Introduction

MAKING PUBLIC GENDER

Maya Puspa steps out of her home and salon with confidence and grace, narrowly avoiding the puddles that have transformed her lane into a muddy track. She smiles, arching her thin, penciled-on eyebrows as she turns to a group of elderly men gathered over a chessboard. It is her evening walk and, cheerily greeting the men, Maya strides out of her lane and onto a city street.

Maya lives alone in one of the many poor, crowded neighborhoods in Jakarta, the enormous capital of Indonesia and a city in the center of a region populated by tens of millions of people. Enveloped by twilight, accompanied by the sounds of motorbikes and crackling evening calls to prayer from neighborhood mosques, Maya pushes on with athletic strength. She quickens her pace far more than her eighty-year-old frame would suggest is possible. Neighbors call out to her with the common greeting “Where are you going?” One middle-aged man on his way to the mosque—with a prayer rug slung over his shoulder and dressed in a sarong—grins as he spots Maya, greeting her with an honorific term of address reserved for senior members of the community. Her movement up the street is less a stroll and more a vigorous stop-start punctuated by warm greetings and playful cajoling from her neighbors. After powering up a steep rise, Mami Maya reaches a bridge that marks a halfway point to the community meeting that is our destination, before turning back to face the lights of the city. She surveils, with visible pleasure, the modern metropolis where she has made her home for over sixty years and where she plans to live out the rest of her days. This scene, unfolding in the middle of 2015, is a remarkable testament to Maya’s neighbors’
recognition of her as a respected member who belongs in their community on terms that are comfortable to her.

Born in 1938 in a town on the island of Sumatra in the last decade of the colonial Dutch East Indies, Maya migrated to Jakarta in 1950, not long after the revolution that followed World War II and Indonesia’s declaration of independence on August 17, 1945. Since that time, Maya has been an active participant in the vibrant social life that the city offers to newcomers from all around the sprawling archipelago nation of Indonesia. More successful than most, Maya runs a salon from the first floor of her humble two-story shop-house. Her salon is overflowing with sparkling sequined dresses on dusty mannequins, rows of gold-embroidered blazers in dry-cleaning wrappers, and old salon equipment. She demonstrates her youthful beauty with framed portraits of her younger self in a glamorous and skillfully executed modern style of femininity. One framed photograph on the wall above her is an image of her wearing a carnival outfit replete with a gold crown and low-cut top. Although transformed by old age, she remains viewed by many of her neighbors as a person who in many respects demonstrates the values associated with a modern body, of which her polished femininity is a crucial attribute.

Maya described herself to me as a waria, an Indonesian word that combines the first syllable of one Indonesian word for woman (wanita) and the last syllable of one word for man (pria). A key aspect of narrative accounts of becoming waria lies in the shared narrative of having a jiwa perempuan, an interior sense of being a woman, which compels a person to transform their body through practices of dandan, or making up. Waria is a term that is in many respects indistinguishable from wadam, a neologism crafted in 1968 that combined the words for the figures Adam and Eve from the story of human creation, common to Islam and Christianity, but which fell out of use from the late 1970s onward. In reports, minutes, and surveys, the Jakarta municipal government began to use the term wadam gradually from the late 1960s onward, after the city’s governor Ali Sadikin—who roughly had the political position of a mayor—had endorsed the term as a modern and more presentable vehicle that enabled greater social participation. As warias moved between various locations in the city against the shifting terrain of mid-twentieth-century Indonesian politics and society, they articulated claims to recognition across disparate sites and domains of knowledge. The innovation of the historically specific terms waria and wadam lies in an elegant but simple combination based on the dualisms of male/female and mind/body that are central to modern formulations of binary gender. The term waria, and its emergence within and alongside the postcolonial state, reflects a modern conceptualization of gender in which a pair of dualisms can be held in combination within a single body. For this reason, warias cannot be separated out from longer histories of the
unsettled relationship between technology and recognition in modern Indonesia. This book therefore addresses warias as inseparable from the history of “socio-technical imaginaries,” that is, “collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable and supportive of advances in science and technology” (Kim and Jasanoff 2015, 4). Gender plays a central role in naturalizing individual and collective visions of social life, in part through the techniques of self and body that “make up people” (Hacking 1999, 170). Take the weight granted to the public meanings of gender in its contemporary manifestation as a binary of male and female, organized according to stable social roles, as a specific alignment of an individual mind and body: in Euro-American societies, a perceived mismatch between body and mind has provoked significant anxieties, as reflected in the deployment of onerous medico-legal requirements and technologies designed to stabilize sex, gender, and sexuality (Stone 1992; Plemons 2017; Aizura 2018; Latham 2019). Rather than marginal to technological development, warias were entangled with the process through which public gender became central to the affective, material, and spatial meanings of citizenship in Indonesia. More than this, warias show how, rather than biological sex developing into a concept of social gender, the Indonesian state’s definition of sex was in fact closer to gender all along. This book advances this argument by drawing on ethnographic and historical evidence of how warias were integrated into sociotechnical imaginaries of the postcolonial state.

The possibilities for Maya and those of her generation to name and to cultivate themselves with the modern clarity offered by the term waria followed a tumultuous period of transition in modern Indonesian history. The birth of the New Order regime in 1965 followed horrific violence during and after the imposition of military rule by General Suharto under the pretext of defending Indonesia from a communist takeover (Wieringa 2002). Suharto remained president for some three decades, until the abrupt end to his rule amid mass protests and economic turmoil in May 1998. During the New Order, gender was a foundation for naturalizing the narrow governmental concept of economic development (pembangunan) that served as the regime’s guiding principle and justification for rule. Women’s and men’s participation in public life was mediated through the nuclear family and the gendered and sexual arrangements that it was predicated on (see Suryakusuma 1996). The history of warias reveals that gender during the New Order did not reflect “the technological put at the service of authority” (Siegel 1997, 5) but was a more unruly object of expertise. Situating warias within a sociotechnical history helps to understand binary gender as a system of knowledge that both reflects and draws together the meanings of a public as a collective experience of social life.
A key component of the desired future presented in New Order development lay in legal and social efforts to enforce upon men and women specific roles and responsibilities to family and society, but perhaps more crucially on advancing a concept of gender as a stable and innate attribute of the mind and body of a single biological individual. Varias were critical to this iteration of the modern state’s project of normalizing and naturalizing male and female as a specific combination of attributes, organized into a specific configuration of personhood as a biological individual. The striking efforts to recruit varias into gendered modernity reveal the significant resources that the state employed to determine an essential basis for gender. The foremost object of state biopolitics in Indonesia was not primarily premised on the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, but rather on an effort to naturalize the meanings of binary gender at the level of the individual self. The efforts made by the Indonesian state to establish the meanings of gender as a product of the individual was reflected in strategies deployed to control the public appearance of varias. The history of varias reveals the highly contingent efforts of the postcolonial state to define gender as a broader condition understood in terms of an alignment between inner psychological state, outer appearances, and reproductive capacity within the individual self. As a result, interpreting gender in terms of an essential and ahistorical self, linked to an inner identity located in the mind, leads to several misunderstandings. These can be addressed by thinking more carefully about the relationship between varia and trans.

**Waria and Trans**

Scholars and activists have translated varias as trans—transgender and trans women—in both Indonesian and English-language media and research. In this book, I interpret the accounts of varias in relation to trans, a way to avoid placing varias on an essentialized grid of difference. The relationship between varias and the category transgender is complex in ways that frustrate attempts to locate and impose the most accurate or authentic term, and the limits of such efforts have been identified by scholars elsewhere (Alexeyeff and Besnier 2014; Boellstorff et al. 2014; Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff 2007). Inasmuch as *waria* is a term that emerged via processes of transformation at the interface of body and self, reflected in naming and being named, the history of varias shares some parallels with the emergence of the category of transgender in the United States. As David Valentine has argued in that context, transgender was not a neutral term for grouping preexisting forms of gender variant or nonconforming subjects, but reflected “quotidien forms of self-making and self education in which all modern
subjects are imagined to engage” and which was “transformative because of its capacity to refine” (2007, 246). Moreover, warias and other Indonesians have long been active participants in shaping racialized Euro-American categories, including transvestite, transsexual, and more recently transgender.

Until the 2000s, warias were commonly described as transvestites in both Euro-American and Indonesian scholarship, policy, and journalistic accounts. The category transvestite, developed by German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910 to refer to a wide array of gender-variant practices (Bauer 2017, 84), was adopted in fragmentary ways by Dutch colonial-era scholars and officials. The category was first used to refer to banci, a term referring to a wide array of gender ambiguity that dates from the nineteenth century and which was used well into the New Order (Boellstorff 2007, 85). Starting in the 1930s, small numbers of European psychiatrists and anthropologists referred to banci as transvestites. Their use of transvestite rather than homosexual not only named but also shaped the historical development of the terms banci, wadam, and waria in the postcolonial state. Indeed, it was only after Indonesian independence that psychiatrists, doctors, and journalists more forcefully adopted transvestite as an object of translation and debate. Although certainly present in various guises, female and trans masculinity remained far less prominent in both the state’s project of defining gender on individualized terms and in scholarship on the topic (see, e.g., Blackwood 2005a). The historical meanings of female and trans masculinity in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia—including the reasons for the visibility of trans femininity in the state’s project to define gender as an individual property—remain an important area of inquiry. In the late 2010s, partially owing to the integration of warias within New Order governmentality, which assessed them as a public nuisance, Indonesian trans activists created a new term to speak of themselves: transpuan, a neologism that combines the first syllable of the global category transgender and the second syllable from one Indonesian word for woman (perempuan). A contested politics of sorting, affiliation, and disaffiliation based on the differences and similarities between waria and transgender is now widespread throughout Indonesia in ways that often overlook longer histories of connection between trans and various Indonesian terms since the colonial period.

I use warias in this book because those individuals I encountered at my field sites and in the archives presented themselves to me as warias, and because it was the term primarily used during the New Order; to replace waria with transpuan would be to deny the vitality of forms of self-expression and the various sexual, gendered, and economic lifeworlds and histories within which warias live. There is a complex temporal, cross-cultural, and class overlay to the use of each of these terms; trans and transgender are, however, suitable insomuch as they encourage
a dynamic engagement with the historical and cultural position of terms such as waria in networks of global exchange. At the same time, it also would not be accurate to call all warias trans women, although some warias may also describe themselves on those terms. Transpuan and queer activists in Indonesia sometimes actively distance themselves from the term waria and warn against its use, because of its relationship to transactional and public sexuality. The fact remains that warias are often poor and are subject to economic marginalization, state violence, and health disparities, which have resulted in increased exposure to HIV.\textsuperscript{3}

This was the case for many of the warias whom I lived and worked alongside during the research and writing of this book. The use of waria or transgender then is largely contextual, but many of those who refer to themselves as either trans women and transpuan often have access to economic and social capital within the vibrant networks of trans and queer activism that have formed in the democratic space that has emerged since the fall of Suharto.

I also use waria because the history of the term offers rich theoretical insights that problematize the relationship between recognition and gender at the level of the individual. Waria emerged at the precise moment when the state more clearly sought to define citizenship in terms of a pair of male and female individuals. That waria appeared as a specific response to efforts to impose a male/female binary in postcolonial Indonesia was not coincidental. As Marilyn Strathern observed, efforts to assert essentialist categories tend to generate hybrids, objects of knowledge that condense within “a single item diverse elements from technology, science and society, enumerated together as an invention and available for ownership as a property” (Strathern 1996, 525; see also Haraway 1991). Given that the body and its relations exceed attempts to impose purity, gender in some way will always open possibility for gaps between what a given cosmology holds as natural and the processes that facilitate that naturalization (Butler 1990). This is not, however, to claim that the hybridity of warias made waria a fluid concept or reflects the liberatory potential of gender in Indonesia, a view that represents the projection of Euro-American theoretical preoccupations more than it does the production, reproduction, and organization of the body and person under specific historical and social conditions (Towle and Morgan 2002; Weston 1993).\textsuperscript{4} Indeed, warias have at times been incorporated into transgender rights in a manner that appears similar to Kath Weston’s observation of “the uncanny resonance between the anthropological ‘discovery’ of multiple genders and the nineteenth-century categorization of homosexuals as members of a third sex, midway between women and men” (1993, 354). Early in the twenty-first century, waria and other terms have been rediscovered within a rubric of transgender rights based on a concept of gender identity as a universal attribute of the individual mind. In one account published by the large international human
rights organization Human Rights Watch that outlines the “quest [of transgender and nonbinary people] to obtain official documents that reflect their identities by using a non-binary ‘X’ marker in lieu of the typical ‘F’ or ‘M,’” warias are described in the following way:

After all, gender variant people have existed throughout the world and across time, celebrated in some cultures, denigrated in others. Some societies recognized people who embodied a gender identity beyond the binary, for example, hijra communities in South Asia, two-spirit people among some Native American cultures, waria in Southeast Asia and Fa’afafine in Pacific Islander communities. While the blunt classificatory instruments of colonial rule imposed new bureaucracies of gender assignment, these communities persist and continue to provide alternate ways of thinking about gender that evade binary classification. (Ghoshal 2020)

Rather than approaching trans as a way to plot one universal variation of psychologized gender identity beyond the binary, this book shows how warias emerged within the sociotechnical relations facilitated by the postcolonial Indonesian state. I hold particular concern for the identification of waria as a nonbinary or fluid gender used to justify a universal project of transgender rights, given that it tends to evacuate warias’ claims of their political urgency within a specific political economic context, as well as simplifies the complex impact of colonialism and capitalism on indigenous cosmologies. Rather than being liberatory, waria reflects something of a parallel story to the enactment of essentialist cosmologies of sex and gender as part of the modern self that were invoked to justify Euro-American legal frameworks of medical transsexuality (see Stone 1992). Attending more closely to gender as a technology that emerges within specific historical and ethnographic contexts reveals a more complex story as to how warias have contended with the modern state’s efforts to naturalize binary gender as a means to claim a monopoly on recognizing the limits of human difference.

**Gender and Technology**

Since the late nineteenth century, when the Dutch colonial state consolidated its rule over the Indonesian archipelago, technology has played a defining role in shaping the meanings of development as a symbol for aspirational, global modernity. The New Order state elevated development to a far-reaching governmental style through which it sought to impose territorial uniformity over the nation’s archipelagic form. In postcolonial Indonesia, development was
a “focus of authority and legitimacy” (Heryanto 1988, 11), symbolized in the establishment and display of sophisticated and expensive technological projects (Amir 2013). The Suharto regime sought to manage the changes wrought by rapid development by advancing a rarefied form of tradition, combining high technology with aestheticized ritual (Keeler 1988; Pemberton 1994). Authoritarian rule proceeded not only through violent terror and coercion, therefore, but also through efforts to instill in citizens a sense of responsibility for the progress of themselves as individuals and families, measured via economic goals. The perceived inability to use (or apathy directed toward) technology by the lower classes, expressed through the euphemism belum (not yet), was a primary rationale through which the elites justified their authority to rule over the large proportion of the population excluded from economic prosperity (Leeuwen 2011; Lindquist 2009). Although the moral force of development in Indonesian society has been the focus of extensive historical and ethnographic study (Barker 2015, 2005; Moon 2015, 2007), precisely how gender shaped the sociotechnical imaginary of the postcolonial nation has received scant scholarly attention.

This lack of attention to the emergence of gender through technology is surprising, considering that modern binary gender was critical to the sociotechnical imaginary used to sustain the legitimacy of the Suharto regime. In particular, femininity was an embodied guise that reached into the most intimate aspects of the lives of citizens, and Indonesian women were expected to take up and implement a vast array of medical, aesthetic, and domestic technologies in their legally defined role as mothers and wives (Suryakusuma 1996; Dwyer 2002; Jones 2010). Notably, Julia Suryakusuma (1996, 101) identified “State Ibuism” (motherhood) as a powerful ideological apparatus for naturalizing women’s social role within the domestic sphere and limiting their political agency relative to men. Yet the growth of the mass media and access to consumer capitalism during this historical period meant that images of femininity were not singular but signified a range of contradictory meanings, as femininity could as easily be a symbol of national development or of moral decay (Brenner 1999). Although these feminist framings of New Order development highlight the centrality of gender to defining participation in the public sphere, in them technology is largely relegated to a tool for the implementation of state ideology. One result of the lack of attention to more hybrid formulations of gender is that male and female bodies are assumed to naturally correspond with the personhood of the individual self, rather than being addressed as one of its effects. A corollary of this view is that male and female have been addressed as always already identifiable attributes of modern selfhood, understood as an alignment of appearances, inner psychological state, and genital morphology. Refusing to separate out the femininity of warias theoretically from that of women serves as one conceptual move through
which I have found the ways that warias played a critical role in mediating the relationship between gender and the self.

In postcolonial Indonesia, as elsewhere, binary gender was a key cultural symbol through which political struggles over development and technology took place. Sherry Ortner, in her landmark 1972 essay, attributed gender relations to a universal nature/culture binary, through the application of a “notion of human consciousness (i.e. systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to rise above and assert control . . . over nature” (Ortner 1972, 10). Rather than a nature/culture binary, however, political and cultural contestations over citizenship in Indonesia emerged primarily through efforts to separate the asli (authentic) from the palsu (false) (Siegel 1998, 54). This binary, one that recalls the colonial project to control contact between indigenous and European subjects, reveals the state’s fragile grasp as the ultimate arbiter of authenticity. The relationship between the asli and the palsu was gendered in paradoxical ways, as the desire to train one’s self “rested on an ironic tension between conceiving femininity as a natural expression of an inner self versus as a result of tutelage, a tension that perpetually threatened to expose the artifice of expertise” (Jones 2010, 271). Warias provide a distinct vantage point on the role of gender in the modern history of Indonesian citizenship. Rather than seeing the gendered self as always already asli, Indonesian, and therefore prior to technological intervention, everyday narratives among warias reveal that they see their gendering as the unfinished product of effort, one that requires human action and relations with others to fully realize. Warias’ accomplishment of femininity does not reflect the assertion of an essential or authentic self but reflects the unpredictable, transformative power of gender to confer recognition.

A sociotechnical approach to the history of waria also helps in considering the utility of cisgender as a universally applicable term when applied at the level of the individual. Cisgender, often presented on binary terms with transgender, has achieved near hegemonic status in Euro-American theory and politics as a concept that normatively refers to “individuals who possess, from birth and into adulthood, the male or female reproductive organs (sex) typical of the social category of man or woman (gender) to which that individual was assigned at birth” (Aultman 2014, 61). Yet any insistence on separating out individuals according to an essential difference between cisgender and transgender at the level of the individual comes with significant risks, given the set of Euro-American assumptions about personhood on which this understanding rests (Strathern 1988; Helliwell 2000). When interpreted via a concept of personhood based on the bounded self, the cisgender/transgender binary appears to smuggle an essentialist model of biological sex into a definition of psychological gender. The view that an alignment of sex and gender is possible reads onto the body one Euro-American
model of personhood in which the individual can be separated out from society (Strathern 1993). Far from facilitating a radical critique of gender, the mapping of individuals onto a binary grid of cisgender/transgender in this way reflects an ethnocentric redeployment of the nature/culture binary. Sandy Stone (1992, 166) long ago critiqued the limits of theoretical perspectives premised on ontologized gender in her critical interrogation of dominant accounts of transsexuality in terms of the “wrong body,” pinpointing their tendency to “foreclose the possibility of analyzing desire and motivational complexity.” Gender—and the cisgender/transgender binary that it increasingly requires for legibility—is not the ground onto which individuals emerge, but a technology of classification.

Rather than replacing one nature/culture binary for another, sex/gender for cisgender/transgender, this book pushes against the inevitability of technological determinism by illuminating how warias appropriated the modern cosmologies of male/female and mind/body to forge dynamic claims to recognition. This helps in contending with the continuities between colonial logics governing racialized status and postcolonial binary gender, as well as illuminates the limitations of the cisgender/transgender binary in Euro-American theory. This opens an understanding of warias that moves beyond a narrow preoccupation with gender or sexuality at the level of the individual, helping to contextualize trans as inseparable from colonial histories of race and citizenship. In the Dutch colonial state of the early twentieth century, the adoption of various modern technologies by Indonesians prompted profound anxiety about how to evaluate the authenticity of racial appearances (Siegel 1997). Indonesians drew on modern technologies related to appearances, such as eyeglasses, modern clothing, and photography, to exceed their racialized status and lay claims to the status and public recognition that had previously been restricted to Europeans (van der Meer 2020; Mrázek 2002). Initially among elites, but increasingly among those of various social classes, individuals also seized on the new term Indonesia to lay claim to public recognition at around the same time (Ingleson 1975). At the moment that Indonesians asserted claims to recognition by their ability to change appearances and language in the early twentieth century, however, an emergent theory of race adopted by the Dutch colonial state stressed that individual psychological state was the basis for racial difference (Stoler 1995; Pols 2007). The history of waria helps to clarify how the postcolonial state advanced a logic of separating out and refining bodies, drawing on a colonial logic of racial categorization redeployed through an effort to separate male and female as naturally occurring and innate forms of human difference.

Together, the forms of recognition that warias accomplished were a result of their capacity to seize technological means and use them to undertake self-cultivation for a public audience. Despite the exhortations of state experts who
claimed that the gender binary was essential and natural, the public meanings of trans femininity and the claims to self-knowledge consistently voiced by trans women undermined the state’s monopoly on recognition. In this respect, a focus on gender and the body helps balance theoretical approaches to citizenship largely developed through a focus on an “imagined community” based on a shared language and print capitalism (Anderson 1996). For all the efforts of warias to accomplish acceptance, advanced through efforts to shift the use of terminology through the adoption of modern terms like *wadam* and *waria*, they found, like transgender women elsewhere, that the “aspirational aim of recognition is confronted with the body’s material limits” (Plemons 2017, 154). The exceptional ability of warias to accomplish femininity placed them in an ambiguous position relative to technologies used to impose binary gender and the legal and social privilege granted by accomplishing it. Rather than displacing binary gender, the solution put forward by warias was to capture the dualisms of male/female, mind/body, and asli/palsu within an individual person as a means to achieve power through unification.

Although separated out in the chapters of this book, in everyday life technologies for enacting gender and having that gender recognized by a seeing public are experienced as inseparable from one another. Some of the warias whose expression of gender drew on a technologized framework of medical transsexuality deployed by the state in the 1970s, for example, were also captured in the raids undertaken by municipal police on public spaces, raids that targeted gendered appearances in ways that drew upon colonial-era sumptuary laws governing appearances based on race. Many warias have encountered technologies of feminization through their work in or as customers of beauty salons and have used visual technologies like photography to capture and represent themselves to a wider audience. As warias participate in technological modes of mediating gender, they articulate themselves—and are articulated—as a part of publics who receive them differently depending on the context. In contrast to a totalizing gaze founded in an essentialized form of difference at the level of the individual, warias’ engagement with global technologies for interpreting and imagining gender offered a means to expand the meanings of what “the public” might mean and how it might be possible to claim recognition as a part of it.

**The City**

This book is based on fifteen months of fieldwork conducted in 2014 and 2015, when I lived continuously in the city of Yogyakarta with extended stays in Jakarta, and ongoing engagement with warias since that time. The archival and oral history
research that I undertook for the book is therefore embedded within a broader ethnographic project, an approach based on a rich Indonesianist literature that creatively addresses the interplay between history and the present (Mrázek 2010; Strassler 2010; Steedly 1993). During fieldwork, I gathered stories about the past during everyday conversations, through oral history interviews, and in personal archives of material objects, including a rich collection of photographs taken during the 1980s. To supplement this material, I drew on newspapers, magazines, and municipal records from the period to better situate the histories recounted to me by warias. Tacking to and from ethnographic and historical approaches in this setting offered a rich set of methods that were both attentive to dynamic processes of change and refused the decontextualizing tendency of Euro-American theories of gender and sexuality that seemed to delimit their analytical focus in advance in ways that could not account for the rich complexity of waria life as lived. Refusing easy answers and heeding Mary Steedly’s call to craft “our stories less to the plausible demands of the ready-made grid and the fully elaborated code and more to the everyday cadences of the perpetually open-end” (1993, 238), I strained my ears to listen to warias’ narratives, pasts, and imagined futures as I encountered them within their ethnographic context.

My two main field sites, Jakarta and Yogyakarta, were not only centers of social life for warias but large cities and special administrative regions in their own right, located on the densely populated island of Java (figure 1). Participating in both cities in the daily lives of warias revealed the centrality to them of the scale of the city for conferring and limiting recognition. In Yogyakarta, I witnessed warias contest their exclusion from public space in response to a 2014 law on busking and begging, which revealed the ways that gender nonconformity had been addressed as a disruption of public space and a specific problem to be solved at the scale of the city (Hegarty 2016). This experience led me to investigate the longer histories of regulating warias as a disruption of public space and a specific problem to be solved at the scale of the city, rather than as individualized pathology. Rather than framing a study of two distinct cities, then, this book is a historical ethnography that addresses the scale of the Indonesian city, a scale that offers a distinctive view of the regulatory, technological, and social forms that enable inhabitants to imagine and practice citizenship in ways that are distinct from those of the nation.

My ethnographic orientation helped me to understand that much of the official discussion of warias did not take place at the national level but largely as city regulations governing public order (ketertiban umum) and public morality (kesusilaan umum). Indeed, the first form of official recognition granted to warias was by Ali Sadikin, the governor of Jakarta from 1966 to 1977, who strove to integrate them into the mechanisms of city governance with the aim
FIGURE 1. The island of Java, showing the boundaries of all districts, cities, and the special regions of Jakarta and Yogyakarta, ca. 1989.
of transforming them into respectable and presentable citizens who formed part of modern Indonesian society. That these innovations first took place in Jakarta reflect the fact that, as the capital of Indonesia, it has served as a site where many of the techniques and meanings of municipal governance have been worked out. Jakarta holds the status of a province and is made up of five smaller cities that serve a largely administrative function (Kusno 2014; Nas and Grijns 2000). As is the case for all Indonesian municipalities, Jakarta is made up of smaller administrative areas including urban districts, subdistricts, quarters, and neighborhoods, which exist to facilitate various kinds of administration and bureaucratic administration. The centrality of the city in the narratives of warias also reflected the central role of Jakarta as one important site for essential forms of community building, economic opportunity, and claims to recognition since at least the late 1960s (figure 2).

A key characteristic of the administrative form of the Indonesian state has been a “two-tier system” (Malo and Nas 1991, 175), in which both autonomous local and central government bodies carry out various functions in the same area. This is reflected in the historical tension between centralized national and decentralized municipal governance (see also Legge 1961). The development of the urban municipality has long played a crucial role in shaping Indonesian economics and politics at the national level. As Manesse Malo and Peter Nas described in their history of urban management in Indonesia, “just as the city can be considered an urban arena in which various individuals, groups, institutions, and categories of people struggle to promote their interests, many different meanings are attached to this organ of urban administration” (1991, 185). Warias were one such group who struggled to pursue recognition at the scale of the city. In both ethnographic research and in the archive, warias consistently emphasized the centrality of the scale of the city in both conferring and limiting opportunities for recognition. Hildred Geertz (1963, 34–35) observed that Indonesian cities were “integrating centers of economic, political, and intellectual life,” that together formed no less than a “metropolitan superculture” of the nation (see also C. Geertz 1976, 378). This book locates waria squarely in the context of transformations at the scale of the city. Doing so helps to understand the role of public gender in efforts to confer the state’s authority over the recognition of citizens in the postcolonial state.

The significance of events in Jakarta at the dawn of the New Order, which witnessed the birth of the term waria based on a novel engagement with the gender binary and an idiosyncratic relationship with the city’s governor, cannot be overstated. The form of recognition provided through a loose integration with municipal governance bestowed on trans women a capacity to claim hitherto unthinkable forms of recognition. Yet to interpret the emergence of modern warias in Indonesia as entirely a product of state intervention would be both to
FIGURE 2. Key locations in the city of Jakarta, ca. 1968.
succeed to technological determinism and to overlook the shared genealogy that governing appearances through gender in postcolonial Indonesia shares with governing race in the colonial period. Chapter 1 describes how colonial histories of regulating public space based on racialized appearances shaped the conditions for the emergence of warías. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European dress and comportment constituted part of a technology of race that was crucial both to the colonial state’s imposition of racist hierarchies and Indonesians’ efforts to contest them. As Arnout van der Meer outlined, rather than advancing an essentialist or biological view of racial difference, “the Dutch used clothing to maintain and visually express their distinction from and superiority to their indigenous subjects” (2020, 116). By contextualizing shifting assessments of the public performance of gender within the history of governing race in the Dutch East Indies, I show how warías were heirs to a “sartorial revolution” (van der Meer 2020, 121) that had been started by Indonesians who were excluded from participating in a modern public under colonial rule. The everyday refusal of warías to limit their performance of modern femininity through the public adoption of dress and makeup challenged the postcolonial state’s monopoly on the recognition of citizens, seizing the semiotic logic of gender classification for themselves to command a position in public life.

This important connection to colonial histories of governing race through appearances notwithstanding, the predominant focus of this book is the New Order. This focus emerged from the narratives offered by many warías, recounted to me during fieldwork, that stressed the importance of this period. Despite the distinctive heteronormative framework of development pursued by the New Order, warías overwhelmingly described their recognition by the governor and integration into municipal governance as marking the dawn of a “golden age.” This account, which was repeated so many times to me that it amounted to a shared narrative, led to a more sustained engagement with historical processes of transformation in the meanings of trans femininity than I had initially imagined. In settings around the world, including in Southeast Asia, historical processes of modernization have corresponded with a concern to extend the state’s definition of citizenship in terms of gender that is both innate and limited to a binary of male and female (Peletz 2009; Blackwood 2005a). Although this certainly appears to have been the case in Indonesia, no waria I met in the course of fieldwork spoke of their experiences in terms of a narrative of decline. If anything, warías evaluated the state’s efforts to impose two clearly demarcated genders and that pursuit’s integration within processes of technological development as a positive move. After all, a creative engagement with a model of binary gender that demanded greater differentiation between male and female is what allowed warías to attain a certain status in public life that had been previously unthinkable.
The role that technology played in shaping warias’ participation in public life is illustrated by events that took place in Jakarta in 1968. A group of warias presented themselves to the Jakarta city government, describing the horrific forms of abuse and exclusion they faced at the hands of other residents of the city, particularly when they appeared during the day and to a wide viewing public. The municipal police, in a practice that stretched back to the colonial era, pursued and temporarily detained warias in police raids on the public places where they gathered. In August of that year, the governor of Jakarta Ali Sadikin sought a solution by bestowing on warias new terms that would render them a more presentable part of modern Indonesian society. This intervention was laudable but not necessarily premised on a desire to expand the visibility of warias. Rather, his interest originated from reports in the popular press that warias’ growing visibility on city streets was a disruption of public order.

Chapter 2 situates the events that established the unprecedented recognition of warias in 1968, contextualizing often contradictory demands and desires for improved presentability of this group in light of efforts to regulate public morality and order at the scale of the municipality. Central to this story of recognition was Sadikin, an innovative and charismatic urban reformer who sought to modernize the city and strove to integrate trans women through a combination of functionalist and aesthetic logics (Hegarty 2021). By calling on warias to make themselves more presentable in public, Sadikin approached public gender in ways similar to how other problem bodies were addressed in cities in New Order Indonesia, what Suzanne Moon called a form of “citizenship in legal and technological terms” that hinged on the degree to which they were “integrated into the day-to-day functioning of cities” (Moon 2015, 192). By contextualizing often contradictory demands and desires for improved presentability in light of urban efforts to regulate public morality and order, I show how this form of recognition was limited, and therefore embedded within anxieties over who could enter public space and on what basis. Nevertheless, it was through these legal innovations at the scale of the city that warias could demand the right to pass through city streets unimpeded wearing women’s clothing and makeup, including in the middle of the day, should they so desire. In turn, the demand for recognition made by warias rested on the assertion that their gender presentation was not only a performance or play but an authentic component of their inner self, and thus a critical aspect of their claims to belonging in the city and the nation.

Expanded recognition achieved by warias through city-level innovations did not go uncontested. Anxieties about the appearance of increasing numbers of warias in public space, coupled with the state’s technological ambitions, corresponded with a rather abrupt engagement with medical models of transsexuality by Indonesian experts in the 1970s. Chapter 3 charts the influence of an array of
technological interventions that emerged under the guise of medical transsexuality and its relationship to the modern self, which had increasing global reach at that time. The meanings of the terms *wadam* and *waria* were shaped through a process of partial medicalization and through the discipline of psychiatry in particular (Hegarty 2019). This traffic in meanings between warias and medical transsexuality contributed to the greater visibility of a wider array of trans femininity than warias alone in the Indonesian media during the 1970s and 1980s. Through a process of sorting and disaffiliation that these technologies made possible, largely in the field of medicine, psychiatrists and doctors conferred the status of natural gender on the basis of an alignment between mind, appearances, and reproductive capacity.

This process relied in crucial ways on experimentation and discussion of wadam and waria, and eventually the imposition of a clearer boundary with those terms and the category “woman.” Attempts to impose legal and social clarity over human difference, along with the distinction between public recognition and state recognition, nevertheless confounded the simplistic clarity of the state’s efforts to make up cisgender normativity as the natural basis for citizenship. Although this was not inherently political, and indeed marked a use of technology to evacuate the powerful political claims advanced by warias, this engagement by Indonesian experts with modern technologies of medical transsexuality at various points called into question the naturalization of gender as an essential component of individual personhood. Warias’ encounters with modern technologies of identifying and correcting gender along a mind/body axis at the level of the individual self influenced broader configurations of state citizenship, visually signifying the emergence of a newfound clarity in the moral meanings of public gender as a symbol of development.

**Appearances and Authenticity**

In 1968, the year that warias were recognized as a legal but nonconforming category on the grounds that they disrupted municipal public order, a major beauty pageant was held at the Duta Hotel in central Jakarta. Under the banner of “Miss Imitation Girls,” a group of glamorous warias wore the latest women’s clothing and styled their hair and makeup in ways that asserted a polished feminine figure. Contestants were evaluated and ranked by judges, to be awarded a prize sponsored by the Anda Mulya Beauty Salon. Sonny Sudarma was crowned the winner of the contest and recognized as a paragon of feminine beauty. A well-known waria and leader in her community, Sonny Sudarma was photographed together with Ali Sadikin and his wife at a waria performance at the
Jakarta Fair, a monthlong event held at Merdeka Square. This was one of a proliferating number of locations that cemented in the minds of the city’s citizens an association between the polished performances of feminine beauty and warias.

As an event for promoting state-sanctioned consumerism and demonstrating national pride in technological progress, the Jakarta Fair was an opportunity for warias to establish a public platform for attempting to wrest the meanings of their visibility from moral impropriety to polished respectability. This allowed warias to participate more freely in public life in the city. Their advocacy emerged from a necessity grounded in threats of exclusion backed up by commonplace claims that they were “afraid to stand in well-lit places.” In Sadikin’s early conversations with warias, he “offer[ed] them an opportunity to work at a stand or restaurant at the Jakarta Fair managed by the city . . . a way to sort out the real from the false, reducing their presence on the sides of roads, cleaning the city, and freeing it from indecent sights” (Selecta 1968, 19). The proliferation of platforms such as the Jakarta Fair, and the demonstration of femininity as a claim to authenticity that it allowed, led warias to see their loose integration into municipal governance not as a constraint but as enabling an expanded participation in public life.

Warias were not only committed to their own performances of modern feminine beauty but came to have a reputation as individuals whom citizens could turn to in order to align their public presentation with an emergent set of expectations associated with modern gender. In this respect, warias provide a better understanding of the relationship between moral and technological progress against a broader backdrop of social change in postcolonial Indonesia. In the 1950s and 1960s, both state and non-state actors increasingly told warias to limit their feminine visibility on the grounds that they were not compatible with national modernity (Peacock 1968). With the emergence of spaces for consumer capitalist and body-centered consumption in the late 1960s, warias harnessed an existing reputation for bodily transformation in specific contexts to advance claims to recognition on terms that they were beauty experts. This leap was only partially successful, as warias continued to find that some publics were more amenable to their presence than others. As demonstrated through their well-recognized presence in professions related to beauty salons and as fashion designers, warias’ belonging, never fully assured, was conditional on their ability to undertake forms of self-cultivation for public consumption.

In chapter 4, I argue that the technologies and forms of expertise that warias adopted to accomplish a more presentable appearance relied on an understanding of economic participation imagined in terms of improvements in the form of feminine beauty. While it was an authoritarian state ruled by the military, the New Order did encourage the kinds of individualized forms of participation advanced
by international development agencies (Li 2007). This meant that the language and concepts of international development, what Christopher Kelty (2019, 231) called its “toolkits,” were translated and adopted into Indonesian notions of the collective espoused by earlier generations of nationalists (see Moon 2015). Suzanne Moon described how, in reference to a broader condition of municipal governance during the New Order more generally, “the issue of local technological participation in rebuilding these neighborhoods was at least as important as the distribution of new and improved infrastructure” (Moon 2015, 187). Warias’ commonly voiced desires to be “accepted by society” (di terima oleh masyarakat) were advanced through local technological participation in the form of the skills and training involved in achieving modern femininity. Training manuals and programs produced by city governments for warias, known as “guidance” (pembinaan), were part of a broader pattern of development that instilled a “desire for collectivity and for authentic participation” (Kelty 2019, 231), a form of liberation through the transformation of consciousness at the level of the individual, the success or not of which was tested every time warias walked down the street.

Seen as more proximate to the technological moorings of Indonesian post-colonial modernity, the practice among warias of dandan—of making up—presents rich insights into the meanings of recognition. On the one hand, dandan rested on skillfully executed technologies of feminization that transformed outer appearances, such as applying makeup, styling hair, and wearing women’s clothing. On the other hand, warias’ narratives about dandan stressed that it made visible their woman’s soul (jiwa perempuan). The practice of feminization through the application of cosmetics and clothing described among warias as dandan therefore escapes Euro-American conceptualizations that the mind has primacy over the body. Tom Boellstorff observed that “warias do not always assume that the soul makes one wear women’s clothes; the causality can be seen to work in the other direction or to be mutually constituting, thereby reflecting the widespread assumption in Southeast Asia that internal state and external presentation naturally align with each other” (2007, 91). Despite the centrality of the accomplishment of femininity to warias, dandan nevertheless involved practices that were largely temporary or could be put on and taken off on a daily basis. While dandan was a concept of self-improvement used commonly in Indonesian social life, the concept held specific meaning when practiced by warias as an effort not only to be visible but to control the conditions of that visibility.

In chapter 5, I argue that, in claiming technologies of gender for themselves, warias cultivated a distinctive style of national glamour that expanded the boundaries of what it meant to see and be seen as an “Indonesian.” This chapter is the most richly illustrated in the book, containing images of warias’ practices of dandan that are from a collection of photographs taken in the 1980s held by
one waria named Tadi. I introduce photographs and oral history accounts with Tadi to trace a history of warias’ aesthetics and practices of feminization that they describe as dandan. I argue that warias’ practices of dandan demonstrate how gender is inseparable from class, nation, spatial regulation, and sexuality. Even as the city identified trans women’s visibility as a problem of public order, and hence as a problem to be solved, warias asserted their own self-knowledge as a claim to authenticity. Dandan in particular, and its capacity to achieve self- hood through bodily cultivation beyond that authorized by the state, reflects the persistence of alternate systems of visual power throughout the New Order. This highlights the potential for gender, a symbol for linking bodily cultivation to the modern self, to establish competing opportunities to participate in a collective public. Reflecting warias’ ambiguous and largely unrecognized relationship to the New Order state’s visual power, the ability to harness dandan as an alternate claim to recognition shows how public gender continued to rely on spatial and temporal forms of regulation. This was most marked in the distinction made among warias between the styles of dandan that were suitable at night and those during the day.

Before and during the New Order, warias negotiated with an ambivalent and contradictory public gaze. The technological processes tied to the specific format of national development that the New Order state ushered in rested on a framework that symbolized the achievement of modernity through the pursuit of a clear-cut gender binary. This provided warias a new format for claiming recognition. The emergence of a distinctive set of possibilities for imagining public gender did not occur alone, therefore, but was shaped by a broader array of sociotechnical relations. Discussion of practices of dandan as contained in this photographic archive helps to clarify warias’ understanding of binary gender as a means to accomplish recognition in ways that were never entirely under the control of the state. In distinction to the state’s definition of sex and gender, warias described their experience of gender as a bodily transformation that reflected a process of refinement or the application of polish, which when done skillfully allowed an essential character to appear more brightly. Warias’ gendering thus has a somewhat processual character, bringing to mind James Siegel’s definition of dandan as that which “bring[s] out a quality that is somehow inherent in whatever is completed” (1997, 73). Practices of dandan among warias reflect how binary gender offered a means to accomplish recognition in ways that were never entirely under the control of the state. Chapters 4 and 5 advance the argument of the book as a whole that the availability of technologies of gender—always far more widespread and accessible than those efforts to impose cisgender normativity by the state—served as an alternate framework of knowledge through which warias could advance claims to recognition. Warias thwarted the state’s
efforts to make up gender as an essentialized format of an individual self and body in part because they were already recognized by community, kin, and one another.

During the New Order, warias claimed forms of recognition that rested on their utility to society. Their gendered form of bodily cultivation was harnessed to the self so that they could become productive members of national society and could assist other citizens to align with the state's desires for economic development. The accomplishment of binary gender was central to an understanding of citizenship as participation in a morally bounded community. Warias demonstrate technology's ongoing role in shaping the limits of belonging, extending to the surface of the body as a medium for recognition. The mixed successes of warias’ efforts to seize sources of visual power and use them to command an audience challenge any simple notion that increased visibility facilitates greater inclusion. Rather, warias serve as a reminder of the need for historians and ethnographers of trans cultural life to attend carefully to the specific meanings of gender within the publics, conditions, aesthetics, and technologies through which that concept is wielded by the modern state.

A Made-Up State

This book centers the sociotechnical relations that both open and limit gender as a technology of classification with far-reaching consequences for the organization of human difference. This approach enables a perspective on gender as a way of differentiating the boundaries of participation within national and social collectives that naturalize dualisms of male/female, mind/body, and cisgender/transgender at the level of the individual self. The ways that warias engaged with and were subject to technological transformations demonstrate how the making of modern gender in Indonesia did not rest on technologies of the self that were focused on the inner life of the subject (C. Taylor 1989) but reflects other histories of personhood, national belonging, and citizenship (Boellstorff 2005). In turn, the technological mediation of gender in postcolonial Indonesia—and the emphasis on bodily cultivation tied to selfhood that underpinned it—established the competent accomplishment of masculinity and femininity as public performances that were key to making and unmaking who could be recognized as a citizen.

The centrality of binary gender to modern citizenship did not disappear at the end of the New Order. Following Suharto’s downfall amid mass protests in 1998, the religious authority of Islam provided an important justification for political action. In the post-Suharto period some religious groups, but by no means all,
have depicted varias as incompatible with a national identity that aligns more closely with a pious Islamic outlook (Wijaya 2020). Yet although the presence of varias in everyday life has long chafed with conservative Islamic publics, secular experts such as psychiatrists and state officials have been equally as strident in continuing their efforts to impose a definition of gender by drawing on binaries of mind/body, male/female, and cisgender/transgender. Rather than reflecting its origins in Islam, this essentialist paradigm of individual gender recalls the history of New Order development, which situated Indonesia as part of a global network in new ways. As Ariel Heryanto has described, the development of the concept of pembangunan by the New Order state sought to rearrange the relationship between technology and social life as “no longer a creative experiment in the expression of foreign ideas” but rather “a distinct response to foreign ideas” (1988, 11).

The gendered body, a key symbol of development during the New Order, continues to be an enduring symbol in the state’s efforts to claim ultimate authority over recognition. From early 2016 onward, just after the moment when I concluded my extended period of fieldwork in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, a wide range of actors mobilized opposition to the claims to political recognition advanced under the broad format of “LGBT rights.” Efforts to oppose LGBT rights appeared to be based on the assessment that such concepts marked a foreign threat to an essential Indonesian character. This public anxiety about the place of LGBT in Indonesian public life led to a corresponding constitutional court case and various efforts to revise the nation’s criminal code (Butt 2019). While these efforts to explicitly criminalize same-sex sexuality at the national level failed, various regional regulations were hastily imposed to criminalize gender nonconformity. Seen from the history of varias’ engagement with public gender contained in this book, these regulations resemble a troubling reversal of the utilization of the mechanisms of municipal and neighborhood governance to expand claims to recognition during the New Order. Varias’ integration into Indonesian social life after Suharto reflects yet another instantiation of the integration of different currents of knowledge and technology, including a reconfiguration of the partial connection between waria and transgender. Attending to the historical specificity of gender as an effort not only to be visible but to control the conditions of that visibility helps us to understand how citizenship is forged through recognition as part of a technologically mediated public, one that is an unpredictable, unfinished, and made-up state.