Similarly, I met one waria whose nephew lived with her while he attended high school. This suggests that, although images of motherhood and fatherhood serve as powerful ideological templates for imagining gender, the dubious clarity of these roles has never been completely assured.

At the moment that the relationship between development and heteronormativity was firmly established in the 1980s, uneven economic growth and rapid migration to urban centres accelerated rapidly. This led to the growth of a large urban underclass who threatened the generational legacy of the New Order in profound ways (Anderson 1990, 185–186). At this time, the category “youth (remaja)” shifted from its historical connotation of the legacy of the national revolution to a more erotically charged notion of “an immature collection of people… undisciplined, inflammable, wild, and, at best, unimportant” (Shiraishi 1997, 149). In the context of these social transformations, urbanisation and growing inequality offer one possible explanation for an historical boom in markets for transactional sex (see Dhakidae 1976). This appears to have been a period of widespread sexual experimentation: some waria explained how it was around this time men “discovered” that waria had a penis and wanted to have sex with them on that basis. Elderly waria also recounted that both kucing and numbers of waria at nyèbong began to grow rapidly during the 1980s. While most descriptions are limited by a presumption of a feminine or feminised prostitute or sex worker, historical and ethnographic evidence suggests that young men have long participated widely in markets for transactional sex in Indonesia (see Bloembergen 2011). The emergence of brondong as more prominent participants in markets for transactional sex from the 1980s onwards presents a challenging context for thinking about transformations in gender and social time in contemporary Indonesia.

Despite powerful modernist ideologies equating men to fatherhood and reproduction, and women to motherhood and reproduction, just who conducts those roles and in what settings is far from settled. Given that this is the case, I describe the work that goes into caring for brondong as a key way for waria to harness their own lives to national kin time, even though they cannot have children or marry heterosexually. Thus, preparing an adolescent brondong to marry heterosexually is the primary way...
through which *waria* participate in a national temporality structured by a “marriage imperative” (Boellstorff 2005, 103). *Waria’s* work enables *brondong* to achieve moral status of becoming a “normal” man, even if he momentarily occupies queer time as a result. This is why I stress that *brondong* are not feminised, but rather that their liminality stems from the fact that their masculinity has not been socially completed according to dominant life course expectations, linked to the achievement of middle class status required to obtain national belonging.

While romantic love is certainly idealised in Indonesia, both *waria* and women frequently shared their frank assessment that it is highly unlikely they would ever achieve it. *Waria* tended to define romantic love as something that happened elsewhere to other people, a type of attachment best defined by its absence. When asked about love, *waria* commonly respond with something to the effect of: “If men cheat on women, or they want more than one wife, what hope is there for us?” Suzanne Brenner (1995, 33) similarly notes women’s candid remarks about men’s inability to control themselves, suggesting that attitudes towards modern, choice-based love are, for women and *waria*, a source of ambiguity in Indonesia. The mothering that *waria* perform for *brondong* by contrast was consistently practiced, if rarely recognised publicly, and easily achieved. The emphasis that *waria* place on caring for *brondong* makes sense in light of a context where femininity is so closely tied to motherhood (see also Blackwood 2010, 142). In this regard mothering by *waria* is a form of intimacy that is enduring precisely because it is *not* borne out of choice but out of the obligation to uphold kin time across families and generations. In this sense, both developmentalist ideals of productivity, and nationally defined ideologies of temporality have been assimilated into moral evaluations about understandings of becoming a complete gendered person. This is best illustrated most clearly by the fact that the final aim of the considerable effort that *waria* put into mothering is the heterosexual marriage of her *brondong*.

**Practices of Mothering Among Waria**

In the previous chapter, I described the common understanding among *waria* that their gendered subjectivity is a process of becoming. *Waria* say that they start out as *banci kalèng* and, in the process of migration and encountering other *waria*, become progressively visible through the glamorous gender performances that they call *dèndong*. Regardless of whether they adopted a more masculine or more feminine self-presentation over time, I found that *waria* in this age group generally defined their primary object of desire as the liminal masculinity of *brondong*. I was not entirely sure whether this had changed as they had aged, but I sensed that *brondong* had been an object of desire among these *waria* for most of their lives. Desire among *waria* and *brondong* thus seems structured by relative age and financial power, rather than by gender or sexuality alone. Forty-eight-year-old Noni, the *waria* born in Sumatra who described her experience of becoming *waria* in relation to migration to Jakarta

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intimacy with *brondong* in some respects resembles this understanding of motherhood which “begins, but does not end, with self-sacrifice; it is also about making an investment in children that can be cashed in at a later time” (ibid., 143). Given that it their relationship is not socially recognised, however, *brondong* rarely feel compelled to reciprocate their *waria*’s investment.
in Chapter 1, described meeting brondong as a definitive moment in her initial experiences in the city. By extension, becoming waria is to a certain degree entwined with encountering intimacy with brondong.

Noni explained how it was in the context of becoming waria that she had discovered brondong waiting outside of nightclubs. She explained how waria would pay for their entry charge and purchase them drinks: “We are waria, so they know that we have money.” Although such relationships seem superficially borne out of an instrumentalist desire for paid sex, I was struck by Noni’s emphasis on other attributes as defining the desire for intimacy with brondong. As Noni explained:

If we went to [the nightclub called] Moonlight, sometimes there are boys who are still young, right (brondong), sometimes they can’t get in to the club. I would ask, ‘Do you want to come in?’ But only the handsome ones! I paid for them to enter, bought them a drink, and then brought them back to my place. They didn’t go home, and sometimes stayed for three days in my house! I looked after (service) them, took them to the salon. I bought them trousers, bought them sandals, buy them different things, you should know that, I’m like that if I like someone. I take them shopping, I care for them, then they go home. ‘Next week come again, OK?’ I would say. Then the next week they would come again.

What struck me most about Noni and other waria’s relationships with brondong was the emphasis that they placed on the importance of concrete practices of care and sustenance. In the example given here, even short-term forms of intimacy not only involves a transfer of money and gifts, but a considerable amount of work.

Although waria certainly do purchase one-off sexual encounters with kucing, Noni’s emphasis here on kin labour reflects how intimacy with brondong has significance beyond the fact that it involves the transfer of gifts or money for sex. I interpret the significant pleasure that waria derive from the labour of caring for brondong as a reflection of the stress on mothering in dominant ideologies of femininity in Indonesia. In this respect, I consider how caring for brondong might be a counterpart to concrete, public displays that waria refer to as prestasi, which is usually undertaken through productive work (Chapter 4). The work involved in caring for brondong, despite its laborious nature, cannot itself be defined as prestasi. This is because intimacy with brondong is unrecognised by official state displays, and is mostly invisible to broader society as a result. By engaging in the forms of work that sustain kin time, waria highlight the many instances when mothering is performed by those other than women, by those who may not be biologically related to the person that they care for, and in spaces outside of the domestic sphere.11 They also indicate how the naturalisation of motherhood for women during the New Order excludes such practices from the realm of prestasi more generally. By caring for brondong, waria see themselves as drawing the liminal masculinity of brondong to completion, much in the same ways that waria describe gender performances of banci

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11 Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994) suggests that the dominant view of motherhood as a natural product of women in the United States and other Western contexts both obscures and devalues occasions when mothering is practiced in other ways and by individuals other than women.
kaléng as requiring social participation by other waria. The work that goes in to securing a brondong’s masculinity is, in turn, an important practice through which waria accomplish femininity.

I observed waria’s mothering most frequently in the form of concrete practices usually characterised as feminine reproductive labour. This labour includes undertaking domestic chores like cleaning, cooking, washing and repairing clothes. I would often arrive at an informant’s house to find them cheerily scrubbing their brondong’s dirty clothes, having woken up at 4am to prepare his breakfast. The giving of gifts and money can also be understood as a form of mothering, as in the case of a number of waria who paid for brondong’s school fees or provided pocket money. The centrality of gifts and money to intimate relationships for waria appear similar at first glance to relationships between transgender-identified individuals and younger men described elsewhere (Kulick 1997; Manalansan 2003, 26). In particular, intimacy between waria and brondong especially resembles Mark Johnson’s (1997, 205) description of older gay men and transgender-identified individuals caring for young men (a relationship referred to as ipatan) in the Muslim southern Philippines (ibid., 205). Johnson (ibid., 205) writes that the end of these relationships are ultimately a source of great hurt given that it reasserts their exclusion from “the reciprocal compassion and obligations which are said to characterize parent-child relationships.” Among waria in Indonesia, however, I found that most experienced a sense of accomplishment from their brondong’s marriage. Most older waria who had experienced relationships with a number of brondong explained that it was far better that a brondong get married than continue on with them.

In this respect, and although domestic labour like cooking and cleaning is certainly important, mothering also extends to more substantial forms of assistance which adheres more closely to Michaela di Leonardo’s (1987) definition of “kin work” as the labour commonly performed by women between households in order to sustain families across generations. Waria commonly stress the importance of forms of “work designed to ensure the survival of the collective” (Stack and Burton 1994, 36), such as finding brondong a job and setting hard limits on marriage prospects. The labour that they provide is often essential for a brondong to marry and become a complete national and economic subject at all.

Sony, a waria aged in her sixties, narrated how she had assisted her brondong with the difficult task of finding regular wage work. As is common among young men in Indonesia, he struggled to find a legitimate job, let alone one that paid sufficiently. Dutifully, Sony located him employment, first in a lower paying section of the restaurant where she worked, and then assisted him to move to another section when he complained that his income was too small. “A man has to have a good job,” she

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12 For example, brondong share a number of similarities with adolescent boyzinhos who travesti in Brazil “actively socialize… into expecting money and gifts from them” (Kulick 1997, 142). However, while travesti see in boyzinhos a future husband, as far as I could tell waria usually have no such designs on brondong.
explained, echoing dominant New Order gender ideology linking a successful performance of masculinity to the productive realm.

Given the importance of a brondong’s marriage, the most emotionally charged task for waria appears to be the kin work invested in securing his moral purity. This is mostly based on waria taking a role sheltering a brondong from women that they consider to be morally suspect, and ushering him towards women who might be good, obedient wives. Sony narrated numerous stories of confrontation with women, suspecting them of having sex with her brondong and leading him astray. She described this jealousy as not motivated by her own desire to keep him, but rather as a defence mechanism derived from a concern for his future. This was consistent with the general anxiety waria expressed about their brondong ending up with a “good woman (perempuan baik).” Sony defined good women explicitly in terms of their difference to “bad women (perempuan nakal)” — those involved in drinking and promiscuous sexuality in the public sphere. I suggest that while despised by waria, the figure of the bad woman also occupies queer time alongside waria and brondong, existing at the intersection of “marginalized time schemes” and “disavowed” forms of sexuality that are especially heightened in markets for transactional sex (Freeman 2007, 159). But whereas brondong appear able to move out of queer time towards the accomplishment of normative masculinity with considerable effort by their waria, the bad woman is seen as morally deviant with little possibility for recuperation.

**A Brondong’s Wedding Day**

Once brondong arrive at a marriageable age, it is waria who are often the most adamant that they get married. Waria in each of my field sites stressed their brondong’s wedding day as an occasion of heightened anxiety and happiness. One waria explained, with a hint of apprehension, that her brondong was approaching an age at which he would “of course want descendants (tentu saja dia mau keturunan).” The fact that waria guard their brondong with fierce jealously yet let him marry heterosexually initially struck me as curious paradox. I spoke to many waria who had enabled brondong to get jobs, encouraged them to stop womanising and find wives, and in some cases financially sustained their brondong’s young families until well after a first child was born. I wondered: Why would waria place so much effort in caring and tending to their brondong, only to encourage them to leave?

Waria’s primary interest is their brondong’s accomplishment of masculinity, which is informed by dominant notions of kin time. As a result, the overall aim of waria’s mothering is their brondong’s marriage to a “good woman (perempuan baik).” However, waria also expressed considerable anxiety that their brondong would “fall (turun)” into immoral practices, in which case kin time would pass him by. This is notable because waria were frequently participating in the very practices that they sought to ensure their brondong avoided (most notably transactional sex). Brondong’s always already dubious capacity to obtain adulthood through marriage lay at the root of a number of instances of jealousy that I observed during fieldwork. For example, a notoriously spiteful older gay man who
spent time with waria gave some money to a waria’s brondong; he did so knowing that, having done this, the brondong would run away and only return to his waria partner when the money ran out (which he did). After exploding with anger, the waria partner burst into tears only to ask: “What if he meets a bad woman (perempuan nakal)?” Yet, while the mothering of waria is dedicated to shaping brondong into morally upright adult men, the attenuated and unrecognised nature of their relationship means that national belonging for waria inevitably remains incomplete. Waria feel this acutely; the marriage of brondong is understood as both a much anticipated and fairly anticlimactic conclusion to their relationship.

In Sony’s case, her brondong’s marriage number of years earlier had left her precisely in such an ambiguous state. She had met him in the restaurant where she worked when he was only seventeen years old. He was on his way to his hometown elsewhere in Java to visit family. After travelling around with him for a few days, she considered their relationship settled: “Then he became my brondong,” she explained. Over the course of the months that Sony and I spent together, I came to understand the deep significance of their relationship. Despite Sony’s claim that waria “quickly forget the one [brondong] before (lupa yang sebelumnya),” it appeared to me that she had invested a great deal of time and effort on him. Given the significance of her efforts, she continued to fret over her brondong long after he had married. She told me that he continued to visit, albeit infrequently, and when he did she offered him money and gifts. I sensed that their relationship had entered a period of decline, even though Sony insisted that “her brondong” — as she continued to call him — remained loyal to her as a kind of surrogate son.

An understanding of the possibility of life after mothering brondong among waria is usefully contextualised by recent descriptions of “shame (malu)” in Indonesia, an affect which reflects a “nation under perceived threats of disintegration” (Boellstorff 2004, 479) and the failure of New Order state-led economic development and partial integration into the global economy (see also Lindquist 2009, 14). This understanding of shame clarifies why waria often placed some distance between themselves and the new family of their brondong, even though that they had helped to make their life possible. Waria experience shame in this context because, unlike the visibility of prestasi, their mothering is unintelligible to an audience. I speculate that the reason that brondong do not experience shame, by contrast, is because they are liminal men at the time that they entered into a relationship with waria: as such, they are removed from the social expectations and obligations incumbent on full adult men in Indonesian society (C.f. Turner 1977). A sense of shame may also explain why waria allow brondong to fade out of their lives after marriage despite fighting so hard to hold onto him through practices of mothering: there is no recognition of their relationship in the eyes of an audience. In Erving Goffman’s (1952, 53) terms, there can be no “one-man team.” Given that brondong is a temporal stage in the life course, they can become a “normal man (laki-laki normal)” in line with kin time expectations. As a result, a timely marriage offers the chance for him to leave both that “queer moment” (Meiu 2015) and his waria partner behind.
Given the lack of recognition of her mothering, Sony enjoyed reminiscing about her *brondong* with me. In these narrations, she did not emphasise the erotic aspects of their intimacy but the labour his visits entailed. She laughed as she explained, “I became a housewife (*ibu rumah tangga*)! I would tell him, ‘Mas, if you’re tired, and you need clothes washed, just wear your clean clothes and I’ll wash them for you.’” I initially interpreted this to mean that Sony saw their relationship as one that emulated a typical conjugal arrangement of husband and wife. However, I later realised that Sony was articulating a rather different understanding of intimacy. In this case, Sony located herself as the Indonesian phrase *ibu rumah tangga* literally indicates: a “mother” in the house (commonly translated as “housewife”) in relation to *brondong*.

The meaning of “mother (*ibu*)” as it developed during the New Order came to rest almost singularly on the roles associated with reproduction (Chapter 2). Sony’s reference to herself as an *ibu rumah tangga* draws on the dominant cultural logic of femininity in New Order Indonesia. In Sony’s view, mothering combines an obligation to commit oneself to household management, and to take responsibility for rearing the next generation of men in particular (Jones 2010, 275–76; Brenner 1999). Given the emphasis on mothering in the definition of femininity, a *brondong*’s marriage is thus the ultimate success in some *waria*’s lifetimes. Despite the important role that *waria* play, however, their intimacy is not legible as fully parental, nor is it considered a substitute for heterosexual domesticity. In this sense, the fact that the labour of mothering is not recognised serves to reinscribe *waria*’s status as “abject males” (Boellstorff 2007, 111) who are marginal to national kin time, widely considered to be outside of heteronormativity due to widespread recognition of their inability to marry and have children.

Despite this tension, *waria* do look forward the marriage of their *brondong* as it the culmination of many years of effort. So, when her *brondong* announced that he wanted to get married, Sony did not object. She only offered the following advice: “When you are thinking about a wife, just make sure that it isn’t a woman that you met in a restaurant.” I found this comment amusing, considering that Sony had herself met her *brondong* in a restaurant. It also serves as another reminder that *waria* do not understand themselves as occupying the role of a loving “wife (*istri*)” in such relationships, but rather stress their relationship to reproduction; *waria* exclude themselves out from the possibility of being a wife in any real sense of that term. Sony’s mothering extended to her spending a significant amount of money to secure his passage to adulthood. Sony recounted how, immediately following his anticipated declaration that he intended to marry, her *brondong* added hastily: “I need some help, for the wedding (*aku mau minta bantuan*).” The affective and material bonds of mothering — never able to entirely separated — are understood by some *brondong* as a resource which they do not fail to exploit.

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13 *Waria*’s stress on mothering also serves as an important reminder of the ways in which the roles of “wife” and “mother,” unified by their relationship to reproductive labour, continue to form a pair of indistinguishable social roles which shape ideals of Indonesian femininity.
Nevertheless, this crude request for money was hurtful for Sony in subtle yet keenly felt ways. On the one hand, Sony knew that he did not have to reciprocate her gift, given that their intimacy was socially unintelligible. After he married, he was not obliged to repay the intensive mothering that Sony had provided by offering her support in old age, as is commonly expected of children in Indonesia (Boellstorff 1999, 492). Yet on the other hand, Sony felt obliged to give him the money; she had, after all, played a meaningful role during a formative period in his life. With this in mind, she handed over almost the entire amount of the savings that she had accumulated across a lifetime of work. While not recognised, such lavish gifts did not go unnoticed by the brondong and his new family. The continuation of gift giving from waria to brondong also indicates that the relationship does not end as abruptly with marriage as some waria seem to suggest. As mentioned, Sony’s brondong continued to see her occasionally even after he had married. I understand waria’s desire to maintain a relationship as animated by the considerable importance of the mothering role to her. A number of waria told me that they liked to perform domestic chores for their brondong even after he married, as well as provide him with money, even though he has a wife who presumably does the same.

Although Sony both happened to be in Jakarta on the day of her brondong’s wedding and had financed it, she did not attend the event. She recalled with a hint of sadness that she felt “shame (malu).” She recounted: “I didn’t want to go. I said to him, ‘I’ll meet you at the station instead.’” Sony’s experiences help to interpret the silences that characterise the intimacy after a brondong marries more generally. Her use of “shame (malu)” in this particular instance recalls Johan Lindquist’s (2009, 14) definition of it as an emotion “that describes the failures to live up to the ideals of the nation.” The fact that Sony’s mothering took place in the shadows meant that there was no audience and thus no prospect of the recognition otherwise so important to waria. This is especially troubling for waria considering the fact that their gender performances, and the process of becoming waria, are considered meaningful mostly in terms of their visibility to an audience. This is why Sony voluntarily removed herself from a recognised role in her brondong’s new family life. This was most explicit in her recollection of the moment that she gave him the money for the wedding. She lowered her voice and explained:

When I went to Jakarta, I didn’t want to go to his house. When I got there, I just met him at the train station. After we met, I asked, how much, this this this (gestured counting money), that’s it.

Their tersely truncated meeting, and the lack of recognition that the tense atmosphere seems to have culminated from, serves to highlight that for waria their femininity can never be fully recognised in the eyes of wider society.

Just before I was about to leave one evening, Sony explained to me that her brondong had promised to come and see her but had not yet made it. I sensed that it had, in fact, been some years since his last visit. She lowered her voice and, in reference to the gifts she had bought for him said, “When he comes home, it costs me more than 500,000Rp (US$50).” While her emphasis on the financial burden
of intimacy caught me by surprise, Sony seemed proud that she was able to remember his favourite items and was in a financial position to be able to purchase them. Sony’s disappointment seemed less about the large sum of money that she had spent in preparation for him than the fact that he had not come to collect it. She walked into the back room and returned with a package of gifts consisting of a bottle of beer, perfume, hair oil and soap. She unwrapped it carefully, and encouraged me to inspect each gift carefully. As she repackaged her gifts, she sighed and said, “Out of all the banci, you show me one who doesn’t orbit around their man (yang sama laki nggak ngorbit).” This parcel of gifts symbolises the many small gestures that together constitute Sony’s mothering, and in turn the unfulfilled potential that it holds for waria to secure their own femininity by ensuring that brondong meet the expectations of kin time.

**Kucing and Transactional Sex**

I have so far suggested a fairly straightforward picture, in which waria perform the thankless task of mothering brondong, and in doing so facilitate them in becoming “normal” men. Far more often, I found that the majority of brondong I met were not innocent young things likely to be whisked off track by sinister bad women (a common fantasy entertained by waria) but were willingly engaging in transactional sex (kucing) for men and waria themselves. Not infrequently I even heard stories about older waria becoming “pimps (germo)” or “mothers (Mami)” of kucing stretching back a number of decades, providing a rather different view on the practices of mothering introduced thus far. While this ensured a supply of brondong and money for the “mothers,” even these waria too seemed concerned by the care that they provided as well. Such waria provided their kucing with meals, and sometimes extensive (and mostly unrepa) loans if they needed them. When one such waria who was well-known in the community passed away and her operation closed, I asked a waria informant: what happened to the kucing? She responded drolly by invoking the use of the term “cat” for brondong who engage in transactional sex: “They just turn into wild cats again (kembali ke kucing liar).” This suggests both the unfinished nature of waria-brondong intimacy, and highlights the role that waria play in domesticating these unruly yet endearing liminal men.

During fieldwork, I met kucing as often as I did waria. Early on, during a visit to Jakarta, I met a young waria in her mid-twenties for dinner. She arrived in the company of a brondong who spent most of the evening giggling and making sexual advances, and showing naked photographs of himself, to both of us. After he left, she told me that she had met him a number of times in a park frequented by waria and gay men. She explained that she usually paid him 50,000 Indonesian Rupiah (US$5), bought him dinner, and they would have sex. On another occasion in Yogyakarta, a fifty-year-old waria friend and I arrived at a meeting for an HIV prevention organisation. We both received a small envelope containing the customary “transport money (uang transport).” Taking it, my friend referred to herself in jest as an “envelope queen (ratu amplop),” a term which refers to a waria who goes to long and boring meetings or fills out repetitive survey questionnaires, simply to earn the small amounts of money offered in return. When I asked her what she might buy with it she laughed and,
with a wry smile, said: “At least it’s enough to buy a kucing (cukup biar beli kucing).” And Mami Maya, when Nancy asked after her health, stated brazenly that “at least kucing are still affordable these days.”

The common understanding among waria that kucing are widely available for transactional sex indicates the complex role that economic exchanges, alongside mothering, play in shaping waria understandings of brondong. Yet, why should waria pay kucing for sex, seeing as they can and do find it easily without buying it? In my description of nyèbong in the previous chapter, I mentioned that waria described how they would often engage in “unpaid (grêtongan)” sexual encounters or that they would receive token amounts as a form of payment. However, as mentioned, both paying and being paid for sex can play a role in defining a waria’s “self-worth (harga diri).” There appear to be two main reasons why waria purchase sex from kucing. The first is that, in purchasing sex from kucing, waria appear to articulate a recognised sense of “self-worth (harga diri)” which can be evaluated in monetary terms. The second is that paying for sex with kucing is a way to meet brondong, with whom a waria can then strike up a longer term relationship. This then serves as a way for waria to engage in mothering (with the added benefit of a sense that she has rescued a kucing from his immoral lifestyle) in order to live up to the ideals structured by kin time described earlier.

Noni identified kucing as the most widely available subjects of sexual intimacy when she first migrated to Jakarta. In fact, she described it as one of the defining experiences of becoming waria. She described how her friend would frequently invite her to go and visit kucing as a form of leisure:

At that time, I wasn’t a stranger to the world of kucing. I already knew there were so many kucing in Jakarta. We worked for two nights, with Kiki, and she woke me up, ‘Noni, you aren’t going out nyèbong?’ I returned from Singapore, I had money. I didn’t focus on nyèbong, right, I didn't nyèbong for three months Ben. I stopped, because I didn't need to look for money. I already had savings. ‘Let’s go to the kucing place!’ Kiki begged me.

In her account, Noni explained how she and her friend would stay at the kucing house for a number of days at a time. She explained: “We said ‘Mas, in a minute we want one each.’ There were rooms upstairs. In that room there was a bathroom. We were asked to bathe, so we had a bath with our kucing.” The length of the stay, and the importance of performances of care like bathing, suggests the meanings of the relationship beyond the impersonal exchange predicated on sexual release which is commonly associated with transactional sex in Western settings.

For waria, intimacy with kucing appears to represent a form of “bounded intimacy” in pursuit of an “authentic emotional and physical connection” rather than an experience related to sexual release alone (Bernstein 2007, 103). While Indonesia differs significantly from the postindustrial contexts described by Bernstein (2007, 102), the “diffuse and expansive” character of emotional aspects of

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14 “In postindustrial sexual commerce, emotional authenticity is incorporated directly into the economic contract” (Bernstein 2007, 105). There are other interesting parallels between this observation and my own. Bernstein describes how the emotional aspect of the exchange means that people increasingly see their bodies as individual assets that they possess; this was certainly the case for many brondong I met.
transactional sex in her account seems comparable to *waria* accounts of sex with *kucing*. However, while in Western contexts, the exchange of money serves to set strong boundaries on personal relationships (ibid., 103), in the Indonesian context this boundary appears far less certain. This is illustrated by the significant overlap between *brondong* from whom *waria* purchase transactional sex and those with whom they enter into ongoing relationships.

One *waria* I met who despised *kucing* offers further insights into these concerns. Marie, the fifty-year-old Yogyakarta *waria* I introduced in the previous chapter, had no time for *brondong* at all. She shared my initial impression that they were opportunistic “hypocrites (*munafik*)” in search of money alone. She was equally scornful of *waria* who paid *kucing* for sex, or those who took *brondong* on as permanent lovers. Marie interpreted the direction of gifts and money from *waria* to *brondong* as representative of a broader problem of recognition. She rightly identified that such forms of intimacy, unlike those with husbands, lack the promise of securing recognition from society. It also annoyed her because it represented a further erosion of the capacity for *waria* to earn money and eroded their overall value. In line with her perspective, Marie insisted that she never offered sex for free at *nyébong*, but rather that she considered it a form of work that she did to make money; she was a professional. However, her view *nyébong* contrasts with the opinions of the majority of *waria* I met who had no qualms about paying *kucing* or giving away sex without charge to cute *brondong*.

By contrast, Marie was firm in her rejection of the common view of *nyébong* among *waria*. “If men are getting enjoyment from us,” she explained grumpily, “then they have to pay. She recalled her experiences of *nyébong*: “I would say, if you want to have me you have to pay me, but there are so many *waria* willing to do it for free (*grétongan*).” This also reflects how money appears to structure intimacy in fundamental ways for *waria*. One *waria* in Yogyakarta explained that a terrible insult for a *waria* during the 1980s and 1990s was to describe her as worth only small monetary amounts.

Shirley also recounted how a gay man had yelled out that a particularly fierce *waria* was worth only 500Rp (US$0.40) at *nyébong*; in response she picked up a large brick and smashed it over his head. And, a common practice for *waria* working overseas in Malaysia and Singapore I heard about was to engage in friendly competition to see who could make the most money in one night, recording the amount earned in a ledger each night.

I found that it was not only the ability to earn money, but an ability to spend it as well that marked the value of *waria*. A wealthy forty-year-old *waria*, who aspired to salon ownership, recounted how she had recently been on a date to an expensive restaurant in Jakarta with a man she had met online. She said that, soon after being seated he asked: “How much will it cost?” She was furious. After asking him whether he thought that all she was after was money, she told him to leave so that she could continue her meal in peace. She recounted, “I told him not to worry about the bill for his cocktail, that I could afford it.” A sense of frustration of being stereotyped as willing to have sex for any price, or a price at all, characterised a number of accounts I collected from upwardly mobile *waria*. 
Yet it was not only upwardly mobile waria who linked their economic prowess to a broader sense of self-worth. Shirley recounted her anger when clients at nyébong expected to have sex despite being ugly, drunk or both. As explained in the previous chapter, she emphasised her retort in such situations as follows: “banci have value too you know (banci juga berharga lho).” The outrage of these waria offers insights into the complexities of the relationship between transactional sex and desires for intimacy in this setting. The relationship between transactional sex, aspirations for kin time, and national belonging suggest that the conjoined projects of New Order developmentalism and the capitalist market fundamentally informs understandings of intimacy for waria. Money here offers a transparent way for waria to judge their own value and that of others, but as the examples above illustrate, establishing the boundaries of what is for sale and what is not surfaces as an emotionally charged concern.

A relationship to transactional sex was also a source of anxiety for brondong. Each brondong that I spoke to stressed that making money from transactional sex was a temporary arrangement, and that the day that they married heterosexually and entered the “normal world (dunia normal)” was the day that such an arrangement would cease. In this sense, brondong are similar to gay men in Indonesia, who stress the importance of marriage as a conduit to recognition in “normal” society while continuing to participate in the “gay world” (Boellstorff 2005, 124, 1999). When I asked brondong whether they would continue to see their waria partner or whether they would continue to be a kucing after they married, however, the answer was a resounding no. They emphasised that part of moving into the “normal” world was leaving “all this” behind. I was initially surprised to hear that brondong would stop participating in markets for transactional sex after they married, given that it provides a far better income than they could otherwise make and that sexuality in Indonesia is not tied to an individual subjectivity in the same way that it is in the West.

My observation that brondong see themselves occupying a stage in the life course rather than possessing an enduring subjectivity helps to explain why they do not usually move comfortably between transactional sex and marriage. It also helps to explain why a brondong’s marriage in most cases marks the end of a relationship with a waria. I speculate that brondong differ somewhat from the “archipelagic self” (Boellstorff 2005, 206) of Indonesian gay men because for brondong, sexuality appears to be fundamentally understood in terms of its relationship to markets for transactional sex in which youth is a highly valued asset. Sexual desire for brondong is therefore not associated primarily with national belonging and love, but rather with economic success. This is the primary way in which I have found that brondong differ from gay men, for whom “authentic love” (ibid., 102) is a defining aspect of sexual desire and selfhood. Brondong also differ from waria who, like women, seem to understand love as something most realistically achieved through unrecognised kin work. It was also clear that, in moving out of liminal masculinity and towards complete masculinity, brondong were no

15 While some brondong certainly also describe themselves as gay, I found that the majority do not.
longer considered especially attractive. Ageing in kin time was a somewhat paradoxical experience for many brondong who found that their liminal masculinity, tied to adolescent youthfulness, was both a primary economic resource and a temporary life course moment that they were required to leave.

**Old Brondong and Heteronormativity in Indonesia**

I have suggested that mothering brondong is one way that waria accomplish femininity. Much of the kin work that waria perform is based on securing the moral attributes that mark out brondong as a proper adult citizen, such as ensuring timely marriage to a “good woman.” Given that many of the brondong that waria adopt are kucing who engage in transactional sex, the effort that they expend to this end is often rather arduous. However, waria seem to harbour a sincere desire to rescue their brondong from immorality and return him to the correct path, even though waria themselves were most deeply implicated in the very worlds that they claimed to be rescuing their brondong from. This tension played out in the fact that some brondong appeared extremely reluctant to move on and become complete men. Even as these particular brondong protested that their relationship with a waria was only temporary, the material and affective fulfilment that this queer intimacy offered meant that they came to experience liminal masculinity as something of a refuge. It was in this context that I encountered numerous brondong who had moved beyond the biological age that they should have married, but were yet to do so.

I conclude this chapter by reflecting on old brondong, those who continue to occupy liminal masculinity despite being at a biological age when they should have become “normal” men. I suggest that the old brondong is a figure who condenses the complexities of negotiating the work of accomplishing femininity and masculinity in the context of historic political-economic shifts in Indonesia, even as it enables new forms of intimacy. This is particularly complex in the context of ongoing market liberalisation in Indonesia, where young men are increasing finding that the value of their bodily capital in markets for transactional sex conflicts with the value of state-sanctioned kin time. What I found especially poignant about old brondong was the way that waria would care for them well beyond the age that they found them attractive; in fact, sometimes a small community of older waria were the only friends that these old brondong had. Rather than disappearing, the fantasy of a “normal life” for these old brondong in fact grew in its allure, structured by their growing distance from the images of happy middle class life and economic success for which they claimed to participate in transactional sex in the first place.

Old brondong who passed the age they should ideally have married but remain dependent on waria partners and forms of transactional sex to get by, make explicit recent divergences in national and economic markers of value. While the economic and national aspects of being a complete gendered subject may have been relatively unified during the New Order, it appears that the moral worth achieved by maintaining kin time for brondong contrasts with possibilities for material prosperity.
Old brondong seem to be willing to defer national belonging in favour of exploiting their liminal masculinity as a resource, as they put it, for “just one more year.” I met old brondong relatively frequently. I observed as old brondong circled through relationships with a number of older waria, usually moving to another city when they had exhausted their options in one. Such relationships, however, seemed somewhat undermined by the fact that an old brondong is something of a failed man, given that he has failed to marry heterosexually at the age he should have done so. Most waria I have introduced in this thesis were in fact uninterested in intimacy with old brondong, given that they preferred the fulfilment of mothering a brondong until he was a complete man. In some cases, I even observed old brondong seek to establish their masculinity through referring to their older waria partner as a “wife (istri).”

I met one such old brondong in Jakarta who called himself the “Sergeant.” He explained that he had selected his name because of his muscular body, but to me it evoked the embodiment of a masculinity lived in the shadow of authoritarianism. The Sergeant spoke infrequently, but when he did, his voice mimicked the monosyllabic vocabulary and staccato tone of an Army officer. However, his body was not — as that of a real Sergeant should be — in the service of the state. Rather, he was one of a number of brondong who described his body as a source of “economic capital (modal).” I found that many brondong came to sex work as a profitable coincidence of participation in the informal economy or poorly paid jobs in Indonesia’s expanding service sector: to use the Sergeant’s fine phrase, this is where he learned that his “body is valued (badan di hargai).”

The Sergeant had migrated from a rural part of another island in search of employment. He told me how he had initially found work as a tea seller on a major intersection in the city, but that it was very difficult to make a living this way. Each day he would only earn around 20,000 Indonesian rupiah (US$2). However, this particular intersection in the city was a place where older men would come to pick up younger men like him and pay them for sex. “It was the obvious thing to do,” he said, “they were willing to pay me up to 300,000 rupiah ($US30) at a time.” Like many kucing he quickly became economically dependent on sex work with gay men for the bulk of his income alongside other forms of employment, at the same time as finding nurturance through intimacy with waria.

A few weeks into their relationship, the Sergeant moved in with Pipin, a fifty-year-old waria in Jakarta. Like the other waria introduced earlier, the Pipin had previously explained her “self-worth (harga diri)” to me in terms of monetary value. For example, she expressed a strong desire to return to her hometown of Padang, not only for the sake of family but also out of a desire to reopen her salon which she had closed before departing for Jakarta. Apart from visible forms of prestasi through her skilful work in a salon, intimacy with brondong was another important avenue through which Pipin had secured a sense of accomplishment. However, given that the Sergeant was in his late twenties, most waria considered him to be fast approaching the end of his attractiveness and barely a brondong.
at all. As such, the fact that he was still a *kucing* meant that he was the subject of ridicule among *waria*.16

That Pipin was still a good two decades older than him was of no concern; *waria*, after all, are not expected to marry. Through this relationship I observed the Sergeant obtain not only money and gifts (although this was important) from their relationship, but also the ability to perform a suitable form of masculinity. This is illustrated by the fact that, in referring to her as his “wife (*istri*),” Pipin played an important supporting role in the Sergeant’s performance. When he was not around, however, I noticed that Pipin would not call him a husband but rather her *brondong*. Most strikingly — and what mostly marked his claim to be a complete man as most tenuous — was that Pipin remained committed to the practices of mothering that characterise *waria-brondong* intimacy. Although the Sergeant understood himself to be something of a man in the house, to Pipin and other *waria* he was an old *brondong*; defined by his need for the practices and expenditure of kin work without the promise of a return.

Soon after he moved with Pipin I noticed that, because she performed extensive tasks associated with mothering, the Sergeant no longer had to work as much as he used to. This meant that he spent his days watching television or glued to his mobile phone. This also meant that he did not have to conduct as much transactional sex with gay men. This suited Pipin because, like many *waria*, she considered this to be an unpleasant source of jealousy. *Waria* often worried that older and usually wealthier gay men would take a liking to their *brondong* and attempt to usurp their mothering role. As such, Pipin put considerable effort into washing his clothes, feeding him and supplying him with pocket money. Another *waria* who lived next door had paired with a slightly younger *brondong* and cared for him in similar ways. This *waria* stressed her deep anxiety that he should marry heterosexually. I sensed that her anxiety stemmed from the fact that she observed the ultimately unsatisfactory relationship between Pipin and the Sergeant, with the Sergeant’s inadequate performance of masculinity serving as a prescient warning. Echoing my earlier description of Sony, she stressed firmly her desire for him to marry a good woman. However, this *waria* seemed in a permanent state of distress due to the fact that her *brondong* would frequently run away for a number of days at a time. On one such occasion she explained her confidence that he would return to her: “But he always comes back when he runs out of money.” She confided in me that she considered him to be nothing but a child, one who required support and encouragement until he would be mature enough to get married. At the same time, she seemed genuinely happy to continue to play a role mothering him even as she fantasised the end of their relationship through his marriage.

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16 Comments about *kucing* usually centred on the accusation that they enjoyed being penetrated by *waria* during anal sex (*di temppong*) a little too much. This is interesting considering that a passive/active regime, as is the case in Latin America (Kulick 1998) is usually described as not relevant to understandings of gender in Indonesia (Boellstorff 2005, 57). I tend to understand this not so much as based on masculine (penetrating partner) feminine (penetrated partner) but rather on other forms of difference. These appear to be primarily age and who is paying (see Oetomo 2000, 50).
Given the material advantages of liminal masculinity, the Sergeant and other old brondong appeared reluctant to marry, whatever their stated ambitions. The reasons why brondong dwell longer in liminal masculinity despite considerable pressures to marry are complex. Some brondong found it attractive to get close to waria and live out their days in comfort. Other waria confided in me that these old brondong are just unredeemable or simply bad men, and thus the best they could do was circulate among older waria. The most compelling reason to stay a brondong, however, seemed to be that it facilitated access to markets for transactional sex far beyond the age than it was usually possible. Brondong appear to be an object of desire among waria, and I suspect that they are a popular object of desire more generally in Indonesia. However, despite a continuing ability to make money, old brondong discovered that they are unable to make a claim to full adult masculinity and thus to national belonging. This is where the tension between economic and national aspects of becoming a complete subject are not easily reconciled. One can get married and attempt to make money through legitimate means, but this is an economically difficult decision to make. However, old brondong engaged in transactional sex up until a point that was, in the eyes of both waria and wider society, too late to be redeemable. The best that such brondong could do was to find a waria who would call them a “husband (suami)” as a temporary yet ultimately unsatisfactory form of recognition of his masculinity.

Pipin’s relationship with the Sergeant ended a few months after it started. Soon after it did, she left abruptly early one morning. When I asked after her, a friend told me that she had caught the bus back home to Padang. In the end, her friend recounted, she made the decision to return to her hometown and restart her salon. I recalled our conversation in which she stressed the importance of work, and an income, to her sense of self-worth. Sony’s intimacy with her brondong was relatively successful; although she lamented the end of their relationship he had married and become a complete man. On the other hand, Pipin’s intimacy with an old brondong like Sergeant had become a dead end — he could neither place her within national kin time, nor was he a youthful and desirable brondong. The Sergeant’s liminal masculinity had extended beyond an appropriate biological age. Old brondong reflect how the “predicament posed by economic integration across national borders” (Rudnyckyj 2010, 132) in post-authoritarian Indonesia is shifting, rather than erasing, the importance of heteronormative kin time to gender performances established during the New Order. It makes sense that during their mid to late teens, brondong can become kucing for a time; after all this is a liminal and ambiguous stage in the Indonesian life course. But old brondong, who cheat biological age and in doing so exploit their access to erotic capital beyond a respectable age, place themselves in a vulnerable position outside of national kin time and fulfilment of ideals associated with masculinity.

17 More research is required to understand how and why brondong engage in sex work, and the forms of intimacy that they sustain more generally. I suspect that brondong sex work is in fact widespread across a number of industries, particularly the rapidly expanding service sector in urban Indonesia. The fact that it is integrated with other forms of migration and labour means that it is characterised by silence (C.f. Shah 2014, 88–89).
Kin Time in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia

This chapter has illustrated how gender normativity and heterosexuality in Indonesia are shaped by the history of national temporality established during the New Order. During this period, to choose marriage and childrearing within the nuclear family was to choose to participate in the twin goals of development and national belonging. In a national imaginary where marriage and reproduction are the measure of gender, the labour invested by waria in producing the masculinity of brondong is a pivotal practice through which they accomplish femininity. Yet, while the kin work that waria perform turns brondong into complete national subjects upon his successful marriage, recognition of his accomplishment is not shared by waria. Unlike publicly visible efforts at national belonging for waria, which usually involve forms of work that translate into socially recognised good deeds or prestasi, making a man out of a brondong is not just any form of work or affective attachment. Waria understand it as something of a labour of love. By this I mean that it is not an intimacy associated with the love of romance and choice, but rather a love derived from the pleasure of obligation and dependency. Waria-brondong intimacy therefore reflects entrenched social anxieties about becoming a complete, gendered subject in the eyes of the Indonesian state that developed during the New Order.

Scholars have long referred to “the discursive intertwining of gender, marriage, and progress” as an assemblage which effects a sense that individuals are “along a historical continuum, labeling themselves or others as more or less modern or traditional” (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, 20–21). As an “idiom of modernization” (ibid.) love shapes individual and collective experiences of temporality. Many of my informants stressed, however, that romantic love is not able to be realised by women and waria. This is observed most concretely in the fact that waria who have a husband are extremely rare. Those that did have a husband are considered both unusual and to be flirting with danger; one seventy-year-old waria who was the subject of much gossip had been duped by the cruel wife of her “husband” and lived “like a maid (pembantu)” in the dark back room near the kitchen of her own house. This is why it appears that waria prefer the labour of love involved in caring for brondong. As a result of taking love and marriage as everywhere the standard for measuring modern intimacy, relationships such as those constituted by waria’s mothering have been made less visible. This is in spite of the fact that such roles also offer important ways for individuals to become modern men and women. In focusing on the practices that constitute waria’s mothering, I have suggested how love — as not only an ideology of choice but of dependency — might be considered in new ways.

Given long histories linking the family to national belonging in Indonesia, there are real and significant reasons why brondong seek a path of middle class domesticity. However, the experiences of queer time that I have introduced also facilitate a perspective on the unruly forms of relationality and kin time which are produced out of the very desire to participate in an ostensibly heteronormative

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18 This bears parallels to Mark Johnson’s (1997, 207) description of the Philippines, where “American love, like American style, provides the conceptual space as well as much of the vocabulary for the articulation of locally defined (yet locally unrealizable) gay transgenderal identities.”
temporality. *Brondong* are interesting because they present a perspective on desire that contrasts with descriptions of gay men who marry women in order to participate in kin time in Indonesia (Boellstorff 1999). I have suggested that *brondong* differ because they understand transactional sex as configured in terms of a temporal scale, a stage from which they see themselves able to exit upon the act of marriage. They see themselves for the most part as “normal” men trying to move on to the next stage in the life course; to become “complete men.” This is the sense in which I have described *brondong* as a liminal masculinity. Unlike being gay in Indonesia, which has its own world, there is no spatially configured subject position for *brondong*. And, once he surpasses the age at which he should have married, the value of his bodily capital in markets for transactional sex diminishes to almost worthless proportions.

*Brondong* are acutely aware of the value of their liminal masculinity in markets for transactional sex. As a result, *kucing* say that they sell sex in order to invest in having a family in future. It is in this context that old *brondong* emerge at the intersection of shifting ideals of heteronormativity and the possibilities of queer intimacy in post-authoritarian Indonesia. While somewhat forgivable to make money through transactional sex up until one’s early twenties at most, the old *brondong* I met migrated from city to city to make money through a combination of poorly paid jobs and transactional sex. In this respect, old *brondong* are part of a growing group of Indonesians, as Johan Lindquist (2009, 150) writes, who “hope to become part of a new middle class, but… most often learn through their actual mobility that they are a part of an expanding underclass.” The fact that *brondong* choose to make money via a means that is certainly considered immoral according to middle class values, but is borne out of a desire to live up to those very values, is a paradox produced by heteronormative kin time in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Most concretely, both *brondong* and their *waria* partner both stress that their current position results from a desire to save money for a future wife and family. This reflects how, despite shifts in normative understandings of kinship and gender towards a more outwardly religious model in recent years, kin time remains animated by a modernist nuclear family with roles of mother and father at its core. Suzanne Brenner (2011, 478) has recently observed “a strong concern with establishing moral ascendancy over the perceived immorality of the previous regime and with building a new moral order as the foundation of the nation.” This might suggest the production of new possibilities of kin time linking individuals to a moral order beyond the narrow “temporal element” (Boellstorff 2005, 198) of the New Order family. However, *brondong*’s attractiveness — and its translation into value in erotic markets — reflects how the relationship linking kin time to national development has not disappeared in this new moral order. Rather, I have shown how roles of motherhood, fatherhood and the heteronormative understandings of gender that underpin them emerges in new ways, even as the possibility to live a life which is synchronous with the forms of kin time that they advise is even less certain in the face of continuing social and economic transformations.
This thesis has described the historical context in which understandings of male-bodied femininity have transformed in the period of the authoritarian New Order (1967–1998). Transgender history provides a perspective on a period of Indonesian national modernity which is better known for the imposition of hegemonic norms. This thesis offers textured detail of how waria — individuals subject to forms of (often pathologising) popular and expert knowledge — draw on and respond to that discourse through fashioning their own bodies and subjectivities (C.f. Stryker 2008). I have explored this history by focusing specifically on the national category waria. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and historical research with waria in the cities of Yogyakarta and Jakarta, I have described how male-bodied femininity has been shaped by the audiences for whom it is performed. I have focused my attention on this by attending to waria’s concern for visibility, structured by broader national ideals of class, gender and sexuality in particular, as an essential aspect of their gender performances.

The historical contingencies that have shaped the possibilities for waria embodiment — often at the intersection between state discourses and everyday subjectivity — suggest the “structures of feeling” (Williams 1978, 128–35) of this period of Indonesian history. Many of the experiences that I describe are specific to waria, and thus help to answer why it is that they say that they are a new phenomenon.
that only emerged at the beginning of the New Order. However, the transgender history specific to Indonesia that I have described in this thesis also offers important insights into the ways in which the gendered body is implicated in national projects of development. I argue for the importance of resisting the powerful imperative to naturalise masculinity and femininity as the properties of certain bodies and identities, emphasising instead that these are historically and culturally contingent practices. In short, gender performances should be described in terms not only of the individual body of the performer but also the audience for whom it is performed. It is this relationship to wider society, which \textit{waria} frequently describe in terms of citizenship and national belonging, that makes their gender presentation meaningful and intelligible, even as male-bodied femininity occupies a marginal place in Indonesian public culture.

The main ethnographic concern of this thesis has been to illustrate \textit{waria}’s own experiences of gender performance, referred to as a process of “becoming \textit{waria}.” I have focused on the way in which, rather than seeing gender performance as emanating out from an inner part of themselves, \textit{waria} understand increased bodily cultivation as the product of individual and collective work performed with other \textit{waria}. I have found that it is this bodily cultivation, which results in increased visibility and recognition of this visibility over time, that effects profound transformations that \textit{waria} understand loosely as a kind of femininity. Common to \textit{waria} across each of my field sites is that they narrated themselves as first only being \textit{banci kalèng} (empty \textit{banci}); it was only through recognition of the “signs of \textit{waria} (\textit{tanda kewariaan})” by other \textit{waria}, often in salons and frequently in the course of migration to cities, that becoming \textit{waria} could then proceed. This aspect of the thesis serves to reiterate the importance of challenging any notion of stable and enduring gender performance across a life course.

The importance of becoming \textit{waria} and the visibility to wider society that it entails hinges on a sense of “comfort (\textit{nyaman}).” This sense of comfort, which defies heteronormative notions of desire and personhood, is an affect associated with recognition and acceptance of oneself in the eyes of others; whether those be clients with whom one wants to have sex with for money, other \textit{waria}, or close family and kin. \textit{Waria}’s description of gender performance as a kind of comfort reflects the emphasis that they place on relationships with others around them. Even as \textit{waria} do occasionally reflect on love as something that might be possible in an ideal world, the relationships that they practice in everyday life are in fact those most associated with dependency and care. This is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the mothering role that they adopt in their relationships with the \textit{brondong} in the previous chapter; these relationships involve the transfer of money and gifts, but this does not diminish the meaningfulness of the laborious practices of care that go into drawing their \textit{brondong} closer to adulthood as secured by his heterosexual marriage to a “good woman (\textit{perempuan baik}).”
**Becoming Waria**

The central ethnographic and theoretical device of “becoming waria (jadi waria)” employed in this thesis illuminates the sites in and audiences for which waria’s gender performances take place in Indonesia. The process of becoming waria, resulting in greater visibility over time, serves to focus attention on the shifting forms and meanings that gender performances take: it involves an aesthetic style ranging from glamour to restraint, and depends on the age of the person performing it. As a result of this understanding, I argue that waria’s gender performances are only meaningful to them as they are performed with a particular audience in mind. This thesis has described waria’s gender performances as inseparable from gender normativity. Both are the product of particular discourses linking class-based ideals of heteronormativity to modernity, an unruly and unfinished legacy of the authoritarian New Order.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the central argument of the thesis: that waria gender performances emerged through the resources and technologies that became available in the course of Indonesian national modernity. This also includes the recent emergence of a global transgender imaginary — through which waria are expected to narrate their subjectivity in ways that are intelligible to audiences in the West. Yet as the category transgender has emerged, so too have critical approaches to understanding the kinds of knowledge that it produces and the subjects that it makes intelligible. Such approaches emphasise the need to pay attention not only to gender and sexuality as discrete realms of experience, but also to the cross-cutting nature of human experience within its historical and cultural context. A move towards a more context-rich and reflexive appreciation of the power of knowledge and the categories that it produces emerged through engagement with earlier ethnographic and historical research about gender and sexuality in diverse settings. This opened up a variety of productive fields of inquiry in various locations globally. Yet, I have suggested that a renewed emphasis on the relationship between practices and knowledge about gender and sexuality did not entirely dismantle the assumptions of stable and enduring personhood that they sought to question. As introduced in Chapter 3, the relations of care and dependency that constitute the gender performances that waria call déndong are frequently rendered invisible even as becoming waria is impossible without them.

Chapter 2 introduced the historical transformation of male-bodied femininity and the emergence of what waria refer to as their first generation at the beginning of the New Order around 1968. This chapter aimed to show how, and in what ways, the New Order state sought to frame male-bodied femininity that it described as “banci” and later as “wadam” as a problem related to modernity. These discussions framed male-bodied femininity as a product of negligent childrearing by parents, and stressed that the lower classes were predisposed to adopt these undesirable aspects of personal development. However, I also illustrated how, in framing this as a problem, waria could also establish their visibility both to the state and to wider society. Despite their creative responses, waria understandings of self were influenced by the enormous effort that the New Order state undertook to define gender normativity along strictly heteronormative lines. I traced how, between the late 1960s
and late 1970s, the state saw male-bodied femininity as a figure that crystallised anxieties about forms of gender normativity appropriate to national modernity. It was in the context of an enormous and invasive program of reproductive health for women during the 1970s that the state focused attention on measuring gender normativity in terms of an individual’s reproductive capacity. While of limited applicability to waria, these state discourses and the Western theories of gender and sexuality that they drew upon offered new resources through which waria could describe, influence and make sense of the self.

Chapter 3 turned squarely to ethnographic descriptions of the process of becoming waria among my informants, attending to the kinds of affective states and performances of gender that it entails. I introduced how for my waria informants, the bodily transformation described as dèndong is absolutely crucial to becoming waria. Without any signs of visible femininity, a person can remain a banci kaléng — seen as holding the potential to becoming waria — but is understand as to have “not yet become (belum jadi).” I linked this to two related processes. The first is the collective work that waria undertake in order to accomplish their gender performance. From this perspective, waria’s gender performances are structured primarily by the expectation of wider society that they are associated with public sexuality and lower class status. For waria, who understand that this is how they are seen in the eyes of wider society, coming to the gender performance of dèndong is thus linked to social worlds of transactional sex (nyébong) and to spaces for work and pleasure like the salon. During the New Order, experiences of gender performance were shaped by the mass media and technologies of visual culture. It is also notable that despite the fact that most waria tend to practice dèndong less as they grow older, they are not considered any less waria as a result. Echoing long regional histories linking bodily cultivation to personhood, waria understand dèndong as effecting a lasting inner transformation. Overall, this chapter stressed that femininity requires detailed contextualisation in order to be classed as femininity at all. Such contextualisation enables a better understanding of the relationship between gender normativity and class status that is so central to Indonesian modernity.

Chapter 4 introduced the kinds of work that waria perform and the locations in which they do so. The relationship to work is a common narrative in each chapter, reflecting the fact that waria’s relationship to dèndong emerged in the context of national modernity shaped by consumer capitalism. Many spaces for work, including the salon, have therefore been influenced by the mass media and visual culture of the New Order. A key understanding among waria is that these work spaces not only provide a source of income or the opportunity to meet with other waria, but they also allow for the cultivation of the individual self through the performance of good deeds known as prestasi. This chapter provides a historical overview of the emergence of waria as well-known experts of feminine beauty and modern bodily comportment. In doing so, it traces the transformations that took place — running parallel to the shifts in definitions of femininity between the late 1960s and late 1970s introduced in Chapter 2 — from male-bodied femininity as a competent performance of middle class
modernity, to one associated with public sexuality and lower class status. Yet, this shift meant that *waria* came to see themselves as always already deficient (in class terms) and as thus needing to orient their efforts at *prestasi* to articulate a coherent claim for social acceptance. It is this historical understanding linking the cultivation of the self through work to claims for national belonging that provides the basis for the contemporary expression of *prestasi* through participation in foreign mass media productions based on the category “transgender.” What appears to make these performances of transgender valuable to *waria* (beyond small financial gain) is that they offer a way to perpetuate *waria’s prestasi* in the contemporary national context, where the capacity to make such claims is diminishing.

In Chapter 5, I described a practice on which *waria* expend an enormous amount of effort from which they gain very little recognition: intimate relationships of care for the liminal masculinity of *brondong*. I was drawn to these relationships in particular not only because they were commonplace among my elderly *waria* informants, but also because my own understandings of intimacy had rendered them invisible. I had initially expected *waria* to desire modern, choice-based love for heterosexual men; after all, this is the dominant discourse of intimacy as it is related to sexuality in Indonesian mass media and state discourse. However, rather than mimicking heteronormative desire, I found that *waria’s* relationships were largely based on an axis of age and economic transaction. *Waria’s* intimacy with *brondong* does not rely on sentiment alone but also on the concrete practices involved in sustaining it; it involves a labour of love. I outlined how this labour of love is a relationship of mothering. This means that *waria* care for *brondong* not to keep them, but so that they might fulfil dominant life course expectations of adult masculinity marked by heterosexual marriage. I suggested that this reflects the shaping power of dominant state discourses linking temporality to reproduction, yet which also produce the possibility for “queer moments” (Meiu 2015) and new formations of intimacy. I observed that *brondong* relationships are a source of considerable anxiety among *waria*: they seem important as a way for them to accomplish femininity, yet they are not recognised by wider society. This means that *waria* feel a sense of shame with the passing of the relationship, even as this event brings them enormous pleasure. I also showed how economic and social transformations in post-authoritarian Indonesia are shaping new gender and sexual subjectivities as they intersect with temporality; this includes the old *brondong* who continues to exploit his youthful attractiveness beyond an age when he should ideally do so.

Overall, femininity has been central to my interpretation of transformations of gender performance during the New Order. Despite numerous ethnographic accounts of masculinity (Blackwood 2010; Lindquist 2009; Boellstorff 2005; Wieringa 2007), the recent complexities surrounding the relationship between masculinity and economic development in Indonesia, such as those reflected by *brondong*, are yet to be fully explored. Kale Fajardo’s (2008) description of sites of work as “a contact zone between heterogeneously gendered and situated subjects” in her transnational study of masculinity in the Philippines offers an innovative template for understanding transformations of
masculinity in the Southeast Asian context. Research which develops Kale Fajardo’s innovative insights to explore the intersection of masculinity, work, consumption and national identity in Indonesia would be a fascinating site for future exploration.

The Value of Visibility

Given the emphasis that I have placed on the importance of understanding gender in terms of the audience for which it is performed, it is especially important that I respond to the following question in concluding this thesis: To whom is this thesis addressed, and what effects are the forms of knowledge within it expected to have? What is my intention in making the lives of waria visible in this thesis?

Transgender studies offers particularly productive insights to this question, especially given its central overarching concern to produce an appropriate critical vocabulary to address the production of expert knowledge. A founding principle of the field, and one that continues to be valuable, has been the need to stress the experiences of those subjects governed by expert knowledge. This thesis thus critiques how waria are constituted as subjects, including within the field of transgender studies. Sandy Stone’s (1992, 166) early call for studies to better understand the discursive scripts by analysing “desire and motivational complexity in a manner that adequately describes the multiple contradictions of individual lived experience” remains especially relevant here. Following Stone’s (ibid.) provocation, this thesis emphasises waria’s own histories and lived experiences to problematise “the disaggregation, reintegration, refinement, and education of the self” (Valentine 2007, 246) in the context of national and transnational modernity.

This is not to single out the category transgender as an exceptional case; as I showed in Chapter 2, the Indonesian state has long incorporated Western forms of expert knowledge about gender and sexuality (including that about transsexuality) in order to reformulate personhood into rational citizen-subjects. However, transgender is relevant to waria in the contemporary moment because, regardless of their own feeling towards the category, they (and many other individuals around the world) are frequently framed in terms of that category. In Chapter 4, I introduced my observations of a journalist who showed interest in the lives of the waria who he filmed, asking about their experiences of “coming out” and their intention to undertake “gender reassignment surgery.” These questions are clearly irrelevant to waria. Yet, his emphasis on representing the lives of waria in such terms is what makes possible their relationship to a global imaginary shaped by Western models of personhood. Yet, as I illustrated, waria do not simply reformulate their understanding of the self in line with these views. Rather, they develop narrative strategies that emerge at the intersection of national histories and what is possible through the representational framing offered by popular understandings transgender. This is why, even as it is important to question the normalising logics of transnational and national projects of self-making, it is even more crucial to understand how waria themselves draw on these resources to shape a liveable life. This is especially important as the Indonesian state
reformulates its definition of citizenship involving a form of personhood that emphasises the burden of each individual to evaluate (and suspect) themselves and others within their social setting. This emergent discourse retains a modernist logic based on heteronormative selfhood that was the basis of New Order citizenship, even while it transforms personhood into a moral category defined by exclusion. This forms an essential area of future critical inquiry about transgender in Indonesia.

The intended audience of this thesis is primarily academics working on gender and sexuality. However, I stress that the research should not be understood as highlighting the possibilities of gender beyond the binary, or as showing that gender and sexuality are cultural constructs. I do not necessarily think that a study of waria can facilitate either of these things, and I question the basis on which waria’s lives would be drawn into the service of such a project in the first place. For this audience, I hope instead to have sparked interest in the complexities of the Indonesian case and to have highlighted the value of a methodological approach based around situating individuals’ lives in their historical and ethnographic context. Waria’s own understanding of becoming waria highlights the importance of understanding the narrative framing that people undertake in order to make sense of the social worlds that they inhabit, gender performances being one important aspect of this. I also stress the necessity of recognising gender and sexuality as profoundly temporally informed, both in the sense of recognising the impact of aging, and as framed in reference to dominant understandings of social time.

I situate my research within a broader literature that attends to the ways that historically and culturally contingent forms of knowledge provide narrative scripts for peoples’ lives that serve to make some, but not other, realms of experience visible (see Reddy 2005; Valentine 2007; Najmabadi 2014). This thesis also aligns with the longstanding anthropological emphasis on gender and sexuality as the product of kin and intimate relations, even as these are subject to rapid transformations globally (Strathern 1988; Weston 1991; Lewin 1995; Bailey 2013; Stout 2014). The combination of historical and ethnographic specificity continues to facilitate valuable theoretical perspectives which illustrate how individuals adapt, tinker with, and transform different forms of knowledge, all the while crafting a social persona within which they are comfortable. This thesis is not a critique of the homogenising power of globalised knowledge and representations of gender and sexuality, such as those produced by Altman (1997) and Puar (2007). While such theoretical perspectives remind us that the uncritical application of knowledge can reproduce racialised hierarchies of modernity, the tendency to focus on behaviour in terms of oppression or resistance in such approaches can obscure practices of meaning making to those involved.

Instead, I have stressed the importance of locating practices related to gender and sexuality within their historical context, over any overarching criticism of institutions and the ways that the knowledge that they produce or representations that they make are detrimental to waria. As this thesis illustrates, much of the knowledge used to describe waria, including that which they use to describe themselves, they have absolutely no power over. I have instead demonstrated the historical coincidences at work
in providing the means for waria to understand themselves, as well as the very narrative form that such descriptions might take. Similarly, I suggest that blanket theoretical critiques of representation (usually derived from the vantage point of the West) diverts focus away from the vital importance of understanding how individuals engage with these discourses, and the complex national and local histories through which such an engagement becomes possible in the first place.

**Gender, Sexuality and the State**

I have demonstrated, drawing on the classical sociological insights of Erving Goffman (1952) that waria gender performances are undertaken in order for waria to be visible. In this sense, certain aspects of gender performance for waria are not performative in Butler’s (1990) terms, in the sense that they are continuously materialised through discourse. Rather, many waria gender performances are wilfully performed with a specific audience in mind; in this way they highlight both the collective work and cultivation of relationships central to gender presentation. This means that waria understand themselves much more readily in terms of care and intimacy. Future perspectives could usefully theorise the culturally and historically specific sites and practices through which gender and sexuality are constituted in terms of the experience of vulnerability (see Kulick and Rydström 2015 for such an approach). This is a perspective that I have tried to illustrate in terms of waria’s relationships with brondong, in which both parties are situated in a relationship of dependency. However, waria’s emphasis on dependency also offer important insights into their orientation towards the audience of the state, their willingness to become incomplete generating new insights into the ways in which vulnerability might be theorised as a necessary condition of personhood.

Although my interest in waria’s gendered subjectivity has followed Goffman’s (1952) approach in highlighting the concrete everyday interactions and the audiences for which it is performed, I have also demonstrated waria’s common desire to be visible to the state through individual acts of prestasi. In the current environment, where the Indonesian state is defining citizenship through the explicit exclusion of non-heteronormative bodies and practices, this claim for visibility is especially fraught. However, the relationship between current acerbic state discourse and transgender visibility must also be framed within an historical perspective. The evidence that I have collected suggests that the New Order state always framed the visibility of waria as a problem, and was never particularly interested in developing tolerant attitudes towards them. I demonstrated in Chapter 2 how, from the late 1960s onwards, waria were considered in patronising and pathologising terms. State discourse has always framed waria’s visibility as a problem related to lower class, public sexuality which require state expertise and development to solve. I have found that it was not state discourse but waria’s own responses and networks of care, along with the opportunities offered by consumer capitalism, that enabled them to have any prospect of social acceptance through prestasi. After all, prestasi is what enables waria to make money, sustain and build relationships and live as a part of wider society.
I mention this to stress that the relationship between waria and the state has never been straightforward. As a result, any depiction of the Indonesian state — even in the context of the recent and at the time of writing ongoing disavowal of LGBT — as moving from a period of tolerance to one of persecution, is misguided. A more pressing concern, and one that waria themselves stress consistently, is that the mismatch between social and state recognition leaves waria and other non-heteronormative individuals less able to access even limited forms of state care. This has manifested particularly in the domain of health and access to healthcare, and law and access to legal institutions. This is nowhere more evident than in waria’s relationship to HIV/AIDS, especially for those who were young from the 1990s through to the early 2000s. Many of my waria informants could recall the names of thirty or forty friends who had died in a short period of time. This particular form of vulnerability intersects with state care in profound ways; Indonesian state doctors and scientists initially denied that HIV/AIDS was a virus that could affect Indonesians, claiming that it was a foreign disease that Indonesians could avoid due to their morally upright behaviour. The way in which waria have were cast as experimental biopolitical subjects throughout the length of the New Order, and the alarming alignment of care and punishment by the contemporary Indonesian state, is a crucial topic for future research.

This is also the case with waria’s treatment in the prison system and by law enforcement agencies both in Indonesia and in neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia, where many have travelled for sex work. Waria in each of my field sites, as well as historical sources, consistently reminded me of the extensive interactions that they have had with police and other forms of law enforcement, often resulting in brutal treatment. Furthermore, the kinds of training that I have described, such as salon work and sewing, have not usually been provided out of state benevolence: many waria explained to me the ways in which they have been subject to invasive enforced recuperative training after having been detained by law enforcement agencies. Yet, as described in Chapter 4, I am cautious to adopt a perspective framing transgender femininity as always already the subject of violence (see Valentine 2007, 208). I believe that these perspectives, themselves part of problematic and naturalised Western histories of personhood and the kinds of politics that are made possible as a result, tend to overlook many other questions and practices (see Mahmood 2005 for a critique of such a view from a feminist perspective). Waria do not see themselves as a locus of resistance or oppression because this is not an intelligible discourse by which they can make sense of their lives.

**Becoming Incomplete**

In moving away from questions of oppression and resistance, and towards those of vulnerability and dependency, I stress the need for an understanding of personhood that that is not always already framed in terms of a desire to become complete. In each chapter I have illustrated how waria social life foregrounds qualities of dependence on others. In spite of the modernist stress on producing rational, independent citizens during the New Order, waria make visible the work that goes into producing gender as a relation rather than a stable aspect of personhood. I conclude this thesis by
reflecting on the following question: If waria are generous enough to allow both myself and readers of this thesis to enter into a relationship of dependency with them, how might this suggest new ways of imagining national modernity in Indonesia?

In Chapter 1, I introduced the fact that waria came to see me as a banci kaléng. The first time that they started to do this was in preparation for an event which the waria community of which I was a part was planning to attend in déndong. This meant that my participation hinged on my being in déndong as well. I quote from my field notes about this occasion:

I went to [my waria sister’s] place and she was putting the finishing touches on her make up. She had said that I should go in a sports dress, but we heard from another friend that she had a ball gown — so it was decided (for me!) that it would be the better option. My waria sister applied the make-up, thick and stage-style, just like waria seem to like it. Especially for an occasion. I hop on the back of the motorbike (hard in a ball gown) and we weave through traffic. People look at me, mostly bemused.

We arrive at Kebaya. “Like a doll (bhonneka)” the other waria exclaim as I walk through the door. They arrived slowly but surely, until everyone was there — dressed in their finest — and we head to the bus. The most spectacular moment comes as I descend from the coach (the elderly waria behind me is vomiting into a bag, which makes sense due to the combination of a long bus ride and winding roads) in my black ball gown and long hair, platform shoes (borrowed from Mami) and sequined clutch hand bag. There are quite a few waria there and a few gay men too — probably no more than 500. The event is in a church, and what it is for is still no more clear or explained as we enter the building. It appears to be a Christian evangelical church run mostly and participated in by Chinese people from Semarang.

There is a series of prizes, for waria to have prestasi. There is a question, people look to me. “Who is the waria who has come the furthest away?” I look around, mortified. “There’s an Australian here!” my waria friends scream, pointing at me, ushering me towards the front of the stage. I climb onto the stage, and the MC hands me my prize. I return and my friends look at me, beaming. In the end we make our way out to the front, people say ‘god bless you’ to us. We take the food and the small envelopes for travel money are put into Mami Fin’s bag and later distributed to us on the bus. We get home, my waria sister helps me remove my make-up. She makes us instant noodles, she has coffee and a cigarette, we go to sleep side by side.

It was these ethnographic experiences, more than any other aspect of the research, that highlighted the importance of relationships of dependency to the process of becoming waria. Without the assistance of my waria friends, I would not have been able to déndong and I would not have been able to confidently approach the stage to take my prize for being the “waria” who had come from the furthest away. Without the recognition of an audience that is not entirely comfortable with waria visibility but tolerates it anyway it would not be possible to déndong. I suggest that this perspective, which sees subjectivity and embodiment in relation to its audience as the “vulnerability of a skin exposed” (Levinas 1987, 146), yields productive insights for advocacy and theory alike.

I have tried to show that waria see their gender performances as essential to who they become. Gender performances for waria, and the kinds of intimate relationships that they reflect, leads to an affective state of comfort and recognition in lower class social worlds associated with public sexuality. On one of my last nights in Indonesia, I went to the railway tracks to nyébong with waria friends from Jakarta. They had started preparing to déndong at midnight, and by now it was three in the morning. They walked across the tracks, ending up at a pile of discarded wooden railway sleepers
where they pulled themselves to the top. They opened a bottle of rum to share. Waria acquaintances that they had met in cities around Indonesia spotted them and called out. These experiences of work and intimacy are embodied in waria’s gender performances: the desire for visibility, the eclectic glamour of déndong, the irreverent humour and the lack of regard for frequent police raids and state violence. I perform déndong to enter into relationships of dependency with others. I perform déndong to show that I am becoming incomplete.
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