Acknowledgments

What is a book for? And whom is it for?

These are not trivial questions in a world where information is easily available and in which pressures to both consume and be consumed by knowledge are acute. I have come to think of the process of writing this book as crafting a document that is intended to hold together relations, and I hope that these relations will persist after I and those who are described in it are no longer here. There are the quotes from fieldwork, which can allow the reader to listen in to ephemeral conversations had in the everyday that would otherwise have been lost. There are references to theorists writing from and about other parts of the world, comparisons that help to orient material differently. Primary sources like newspapers provide a glimpse into fleeting accounts of events that happened decades ago, supporting shaky memories. Photographs serve as a record of memory, a trace that seems secure but that I found as fleeting as the instant of a glance given to the camera and captured in its frame. There is the author, who researches the material required and writes it up, giving a false impression that there is a singular and authoritative speaking subject. And there are the readers, individuals who come together to engage with the book in their own time and on terms that are meaningful to them. It is not an understatement to say that the period over which this book has taken shape has been challenging; just after I completed the main period of fieldwork for this book in 2015, a sustained series of attacks on LGBT people in Indonesian political life shook badly a hard-won sense of belonging among many of my waria interlocutors, who came to see their position in the nation as less secure than they had imagined it to be. The period of writing this book in 2020 coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the terrible and unequally felt impact on health and loss of life that it entailed, including in Indonesia. Fortunately, the process of writing this book has brought me into dialogue with so many people, with whom I have been able to work on so many intellectually sustaining, enjoyable, and valuable projects. I am so grateful to each of them; to me, then, this particular book is valuable inasmuch that it reflects an archive of relations. In presenting it, I hope in my own way to contribute to bringing together a public that is capable of assessing the beauty and the complexity of trans history in Indonesia, not as something that is possessed and known on totalizing terms by any given individual or group of people, but
rather as an open-ended promise that invites sustained forms of engagement, care and attention.

First and foremost, I offer my gratitude to the many Indonesians, and particularly the many warias, who have contributed to and continue to engage with this project; they shared their time, their memories, their hopes and dreams, and their personal records with me. I learned much from participating in the everyday life of waria communities in Yogyakarta and Jakarta, a remarkably talented group of people whose grace, humor, and intelligence is rarely acknowledged in any official documentation. This book is for them. In particular, I express my thanks to Mami Vinolia Wakijo, Mami Rully Mallay, Mbak Yuni Shara, Bunda Yetti, Ibu Shinta Ratri, Nancy Iskandar, Mami Maya Puspa, Ibu Lenny, Bunda Joyce, Chenny Han, and Meifei. Mami Vinolia’s remarkable shelter for HIV-positive waria and other vulnerable people in Yogyakarta–Keluarga Besar Waria Yogyakarta (KEBAYA) and the Waria Crisis Center (WCC) have served as constant reminders of the importance of this book and as catalysts for action. Mak Tadi’s lively narratives and photographs helped me to really understand waria friendship, and I am eternally grateful for her permission to include them in this book. I hope they serve as a testament to the vitality and beauty of waria life. Ibu Lenny and Bu Nancy provided me with guidance in the challenging context of fieldwork in Jakarta, and I learned much from their tireless efforts among communities of trans women through their work with the community organization Srikandi Sejati. Mas Toyo and his team at the LGBT advocacy organization Suara Kita provided me with a setting in which to present early versions of my work to a youthful and energetic audience in Jakarta. Many others who remain unnamed will see themselves in this book. As well as valuable advice, this audience provided me with inspiration and a sense of urgency to get it out there in the world.

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