

The politics of heteronormativity for Indonesian *waria* in YouTube videos

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Abstract

Through the lenses of structuration and gender performativity, this article investigates how select YouTube videos speak to the complexities of *waria* identities and the politics of heteronormativity. *Waria* are male-to-female transgendered individuals in Indonesia. Although the YouTube videos often try to 'humanise' and 'normalise' *waria* to non-*waria* viewers with the hope that such exposure can lead to greater tolerance and support, the videos present particular images and messages that, at times, reinforce a heterosexist gender binary framework, while on other occasions resisting that system or duality. Using an interpretative approach, the analysis treats the videos as data and texts. The general orientation of this type of content analysis is to uncover patterns of actions and meanings. This article pays special attention to the ways in which identity is socially constructed, and how the YouTube videos both support and challenge current dominant discourses about gender in Indonesia.

Keywords: gender, heteronormativity, identity, politics, *waria*, YouTube

Introduction

In an effort to build a national community from a diverse population, President Sukarno announced *Pancasila* at the Republic of Indonesia's Independence Proclamation in 1945. It is a type of state ideology or philosophical foundation derived from the Sanskrit terms *panca* meaning 'five' and *sila* for 'principles'. The five interconnected principles are 1) belief in the one and only God; 2) just and civilised humanity; 3) the unity of Indonesia; 4) democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives; and 5) social justice for all the people of Indonesia.¹ Added to *Pancasila* is Indonesia's official motto of *Bhinneka Tunngal Ika* (unity in diversity). Although the second president Suharto (1966–1998) claimed to uphold *Pancasila*, critics contend that his military-dominated government and authoritarian rule instead contradicted the true aims of the doctrine.

Since the fall of the Suharto regime, contemporary democratic reforms have provided opportunities for different political and social groups to once again pursue and implement *Pancasila* in a way that benefits the masses and specifically groups that have traditionally been marginalised or underrepresented, such as women. While there have been great strides in improving the status of women in Indonesian politics, society and economics, there is still room for improvement under *Pancasila*'s fifth principle of social justice. Complicating the discourse on development, however,

is the very concept or definition of ‘woman’, which has specific exclusionary characteristics and boundaries according to the Indonesian state and Islam, the majority religion. Estimates vary, but Islam is generally understood to be the religion of between 80–90 per cent of the Indonesian population. While Islam is ubiquitous, it is by no means uniform or standardised across the archipelago.

The presence of *waria* – male-to-female transgendered individuals – embodies the multilayered debate over gender inclusion and how to accommodate and promote ‘unity in diversity’, equality and justice in a developing democracy. Since ‘transgender’ can have different meanings and histories, depending on the country case of interest, *waria* will be used in this article as it is unique to Indonesia.² ‘*Waria*’ is a term that combines *wanita* for ‘woman’ and *pria* for ‘man’, but not usually meaning intersex people. Instead, a *waria* is male in a biological sense, but typically self-identifies as a woman psychologically, emotionally and, depending on the person, spiritually as well. ‘Spiritually’ here refers to identifying with certain Islamic beliefs and practices that *waria* may rather associate with the domain or purview of women, as opposed to those associated with men. As one *waria* notes in a movie trailer clip for *Tales of the Waria* (2011): ‘A waria is a man. But he has a woman’s soul.’ There is also variation regarding self-presentation and body modifications. Film notes from a study guide for *Tales of the Waria* explain: ‘While some *warias* wear women’s clothes, put on makeup, take hormone pills, and pursue cosmetic surgery, not all do.’ In addition, not all *waria* are transsexuals who try to align their gender and sex through medical interventions. Like transgender individuals in other countries, *waria* may forgo surgery altogether or just have a part of it (e.g., surgery of the chest area). Many *waria* choose not to have full sex reassignment surgeries for two main reasons: as the aforementioned film notes report, ‘[t]heir reluctance stems from both an economic factor (the high cost) and a religious one’.

Indonesia is a large country with over 240 million people; activists estimate seven million Indonesians are *waria* (*Tales of the Waria* [study guide] 2011). The presence of *waria* in Indonesia is not new, but their visibility has slowly increased over the years as their numbers have grown and changes take place in the sociopolitical climate of the post-Suharto era. A rise in domestic and international media attention focused on women and gender sometimes opens up discussions and debates about transgender issues in Indonesia as well.

YouTube is one Internet medium for learning about and from *waria*. A variety of topics are covered in YouTube videos concerning *waria*. When an online user searches for videos by using keywords such as ‘waria’, ‘transgender’ and ‘Indonesia’, popular results include clips of beauty pageants, musical and dance performances, health-related issues, movie trailers and mini-documentaries. These video categories can overlap in form and content. Many of the YouTube videos attempt to challenge negative stereotypes of *waria* by presenting sympathetic stories and images. These videos focus on the ups and downs of faith, love, family, friendships and health – subject matter that is common, and with which non-*waria* viewers can identify. In the spirit of Sandy Stone’s call in ‘The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto’ (1987), to move beyond ‘passing’ as a certain gender and thereby perpetuating gender binary divisions, these videos can be seen as a means of sharing multiple voices or narratives and diverse identity experiences

– a way for *waria*, like the transsexuals to whom Stone is speaking, to ‘be consciously “read”, to read oneself aloud and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written ...’ (Stone 1987, p. 232). Stone adds: ‘I ask all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives’ (1987, p. 232). YouTube is also perhaps a forum for not just educating non-*waria* about *waria*, but also a way to ‘fight back’. Kate Bornstein, in a chapter titled ‘Gender terror, gender rage’ (1994, p. 243) writes: ‘There are lots of ways to fight, and transgendered people these days are coming together in the common fight for the right to express our genders freely. Where once we met only in drag bars or social teas, we’re now meeting at protest marches and in consciousness-raising groups.’ For Indonesian *waria* living in a society where there are still limited opportunities for activist marches and groups, the internet is one avenue to conduct the ‘good fight’.

Through the lenses of structuration and gender performativity, this article investigates how some of the videos speak to the complexities of *waria* identities and the politics of heteronormativity. Although the YouTube videos often try to ‘humanise’ and ‘normalise’ *waria* to non-*waria* viewers, with the hope that such exposure can lead to greater tolerance and support, the videos present particular images and messages that, at times, reinforce a heterosexist gender binary framework and at other times resist that system or duality. This article pays special attention to the ways in which identity is socially constructed and how the YouTube videos both support and challenge current dominant discourses about gender in Indonesia.

Heterosexism in Indonesia: Duality in discourses

There are two types of duality in Indonesian political discourses on gender: 1) gender is understood and experienced as a binary system, which has implications for 2) a division between public and private spheres. In Indonesian society and politics, gender is usually presented and performed as a binary concept and practice. This reflects a heterosexist system whereby heterosexuality is favoured over other types of sexuality or sexual orientation. Heterosexism is found among individuals, groups and institutions. It is consciously and unconsciously reinforced and reproduced over time through multiple formal and informal channels and actions. As such, heterosexism can be understood as a cumulative phenomenon or development in which fixed gender categories, and the social and political meanings attached to biological differences, become a hegemonic norm. Although heterosexism can manifest in different ways, the primary effect is that acceptance into mainstream society – and all the social, political and economic benefits associated with such acceptance – hinges on individuals and groups adhering to the heterosexist system *and* contributing to its maintenance, thus leaving little space from which to challenge the system from within.

Waria – along with *tomboi* (female-to-male transgenders), gay men and *lesbi* (lesbians) – complicate the binary view of gender because their ‘nature’ does not fit neatly into the existing heterosexist binary framework.³ Evelyn Blackwood (2010, p. 33) writes: ‘Contemporary Indonesian discourses create an image of innate gender difference in which modern women are oriented to domestic and wifely tasks, while men are encouraged to be heads of households and active leaders

in the public domain.’ This image is reinforced directly and indirectly in a variety of settings: schools, business, government and public policy, religion, marriage and family, social groups and mass media. The New Order government’s emphasis on nuclear families and motherhood – known as *Ibuism* – from 1965 to 1998 in particular, set the tone and context for viewing women and men as naturally and socially different.⁴ Sharyn Graham Davies (2010, p. 98) adds: ‘The hierarchical order of a woman’s duties, which is still influential today, shows that only after a woman has married and produced children is it her duty to be a member of society.’ In other words, women are frequently domesticated and depoliticised, relegated to the private sphere of the home. There are exceptions, and Davies (2010, p. 99) states: ‘Indonesian women are now more frequently assuming positions of political power than in the past. Yet a closer examination shows that in popular understandings in Indonesia, women are still considered innately suited to the home environment while men are seen as better equipped for engagement in the public world.’ The national language of Bahasa Indonesia also structures gender into an either/or dichotomy. Blackwood (2010, p. 40) notes: “*Perempuan*” means both female and woman, “*laki-laki*” means both male and man; “*kelakialakian*”, for example, which has the root “*laki*”, is defined as manliness, mannish. In using these terms, Indonesians express a concordant relationship between bodies and behaviors.’ Biological sex is thus difficult to disentangle from perceptions of gender and related practices. The existence and experiences of *waria* suggest a need to deconstruct these political labels and categories for gender, especially taking into consideration the real tension and conflict of trying to force-fit *waria* into a framework that many of them feel is too restrictive and unfair.

Waria face further difficulties with their identities, since Islamic gender ideals intersect with the heterosexist political models outlined above. For example,

Islam exhorts Muslim men to be the caretakers of women and to be their managers, leaders, and educators. Entrusted with providing for their wives and children, men are economically responsible for their families. Islam requires men to ensure the protection, provision, and development of their family, while fostering a home environment that is cooperative and equitable, rather than combative and competitive. Muslim men are required to pray at the mosque on Fridays; this large gathering of men often serves as a public forum for asserting and affirming notions of masculinity. (Davies 2007, p. 148)

Although there is much diversity in Islamic discourses and practices across Indonesia and other parts of the world, there is a general consensus in Indonesia on the ‘natural’ differences between men and women, along with strict prohibitions against same-sex relationships and transgenderism. While Islam is not monolithic in form, substance or practice in Indonesia, and certain versions of Islam can be described as feminist, most of the population has been socialised to believe in the aforementioned differences and prohibitions. These complexities and challenges in public and private settings are evident in YouTube videos online, examples of which are examined in the next section.

Structuration, gender performativity and multifaceted YouTube messages

YouTube videos about and by Indonesians, and in this case *waria*, are significant for their role or space as a free ‘marketplace of ideas’.⁵ Alexa Internet (2012a) ranks Indonesia #13 in the percentage of visitors to YouTube, and reports that YouTube is the fifth most popular website in Indonesia (2012b). A lot of content from YouTube is cross-posted or shared on Facebook as well. In June 2012, YouTube launched YouTube Indonesia (www.youtube.co.id), which aims to attract even more local viewers and advertisers (*The Jakarta Globe* 2012). Unlike newspapers, books, television programmes and movies, which are reviewed and monitored by local media outlets, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, the Film Censorship Board and other entities, the Internet is much harder to regulate and censor. The Indonesian masses know this and often turn to the Internet to ‘shop’ for and share ideas. While the marketplace is not always easily accessible or a level playing field for all participants, it is an interesting and relatively inclusive democratic environment that opens up opportunities for users to learn about minority groups and for *waria* themselves to have a place to share their identities.

One common theme that appears in YouTube videos by and about *waria* is the presence of gender binarism, which is sometimes supported and at other times resisted by *waria*. Because of firm expectations and norms influenced by gender binarism, the *waria* profiled in several YouTube videos encounter many stereotypes, namely that they are too feminine to ‘belong’ as men, too masculine to ‘belong’ as women, or too ‘abnormal’ to belong anywhere. This can have negative consequences for employment, social events and spaces, and relationships. For example, in a country where employers typically require that employees strictly adhere to traditional gender norms for clothing, manner and disposition, speech and physicality, *waria* face job discrimination whenever they do not (or cannot) easily conform to such gendered expectations. Social events are often restricted to beauty-oriented and entertainment industry activities as opposed to activities found in religious, educational and community spaces. As for relationships, *waria* regularly face hardships and opposition in their search for love and partnership. Applying certain elements of ‘structuration’ and ‘gender performativity’ to five YouTube videos about *waria* can aid in our understanding of the stereotypes and limitations that they face and the corresponding negotiations that they make within a heterosexist gender binary system.

The five videos analysed in this article were selected based on their public availability online, top positions in YouTube search results (also indicative of a high number of video views), the use of Bahasa Indonesia and English (the author’s languages), and relevant examples demonstrating different types of negotiations that reinscribe heteronormativity, but also challenge heteronormative discourses. Using an interpretative approach, the analysis treats the videos as data and texts. The general orientation of this type of content analysis is to uncover patterns of actions and meanings. The units of analysis include a combination of individuals, behaviors, themes, concepts and messages.

First proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens in *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration* (1984), structuration theory focuses on the production and reproduction of various social systems that involve agents and structures (e.g., rules and resources). Structuration

points to a duality: actions that we take produce and reproduce social structures, and these structures in turn or simultaneously can define and direct our actions. In other words, agency and structures exist in interdependent or reciprocal relationships that serve to enable or constrain one another. A structurational approach to the politics of heteronormativity for *waria* helps locate the specific ways in which social agents create, reinforce/reproduce, resist or change structures. In this case, 'structures' refers to gender binary frameworks, discourses and policies in Indonesia.

Structuration can work in tandem with 'gender performativity'. Philosopher Judith Butler introduced her performative theory of gender in *Gender trouble* (1990). She argues that 'gender', 'sex' and 'sexuality' are culturally or socially constructed categories and not manifestations of some kind of intrinsic essence inherent in human beings: 'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990, p. 33). Gender identity is thus understood to be a product of recurring performances over time. This performance aspect of identity points to instability in the assumed 'natural' relationship between 'gender' and 'sex', which implies that gender identity can be altered or resisted. For example, *waria* identities and actions can contribute to the reproduction of gender binary social structures, but their gender performances at the individual level or in group settings can also challenge that heterosexist system or duality. YouTube videos that cover employment, beauty pageants and relationships, provide evidence of structuration and gender performativity in practice.

Employment

One stereotype that is projected onto and often internalised by *waria* is that they are ill-suited for employment in most economic sectors. In the public sphere, *waria* have some room to maneuver when it comes to the beauty industry and entertainment, however. Beauty salons and independent beauticians are one arena where *waria* may be employed or be their own boss, provided they have sufficient resources and live in a community where *waria* are socially permitted to live and work. In the seven-minute YouTube video *The wrong body* (2012), a *waria* named Nancy Iskandar is shown styling a bride before a wedding ceremony in an urban city. She is conservatively dressed in all black and wears a headscarf. Her own make-up and glasses fit with the style often expected of older women in Indonesia. Nancy remarks: 'The people accept us now because waria (transvestites) have a gift that is well known now. Our achievements, our capacities are what can we do good. We are good in cooking. We are good in make-up for brides. Beauty parlours. That is our capacity. A good factor for our lives and the people approve it.' On the one hand, Nancy indicates a certain level of human agency here: she is determining a career path for herself and encouraging others to do the same. There appears to be some level of tolerance or support for *waria* agency in this regard by non-*waria* as well. A Muslim man, identified as such by the black *peci* (small fez-like hat) he wears, who is present at the pre-wedding preparations states: 'This is not strange. In a way, it is already common. In humanity you have deviations. There are women. There are men. And at the end you have these people.' Elsewhere in the video, a sub-district head official talks about Nuke, another *waria*: 'He understands more about make-up when people have a party. He can help with

the make-up of the bride.’⁶ On the other hand, Nancy’s comments and those of the two men reflect structuration in practice: *waria* who choose to only work in the beauty industry and community members who believe that beautician jobs are the only socially acceptable type of work for *waria*, together serve to reinforce existing social structures. ‘Women’s work’ is thus confined to select domains, which in turn constrain future career trajectories for Nancy, Nuke and other *waria*. From Nancy’s standpoint, the beauty industry affords a space and prospects for success and acceptance. Her viewpoint, however, is shaped by the reality of heterosexism and gender binarism which are present in the economy. This is further illustrated in the types of remarks Nancy makes during the wedding preparations. In reference to the function of make-up for the bride, she explains: ‘This make-up is for getting married. To pleasure the husband.’ Later, addressing two men, Nancy waves them out of a room and firmly says: ‘Men cannot be here with women. Go away to the place for the men.’ Nancy is reproducing expected gender norms here, but by virtue of her being a *waria* in that space, she is also simultaneously challenging the socially constructed border between the genders. Her performance as a woman permits her to do ‘women’s work’ and be in women’s spaces, while reinscribing heteronormativity, but her identity and actions also resist strict gender binarism because she and the people around her are aware that she is performing gender, and crosses over or moves between the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ or ‘female’ and ‘male’.

Another YouTube video titled *Indonesia’s transsexual Muslims* (a documentary) (2012), is about 28 minutes long and profiles Maryani, a *waria* in Yogyakarta, Java, who built a business to financially support herself and provide resources to carry out her faith. Maryani operates a beauty salon along with an attached small school for the unique purpose of helping other *waria* learn about and practise Islam. Maryani created this alternative religious space since most mosques do not permit *waria* to enter, dress or engage in prayer and rituals as women. Maryani explains:

I want people to open their eyes and minds. Transvestites are humans. We are created by God and we must worship Him. And as transvestites, we all have the right to worship Him. This is applicable to all religions. Christians, Confucianism, Hindu ... They all have to be able to practise their own religion. When a man or woman wants to learn how to pray, there is a place to go. But if transvestites wanted to learn how to pray or go to an Islamic school, they would never be accepted. People only view transvestites in negative aspects. This Islamic boarding school is a place of worship for transvestites. It is a place for them to learn about Islam.

Running this school is a form of resistance to the gender binarism supported by most versions of Islam in Indonesia. Maryani states: ‘The main purpose of this boarding school is to provide a place for *warias* to worship. A place to feel comfortable and accepted as *warias*.’ This is in contrast to Nancy Iskandar, from *The wrong body*, who comments: ‘For the One up there I pray. When I pray, I pray as a man. I don’t want to pray wearing woman clothes. For me I realise when I pray to God my whole body and soul asks forgiveness for my sins. You cannot cheat God.’ By removing her make-up and changing into traditional male religious clothing, Nancy may enter a mosque and pray in the men’s section. Her performance as a man in this context reinforces heteronormativity.

A young 19-year-old *waria* named ‘Nur’ traveled from Lombok near Bali to Yogyakarta after reading about Maryani, her business and the rare boarding school, on the Internet. Nur describes her personal background and experiences:

I came to Yogyakarta by myself without any friends or anyone I knew. Maryani accepted me right away. In Lombok, the Muslims are very fanatic. So whenever we'd go out, the people always ignored or mocked us. My parents died in 2010. Since I met this new community and joined the Islamic boarding school, I consider them my new family. They made me feel right at home.

Nur's move to join other *waria* in Yogyakarta shows her resistance to the heterosexism and gender binarism she met with in Lombok, but she reinforces heteronormativity with her comments about her future career goals and her current means of making a living. When asked by an interviewer: 'What would you like to do with your life?', Nur responds: 'Right now, I'm taking a course specialising in hair and beauty. So, God willing, I can open my own hair salon in the future. I'm going to work very hard to have my own hair salon.' To make ends meet in the meantime Nur works as a prostitute, much like Maryani did before converting to Islam in her 30s and opening her salon and school. Due to a multidirectional flow of influences, Nur's choices and actions can be understood as both voluntary and involuntary. Nur's situation highlights employment marginalisation for *waria*, where certain perceptions of *warias*' 'feminine' characteristics and sexuality are 'accepted' enough by local communities, thereby allowing them to be hairdressers, make-up artists or sex workers, but they are still not accepted in the sense that they are often restricted to occupations commonly considered the domain of the lower class or 'invisible' populations. As these 'rules', social relationships and individual gendered performances are repeatedly produced and reproduced over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to change or undo these structures and engage in alternative performances.

Indonesia's transsexual Muslims further addresses employment marginalisation by examining the difficulties of underground economies like those of street performances or busking and prostitution. While the 'streets', like beauty salons, appear to be another public space where *waria* are relatively permitted, they are not completely accepted or tolerated. Street performers and prostitutes can be subjected to harassment, environmental hazards, health risks, arrest and violence. Maryani says: 'Most young transvestites start working as prostitutes because they left home without any money. When I first started out doing prostitution, I got a lot of negative comments from people. People yelled, "Sissy! Sissy! Sissy!"⁷ Now, a lot of transvestites are changing directions from prostitution to street singing. The income is better and more predictable. Street singers make about Rp 100000 (\$10) per day.' In addition to potentially improved income for *waria*, street singing can be safer than prostitution. Maryani gives an example of when she experienced violence while working as a prostitute:

When I was 14 or 15 years old, I was a prostitute in Alun Alun, Yogyakarta. I made between Rp 2000–3000 (20–30 cents), which was considered a lot of money. Nowadays, they get paid between Rp 20000–25000 (\$2.00–2.50). I was beaten by the national police. They hit my arm with a gun. They stripped me naked. They pissed on my face. Yes, it all happened. I experienced all of that because I didn't know it was so risky.

Wulan, another *waria* profiled in *Indonesia's transsexual Muslims*, is shown dressed in a bright-pink sari and goes from shop to shop requesting tips. She transitioned from prostitution to street singing and tells the interviewer in the video: 'I'm much happier now working as a street singer

than being a prostitute.’ Although there are some smiles here and there, the video shows more images of bad traffic jams, pollution and wary onlookers, along with commentary about long hours and spontaneous, intense interactions with other people on the street, to convey the message that though an improvement on prostitution, street singing is not without its own set of hardships.

Whether as street performers or prostitutes, the *waria* are self-presenting in public as ‘women’, as exhibited by their clothing, make-up and mannerisms, but in hyper-feminine or sexualised ways, which is not a conventional norm in this Muslim-majority society. Their jobs require attracting attention to their femininity *and* difference in order to receive money. They are not merely blending in or trying to ‘pass’ as women. In this way, *waria* identities support and oppose heteronormativity in these specific economic contexts. Similar to clips of Nancy Iskandar in *The wrong body*, the scenes of *waria* street performers show that they and the people around them are all aware that the *waria* are performing gender, which can be perceived as reinscribing or resisting gender binarism, depending on the participant/subject and viewer. As these performances and scenes are repeated daily on the city streets of various cities across Indonesia, the existing social structures are reproduced and, in turn or simultaneously, define and direct individual and group actions, but are also shifting or changing in form and function as *waria* are not completely passive or submissive actors in the process.

Beauty pageants

Besides salons or the streets, beauty pageants are another public space where *waria* navigate and negotiate the gender binary framework, at times supporting it and sometimes resisting it. In *Miss International Queen 2005* (2012), YouTube viewers can watch four-and-a-half minutes of spliced highlights of an international competition, one in which Miss *Waria* Indonesia 2005 – Olivia Lauren – is awarded the title of ‘Miss Congeniality’. The entire programme is structured by and reflects the gendered norms and practices of popular women-only beauty pageants like the Miss World and Miss Universe contests. The award categories, voting process, hosts’ comments, stage production, contestants’ attire (e.g., evening gowns and national costumes) and participants’ performances all mimic women-only competitions. YouTube users who are unfamiliar with transgenderism might even have a hard time distinguishing between transgender and women-only competitions online, since the video categories, titles and presentations of self are so similar. For instance, the types of make-up, hairstyles, clothing and jewellery displayed in the video are ‘feminine’. All serve to highlight stereotypical female features such as ‘softer’ faces, breasts, hips and slender bodies. During the evening gown competition, men dressed in suits and ties escort the contestants onto the stage and present them to the judges. The transgender contestants also walk, gesture and pose as one would expect contestants to do in women-only pageants. There appears to be an emphasis on grace, poise and ‘naturalness’. The entire event and its micro-level details reinforce heteronormativity and the social structures associated with it, as the gender performances aim to copy women-only pageants as closely as possible. At the same time, the staging of transgender beauty contests separate from women-only events could suggest a form of resistance in the creation of a safe alternative space for *waria* to be *waria*. Whether initially created out of necessity due to

being locked out of traditional women-only events, or because of a desire to celebrate members of the *waria* community, the public nature of these activities pushes against the prescriptions and proscriptions of gender binarism. In this way, *warias*' positions and actions are simultaneously informed by existing heteronormative structures and serve to influence potential avenues for adaptation and change.

In a YouTube video titled *Shemale, ladyboy, transgender, waria, from Indonesia 'Hanny Liem'* (2012), a *waria* takes to the stage during a semi-final round of a beauty contest. The banner hanging on the stage reads 'Miss Universe Beauty Contest IPOOS 2011'. IPOOS refers to *Ikatan Persaudaraan Orang-Orang Sehati* (Fraternal Association for People of the Same Heart), a Jakarta-based gay organisation. The clip is a little under four minutes and shows a *waria* named 'Hanny Liem' on the catwalk, in various evening gowns. The gowns are of the kind worn by contestants in a women-only pageant. They are colourful, long and flowing. The dresses are perfectly coordinated with matching high heels and jewellery. The swimsuit portion of the competition in particular garners raucous applause, shouts and whistles from the audience. Hanny wears a green patterned bathing suit that looks like a one-piece from the front and a bikini from the back. American and Indonesian music can be heard over the loudspeaker. She has 'the look' in this video: glamorous make-up and hair, fine clothing, and attractive poses and walking style. Similar to the scenes from *Miss International Queen 2005*, Hanny Liem's gender performance supports the gender binary framework by attempting to fit into the category of 'woman', while also subverting it by demonstrating that femininity is not the sole domain of biological women or females.

To see more videos of Hanny Liem, users can click on her YouTube channel. Several videos are of a beautifully dressed and made up Hanny Liem lip-synching to songs from around the world. One video shows Hanny Liem 'transforming' herself with make-up and a different hairstyle. Her persona and performances can be characterised as hyper-feminine, but because exaggerated self-presentation is often expected in entertainment, viewers who are unfamiliar with *waria* may perceive Hanny Liem as 'just' a woman. Here, again, Hanny Liem is both reinforcing and resisting heteronormativity and gender binarism. Her musical and make-up videos directly and indirectly show that a physical transformation has taken place, from male to female or man to woman, which implies one can only be in one of those gender categories at a time, but because the transformation is even possible, her performances also suggest that gender binarism is socially constructed and can therefore be deconstructed or problematised. Hanny Liem's identity both conforms and fails to conform to traditional gender expectations and norms in Indonesia.

Relationships

YouTube videos about and by *Waria* at times address certain challenges related to relationships and religion. *Tales of the Waria* (2011) presents examples of these challenges with an emphasis on the pursuit of love. The film's director, Kathy Huang, did not originally intend to make a film about love, though. She writes:

As an American entering the scene, my initial interest had been in the role Islam played in *warias*' lives. How did they negotiate their faith with their lifestyles? How did the members of their religious

community receive them? When I approached *warias* with the idea of making a film on this topic, they were unenthused. ‘What for?’ one *waria* asked. For them, religion was not a source of conflict in a way that an outsider might imagine. They suggested a film on a more immediate concern: how to find lasting love. This was a story overlooked by the mainstream media, which preferred to portray *warias* as buffoons or sexual deviants. A film on love could be a wonderful opportunity to deepen people’s understanding of their community, to recast their image in the public eye. (Huang 2012)

Although the film’s director and the *waria* profiled in the film may have been able to reconcile religion on a personal level, it is hard to imagine a narrative that is absolutely devoid of the roles that Islam and the state play in structuring and conditioning love and the very possibilities of partnership. There are cultural norms and, arguably more importantly, there are also formal policy and institutional norms that tell society what is and is not permitted when it comes to love and relationships. In a book chapter titled ‘The state, gender and sexual politics: Theory and appraisal’, R.W. Connell (1994, p. 158) writes that the state is ‘not just a regulatory agency, it is a creative force in the dynamic of gender. It creates new categories and new historical possibilities. But it should not be forgotten that the state also destroys.’ The *waria* in Huang’s film (and from the videos discussed earlier in this article) may not always be cognizant of how Islam and the state apply and promote gender binarism, or how they may involuntarily contribute to gender binarism themselves. It is difficult to be consciously aware of these norms, and to be in a position to resist or change them.

Conformity to norms concerning heterosexual relationships is generally expected and hard to avoid in Indonesia. Davies (2010, p. xiii) writes: ‘In Indonesia gender ideals are disseminated through a variety of sources, such as government ideology, school curricula and religion. The strength and pervasiveness of these ideals means that individuals feel constant pressure to conform to gendered expectations.’ In the two-and-a-half minute YouTube movie trailer for the film *Tales of the waria*, viewers hear different *waria* sharing their thoughts on the pressure to conform and its related consequences:

If a waria loves a man and sacrifices everything for him, there’s nothing wrong with that. I’ve been with my husband for 18 years. I don’t know how much longer our relationship will last. If it were up to me, it’d last forever.

[A waria looking through a photo scrapbook] *This is Akmal. He was with me for seven years. He told me that if I had been a woman, he would have married me. I was just a place to stop until he found a woman.*

Love is important for a waria. It completes her life. She must find love. Even if she fails, she must keep trying. (Global voices/Tales of the Waria/Trailer/ITVS 2012)

These quotes are presented with scenes of everyday life (e.g., neighbourhood streets, mosques, homes and sunsets) and melancholic music in the background. There are additional comments in the video, such as: ‘*Having a partner is every waria’s dream. Someone who inspires us and makes life more beautiful.*’ These thoughts and images reinforce conceptions and practices of romantic love, ‘soul mates’, marriage and failure from a heteronormative perspective – one that is closely

tied to Islamic and state perspectives. They also juxtapose the ‘normality’ and ‘otherness’ of *waria* in Indonesian society.

Nancy Iskandar, from the video *The wrong body*, points to one potentially grave consequence for non-conformity in gender performance and when relationships do not work out: ‘*For sure always all transvestites want the following: They all want to get married ... When a transvestite loves a man the love will be total. Total or full love. Sorry, one aspect of our customs is when a waria breaks a relationship with a man they sometimes commit suicide.*’ In this example, it seems that a *waria*’s actions would be reinforcing heteronormativity. It is important to note, however, that gender performativity in this case is not simply confined to the distinct individual or couple, nor are they necessarily making conscious decisions daily. Judith Butler (1993, p. 95) explains in *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of ‘sex’*:

... I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.

Perhaps this is why the same video also profiles a couple that appears relatively successful in negotiating their relationship. As the passage above suggests, gender performativity and gender binarism do not predetermine the same outcomes for all *waria*. One husband of a *waria* comments: ‘*Waria are more complete than women. They give a lot of love. For example, when I am sick, she is more careful with everything to me.*’ Though the clip is very short, it gives the impression that the relationship is successful, but to the extent that the *waria* engages in gender conformity and performs her gender as a really good wife to the man. To outsiders, their marriage could be seen as resisting heterosexist norms, but it may also reinforce those norms if their individual roles within the relationship are segregated based on a strict interpretation of gender binarism.

Conclusion

At present, the multifaceted media messages from YouTube about *waria* provide examples of and spaces to reinforce and resist heteronormativity. The videos identify a preference for and need to question and transcend the traditional ideals, norms and practices of gender binarism, if social justice – and specifically gender justice – is a priority. The videos also suggest that the politics of heteronormativity occurs in multiple arenas and can be hindered or facilitated by technology such as YouTube. The value of new social media is, in part, their contribution to Indonesia’s motto of ‘unity in diversity’. Though *waria* may continue to encounter personal, economic, social, religious and political challenges in the future, there is at minimum a space online for community, debate, education and entertainment that can bring some modicum of relief, recognition and change in the short term, and perhaps even justice in the long run. The latter, however, necessitates a sizeable and

genuine shift in thought and practice, not just in private spheres, but also in public spheres where diverse vantage points would be acknowledged and incorporated into creating and maintaining entirely new social structures.

Finally, in many of the YouTube videos about and by *waria*, there is an underlying tone and a direct appeal for ‘equality’. One interpretation is a request to shift from two gender categories (or even multiple gender categories) to the one category of ‘human’ or ‘citizen’ – a status that is symbolically referred to in Indonesia’s *Pancasila*. This interpretation leads to several other questions that arise in relation to *warias*’ day-to-day realities, Islam and the historical trajectory of the law in Indonesia: Are *waria*, then, to be included or excluded from discourses, activism and public policies related to women? To gays and lesbians? To minority groups, broadly speaking? Should there be similar or distinct categories of analysis and application for legal and religious purposes? These questions currently remain unanswered. In the search for answers in the future, using the lenses of structuration and gender performativity could be quite helpful in understanding and possibly resolving some or all of the problems of heteronormativity and gender binarism for *waria* in Indonesia.

Notes

- 1 Alternative wording for *Pancasila* include ‘religious devotion, humanitarianism, nationalism, consultative democracy and social justice’ (see *National symbols*, The Embassy of The Republic of Indonesia [2012]).
- 2 For historical background on the origin(s) and meaning(s) of ‘transgender’ in the United States, see, for example, David Valentine’s *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of a category* (2007). For background information about ‘transgender’ in Indonesia, see Tom Boellstorff’s *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia* (2005).
- 3 See Don Kulick’s *Travesti: Sex, gender, and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes* (1998, pp. 9–11) for arguments and critiques related to the ‘inversion’ of male and female roles, how biological sex is a gendered notion, and ‘cultural configurations of sexuality, sex and gender’.
- 4 See Sharyn Graham Davies, *Gender diversity in Indonesia: Sexuality, Islam and queer selves* (2010) for a literature review of this period.
- 5 For more on this metaphor, see John Stuart Mills’ *On liberty* (1859).
- 6 Although the YouTube video uses ‘he’ in the English captions for this quote, the speaker uses the term *dia*, which can mean ‘he’ or ‘she’ in Bahasa Indonesia.
- 7 The English translation of ‘sissy’ arguably does not convey the severity or possible threatening tone for the original Indonesian term *banci*.

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