The Made-Up State

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Published by Cornell University Press

Hegarty, Benjamin.

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In the photograph, a waria stands in a dazzling black-and-gold dress, one hand on her hip and the other resting on the hood of a red sports car (figure 8). She holds her gaze steadily, looking with purpose into the distance, as if called to the nighttime festivities in which warias have participated and a form of visibility tied to their gender performance that has been an object of surveillance since at least Indonesian independence. For the waria in the photograph, the image does not merely serve as a record of the past; it is a way to keep alive her memories and to seize control over how she wishes to be seen by an audience.

This photograph was one of hundreds contained in the personal collection of Tadi, a waria who was in her mid-seventies when we first met during fieldwork in Yogyakarta in 2014. Tadi frequently invited me into the living room of her home in the city, located approximately five hundred kilometers and an eight-hour train ride to the east of Jakarta. In her house, we would talk late into the balmy tropical night to the chirping of crickets and roar of motorbikes. Hers was one of hundreds of houses perched precipitously on a hill above a river that swelled with rain in the wet season and was completely parched in the dry months, a simple two-room dwelling constructed of bamboo and plywood. Tadi lived in humble surroundings and mostly spent her days alone, at a remove from the extensive community circles of waria in the city. Her life at the time that I met her did not adequately represent the richly populated, highly social one that she had lived over the time depicted in this collection of photographs, taken over a period spanning approximately a decade from the late 1970s to the late 1980s.

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
But through her collection of photographs and narrative accounts of life at the height of the New Order, it was possible to situate her among the dense social worlds of warias in Yogyakarta and beyond.

The photographs consisted of scenes from everyday domestic life, life on the streets at night, large group gatherings before and during events, and formal portraits taken in rented rooms of local studios. With few exceptions, every photograph depicted warias in makeup and dressed in women’s clothing, corresponding with an understanding of the practice of dandan as the broad utilization of technologies of feminization to accomplish public visibility. Warias in both Jakarta and Yogyakarta agreed that in the 1980s public practice of dandan was at its most visible. The photographs were a visual record of both the practice of dandan among waria and its relationship to shifting aesthetic norms of feminine beauty more broadly during the 1980s, the decade in which Suharto perfected the cultural display of Javanese tradition as a symbolic counterpart to the “regime of order” central to the technological security state. John Pemberton described the selective occlusion and display of carefully staged rituals by the New Order state as an “exemplary exercise in orderliness” and a demonstration of a “state in which nothing happen[ed]” (1994, 315). But as the photographic images in Tadi’s collection and the centrality of them to her understanding of being and becoming a waria show, the state never achieved a total monopoly on visual power. Warias’ practice of dandan emerged instead as a way of seeing and being seen that harnessed other collective imaginings and practices of identification in public extending beyond that authorized by the state. Dandan was a form of bodily cultivation that enabled public participation in the modern life of the city and the nation. More than this, however, the practice of dandan among warias reflected the centrality of class to the meanings of public gender in shaping sociotechnical imaginaries during the New Order. Understanding these photographs of dandan not only as representations but as constitutive of its potential for multiplication and enhancement helps to understand how gender in the New Order was at once hopeful and dangerous, imagined as a way of seeing and being seen that was in dialogue with the affective intensity of mass publics.

This final chapter introduces Tadi’s photographs and the narratives that accompanied them. It draws on the photographs alongside oral histories for an ethnographic encounter with the past, an approach that allows for a more thoroughgoing interpretation of the ways in which trans femininity was shaped within a specific experience of postcolonial modernity characterized by authoritarian rule. The 1980s was a period that witnessed the consolidation of the New Order state’s distinctive visual format of power, with increased access among Indonesian citizens to visual technologies, including film and television. In describing the centrality of emergent visual technologies during the New Order,
Saya Shiraishi depicted the president as synonymous with the act of unilateral state power to see without itself being seen, as when he “appeared on TV, standing in silence . . . with his dark sunglasses” (1997, 91) or in a more benign role, holding a video camera during family holidays (see also Strassler 2009). These visual signs conveyed a sense of state power that lay in the use of technologies to make the objects of its gaze visible, an all-seeing gaze that denied access to the source of that gaze or the capacity to ascertain its authenticity.

I attend to photographs taken by and of warias in everyday life as a way to interpret the processes involved in making Indonesian modernity at the intersection of visual technologies, the body, and the meanings of state citizenship. Warias’ rich historical engagement in Indonesian publics, and vexed visibility, can contribute to Karen Strassler’s pathbreaking interpretation of the use of popular photography in Indonesia to graft “an alien and yet-to-be-achieved modernity” onto more intimate and personal domains, “generating new conceptions of time, truth, authority, and authenticity” (Strassler 2010, 18). Focusing attention more broadly beyond warias’ enmeshment within photographic images and visual technologies, I propose that dandan is also a practice that works to mediate between visual forms of representation at the level of the nation and everyday affective registers of navigating public space. The previous chapter described how the possibility to become beauty experts emerged in the shadow of city and state projects of governance that limited the meanings of participation in public life. Nevertheless, warias consistently stressed the centrality of their participation in vocational training schemes in fields related to feminine beauty as helping them to acquire skills for self-improvement that enabled acceptance by society (di terima oleh masyarakat). This chapter looks to the opportunities that public gender offered that were not as restricted as the disciplinary projects pursued by city governments or that always had the state in mind as a single arbiter of the authenticity of citizenship. Practices of dandan were also addressed to other audiences, emphasizing the instability and potential for alternate forms of participation that flickered at the corners of visuality as a public domain over which the state sought to wield control. Photographs of waria practicing dandan in the 1980s reveal that cisgender is not an inevitable or natural basis for determining authentic citizenship, but rather is a divergent set of meanings shaped through struggles over participation in the technologies that make visible claims to recognize authenticity.

This chapter returns to a question that has arisen at different points in this book: What are the meanings of gender as an effort at cultivation and curation that is central to being a citizen who participates in the publics made possible by the modern state? Considering the historical centrality of participation in mass publics among Indonesian warias (Peacock 1968; Hatley 1971; Geertz
1976, 295), I turn to the role of photographic technologies as a crucial component of practices of dandan and gender as they were shaped within the broader economic context of Indonesia during the 1980s. An ethnography of historical photographs from the New Order period further pushes back against the limitations of Euro-American theories premised on the cisgender/transgender binary, while also pinpointing it as a model that shifts a concept of biological sex to psychological gender, retaining the limitations of naturalizing citizenship as the property of a biological individual understood in terms of a mind/body dualism. The history of warias introduced thus far has outlined both the analytical shortcomings and exclusions that follow from an assessment of citizenship as naturally following from individual personhood. Rather than a natural state, warias’ participation in public gender shows just how constructed and hence limited a concept of citizenship framed within the concept of the biological individual has been. During the New Order, an understanding of an awareness of the self as a national subject was increasingly recast in terms of development and the attainment of middle-class status. Widespread forms of national development, including those that were focused on poor and rural populations, held that economic underdevelopment was a lack that individuals needed to become aware of in order to overcome (Tsing 1993). The aesthetics and practices of dandan as a form of national glamour are much more portable, sensuous provocations that facilitated movement across boundaries of class and nation and which needed no authorization, apart from that provided by the viewing public. Attending closely to warias’ practice of dandan helps in understanding the way that public gender opened citizenship to possibilities apart from the grid of state bureaucracy, generating affective incitement to participate in social life in ways that could transcend the state’s exclusionary format of development. The practice of dandan instead made legible an understanding of citizenship as a set of claims and struggles waged within a more fractured domain of belonging to a national public in the authoritarian state.

Authenticity and Evidence

Tadi was born in 1946 in Yogyakarta, the same year that the city was announced as the capital of the newly declared Republic of Indonesia. Although a clear biographical arc was difficult to establish, from our conversations I pieced together that she had spent her early life in Yogyakarta, and although she had traveled frequently, had returned to settle down there when she was in her early twenties. Unlike many waria, Tadi did not work in fields associated with beauty but rather for the Indonesian state railway company as an assistant in train restaurant cars. This constituted an important feature of her life, given that it marked a clear
delination between her public performances of dandan and the standard-issue uniform she was required to wear at work. Yet this did not appear to have posed a major problem for Tadi; as she explained, everybody at her workplace knew that she was a waria anyway. Before her retirement, she worked in this position for more than twenty years, during which she traveled between cities on the island of Java. Tadi was particularly proud of her rare accomplishment as one of the few warias who had been able to gain formal employment within a state-owned industry.

Part of what made Tadi’s collections of photographs so important to her was that her employment meant she was not able to practice dandan in all contexts and at all times of day. Rather, because of strict policies that required a uniform public presentation while at work, Tadi limited her femininity to particular times and locations, mostly in salons and at night in the context of sex work, for which she had been arrested in raids by municipal police several times. Given that her performance of dandan was necessarily limited by the nature of her employment, she always carried a photograph of herself to prove that she was in fact an “authentic waria.” As she explained, “When I was at work I brought a photo in case I met a man. I always brought a photo, so if I saw a man, I’d approach him and show it to him. If I didn’t bring a photo, he might not believe me [that I was waria].” Echoing Maya’s stress on her capacity to transform herself into a more beautiful version of famous actresses, Tadi insisted that these photographs served as “evidence” (buktinya) and that I could “see for myself” (bisa lihat sendiri) that what she was saying was true. Her appeal to visual evidence in support of claims to truth mirrored a specific kind of “documentary history” (Strassler 2010, 270) common to historical practices during the New Order, one that emerged out of broader anxieties over the relationship between truth and authenticity. If anything, Tadi’s description of the importance of carrying a photograph of her performing dandan seemed to amplify her capacity for making claims to authenticity and through it recognition.

To Tadi, the photographs thus not only represented a treasured artifact of a lifetime of memories but served as documentary evidence of her claims, as reflected in her studied treatment of them as precious objects. Stored in sturdy albums and printed on quality paper, the photographs reflected a considerable investment in a neighborhood where many residents struggled to meet even the most basic of economic needs. When I asked her why she had started taking photographs in the late 1970s, Tadi simply explained that it had only become affordable at that time and that once she started, she had found it to be an enjoyable hobby. She was clearly no expert in photography, appearing ambivalent about the technology even as she actively and enthusiastically used it. One reason why she permitted me to both record and reproduce the photographs was that, as she framed it,
ownership over the images was not a straightforward matter of property. While many of the people in the photographs were identifiable, Tadi referred to the collection as an archive of “Indonesian warias” whom she imagined on collective terms, bringing to mind alternative yet nevertheless overlapping possibilities of belonging to the publics made possible by the limited and bounded imaginary of the nation-state (Anderson 1996). My participation in reproducing these images, and contextualizing them in this book, was seen as one further step in expanding the grounds for participation in a collective public, raising hopes for recognition as authentically “Indonesian.” This framing highlighted how efforts at taking, curating, and reproducing the images was not an idiosyncratic or individualized form of self-styling but reflected a hope of shared recognition as part of a collective public that was constituted for and by warias, one through which they could exercise greater control over the means of technological reproduction.

The photographs also help the viewer to see a more everyday aspect of warias’ entanglement within the historically specific visual regimes of Indonesian postcolonial modernity. The aesthetic styles related to the practice of dandan apparent in the photographs—a counterpart to my historical description of how warias began to gain a reputation as beauty experts from the early New Order—show how dandan was gradually transformed into an aesthetic that I characterize as a form of national glamour. In referring to the styles of clothing, makeup, and other aspects of public gender presented in the photographs as national, I do not mean that the practices of dandan in these photographs are explicitly nationalist (although some do draw on national symbols of affiliation), or that they are explicitly condoned by the state. Rather, I do so to further illustrate how dandan reflected a format for femininity that connected the state’s promotion of self-cultivation to feminine symbols of consumer capitalism in the market-based logic of the authoritarian New Order. Dominant accounts of glamorous femininity at times insinuate that it is akin to a façade, what Stephen Gundle called a “project or canvas on which a variety of socially significant meanings may be inscribed” (2008, 11). I want to link glamour to citizenship in a different way. Rather than outer appearances as markers of inauthenticity, I follow Marcia Ochoa’s interpretation of glamour as an aesthetic which (in Ochoa’s case) Venezuelan transformistas used “to draw down extralocal authority, to conjure a contingent space of being and belonging” (2014, 89; see also Berlant 1997). My interpretation of national glamour, and the centrality of it in making spaces for belonging at this time, must also be understood in light of the widespread understanding of personhood in Southeast Asia in which outer appearances are not signs of insincerity but key to the accomplishment of authenticity. As Nancy Florida argued, appearances do not conceal an inner truth, but are viewed as signs to be decoded by trained eyes, a “clue presenting itself to be read” (1995, 273). Yet even as glamour was
an aesthetic central to the public practice of dandan among waria—and hence arguably that which was most open to interpretation by public audiences—it was not the only aesthetic format that their trans feminine mediations took. The practice of dandan was never a univocal style limited to glamorous display. The photographs showed that warias performed myriad styles, which ranged from the demure to the spectacular. The sheer number of photographs taken at night and in public spaces and given over to glamorous femininity nevertheless raise the question as to why this particular aesthetic played a central role in shaping the experience of public recognition.

A key shaping factor in warias’ practice of dandan was, as I argued in chapter 2, the regulation of public space at the scale of the city. Tadi’s photographs demonstrated how, as late as the 1980s, there continued to be differences in performances of dandan according to the time of day and location in which waria were present. This highlights the persistence of the spatial separation of forms of dandan and public gender more generally, even though warias’ narratives described that such separation tapered off at the beginning of their golden age from the late 1960s onward. Indeed, perhaps the most dramatic distinction that can be observed in these photographs is between the practice of dandan at night (figures 8, 9), including the sequined gown that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, and that which was performed during the day (figure 10). Waria’s recollections of the period suggest that it was not necessarily important to practice dandan consistently in each setting in which a waria might be socially recognized. Perhaps because Tadi could not practice dandan at work, her narratives often centered on her relationship to practices of dandan explicitly undertaken for a wide public audience.

On one occasion Tadi described in detail the location in Yogyakarta where she presented herself in dandan in public, noting how the warias present stood apart from women: “In the past we had our own location. The women [sex workers] were here, and there was a ditch over there. Then, over there, were the waria. Waria were right at the back, but I was at the far end of them. I didn’t want to be in the dark. I wanted to be in the light.” Tadi and other warias’ engagement with glamorous femininity in public spaces, albeit under certain conditions, highlights the delicate negotiation that it required. Tadi insisted that appearing in dandan in public spaces at night was a particularly important practice for her: “After meeting waria in a nearby salon, I started to practice dandan [berdandan] regularly. I started to practice dandan in public in the town square, when I was looking for men.” Since the beginning of the New Order, salons have served as a crucial locus of social life and opportunity for economic advancement for warias throughout Indonesia. Tadi described how several well-known salons in the city, including the Ambassador Salon, served this function, connecting warias to a

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
FIGURE 10. A waria dressed in daytime dandan at a beach near Yogyakarta in the mid-1980s.

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
wider community. These salons, and the senior leaders associated with them, provided the infrastructure through which varias organized themselves into groups that undertook a range of activities. Tadi recalled fondly the role of organized sporting competitions, both football and volleyball, that bound Yogyakarta varias together into teams, which frequently departed for competitions in other cities. Salons were also a key site where varias obtained access to the technologies of feminization through which they could cultivate expertise in makeup, hairstyling, and other forms of self-improvement. It was salons that facilitated the gendered public visibility that positioned varias alongside, yet separate from, other public forms of femininity in the Indonesian city.

The historical practices of dandan pictured in Tadi’s photographs overlap with a period of significant reorganization in forms of state power during the New Order. In the early 1980s, just at the time when many of these photographs were being taken, the military and other state operatives covertly undertook what came to be referred to in the press as “mysterious killings,” the targets of which were known and suspected petty criminals. One way in which the state instilled fear in citizens was through the visual forms of power it deployed, which stretched from its extensive surveillance apparatus to pictures in the pages of newspapers. James Siegel described how anxiety about “criminal types” was fed by newspapers popular among working-class people in Jakarta, in which photographs of the faces of criminals were obscured through bars over their eyes. According to Siegel, this served as a demonstration of the power of the state to erase citizenship claims. Such pictures were a “photographically imposed mask or veil,” behind which was “only the face of ordinary Indonesians,” an aesthetic style that Siegel interpreted as reflecting historical fears of those who claimed to be citizens but were not, a sense of something “familiar, not strange, or, rather, strange in its familiarity” (1998, 6). The public practice of dandan demanded a delicate engagement with the shadowy agents of the state and their efforts to control the limits of participation in public life, making sure that those who were “wild” (liar) were visible in their invisibility, a target for defining who was in fact a legitimate “citizen” (warga). In this respect, Tadi’s photographs can be usefully contrasted with Karen Strassler’s description of Indonesians’ appropriation of the portrait photography used in state bureaucracy, employing the format instead for idiosyncratic purposes of family and individual memory, exceeding its role as a “fetish of state power” (Strassler 2010, 128). In contrast to the identity card—itself a visual icon that placed citizens within a gendered regime of surveillance—the practice of dandan, performed on the body and face of ordinary citizens, reflected public gender as a different kind of public sign, one that made possible claims to recognition as authentic citizens as part of a public that itself was beyond the control of the state.
Given that the practice often faced hostility from state and nonstate actors, warias’ efforts to make themselves hypervisible through the performance of dandan may seem unusual. Tadi’s statements on the reasons why she wanted to be visible echoed a desire commonly expressed among warias during the New Order. Tom Boellstorff (2005) described how discourses about national belonging in Indonesia have shaped deeply felt desires for recognition, even for those such as waria, gay men, and lesbian women, whose desires and embodiment might appear at first glance foreclosed by the heteronormativity of these discourses. During the New Order, the practice of dandan was similarly incorporated into discourses of national belonging. Warias came to believe that social acceptance might one day be possible if only they expended enough effort to obtain the expertise associated with a skillfully performed modern femininity, a femininity that not only showed but revealed the authenticity of their claims to citizenship.

**Becoming Waria**

The importance of public visibility through dandan is better understood by tracing the relationship between narratives of the self and expressions of national belonging among warias. Across all my fieldsites, warias narrated a relationship between appearances related to dandan and an inner self in ways that commonly invoked tropes that drew on visual metaphors of personhood. These often came up in spontaneous reflections on self-transformations undertaken as a source of inspiration and potential for claiming public recognition through what they called “jadi waria” [becoming waria] (Hegarty 2018, 365). One forty-year-old waria defined her selfhood as a process of becoming waria, which she narrated in terms of the externalization of visible signs, using a metaphor of an empty vessel that could be filled up over time. She described trying out different social settings and gradations of feminine gender performance before settling on becoming waria, by which she meant appearing in dandan on a consistent if not daily basis. She explained her own transition in terms of the phrase “banci kaléng,” meaning a “canned” (or, as I have interpreted the term elsewhere, “empty”) waria, a reference to the period during which she tentatively began to practice dandan but only within circumscribed settings, retaining a mostly masculine gender presentation on an everyday basis. She conveyed to me a common narrative of the process of becoming a waria as a series of steps: “We start out as gay ngondhek [feminine gay], and then we become banci kaléng. We only become complete when we meet other waria in salons, participate in nyébong [spaces commonly associated with transactional sex for waria] and perform dandan.” In this view, signs of “waria-ness” (kewariaan) are initially open only to those able to read
them, gradually revealed by the adoption of knowledge and its application onto the body as a means to become visible to the public. For many warias, practicing dandan at night and during the day, in public and in private, was described as the culmination of the process of becoming waria.

This understanding of a body that becomes increasingly visible over time rests on an implicit comparison with gay men, who are understood as able to be invisible or able to conceal their sexuality. This view is not entirely straightforward, given that it relies on the assumption that there has always been a distinction between the practices that constitute identification as gay and identification as a waria. Indeed, many warias explained to me that it was only during the 1980s that a clear distinction between themselves and gay-identified men became increasingly evident. This is perhaps because the term gay—signifying a man who desires a person of the same gender—was itself not in wide circulation until the early 1980s (Wijaya 2019), more than a decade after the establishment of the first waria organizations in Jakarta in the late 1960s. Recall that a single term, banci, was used to refer to a very wide range of gender and sexual embodiment, not all of which appears to have rested on transformations made to outer appearances. Still, warias usually stressed a degree of permeability between the two subject positions while emphasizing their distinctiveness at the level of the soul, particularly at events or performances at which dandan was practiced (Boellstorff 2005, 175–77). Waria whom I spoke with commonly explained the chief difference marking them as distinct from gay men as their comfort in feminine attire across all settings, as well as the degree of skill in the adoption of knowledge and technologies of enacting a feminine appearance through dandan most of the time and in most situations.

Nevertheless, accounts of becoming waria as the culmination of a process rested on an understanding that there was also a family resemblance between identification as waria and as gay, even as they were distinct terms that indexed distinct understandings of the self. Such similarities and divergences in the gay/waria boundary eschewed a firm demarcation between sexuality and gender, suggesting a more processual understanding of personhood that renders any claim to what David Valentine called an “ontological separateness of gender and sexuality” under suspicion as a move that “transforms an analytic distinction into a naturalized, transhistorical, transcultural fact” (2007, 62). As is the case above, narrative accounts of warias often commenced with a description of a gradual revelation of character that began with being seen as ngondhek and gradually adopting dandan more of the time. That said, it is important to clarify that ngondhek is distinct from the femininity that waria accomplish through dandan, given that “it is made up of actions—gesture, language, clothing—that can be quickly set aside . . . it is not strongly linked to bodily modification” (Boellstorff
2005, 166). Warias recounted that the difference here lay in their willingness to both exercise mastery over the application of everyday practices associated with dandan and the comfort that they experienced as a result of doing so, which made it entirely distinct from ngondhek. Despite this degree of permeability between the two terms, warias have long stressed that the dandan gay men perform was distinct from their own, while not discounting the possibility that such performances may be the very means through which a person comes to recognize themselves as a waria.

Judith Butler provided a powerful and oft cited model for understanding gender in terms of its relationship to an audience, wherein gender naturalizes heteronormativity through the “repeated stylization of the body” (Butler 1990, 33), imagined as an alignment between inner self and the body. As Butler made clear, the seamless performative dispensations required to sustain gender as a natural property of a person come under scrutiny in contexts where gender performance—classically theorized in relation to drag performances—can also be consciously enacted and thus subverted through parody or imitation. As Esther Newton’s (1979) observations of situational performances of femininity among gay men and drag queens revealed, gender performance is not necessarily univocal in the West. And in the 1960s United States, the stakes of disregarding such boundaries differed significantly along class and race lines. The full-time femininity of “low-status queens” paradoxically represented a pinnacle of “coherence and power” (Newton 1979, 30) when contrasted with white middle-class gay men, who limited their performance of femininity to private settings. This partially reflects how sexual and gender normativity was condensed through racial and class difference in the United States, helping to explain why it was that mainstream efforts to advance gay and lesbian rights in that context have predominantly rested on a formulation of sexuality (and, increasingly, gender identity) in terms of private rights and the body imagined as the property of a bounded individual. One of the effects of normative formulations of gay and lesbian rights as claims to private identity, as David Valentine described, was the gradual excising of “the excess of public sexual deviance, gender variance, and street life from the category of homosexuality and [insistence] on the gender normativity of homosexuality” (2007, 242). Distinct from the form of public symbolism in which gender nonconformity was bound up with homosexuality as a product of the individual self in the US, practices of dandan in Indonesia could (under certain conditions) refract desires for modernity that, if anything, led to an increased visibility of transgender femininity in pursuit of claims to recognition.

As previously noted, in New Order Indonesia, a capacity to style the body with the trappings of modern femininity was advanced as one strategy for social acceptance. This chiefly hinged on a relationship to the expanded visibility made
possible by the mass media. Thus, the visibility of waria of various social classes does not appear to have been structured by the kinds of “trouble” that come when the “regulatory fiction” (Butler 1990, 136) of gender is disrupted in the West. As the historical accounts of public gender throughout this book suggest, the fact that there is a disjuncture between outer appearances and how people imagine themselves has not necessarily provoked a crisis of authenticity at the level of the self in this context. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the tension between outer appearances and inner self was instead experienced in terms of navigating the relationship between self and society. As this book has shown, the public visibility of warias has been met with moments of acceptance as well as moments of rejection within Indonesian postcolonial modernity, depending on from whom they have sought recognition. This relationship to public visuality highlights the need to attend to the historical specificity of processes of defining which bodies should perform masculinity and femininity, the kinds of behaviors that those bodies are thought to index, and the spaces in which they should be visible under the conditions of postcolonial modernity. Understanding this process requires examining the distinctive technologies that yield the possibility of new modes of gendered affiliation and recognition, and in particular the kinds of technologies that are meaningful to warias themselves.

The visual technologies that constitute the practice of dandan among warias did not only incorporate feminine styles from the mass media and corresponding forms of national glamour but reflected a visual logic that drew from the powers of the state’s bureaucratic practices of documentary identification. In narrative accounts of the New Order, and during my encounters in my 2014 and 2015 fieldwork, warias often struggled to obtain identity cards or other bureaucratic forms of identity issued by the state, in part due to their fraught connection to their families. In some of Tadi’s photographs, a single waria was positioned alone against a wall (figure 11). In style and format, these images mirrored the portrait photographs that are commonly required for identity cards and other bureaucratic purposes in Indonesia. This use of bureaucratic-style portraits in forms of self-fashioning was not necessarily surprising; as mentioned, the identity card and its portrait photograph was a key component of New Order bureaucracy. Yet the unofficial identity card portraits presented here were not necessarily captured by a photographer for the purposes of the extensive state’s surveillance apparatus. Rather, the photographer and the person photographed staged what was designed to look like a bureaucratic portrait photograph. Such images draw on the genre conventions of bureaucratic portraits even as they subvert their functionalist aesthetic by introducing a style that brings state-sanctioned femininity into dialogue with the practice of dandan as national glamour. In its photographic mediation, the practice of dandan was one way in which warias
FIGURE 11. A waria poses against a plain backdrop in the style of a portrait photograph in the mid-1980s.

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
seized control of the state’s effort to adjudicate the boundary between the asli and the palsu, the authentic and the false. This appropriation of the aesthetics associated with the state’s visual powers in these photographs makes a poignant point that for warias, the practice of dandan offered an alternative route to visual recognition by neighbors and kin that did not require the authority of the state for legibility.

Into the Lights, onto the Stage

The practice of dandan as a specific technological act was performed as part of a wider repertoire of public visibility. This understanding was reflected in Tadi’s frequent use of metaphors associated with performance when expressing an early desire to practice dandan. She commonly reflected on her initial steps toward practicing dandan as a calling that was like being “on the stage” and “in the lights.” On one occasion, she recalled to me, “I used to dance like I was on a stage since I was little. I used to behave like this in public settings, but my parents couldn’t yet recognize why I did so.” Echoing the conception of gendered visibility, encompassing dress, makeup, and narratives of selfhood that all form part of a process of becoming waria, Tadi explained that becoming aware of her woman’s soul came in the form of subtle signs of femininity, which were the reflection of sexual desire for men. Like many warias, Tadi described this as a gradual process, one that was achieved through others’ recognition of signs of her being a waria.

Photographs of the practice of dandan attested to warias’ skillful use of technologies of feminization to transform their public gender into a form of visibility that could enable recognition. These photographs also prompt a number of questions. What kind of recognition does the practice of dandan offer to waria? What kind of audience does their performance gather, whether under the lights on a street corner or illuminated by a camera’s flash? Rather than displaying or emphasizing consistency, the practice of dandan among waria highlighted the fragmented scales at which recognition was possible; certain times and places were understood as inherently more suitable than others. Some settings, waria maintained, simply facilitated recognition more readily than others. Other audiences had to be approached with caution but, given enough effort, might warm to their presence.

A desire for recognition by an audience offers further insights into how spatial governmentality shapes the meanings of the gendered body. Many photographs, whether taken on street corners or set among tropical foliage (figure 12), share parallels with Marcia Ochoa’s (2014, 88) description of transnational glamour as “a way of reordering time and space around oneself for purposes of enchanting.”

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
Ochoa interpreted trans femininity as part of a process of ongoing transformation that was facilitated by the technologies at hand. When transformistas are visible on the sides of highways and streets of the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, they draw on transnational images of femininity as flexible resources that allow them to craft distinctive forms of belonging. But the space within which they are visible is not free of regulations and forms of state discipline. Like many Indonesian cities, Caracas has punitive public order regulations that justify police raids and community surveillance. As Ochoa wrote, in terms that bring to mind the municipal regulations aimed at public order that have targeted warias in Indonesia, spatial forms of regulation framed as “citizenly coexistence” in Caracas “impl[y] a social harmony that respects all citizens as long as they respect the law. But some citizens ‘live together’ better than others, and the law always values some existences while marginalizing others” (2008, 147). In Indonesian postcolonial modernity too, gender was a central aspect of shaping the meanings of the city that makes possible forms of both recognition and exclusion.

Following Ochoa, I interpret warias’ practice of dandan as part of a mediation of transnational femininity that is entangled with forms of regulation that take place at the scale of the city. A number of Tadi’s photographs demonstrated a relationship between warias’ national glamour and the city as paradigmatic of an imagined modernity. Nevertheless, responses to the public performance of national glamour and this urbanized format for articulating national modernity were not uniform. If warias found that they could perform dandan in everyday life in cities, at least during their golden age, their feminine presentation also attracted increased scrutiny as a symbol of urban-centered moral decay. Just as some locations facilitated recognition more readily than others, so too did certain moments serve to point out where the limits of recognition offered by the performance of dandan might lie. Warias often recalled how they had experienced “discomfort” or outright rejection. The comfort that warias had carefully curated in their cultivation of a public could be shattered by a change as subtle as the approaching dawn, or one as violent as a pursuit by the city police.

The visibility that warias achieved must thus be interpreted within its context. Some of Tadi’s photographs show the way in which warias were visible when on their way to events. One waria is pictured wearing a sheer black-mesh crop top over a dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up. A black-and-silver bow tie is attached directly to her neck. Brilliant cherry-red lipstick accentuates her mouth, and she wears eye shadow of the lightest pink and silvery hue, a diamond stud in one ear, and a dangling parrot in the other. Her fedora is decked out with a feathered plume (figure 13). Another photograph shows a waria in a tartan skirt, taking a mock curtsy beneath banana trees at night on the unused tracts of land beside railway stations where waria commonly gathered (figure 14). In yet another
FIGURE 13. A waria on her way to an event in the mid-1980s.
Source: Tadi’s personal collection
FIGURE 14. A waria curtsies beneath banana trees at night, most likely near a railway station, in the mid-1980s.

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
FIGURE 15. A waria in a private home, posing on a sofa, mid-1980s.

Source: Tadi’s personal collection
photo, a waria drapes herself casually on furniture in the comfort of a private home (figure 15). This reflects one way in which recognition was not imagined but spatial and embodied for warias, who had to contend with limits placed on what they should wear and where they should go at what times.

In part because of the consolidation of their position as beauty experts in the 1970s and early 1980s, warias emerged as among the very few groups of people who could successfully mount public campaigns calling for a more inclusive vision of the nation. This included campaigns to contest raids by city police on the public places where warias gathered. In particular, the drowning deaths of several warias in Jakarta in the course of police raids catalyzed an intensification of the public protest and organizing that had taken place since the beginning of the New Order (Kompas 1979c). With warias mounting an effective protest against police harassment, the drowning deaths received prominent treatment in the national press, evoking considerable sympathy from middle-class Jakartans, as expressed in journalistic accounts of the social life of warias published during the 1980s (Atmojo 1987).

It was in this context that Mami Myrna, the prominent leader of the Fantastic Dolls, had made it clear that warias’ continuing presence on the streets reflected a lack of opportunity. Echoing claims made by warias since the late 1960s, she complained, “If warias don’t have any skills, because they haven’t been given any opportunities to study, how are we meant to make any money?” She continued, “We are abused by our family, abused by our neighborhood, we want to work—there aren’t so many who want to understand us—so what should we do? We go to the streets!” (Kompas 1979c). Other warias described their fear of being sent to a rehabilitation center, where they could be subject to abuse. Myrna stressed that almost any fate would be better than a long period of confinement in one of the rehabilitation centers run by the city. Such comments illustrated how exceptional waria were in their willingness to contest mistreatment through concrete forms of organizing and mobilization, premised on a more expansive vision of what not only gender but also citizenship could be.

In chapter 2, I introduced how warias’ performances of dandan emerged in dialogue with the ongoing spatial concerns within municipal governance. The efforts made by the city to regulate waria (and indeed the very development of the category) suggest how their gender performance emerged in dialogue, as Maria Valverde described in a different setting, with “creaky mechanisms of urban governance [that led] to distinct, often unpredictable outcomes, depending on a host of local factors” (2012, 195). Ali Sadikin’s successor, Governor Cokropanolo (1977–1982) effectively consolidated his predecessor’s view that it was his job to ensure that warias did not “disturb public order” (Kompas 1977, 3). Reflecting a historical pattern of resort to partial medicalization, Cokropanolo drew
municipal governance into dialogue with psychiatric expertise, stating that waria had a “mental disorder” that “needed to be treated by psychological experts.” Cokropanolo’s vice governor, Sardjono Soeprapto (who subsequently himself became governor) noted the ongoing role for technocratic policies regarding warias. According to Soeprapto, solving what he saw as the “problem of waria”—a phrase that had been in use since the late 1960s—required expertise obtained through firsthand knowledge. “We have to know beforehand what it is that waria want. We cannot create a distinct area in the city, like the red light districts the government organized for prostitution, without researching some more what the problem is” (Kompas 1977, 3). Indexing a historical format for spatial governance that had long been focused on gender-nonconforming bodies in Jakarta, warias continued to operate as a crucial node in the circulation of expertise about public gender between the scale of the city and the nation.

By pushing the boundaries since the 1950s of where their presence on city streets would be tolerated, waria gradually increased the settings in which they could appear in dandan. Skillfully accomplishing iconic forms of femininity, as Tadi and other warias explained, gave them a sense of “comfort” (nyaman) in public by the 1980s. Other warias who had lived in Jakarta during the 1980s described to me their increased “comfort” linked to a sense that they could perform dandan at a growing number of times and in a growing number of places. In the 1980s, a time when economic transformations were leading to increasing class stratification, spatially segregated consumer-capitalist forms of femininity emerged as an ambivalent public symbol that both served as cause for celebration of the possibilities of national development while representing the threat of corruption and moral decay (Jones 2012). For warias, however, the performance of dandan served as an expansive medium that enabled increased access to public space.

Tadi’s narrative accounts and the practices of dandan depicted in the photographs introduced in this chapter suggest that warias had to regulate their appearances well into the 1980s and beyond. Their orientation to an imagined public, albeit at a different historical juncture, also shaped the scope for gender nonconformity in the postauthoritarian period that followed Suharto’s fall in 1998. Just as warias’ prospects for recognition remain closely connected to possibilities that unfold at the scale of city, so too has the city come to play an increasingly prominent role in the disciplinary logics of gender and sexuality at the level of the nation after the New Order. Warias’ historical engagement with dandan across fractured sites and publics offers an understanding of the profound fragility and power of appearances to bestow the recognition associated with state citizenship.
Indonesian Publics

Seen as more proximate to the technological moorings of Indonesian postcolonial modernity that I have outlined in this book, public gender is key to understanding historical anxieties related to authority over seeing and being seen, or what Mary Steedly described as a broad “regime of visuality” (2013, 262) shaped by histories of authoritarian rule during the New Order. Noting the interplay between the technological and historical specificity of the photographic image and dandan as an effort not only to be visible but to control the conditions of that visibility has helped to clarify how citizenship might be forged through recognition as part of a public, albeit one that ultimately remains unpredictable and unfinished. National glamour, as shown in Tadi’s photographs and expressed in her narratives, reflects an understanding of citizenship that cannot be reduced to the normalizing tendencies of either state surveillance or neoliberal self-fashioning.

An ability to forge a space through making up the body for a public audience has long rested on warias’ understanding that participation in mass publics could offer new opportunities to achieve acceptance. Warias’ partial integration within and capacity to leverage city-level forms of governance during the New Order presented a useful work-around in the context of a state in which the boundaries of modern citizenship were resolutely heteronormative. But this conceptualization of drawing on the practice of dandan as a way to expand opportunities for public participation, a practice that was shaped by historical legacies of appearances as a vital means to contest hegemonic forms of power in Indonesia, also foreshadowed the limits of this access to citizenship. As Tadi reflected, it was not necessarily that warias were rejected, but more that they should be cautious about the kinds of dandan they practiced and how it made them visible, with particular attention paid to the intersection of gender and class norms. As Tadi explained, “There were warias who would be visible at night and during the day, but they were those who were buskers who would be visible during the day.” Given that busking was seen as a form of lower-class economic participation, it marked a kind of visibility from which respectable warias sought to distance themselves. For Tadi, much of her pride emerged from her capacity to engage in practices of dandan for pleasure, rather than being reliant on gendered visibility as a means to make a living.

Economic exclusion and gender nonconformity were closely entwined among many of the warias I spoke with, including Tadi. She contrasted her capacity to make a living on her own—and particularly her freedom from the constraints of sex work, thanks to her position in the state railway—with her experiences of
her early life. She described how her father, a member of the armed forces who had fought in Indonesia’s revolution of independence, had struggled to provide for his family when she was growing up in the 1960s. These early experiences had clearly shaped Tadi’s own sense of self and desires for recognition. Referring to one experience from her childhood, she explained, “My father would wake us up in the early morning at 3 a.m., myself and my siblings. He would tell us to get dressed, and he would bring us to the railway station. There, he would park us down in chairs in the waiting room, and we would take a place in the queue for a ticket, and we would sell our place to people who arrived later.” This experience seemed to animate a desire for a form of recognition and belonging that could transcend experiences of economic exclusion, in favor of a more just opportunity for participation in public life. The practice of dandan must be considered as a form of self-expression that cannot be separated from warias’ everyday sexual, gendered, and economic worlds.

Tadi’s photographs, and the relationship between gender performance and selfhood that they convey, refract broader desires for national belonging and recognition. For the New Order state, public gender was a format for transforming the bodies of all citizens into participants in a national project of economic development. For this reason, the practice of dandan was not only about gender at the level of the individual but the expression of a hope for more transformative possibilities of technology to facilitate recognition. For warias, the practice of dandan was conferred with the hope that the mediations of class, gender, and nation that they undertook would be recognized by neighbors, community, and kin. Even as warias tended to approach the possibilities for integration into state citizenship on cautious terms, their participation in national publics through the practice of dandan pushed at and even expanded the boundaries of citizenship. The act of dandan appeared to invite recognition by an audience that witnessed, and in some contexts acknowledged, alternate possibilities for seeing and being seen that public gender could enable. In this guise, the practice of dandan among warias was not primarily experienced as a means of self-actualization but rather as one component of a desire for recognition that, under certain conditions, could exceed the authority of the state.

Here it is worth returning to the narratives of warias that the opportunity to be seen (ternampak) at all times of day and across all places was only a possibility at the dawn of their golden age in Jakarta, 1968. The history of warias contained in this book suggests that the practice of dandan on an everyday basis is not only about public gender, but shows the centrality of appearances tied to projects of self-cultivation as a citizen of the nation-state. Building on Benedict Anderson’s (1996) analysis of national belonging as facilitated by print capitalism, Tadi’s narratives and photographs revealed how citizenship in postcolonial
Indonesia was also shaped by limitations on what the body could do to strive to fit into the sociotechnical imaginary of the New Order. Warias’ experiences of practices of dandan as a medium for recognition in public space, one premised on a process of refinement or completion of what is already there, crystallized the boundaries of class differences. Warias’ deft navigation of the shifting currents of visual modes of power contribute an important historical perspective on how gender and sexuality continue to play an important role in shaping claims to recognition and the publics that they generate after Suharto (Hegarty 2022; Wijaya 2020; Paramaditha 2018). In the conclusion to this book, I turn to this more open-ended promise of the possibilities of citizenship understood in terms of the practice of dandan, and the implications of public gender as a locus for transformation after the New Order.