Governing Nonconformity: Gender Presentation, Public Space, and the City in New Order Indonesia

Abstract

The regulation of public space is generative of new approaches to gender nonconformity. In 1968 in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, a group of people who identified as *wadam*—a new term made by combining parts of Indonesian words denoting “femininity” and “masculinity”—made a claim to the city’s governor that they had the right to belong in public space. This article illustrates the paradoxical achievement of obtaining recognition on terms constituted via the logics of public nuisance. The origins and diffuse effects of recognition achieved via the terms *wadam* and later *waria* facilitated the partial recognition of these terms as a status that was legal but nonconforming. This possibility emerged out of city-level innovations and historical conceptualizations of the body in Indonesia. Recent scholarship has addressed the importance of gender and sexuality in shaping the boundaries of citizenship. Attending to the way that gender nonconformity was enfolded into existing methods of codifying space reflects a broader concern for restricting entry to public space and on what basis. Considering a concern for gender nonconformity on spatial grounds encourages an alternate genealogy of the emergence of morality as a definitive feature of national belonging in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Keywords

transgender, Indonesia, waria, nonconformity, citizenship, space, cities, belonging, the body

On the evening of 2 August 1968, a delegation of twenty-two transgender women held a meeting with Ali Sadikin, the governor of Indonesia's capital city Jakarta. The respected Indonesian daily newspaper, *Kompas*, reported that a representative named Lidya had addressed the governor directly. She claimed to speak on behalf of a staggering fifteen thousand transgender women estimated to be resident in the city at the time. At the governor's official residence, located in an exclusive enclave in the center of the city, Lidya made a plea for assistance, stating that transgender women were subject to intolerable forms of exclusion and abuse at the hands of their fellow residents. When they appeared during the day in public places wearing women's clothing, Lidya explained, they faced verbal and physical abuse. To avoid such abuse, they gathered clandestinely, meeting at night in obscure locations, such as along highways and railway tracks. Because of this, the public associated them with moral impropriety and public indecency. In response to their predicament, Sadikin—a respected former naval officer—not only declared that Lidya was a member of a group “whose social rights must be protected” but also called on the city's residents to come together to help them (*Kompas* 1968, 2). Although gender nonconformity of various kinds had long formed a part of Jakarta's urban fabric, the city government saw it as a matter that required official concern and action.

This meeting of Lidya and Sadikin was the first of many held to both understand and advance the place of transgender women in the decade that followed, the early years of the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–1998). One of the efforts to improve the condition of transgender women, possibly raised as early as this inaugural meeting, concerned the introduction of new terminology.¹ Although its use in official policy was uneven, by 1968 Sadikin himself referred to “*wadam*,” a new term that reports suggest was constructed by combining the names of the biblical figures Eve (Hawa) and Adam.² The reason for the adoption

of *wadam*, an understanding expressed by Lidya and shared by Sadikin, was that the term served as a vehicle to articulate transgender women's desire to improve their social status. This new term, transgender women reasoned, would serve as a vehicle for respectability. It would serve as a modern substitute for the older term "*banci*," which by the 1950s had acquired an offensive meaning akin to an abusive term of address.³ A decade later, in 1978, "*wadam*" was replaced by "*waria*," a word bearing roughly the same meaning, albeit combining parts of the words for "woman" and "man" instead of Adam and Eve.⁴ Yet despite these shifts, descriptions and narrative accounts offered by those who identified *banci*, *wadam* and *waria* appeared to remain stable. As they appeared in the historical archive and in everyday life, I found that this constellation of terms was used to refer to individuals who had been assigned male at birth, and who gradually enacted a feminine appearance in order to articulate that they possessed—in a phrase used so often that it amounted to a shared narrative—a "woman's soul."

Sadikin's adoption of these new terms in official settings served as an important initial recognition of *waria*'s efforts to assert control over how they would be seen by an audience. The official endorsement of the terms *wadam* and *waria* also conferred a modern quality to gender nonconformity, achieved in part due to the definitional precision offered by an emergent body of scientific and medical expertise about "transvestitism" and "transsexuality" used among Indonesian experts (Hegarty 2019). However, the new terms of address mattered chiefly because they contributed to an improved public image. According to both official historical accounts and *waria*'s own recollections of Sadikin's Jakarta, the adoption of these new terms was accompanied by the adoption of higher standards of modern feminine appearance and presentation across all public settings. Together, such strategies were employed to leave behind the abusive catcalls of "*banci*," which had acquired venomous force as a lewd insult. The

demand to be identified as *wadam* in 1968, and its easy adaptation into *waria* in 1978, was described to me as emblematic of a new era in which transgender women attempted to fashion themselves as respected citizens of the city.

Although those who identified as *wadam* and *waria* evaluated interest from the city administration positively, Sadikin's interest in gender nonconformity was primarily motivated by the threat that gender nonconformity posed to "public order" (*ketertiban umum*) and "public morality" (*kesusilaan umum*) in a growing metropolis. Although diverse ways of imagining and doing gender have not only been tolerated but recognized throughout Indonesia, such pluralistic sensibilities were eroded by the expansion of heteronormative scientific and religious understandings of gender during Dutch colonization from the nineteenth century onwards (Blackwood 2005; Peletz 2009). However, gender nonconformity appears to have faced unprecedented hostility, by state and nonstate actors, in postcolonial Indonesia of the 1950s and 1960s. Widespread, often politically motivated, efforts to reduce the visibility of gender nonconformity during the 1950s and early 1960s were not limited to a distinct geographical area but appeared in different parts of the new nation (see for example Davies 2007; Peacock 1968). The pervasiveness of this hostility towards gender nonconformity suggests both an emergent heterosexual and gender normative cast to Indonesian national identity. Against the backdrop of these historical patterns of exclusion, the Jakarta governor's recognition of *wadam* in Jakarta in 1968 marked a decisive historical break.

That *waria* would express a desire to pass through public space unhindered was understandable; at the time, they appear to have been excluded almost entirely from the city. Oral history accounts and written sources suggest that, upon leaving their home during the day, *waria* faced fierce insults from residents of the city. If they gathered together at night, the

municipal police would target them in raids (*razia*) along with other nonconforming individuals in public places. As a moral concern addressed on spatial grounds, gender nonconformity was ensared in a wider logic through which the appearance of femininity in public space was adjudicated and disciplined. In particular, *waria* and street-based female sex workers were framed through an overlapping set of regulatory logics governing their appearance and movement.⁵ But although police raids on *waria* who gathered at night in dark corners of the city continued—and even possibly increased—in the early years of Sadikin’s tenure, this period also saw the introduction of more wide-reaching regulation to address gender nonconformity in the city. These new policies did not seek to remove *waria* entirely from view, but made them responsible for the status of their own public visibility, encouraging them to limit their appearances to more respectable settings and to improve their appearances as a way to take charge of how they were received by the public. Far from a superficial matter, the adequate accomplishment of gender offered access to new spaces and forms of belonging.

The recognition of *waria* as a legal but nonconforming status facilitated a hard-won but fragile form of participation in city life, one that ultimately bore on the position of gender nonconformity on Indonesia’s national stage. In this respect, the conditional recognition granted to these terms paralleled other aspects of city-level governance, similar to how criminologist Mariana Valverde’s (2011) interprets “legal non-conforming use” as an ambiguous but common category of planning law. As Valverde (2011, 280) observes, “governing urban disorder through embodied, experiential, and relational categories is a *necessary* component of contemporary urban governance.” The legal nonconforming status granted to *waria* was also a specific type of discipline entangled with the routine codification of nonconformity that is characteristic of municipal governance. As the history of regulating gender nonconformity in Jakarta

demonstrates, however, such efforts are rarely informed by the top-down model usually considered exemplary of modernist modes of governance (for example, Scott 1998). Rather, these attempts to enforce subjective standards of what “men” and “women” should look like proceeded through the regulation of space, in turn shaping broader understanding of the role of morality in Indonesian public life.

To chart the curious mixture of discipline and celebration granted to *waria*’s gender nonconformity in Jakarta in 1968 and the years that followed, this article draws on ethnographic and historical research conducted during fifteen months of fieldwork in the cities of Jakarta and Yogyakarta in 2014 and 2015, which examined how the governance of space shapes public meanings of the gender-nonconforming body. While based primarily on historical sources encompassing newspaper accounts, municipal records, and oral histories, this article also makes use of *waria*’s own recollections of the period gathered in the course of ethnographic research. Although not necessarily reliable historical artifacts, *waria*’s memories of this time—and their repeated insistence that it was the “starting point” for their own history—shaped both my understanding of the period and the analytic focus I deploy. Building on recent anthropological insights into how citizenship is constituted through the public meanings of bodily appearances in Southeast Asia (see for example Käng 2012; Davies 2015; Jones 2010; Boellstorff 2007), I trace how the Jakarta government incorporated the gender-nonconforming status associated with the terms *wadam* and *waria* as the very basis through which it would recognize them. I argue that discourses of morality are tied not only to individual bodies, nor simply originate from an ideological apparatus, but emerge through the regulation of the spaces that bodies inhabit.

The Governor of Waria in the Early New Order

The concern shown by Sadikin towards gender nonconformity unfolded against the tumultuous backdrop of the early years of the New Order. The military general Suharto, who swept to power during the opaque events surrounding a 1965 coup and paroxysmic violence against real and imagined members of the Indonesian Communist Party, was sworn in as acting president in 1967 (for an account of the coup, see Wieringa 2002). Suharto was elected president the following year, a position in which he remained until his downfall amidst the mass protests and economic turmoil of May 1998.

A critical aspect of the early New Order was the central role that gender played in shaping Suharto's claims to political legitimacy. The founding myth of the regime incorporated a fanciful account—reinforced in official sources, ranging from propaganda films to public monuments—in which members of the women's organization of the Indonesian Communist Party committed gruesome forms of sexual violence against the generals murdered in the unsuccessful 1965 coup attempt. Although little is known about the treatment of gender nonconformity in this context, the military state portrayed women as capable of vengeful and politically motivated acts of sexual violence, and thus a force that needed to be controlled. The repetition of this discourse reduced femininity to a caricature, one in which women had both the “symbolic power ... to save (give birth to) and devour (or castrate) men” (Wieringa 2002, 338). During the thirty-year period of Suharto's presidency, the subordination of femininity remained a key component of the New Order state, defining the gendered basis for the narrow concept of “development” (*pembangunan*) that served as its guiding principle and justification for rule.

The gendered symbolism of the New Order not only operated at a political level but also established the contours along which state citizenship and national belonging were lived and experienced on an everyday basis. In this context, citizenship was mediated through the demand

that citizens participate in the nuclear family and the gendered and sexual arrangements it was predicated upon (see Boellstorff 2005). Centralized state organizations for the wives of civil servants and military officers were key institutions through which women were transformed into mothers and housewives, responsible for the domestic sphere but accountable ultimately to men (see Suryakusuma 1996). In this context, and especially given the overall denigration and narrowing definition of femininity in the years leading up to 1968, it is peculiar that Sadikin granted gender nonconformity a platform for increased visibility by lending support for the new term *wadam*. To understand how it was that those who eventually came to identify and be identified as *waria* accomplished new forms of visibility at the precise moment that the state was establishing an entire mode of governing premised on narrow heteronormative definition of gender, I turn not to politics on the national stage but the arcane workings of municipal regulations in Jakarta.

Although Jakarta was an important theatre for national politics in the wake of the 1965 coup, efforts to regulate gender nonconformity were not driven primarily by national concerns. Rather, they emerged as one part of a piecemeal strategy deployed by the city to regulate public space. Analyzing gender nonconformity as key to governing space in Jakarta and considering the city as a vantage point on the nation help us to rethink the developmentalist state, moving beyond the notion that it was a top-down effort engineered through ideological or administrative means. The city's efforts to regulate gender nonconformity along spatial lines ultimately required addressing *waria* in terms that paralleled other aspects of city governance. Attempts to discipline gender nonconformity rested on defining subjective and aesthetic standards that were fast-changing and thus difficult to regulate in New Order Jakarta, where what marked the adequate performance of masculinity and femininity was far from settled. The heterogeneous meanings

associated with the competent performance of “femininity” and “masculinity” in turn ultimately made gender presentation a vehicle for cultivating alternate audiences and envisioning horizons for establishing belonging at the scale of the city. And all of this rested, along with concern with how one appeared to one’s neighbors, on the idiosyncratic relationship that *waria* developed with the city’s governor.

Appointed in 1966, Sadikin was the first New Order governor of Jakarta, holding the post until he was forced into retirement in 1977 (Abeyasekere 1990). Although the position of governor was close to that of mayor in some respects, it was also a relatively important political post that held the status of a government minister who reported directly to the president (Nas and Malo 2000). Sadikin was appointed on the basis of his reputation as a charismatic reformer, one who used his military experience to tackle problems in the city. The reforms implemented by Sadikin included regulating migration flows, modernizing the city’s appearance, and various administrative changes (Kusno 2014). More controversially, Sadikin applied his modernizing zeal to the regulation of gender and sexuality, including pushing to convert informal red-light districts for women into state-sanctioned complexes offering access to health care and other support services (Abeyasekere 1990). Sadikin also oversaw a pilot birth control project premised on “total community mobilization” (Hull and Hull 2005, 20–21), an approach that would later serve as a template for cities, towns, and villages throughout Indonesia. Such innovations were double-edged, offering both fragile forms of recognition and pernicious surveillance.

Each of these efforts attracted strident criticism from conservative Islamic groups and those aligned with them, who considered Sadikin’s toleration of these modern vices to represent a broader problem of moral decay. One magazine editorial responding to a 1969 constitutional court review of pornography listed “*wadam*” alongside several behaviors, such as sex work and

dancing in dance halls, condemning them as “pornographic” (*Varia* 1970). The influential Islamic scholar Buya Hamka (1981, 275), writing in the mid-1960s in his famous *Tafsir* commentary on the Qur’an, criticized those that he called “*banci*” for flaunting themselves, brazenly “facing the public” in the middle of the city. The governor’s controversial if ambiguous support for *waria*, and the critiques of such, should be seen in the context of various efforts to control the visibility of gender-nonconforming bodies in the early years of the New Order. In some accounts—and the memories of *waria* who remember him—Sadikin couched his interest in *waria* in terms of a desire to encourage greater social acceptance of them by the city’s residents.⁶ Yet his support was hardly unequivocal. Rather, in stressing the need to rehabilitate *waria* into respectable society, Sadikin incorporated gender nonconformity into a more general vision of a society founded on public order. In this respect, Sadikin’s invitation to *waria* to participate in their own process of development both mirrored his attitude towards managing other unruly aspects of the city and echoed the broader emphasis on morality through self-regulation characteristic of modern governance regimes globally.

Details of the governor’s support for *waria* surfaced again in September 1968, when the tabloid magazine *Selecta* printed an account of Sadikin and his wife attending a performance. Accompanying the article was a photograph that showed Sadikin seated alongside Sonny Sudarma, who would later win first place in Jakarta’s inaugural beauty contest for *waria* (*Kompas* 1969b). The same account also reported that Sadikin had dispatched his representative Haji Sapi’ie to a secret meeting with *waria* held at city hall (*Selecta* 1968; see also Sadikin 1992, 484). Reports of this secret meeting were the first public declaration of municipal support for *waria* by the governor. The publication of a photograph of Sadikin with a group of glamorous

waria amounted to a bold show of official support for a group that was more frequently condemned as an immoral aberration.

A vision of Sadikin as a kindly father figure concerned with improving *waria*'s social position, rather than a harsh disciplinarian, was widely shared among *waria*. Although more than fifty years had elapsed since 1968, the *waria* I met with who had been in Jakarta during that time frequently referred to Sadikin using terms of endearment such as "Uncle Ali" (Bang Ali) and "The Governor of *Waria*" (Gubernur Waria). Drawing on a powerful shared narrative of 1968 Jakarta as the beginning of a "golden age" (*zaman emas*), *waria* remembered the governor as playing a pivotal role in assisting *waria* to become "accepted by society." Many *waria* credited Sadikin's support for a new suite of policies introduced by the city that they glossed as "guidance" (*pembinaan*), using the official term used in legal regulations and policy documents. The guidance provided to *waria* took the form of training in vocational skills, such as salon work and bridal makeup, which *waria* frequently claimed had enabled them to demonstrate their use to society (see also Boellstorff 2007). Over time, older, more senior *waria* became responsible for providing this vocational training on behalf of the city. Yet despite a common refrain of admiration for Sadikin, this was by no means an entirely benevolent effort. After all, the desired aim of the municipal government was to ensure that *waria*'s visibility could be managed in a way that did not cause offense to respectable society.

Sadikin's concern for the spatial management of gender nonconformity, as part of a broader effort to govern Jakarta, can be understood in relation to the city's historical role in shaping Indonesian governance since the colonial period (for a historical account of the development of the city in Indonesia, see Malo and Nas 1997). John Legge's (1961) pioneering account of the history of decentralization in Indonesia identifies the key role that "lower" level

forms of government played in shaping the early national administration, a dynamic that has remained a problem in national political and social life. Hildred Geertz (1963, 34–35) described Indonesian cities as “integrating centers of economic, political, and intellectual life,” which together form no less than a “metropolitan superculture” of the nation. And many of the spatial grounds for governing gender nonconformity share the same logic of earlier municipal sumptuary laws that governed race via dress, introduced cities in the Dutch East Indies from the seventeenth century onwards (van Dijk 1997). Considered in light of these historical patterns of city-level governance in Indonesia, the spatial management of gender nonconformity reveals the “municipal” as a scale defined by more than administrative or political boundaries alone. Rather, the spatial governance of gender nonconformity illuminates new insights into everyday ways that national belonging was adjudicated, in turn setting the stage for morality to become a prominent feature in Indonesian political life.

Waria’s ability to articulate a desire for acceptance during the early New Order was built on a clever negotiation with regulations concerning spatial governance. In interviews and conversations in the course of everyday life, many *waria* recalled the 1950s and early 1960s as an era of exclusion. Many expressed that they dared not leave the house during the day in women’s clothing out of fear of violent retribution. In this respect, *waria*’s deft navigation of municipal regulations recalls and recasts Nikolas Rose’s (1999, 176) description of “government through community.” *Waria*’s engagement with Sadikin around issues of their public appearance was a means to advocate for inclusion and to negotiate new ways of seeing and being seen, rather than being only an object of power. In this respect, *waria* accomplished a degree of recognition unthinkable in the United States, where the regulation of cross-dressing—similarly regulated at the municipal level—became a misdemeanor offense in the late nineteenth century. As Clare

Sears (2015, 138) writes about San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century, rather than putatively local concerns, such legal regulations established “gender normativity as a precondition for full belonging, denying access to the city and nation to those who fell outside its bounds.” In Indonesia, the regulation of public performances of gender also played a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between citizenship and belonging. But rather than push gender nonconformity into the private sphere—as was the case in the United States—in Sadikin’s Jakarta, the terms *wadam* and *waria* and policies directed at them facilitated an enhanced visibility, even as the city sought to extend spatial and temporal control with greater precision.

The Spatial Regulation of Gender

Even as the city addressed gender nonconformity as a problem to be solved, by the time Sadikin retired in 1977, *waria* occupied a far more reputable social position than was the case in 1968. Sadikin took pride in this achievement, writing in one biographical account that, “When I began to guide *waria*, who in the past would be showered with stones and abuse on the street, I was criticized. But I guided them (*membina mereka*), and now they are accepted by society” (quoted in Roem 1977, 2:230). Thanks to Sadikin’s interest, *waria* developed a national reputation as skilled workers in beauty salons and as hairdressers, finding in this work a level of recognition that provided conditional acceptance. The fact that this reputation was scaled up to the level of the nation is no doubt in part because Jakarta, as the capital and a region with the legal status of a province, has an outsized degree of influence in Indonesian political and social life. Indeed, it appears that legal innovations in the city facilitated *waria*’s increased acceptance at the national level, rather than the other way around.

The legal regulations that targeted *waria* on the basis of their unwanted appearance in public, both before and after 1968, were the twin concepts of “public order” (*ketertiban umum*)

and “public morality” (*kesusilaan umum*). Although a concept that preceded the New Order, “public order” was a key component of military rule, serving as the initial justification for Suharto’s ascendancy and its claims to ongoing legitimacy (Barker 2001). The regulation of “public morality,” on the other hand, was central to what Evelyn Blackwood (2007, 296) calls the “deployment of gender,” referring to the central role of reproductive heterosexuality in defining social life during the New Order. Although its origins lay in Dutch colonial law, a legal charge akin to public indecency was gradually developed around a specific understanding of pornography, which emphasized images’ effects on viewers rather than the visual material itself (Lindsay 2010). These distinct disciplinary norms of public morality and public order overlapped on city streets, where the limits of public behavior deemed “moral” were regulated in concrete terms. In 1972, a regulation on public order issued by the Jakarta government stated that, “Any person whose performance of moral acts [*berbuat susila*] disturbs public order [*ketertiban umum*] is banned from being on the street, the park, and in public places.”⁷ Listed among such banned behaviors were kissing and congregating in city parks at night. In line with this understanding, gender and sexual nonconformity were not subject to specific codes related to individualized forms of pathology. Rather, the municipal police targeted *waria* in police raids on the more encompassing yet flexible basis that they formed a disturbance to public order.

Although the granularity of this definition of gender nonconformity was new, concern for the visibility of gender nonconformity in urban public settings was not. As early as 1951, the discovery of gender nonconformity among female sex workers on the streets of the city was the subject of interest and concern (Hegarty 2018). But Sadikin’s governorship appears to have been the first time that gender nonconformity was specifically listed in regulations governing space. Spurred by reports of unprecedented numbers of *waria* in Jakarta, in April 1969, the government

commission responsible for “public order” adopted a resolution to establish measures to solve the “problem of *wadam*” (Item no. 2, 19 April, Komisi ‘A’ 1969). In adopting this resolution, the commission drew on the work of the *Banci* Research Project, a series of medical and psychiatric evaluations of gender nonconformity by researchers at the University of Indonesia that had taken place in the preceding years (see Ling 1968). While *waria* welcomed Sadikin’s toleration and recognition, ensuing “public order” regulations did not subdue concerns about gender nonconformity and its moral status, but rather heightened them.

Such policies rested not only on top-down discipline but also on the recruitment of *waria* into a regime premised on public order. Senior *waria* leader Maya Puspa explained to me that the city asked *waria* to create local organizations in each district in the city (interview, Jakarta, June 12, 2015). These local *waria* organizations mirrored Jakarta’s administrative districts, with one organization and corresponding leader in the north, south, east, west, and central areas of the city (on Jakarta’s administrative structure, see Kusno 2014). Each leader was responsible for maintaining control over the *waria* living in her area, which meant dealing with petty crime undertaken by members of the group, regulating sex work on the street, and mobilizing *waria* to participate in other municipal activities such as dance performances. The city also recognized a single *waria* leader for the whole of Jakarta who served as a community representative accountable to the government. Maya explained that this system enabled *waria* to forge personal relationships with individuals in various organizations and the New Order state apparatus, connections that enabled them to advocate for social inclusion.

The loose integration of *waria* into city governance in the interests of public order was not necessarily exceptional; in fact, it mirrored the ubiquitous presence of the military at the local level during the New Order. As Joshua Barker (2001) writes, criminal gangs frequently

collaborated directly with state security forces and local governments. In a parallel manner, the city did not condone *waria*, but rather approached them as nonconforming individuals who could be entrusted to enforce discipline on their own group members. This system of state security emerged in dialogue with exceptional forms of violence meted out to other nonconforming groups, the most well-known example of which was the “mysterious killings” of the early 1980s, in which military and paramilitary groups murdered an estimated five thousand petty criminals (Bourchier 1990). Although *waria* largely escaped this more violent register of New Order governmentality, they did gain recognition in parallel to it: their visibility and responses to it were shaped by broader concerns over who could occupy public space and under what conditions.

The city sought to manage *waria*’s visibility in part through integrating them into the “guidance” (*pembinaan*) programs that were representative of the paternalistic forms of social welfare that characterized the New Order. “Guidance,” also referred to in the passive form of “being guided” (*di bina*) and as a verb “to guide” (*membina*), was premised on a hierarchical chain of command (see Li 2007).⁸ In the eyes of many *waria*, the governor occupied the highest rung, with senior *waria* representatives acting as intermediaries between themselves and the city administration. In this respect, *waria* encountered a regime that paralleled New Order forms of regulation and discipline that targeted the wives of civil servants (Suryakusuma 1996). But while guidance for women was predicated on their relationship to the family and the domestic sphere, guidance for *waria* was premised on encouraging their participation in the public realm of work. *Waria*’s guidance therefore took the form of programs in skills associated with feminine beauty that could be translated into vocations, including tailoring, bridal make-up, and hairdressing. In interviews, many senior *waria* shared the city’s assessment that vocational training would allow

waria to escape street-based forms of sex work and hence avoid disrepute. *Waria* stressed that guidance—both of one another and by the city—could improve individuals’ appearances through the cultivation of a more polished femininity. These individual efforts could in turn play a role in elevating the presentation, and thus the status, of *waria* as a group.

The formal adoption of guidance policies towards gender nonconformity had been foreshadowed publicly at the city level in October 1968 in a series of articles titled “the problem of *banci*” published in the weekly municipal government magazine *Mingguan Djaja* (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968d). Suggesting that push for this series originated at the highest levels of city hall, the anonymous authors presented dozens of didactic essays that conveyed to Jakarta’s residents the steps being taken to address the increasing visibility of gender nonconformity on the streets of the city. Amidst firsthand and relatively sympathetic accounts of *waria* living in the city, the series also included translations of well-known Western theories borrowed from sexology and psychology. Most likely an action that grew from Sadikin’s first meeting with Lidya in April 1968, this information campaign reflected an unprecedented public effort by the city to communicate and redefine the “problem” of gender nonconformity to the city’s residents.

The government conveyed its official position that gender nonconformity was best addressed by offering vocational rehabilitation to *waria*. This, they reasoned, would enable *waria* to cultivate the skills required to enact a more presentable modern femininity (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b, 7). In one of the final articles to appear in the series, a *waria* pleaded directly to Sadikin, calling for concrete support in the provision of a location where *waria* would be able to both train and work (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968c, 12).

Although those subject to such training were most likely not in a position to refuse it, the desire to participate in was most likely a widely held view among *waria* at the time.

Much of *waria*'s official forms of organizing, past and present, tends to hinge on their relationship to various forms of employment tied to feminine beauty. Indeed, part of *waria*'s claim was tied to the discrimination they faced in obtaining employment, and the *waria* who approached Sadikin were most likely seeking to a solution to their poor economic position by lobbying for access to better paid and more reliable work. The fact that *waria* were not paid in full for work as entertainers in performance groups served as a catalyst for their direct communication with Sadikin (*Selecta* 1968). In some respects, this made *waria*'s advocacy similar to that undertaken by a union or cooperative which linked labor rights to social advancement. However, it was not only the economic aspects of work that mattered to *waria* but the relationship of work to the cultivation of an ethical self, which Tom Boellstorff (2005, 209) characterizes as “a kind of personhood-as-career where ‘success’ carries momentous implications for recognition and belonging.” In some settings, the kinds of work undertaken by *waria* cannot be separated from the morally worthy good deeds that can advance claims to national belonging (see also Boellstorff 2007). It was these forms of activism and mobilization, emerging at the intersection of economic advancement and ethical cultivation, that led to the first formal organizations for *waria* and the intensification of their relationship with city governance.

Regardless of the motives of city leaders and bureaucrats, the efforts to discipline *waria*'s nonconformity resulted in several shifts in the years that followed. In 1969, guidance programs for *waria* were officially adopted by the municipal department responsible for social welfare (Departemen Sosial 1969). In 1982, the *Kompas* newspaper reported that in one three-year period, 271 *waria* had graduated from training courses in fields related to beauty. The citywide

representative of *waria* at that time, Myrna Bambang, together with Manihuruk, the head of the city department responsible for the “guidance of people with a disability” (*urusan pembinaan penderita cacat*), referred to the program in the following terms: “Upon completion, the *waria* received a number of beauty products and other tools, as well as enough money to start their own salon. Many of them already have experience working in salons and in showbusiness. As many as eighty participants returned to their region of origin and opened a business there” (*Kompas* 1982). In the years that followed, salon work became closely linked to *waria* identity, an occupation in which they directed their skills towards gendered improvements in the service of making up “better representatives of proper modern Indonesian womanhood and manhood” (Boellstorff 2007, 111). Thus, guidance policies developed and implemented at the municipal level played a profound role in shaping *waria*’s position within national society.

Whatever the benefits *waria* received through their participation in vocational guidance programs, it is important to bear in mind that such programs were often on some level coercive. Participation was frequently but not always punitive, often stemming from being arrested in the course of police raids. The city thus framed such programs not necessarily as an embrace of nonconformity or as a reward, but as corrective mechanisms reserved for troubled individuals. Seen from the vantage point of protecting the public from moral disorder, and as a form of spatial discipline, encouraging *waria* to work in salons served to restrict their appearance to certain locations that heightened idealized standards in masculine and feminine presentation. Overall, therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which such programs benefited *waria*. Nevertheless, decades later many *waria* understood “guidance” not as an intrusive form of state discipline but rather an important vehicle for obtaining recognition and respect.

Contesting Public Exclusion, from Police Raids to the Jakarta Fair

The city's efforts to address gender nonconformity—from police raids to Lidya's official audience with Sadikin to vocational guidance programs—unfolded against the backdrop of a transforming metropolis. After the turmoil of 1965 and a period of austerity, Jakarta saw a rise in consumer capitalism and displays of wealth, and not only at the individual level. Urban studies scholar Abidin Kusno (2014, 67) characterizes this time as a period of “market modernism,” in which the military regime enacted top-down reforms that drew upon easy access to foreign capital and the development of new spaces for consumption and leisure.

By 1968, Jakarta had witnessed the completion of several large-scale projects that had been planned by the first president Sukarno in the 1950s as a means to inculcate the city's residents with a sense of national pride. This included the city's first hotel that met international standards, as well as a network of highways that would give Jakarta the look of a modern metropolis (Abeyasekere 1990). Accompanying these architectural transformations were new approaches to governing space, which incorporated efforts to apply methods for adjudicating the distinction between conforming and nonconforming bodies. In the case of Jakarta, this included defining *waria* not only as a nuisance but a moral problem assessed in relation to the emergent spaces in which they appeared, which included new hotels, highways, and forms of nightlife. Emerging as a locus of pleasure and display, the bodies of *waria* acquired a certain communicative density under conditions of consumer capitalism. A focus on the connection between morality and the governance of space helps to consider the body on terms that feminist theorist Sandra Lee Bartky refers to as “institutionally unbound” (Bartky 1990, 75) forms of discipline, rather than proceeding via a logic of rationalization. In considering gender not as a product of the city but rather as a constitutive force emerging within its spatial modalities of governance, we can apprehend both the exclusionary mechanisms that gave shape to an

emerging moral notion of “the public.” In turn, considering the ways that the city’s gender-nonconforming residents engaged actively with spatial governance—linked closely to seeing and being seen—as an opportunity to obtain recognition reveals a concept of public decency that was not fixed but lay in the eye of the beholder.

This perspective is clearly seen in the events surrounding the first Jakarta Fair, held between June and July of 1968. The fair combined the trappings of a trade exposition with modern forms of entertainment, and was later remembered by the governor as an opportunity for the city’s residents to come together around a shared cultural imaginary (Sadikin 1992). Among *waria*, the fair was remembered as a watershed moment at which they asserted their association with modern norms of feminine beauty. It offered them a stage on which to perform a more polished presentation to an urban public. Indeed, given the timing of the fair, it may have served as the catalyst for the initial meeting between Lidya and Sadikin in August 1968. The idea that vocational training was the key to the advancement of *waria* similarly had its roots in the role that they played in the fair. One *waria* named Camelia said the fair was memorable because it hosted the very first professional *waria* performance groups at two venues, Sasana Andrawina and Paradise Hall (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968b, 36). Although these venues offered a new opportunity for *waria*’s economic advancement and collective identification, they also provided a template for new suite policies aimed at managing the visibility of gender nonconformity in the city.

The Jakarta Fair—a theatrical combination of consumer capitalism and state-led development—and *waria*’s presence there together shine a light on the role of spatial governance in shaping, and undermining, normative conceptions of citizenship. After all, it was at the level of the city that *waria* first gained a recognized nonconforming gender status, giving rise to the

possibility that the categories “man” and “woman” were not the only grounds for belonging within a modern concept of citizenship. The adoption of “*waria*” as a replacement for “*banci*” facilitated the city’s efforts to cast gender nonconformity as a practice that was an affront to public decency. Yet both the adoption of a new term and the vocational training programs that accompanied it also provided a means for *waria* to contest their classification as disorder. Their partial integration into municipal governance facilitated a set of practices through which they could adjust their visibility. In, particular, their improved presentability provided the means through which *waria* could introduce gender nonconformity to Indonesian society as a less problematic presence. *Waria*’s manipulation of this legal but nonconforming status is equally reflected in the way that their capacity to improve their appearances exceeded the narrow purview of city-run guidance programs. Indeed, rather than framing vocational rehabilitation in terms of discipline, *waria* asserted that it helped them to satisfy their own desires to become experts in the application of technologies required to achieve a modern femininity.

For *waria*, these new norms of feminine beauty served as both the grounds for their increased recognition and a form of discipline. More than this, however, *waria* found that their improved appearances helped them to convene an audience. *Waria*’s participation in the Jakarta Fair, for example, was met with a more positive evaluation of their visibility than had arguably ever been the case. In this respect, *waria*’s ascendance from outsider to source of inspiration has regional parallels with changes which took place in other parts of Southeast Asia at the time. Similar to what Peter Jackson (2003) has argued about the Thai context, the pleasure and discipline tied to altering appearances, as facilitated by the consumer capitalist market, allowed *waria* to stake new claims to recognition. The meanings attached to expertise in feminine comportment were also complicated by *waria*’s gendered subjectivity, in which a feminine

appearance is seen as critical to expressing that they possess the “soul of a woman” (*jiwa perempuan*). For *waria*, the performance of femininity thus emerged as a distinctive source of pleasure, one that subverted disciplinary logics that defined their visibility in terms of public order.

This transformation continued to unfold across the 1970s and early 1980s. *Waria* gradually obtained a widespread and esteemed reputation for their work in beauty salons and other related fields. In turn, this reputation enabled new forms of political engagement that contested the very terms of the “public” within *waria* had established a fragile form of inclusion. In this respect, *waria*’s early organizing exceeded the remit issued to them by Sadikin, as their improved status facilitated newfound claims for belonging. *Waria* continued to face threats of state and nonstate violence for simply walking down the street, as the introduction of guidance programs did not eradicate older forms of discipline that simply excluded gender-nonconforming bodies from public spaces. Similar to the harassment faced by transgender people by state security forces in the name of public order in many other parts of the world (see Valentine 2007), the *waria* who gathered on Jakarta’s streets at night continued to face the likelihood that their presence would be met by overt forms of rejection.

This violence inspired *waria* organizations to engage in official advocacy, particularly in response to the frequency and severity of police raids on *waria* from 1969 onwards (see *Kompas* 1969a). In 1973, a *waria* organization named *Wadam* of the Capital (*Para Wadam Ibukota*) took the noteworthy step of issuing an official letter of complaint to Jakarta’s municipal police force in response to their policy of raids (*Kompas* 1973). Reports of the letter suggest that it demanded that police immediately release the *waria* arrested and cease the policy of raids altogether, on the basis that those arrested had not undertaken a criminal act. Although the police agreed that *waria*

had not committed any criminal offenses, they reiterated the common complaint that their presence had “disturbed public order by being too visible in public places, especially along the sides of major roads” (*Kompas* 1973, 3). The police also clarified that *waria* were not “arrested” during raids but rather detained for the purposes of rehabilitation, an ambiguous distinction that framed gender nonconformity not as illegal but nevertheless subject to spatial regulation and discipline. A decade later, in 1979, the drowning deaths of several *waria* in Jakarta while fleeing from police raids led to renewed protests by another organization, the Association of *Wadam* of Jakarta (*Himpunan Wadam Jakarta*). On this occasion too, *waria* called for an end to the ineffective and violent tactic of police raids (*Kompas* 1979; see also Atmojo 1987, 11–12). Considering the context in which such vocal protests unfolded—a military state that had no qualms violently eradicating nuisance bodies from urban space—such early *waria* organizing was both tenacious and courageous. Such advocacy at the scale of the city, centered on public visibility, highlight *waria*’s success in leveraging their ambiguous recognition as a legal but nonconforming status.

These efforts, and the transformed public within which *waria* sought to negotiate belonging, present an opportunity to reconsider modern state governance, and specifically the imagined homogeneity of top-down, expert-driven governance (see Scott 1998). In urban settings, as James Scott (1998, 55) observes of the emergence of modern cities, this logic is exemplified in forms of modernist planning which strived for “straight lines and visible order” that represent “a simple, repetitive logic ... easiest to administer and police.” New Order Jakarta, a capital built along modernist lines, might be characterized in this way. However, the bodies of those subject to such disciplinary regimes are rarely as malleable as the spatial efforts to discipline them presume them to be. As this history of *waria* suggests, city-based forms of

governance also can offer possibilities, however fragmented. Analyzing efforts to address gender nonconformity in Jakarta, similar to what Valverde (2011, 277) calls “seeing like a city,” allows us for consideration of alternate pathways for negotiating citizenship via everyday practices in public. The city’s attempts to codify gender presentation—a subjective and aesthetic standard—reveals moral positions as not fixed to inner essence or unchanging state, but rather subject to change and appropriation over time.

Read in this way, Sadikin’s concern for gender nonconformity unexpectedly brings to mind Southeast Asia’s long regional history of efforts to link bodily appearance to. A concern to improve the presentation of gender nonconformity shares several features with what Michael Peletz (2011, 666–67) identifies as gender pluralism in premodern Southeast Asian polities, chiefly those “grounded in sanctified cosmologies,” some of which “valorize gendered and sexual arrangements that are not reducible to cultural logics based on utilitarianism.” This movement of gender pluralism into the modern city resonates with Valverde’s (2011, 309) observation of the “unpredictable dynamic by which older knowledge formats and older legal forms appear to go underground only to suddenly revive as one or another modernist legal invention breaks down.” Concern for gender nonconformity in New Order Indonesia, I contend, was a product of a dynamic akin to this description of city governance. The recognition of *waria* emerged out of the forms of modern knowledge tied to the modern gender binary and the possibilities offered by attempts to spatially regulate gender nonconformity in terms of public order. It was by seeing like a city that *waria* could be addressed as a legal but non-conforming status, one which allowed the state to admit their presence but ensure that their tenuous hold on national belonging would remain incomplete.

Governing the City, Governing the Nation

The Jakarta municipal government's efforts to regulate gender nonconformity in public space during the New Order resulted in unlikely coalitions. Various actors, ranging from charismatic *waria* leaders, the city governor, the municipal police, and municipal social welfare officers, made every effort to restrict gender nonconformity to certain settings under strict conditions. To *waria*, this was a new vehicle for obtaining recognition. But without an adequate set of legal and social frameworks in which *waria* could improve their position in society, such efforts to obtain belonging were fragile. The meanings of gender nonconformity remained ambiguous, as easily representing an exemplar of feminine beauty as it might a threat to public order. Living in the shadow of regulations designed to limit their visibility, *waria* navigated their designation as a disturbance to public order by demanding recognition from a city governor. Similarly, even as guidance programs were intended to discipline them and produce a more presentable appearance, *waria* participated in training programs as a means to respectability and belonging .

The paradox of recognizing *waria* by virtue of their nonconforming status demands reconsideration of gendered and sexual patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Of particular concern is the relationship between the acceptance of *waria* and understandings of the “public” (*umum*) that have become naturalized in Indonesian social life, as objects of state welfare are not necessarily those in need of support or aid, but rather a public to be protected from forms of indecency represented in gender nonconformity. The concept of the public at work here is closely tied to urban spatial governance. In Indonesia, decentralization after the New Order from 1998 onwards saw the development of thousands of new laws and jurisdictions, including many that regulate moral practices linked to gender and sexuality through the enhanced surveillance of public space (see Butt 2010). But rather than a fragmented format of governance tied to a specific locality rooted in place-based traditions, the growth of regional- and municipal-level

laws and regulations in Indonesia appears to spring from a desire for national conformity with its basis in the urban form. The regulation of gender and sexuality at the level of the city is not marginal to this process, but plays a central role in mediating the relationship between everyday practices of belonging and emergent definitions of citizenship.

Just prior to and during the early New Order, gender nonconformity was subject to punitive forms of surveillance and informal forms of exclusion. In response, *waria* developed strategies to craft their appearances into something more acceptable to the public, in doing so transforming their visibility into a claim for recognition. The strategies that *waria* developed during the New Order, and the audience that they managed to cultivate, place gender and sexuality central to theoretical consideration of the governance of space. Citizens of Jakarta were trained to see *waria*, and *waria* themselves were trained to manage their own visibility. As a vehicle to control how gender nonconformity was seen, the very term “*waria*” reflects how cultural understandings linking bodily comportment to status were recruited into spatial discipline, and subverted it. *Waria* used the social regulations concerned with managing their visibility to exercise greater control over how they were seen, a move that facilitated new possibilities for acceptance.

Waria’s accomplishment of a fragile form of recognition in Sadikin’s Jakarta reflects the results of meeting the challenges posed by a fickle public. And in transforming themselves, *waria* also reshaped the very boundaries of the public that would adjudicate their belonging. This has broader significance in Indonesia after the New Order, where the body continues to be an object of surveillance. The intensification and evolution of patterns of “sexual surveillance” (Davies 2015, 29), particularly aimed at women as well as gender and sexual minorities, have transformed the Indonesian public sphere into a suffocating place. A simple walk through the

streets of a village or town has become an activity subject to a range of spatial, and moral, regulations. *Waria*'s accomplishment of recognition by virtue of the very municipal regulations that sought to constrain their visibility suggests one alternate consequence of such policies. In a context where anybody might find themselves ensnared in invasive regimes of surveillance, the ability of *waria* to leverage their nonconformity to achieve a fragile form of recognition serves as a reminder of the possibilities and the dangers of seeing like a city in the modern nation-state.

Notes

¹ Forms of identification and categorization related to gender and sexuality in Indonesia are diverse and continue to change. *Wadam* and *waria* are terms most widely during the New Order (1966–1998), although *waria* was the predominant term used and understood in Indonesia during my period of fieldwork in 2014–15. It is for this reason, and that those who I spoke to and lived with identified as *waria*, that I use that term in this article. “Transgender woman” is a category both widely legible to an international audience and one that is used in Indonesia in ways that cross-cut and overlap with *waria* and other extant categories in diverse ways tied to class, migration, access to healthcare and other structural concerns (Hegarty 2017a; 2017b). The growth of an Indonesian national discourse established via the category “transgender” is reflected in the emergence of the term “*transpuan*,” also a portmanteau but one created by activists around 2018 by combining the English-language category “transgender” and an Indonesian word for “woman” (*perempuan*). I use “gender nonconformity” to highlight the treatment of such figures in the regulation of space, rather than denoting a specific type of individual.

² An alternative possibility is that “*wadam*” is a combination of the words for woman (*wanita*) and Adam. The precise origin is unknown, with different opinions offered as to the words

selected and the role played by those present. *Waria* with whom I spoke speculated on both as possibilities, but stressed the role played by *waria* in coining the term. By contrast, a United States embassy dispatch issued in 1968 refers to *wadam* as a combination word made up of “Eve” and “Adam,” and credits its coining to Sadikin (see Hannah 1968, 7).

³ In spelling *banci*, I have followed the Indonesian orthographic system officially adopted in 1972, even though some primary sources use *bantji* as per the previous orthographic system. In the list of references, I preserve the original usage contained in the source.

⁴ The reason for the replacement of the term “*wadam*” with “*waria*” in 1978 was reported in the national media as due to protests by Islamic groups over the use of a prophet’s name for people associated with same-sex sexual practices (*Kompas* 1978). I believe that more subtle and complex reasons, including shifting medico-legal attitudes towards transsexuality by the Indonesian state, played a role in influencing this change (see Hegarty 2019).

⁵ Female sex workers were also addressed by a new term in Sadikin’s Jakarta: “woman without morals” (*wanita tuna susila*, often abbreviated to WTS) (see Sedyaningsih-Mamahit 1999).

Unlike *waria*, however, the new bureaucratic term “WTS” offered neither an opportunity to exert greater control over presentation to an audience nor the basis for asserting citizenship rights.

⁶ Indeed, the official magazine of his government lauded his efforts toward *waria* in terms of paternalistic care: “If it wasn’t for Governor Ali Sadikin, who sees all citizens of the capital city as his children, they would be fated to live out their days as isolated and miserable wretches” (Jakarta Municipal Government 1968a, 4).

⁷ This passage is contained in Article 25 (Jakarta Capital Region Representative Council, 1972).

⁸ “Guidance” was a keyword of paternalistic New Order governance, used to describe efforts to improve individuals and populations placed ambiguously in relation to the state’s development

efforts (Tsing 1993). The Indonesian term “*pembinaan*” can be translated in a number of ways, but its common translation into English as “guidance” should be understood in relation to its likely origins in military forms of territorial occupation—most notably as what Anna Tsing (1993, 28) translates as the “management” of peasant populations—in mind.

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