

Body Transformation through Transvestism in Raminten Cabaret Show, Yogyakarta

Delfin Febriansyah* and Wahyu Novianto

Theatre Study Programme, Faculty of Performing Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta, Jl. Ki Hajar Dewantara No. 19, Kentingan, Jebres, Surakarta, Central Java 57126, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: delfin.feбри98@gmail.com

Submitted: 9 January 2025 • **Accepted:** 20 February 2026 • **Published online:** 31 May 2026

To cite this article: Delfin Febriansyah and Wahyu Novianto. 2026. "Body Transformation through Transvestism in Raminten Cabaret Show, Yogyakarta." *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse* 25(1): 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ws2026.25.1.4>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/ws2026.25.1.4>

ABSTRACT

This research examines the societal positioning of transvestism and its cultural implications. The study aims to analyse the process of bodily transformation among transvestites performing at the Raminten Cabaret Show in Yogyakarta. The theoretical framework employs Michel Foucault's concepts of body and power, focusing on the interconnections between social relations, transvestism, and performance space. Foucault's approach illuminates how bodies become sites of power negotiation and knowledge production, where disciplinary mechanisms shape and regulate gender performance. His genealogical method reveals how seemingly natural categories of gender and sexuality are historically constructed through complex networks of discourse and practice. Through this Foucauldian lens, the research examines how transvestite performance both challenges and reinforces normative gender boundaries within specific cultural contexts. This research employs qualitative analysis utilising a taxonomic approach. The methodology yields results through systematic stages of data reduction, management, and verification. The findings demonstrate that bodily transformation establishes power relations between transvestite performers and their audience. These power dynamics generate knowledge production regarding the construction of masculinity. The masculine perception of feminine ideality extends beyond mere physical attraction, serving as a modality for constructing feminine forms within masculine bodies, thereby revealing the fluid and performative nature of gender identity.

Keywords: transvestism, Raminten Cabaret Show, transformation, power, body

INTRODUCTION

The body serves as a fundamental site of social construction and identity formation. From birth, individuals are assigned various identity markers such as physical features, skin colour, and hair texture that society interprets as indicators of social positioning. Body identification extends beyond biological characteristics to encompass social identity, as communities construct understandings of individual bodies based on environmental, regional, and gender-based factors (Darwin 1999). The body as social identity carries significant societal expectations, particularly regarding gender norms that establish binary constructions distinguishing men from women (Wandi 2015, 241).

Travesti, waria, wandu, banci, bencong, or in English known as transvestite, is one of many issues arising from gender construction (Wardani et al. 2019; Yutanti and Rahadi 2022). Transvestites are considered to have deviated from or misused their bodies through their behaviour in imitating women's appearances. *Waria* have been identified in various regions across Indonesia, one of which is Yogyakarta (Jati, Mukhosiyah, and Febriani 2021, 255). Several places in Yogyakarta serve as stages for *waria* to present themselves, such as Lempuyangan, Prawirotaman, Malioboro, and others. One transvestite who works as a busker attracted public attention after a video of him spread on social media. This transvestite is known as Ambyar Wikwik, a title given in reference to the song considered typical of his performances along Malioboro Street. The existence of *waria* in society tends to generate a negative impression (Gelarina 2016, 32), largely because most *waria* appear on the streets of Yogyakarta.

On the third floor of the Hamzah Batik building, within Raminten Resto, there is a performance that attracts many visitors. Raminten Cabaret Show is widely known as a nightlife tourist destination in Yogyakarta (Fajarwati 2021, 8). The show presents several performances, including *keroncong*, traditional dance, and talent performances. The talent in the Raminten Cabaret Show are men who dress as women and impersonate Indonesian or international singers. They deliver their performances through lip-sync and captivating dances that hold the audience's attention. Raminten Cabaret Show provides a spectacular stage to support these performances provides a spectacular stage to support these performances, and as observed by Sutrisno (2020, 79), such cross-gender cabaret performances in Yogyakarta occupy a distinctive space within the city's contemporary performance culture. This situation appears to stand in stark contrast to the reality experienced by *waria* on the streets.

The performers in this research are more appropriately referred to through the term transvestism. The term was introduced by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910 (Thanem 2022, 2), who used it to refer to individuals who wear clothing of the opposite sex. Transvestism refers to actions driven by a need for entertainment and comfort (Thanem 2022, 2). The term transvestism is considered close in meaning to *travesti*, a concept familiar to Indonesian society, describing the behaviour of imitating the opposite sex for parody or entertainment purposes. Transvestism is not a new phenomenon for Indonesian people, in several traditional performance forms such as Ludruk, Gandrung Marsan Dance, Lengger Lanang Dance, and others. Transvestism has played an important role in attracting audience interest (Hidayat 2020; Sukamto 2016; Wardani 2019; Yutanti and Rahadi 2022).

The development of knowledge has repositioned transvestism as a deviant figure. The erosion of traditional dogma has displaced transvestism from conventional performance stages. This shift has occurred due to the assumption that transvestism in performance is unsuitable for public consumption. Various opinions have emerged in the community suggesting that transvestism sets a bad example, constitutes an immoral figure, and involves same-sex attraction (Hidayat 2020; Sukamto 2016). This societal view has a measurable impact on the well-being and self-acceptance of *waria* themselves (Manja Sari and Purwaningsih 2012, 78). Such societal views have narrowed the space available for transvestism to operate, even in traditional performance contexts such as *ketoprak* (Wahyudi 2019); even one of Indonesia's celebrated dance maestros, Didik Nini Thowok, was marginalised as a result.

At the Raminten Cabaret Show, the researcher observes significant differences from the reality that occurs in broader society. Spectators are willing to pay and queue to watch transvestite performances on the Raminten Cabaret Show stage. These differences form the basis for conducting this research. The primary analysis focuses on transvestite body transformation in the Raminten Cabaret Show, whilst further examination addresses the power relations between transvestites and their audience. Questions of body, gender, and social identity in Indonesian

contexts have been examined from various disciplinary perspectives (Terre et al. 2013, 15). The concepts of body and power as proposed by Michel Foucault serve as the theoretical framework for data analysis, with the expectation that the outcomes of bodily transformation will yield discernible impact. The body, politically transformed through networks of power relations, constitutes the central idea of this research. The orientation towards knowledge production through transvestite body transformation reflects the researcher's assumption regarding the phenomenon of conflicting masculinity present in contemporary society

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of body and power, which provides the analytical lens for understanding transvestite body transformation at the Raminten Cabaret Show. The methodological approach is deliberately aligned with Foucault's genealogical method, which examines how bodies become sites of political transformation through networks of power relations, knowledge production, and discourse formation (Kurniawan and Zubaidah 2023; Dhona 2019, 191). Foucault's perspective on body and power directly supports this research's central argument that transvestite body transformation represents a form of resistance and agency within constraining social structures. Foucault's concept of biopower provides the theoretical foundation for analysing how transvestites navigate between social marginalisation and artistic recognition. The methodology thus adopts Foucault's understanding that bodies are not merely biological entities but are politically constructed through social practices, discourses, and power relations.

The research operates within the social definition paradigm, emphasising social action and interaction resulting from cognitive processes. This paradigm aligns with Foucault's rejection of essentialist categories, instead focusing on how identities are constructed through social practices and discursive formations. The study employs micro-analytical approaches to examine observable patterns and movements within the research subject, reflecting Foucault's genealogical method that traces the emergence of specific practices and their effects on subject formation. The methodological framework integrates Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine how transvestite bodies become sites of knowledge production and power negotiation. This approach enables the research to analyse not only what transvestites do (body transformation) but also how these practices create new forms of knowledge about gender, sexuality, and artistic expression.

The discourse analysis examines three key dimensions that align with Foucault's analytical framework. First, the archaeological dimension investigates the historical emergence of transvestism in Indonesian performance traditions (Ludruk, Gandrung Marsan, Lengger Lanang) to understand how contemporary transvestite practices at Raminten relate to broader genealogies of cross-gender performance. Second, the genealogical dimension traces how power relations shape transvestite body transformation, examining the mechanisms through which marginalised subjects create spaces of agency and resistance within dominant social structures. Third, the ethical dimension analyses how transvestites constitute themselves as subjects through practices of self-transformation, such as what Foucault terms technologies of the self. This multi-dimensional approach ensures that the analysis can address the research question comprehensively whilst maintaining theoretical consistency with Foucault's analytical framework.

The research employs multiple data collection methods that align with Foucault's emphasis on examining power relations through various discursive practices and social interactions. Participant observation was conducted over two months (17 February 2023 to 27 April 2023) every Friday and Saturday, focusing on backstage transformation processes and performer-

audience interactions. This method aligns with Foucault's attention to the microphysics of power, examining how power operates in everyday practices and interactions. The researcher's backstage access enables observation of the disciplinary practices through which transvestites transform their bodies, revealing what Foucault would term techniques of the self. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven transvestite performers (Mamuk Bohay, Luna Kamarie, Acipta Sasmi, Dolce Maria, Suzza Ravina, Jaclyn Vee, and Jiah Sunrise) and stage manager Dewi Sinta Fajarwati to capture subjective experiences of body transformation. This method corresponds to Foucault's interest in how subjects understand and articulate their own practices of self-formation. The interviews focus on performers' narratives about their transformation processes, professional identities, and experiences of social positioning.

Additionally, systematic documentation of costume changes, make-up application, and stage performances was conducted to analyse how bodies are materially transformed. This visual and performance analysis aligns with Foucault's attention to the material practices through which power operates on bodies. The research also examined how transvestite performances are represented and discussed in various media contexts, analysing the discursive formations that shape public understanding of transvestism. Literature analysis involved collecting relevant data through books, theses, dissertations, journals, and papers, enabling concept finalisation through comparison with previous studies that examine transvestism, performance studies, and Foucauldian theory.

The study employs taxonomic analysis techniques adapted through Foucault's theoretical framework. Traditional taxonomic analysis establishes primary domains and describes internal structures (Subagyo 2011, 255). However, this research modifies taxonomic analysis to align with Foucault's genealogical method by examining how categories of analysis (biological body, social body, transformation practices) are not fixed entities but are produced through power relations and discursive practices. The spatial dimensions of this analysis are further informed by theories of social space and its production (Sugiyono 2022, 103), which illuminate how the Raminten Cabaret Show stage itself functions as a constructed and contested space. The analytical process operates through three integrated stages: archaeological mapping of the emergence and transformation of transvestite practices within Indonesian cultural contexts; genealogical tracing of power relations that shape transvestite body transformation; and ethical analysis of how transvestites constitute themselves as subjects through body transformation practices.

Data analysis follows Foucault's methodological principles whilst employing systematic qualitative analysis techniques. The process involves three interconnected phases of discourse mapping, power relations analysis, and subject formation analysis.

An exemplary case of this subject formation through heterotopic transformation is visible in the career trajectory of renowned dancer Didik Nini Thowok, who navigated the tensions between self-transformation and social positioning throughout his artistic practice. Didik Nini Thowok's work demonstrates how transvestite performers constitute themselves as subjects through deliberate engagement with traditional performance genealogies, whilst facing marginalisation when cross-gender performance moved from traditional to contemporary contexts. His experience illuminates the complex relationship between self-transformation as artistic practice and the social positioning that determines where and how such transformation can be legitimately enacted, revealing how heterotopic spaces like traditional performance venues and contemporary cabarets function as essential sites for the possibility of such self-formation.

Discourse mapping identifies key discursive formations that shape understanding of transvestism, gender, and performance in Indonesian contexts through analysing interview transcripts, performance observations, and media representations. Power relations analysis examines how power operates in the transformation of transvestite bodies, focusing on

disciplinary mechanisms, normalisation processes, and strategies of resistance. Foucault's concepts of discourse and power, as elaborated by secondary scholars (Mills 2003, 54; Smart 1985, 77), provide the analytical vocabulary for this examination. This analysis pays particular attention to how the cabaret space functions as what Foucault might term a heterotopia, a space that exists outside normal social relations whilst remaining connected to them. The theatre, as Foucault notes, brings onto the stage a series of places that are foreign to one another, creating a space where multiple incompatible realities converge. Significantly, this heterotopic quality is not unique to modern cabaret spaces but finds historical precedent in Indonesian traditional performance forms such as Ludruk, Gandrung Marsan Dance, and Lengger Lanang. The Raminten Cabaret Show thus operates within a genealogy of heterotopic performance spaces, though transformed by contemporary urban contexts and commercial entertainment frameworks.

The research ensures methodological rigour through triangulation of data sources, theoretical consistency with Foucault's framework, and reflexive analysis of researcher positionality. Data validation occurs through comparison of observational data with interview narratives and performance documentation, ensuring that analysis remains grounded in empirical evidence whilst maintaining a theoretical framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transvestite Body

According to Merleau-Ponty's view, the body in phenomenology is seen as the starting point for the mode of human existence (Sebastian 2016, 95). The body is also considered the origin or basis of human existence in the world (Sebastian 2016, 95). Humans essentially possess a body as capital for their lives. The existence of the body has become embedded in social perspective, giving rise to understandings of the biological, social, and political. The body is fundamentally divided into two categories, namely men and women, but as the era of human life develops, social constructions have emerged that bind it. The construction attached to the human body has given rise to several problems, one of which is gender construction.

Gender identity can be understood as a social construction attached to a person in order to identify his or her position in an environment (Prajoko 2017). Violations of gender construction are also a problem that is often highlighted, one of which is transvestism. The term transvestism is used to refer to the behaviour of wearing clothes of the opposite sex. This behaviour has occurred in various social spaces, giving rise to various fluctuations in rejection and acceptance. Transvestism renders the practitioner a "wrong" figure in social life. Society considers this behaviour to be immoral, so that quite a few people discriminate against its practitioners. From a dramaturgical perspective, this social positioning can be understood as a conflict between the performer's identity and the audience of everyday social life (Benford 2013).

The transvestite body is fundamentally still natural or the biological body of the practitioner. Transvestite practitioners only use attributes of the opposite sex to create a certain accent. The use of these attributes serves its own purpose, such as fashion taste, self-expression, and work interests. The public lacks understanding of the use of these attributes, giving rise to a negative perspective. As Butler (2011) argues, the body is never simply a natural given but is always already inscribed through cultural and political processes that determine what counts as a legitimate or intelligible body. What must be understood is the transvestite body, as discussed in the following subsections.

Biological Body

The biological body is a natural body that every person has a gift from God given to humans from birth. Humans are born with two types, namely male and female. These two types are distinguished by two reproductive organs, as well as external conditions used as characteristics of human life. Men and women can be distinguished by several characteristics, for example, hair areas, genitals, the shape of bones and other organs.

In everyday life, the biological body of the transvestite does not change; this can be seen from the presence of moustaches, hair on the feet and hands, and other characteristics. The biological body of the transvestite can be observed during exercise and general rehearsal. When implementing general rehearsal, the transvestite does not wear a costume, so his appearance is like that of a man in general. This situation shows that, in reality, the transvestite still maintains his biological body.

The biological body condition of the transvestite is also an important aspect in performance. Luna Kamarie stated that a beard is a characteristic of his identity (interview, 27 April 2023). Luna Kamarie feels that she is often seen as imitating singer Conchita Wurst, but Luna did not actually do that. The beard that Luna has is a unique charm; she calls it a differentiator.

The biological body for the transvestite can be the main modality in performance. The male body of the transvestite also provides power in performance. The power referred to here is extreme action performed in an attractive manner. This is an advantage for the transvestite in attracting the attention of the audience; such an action would not be appropriate if it were done by an actual woman.

∴ “...yes, as performers, they can do interesting things, right? They were made..”
∴ (Luna Kamarie 2023)

The narrative provided by Dewi Sinta Fajarwati as stage manager confirms that the existence of the transvestite is not to be denied as a complete woman. The transvestite is not presented as a woman, but rather as a man dressed as a woman. This situation is also made clear through the actions of the transvestite on stage, as an awareness for the audience of the transvestite's true identity.

Social Body

Humans living in society are equipped with society's construction of gender identity. This construction influences the social identity of the people in an environment. The body as a medium for social communication is closely related to behaviour and attributes of gender identity. In certain environments, the body is regulated through the constraints of social norms. Social norms then become a person's benchmark in identifying entities around them. The dominance of masculine norms in society creates a framework within which any deviation is measured and judged (Wardani 2018, 70).

In social construction, men are synonymous with firm, simple, and dominant figures. This can be identified through the way a man looks. Men's appearance in society is synonymous with wearing trousers, t-shirts, shirts, and so on. These attributes differ from those used to identify the characteristics of women who wear jewellery, dresses, skirts, and so on. Society accepts and implements gender construction, so that if gender attributes are used inappropriately, it will be considered a violation of norms.

In social life, the transvestite does not violate gender construction; in everyday life, the transvestite wears trousers and male attributes. Transvestites have their own lives; Dewi Sinta stated that some talents make the Raminten Cabaret Show a sideline or merely a hobby (interview, 27 April 2023).

“...there’s one talent who is married and has children, so talent...yes, he is indeed a performer...”
(Dewi Sinta 2023)

Dewi Sinta’s narrative shows that the background of transvestites differs, but as talent, they are completely professional performers.

The social body of the transvestite ultimately leads its own life. The meaning of the transvestite body is then divided into two: social reality and the performance stage. These two areas must be clearly divided in the context of professionalism. The transvestite’s social body is professionally separated as that of a member of society and as that of a performer. In society, the transvestite social body is identified as a man in general, whilst the transvestite social body as a performer is that of a transformed stage actor.

Through their social bodies, transvestites can interact according to their environmental situation. Social body adjustment in transvestites can be assumed to be a form of camouflage for social interactions. The camouflage carried out fulfils social norms; in addition, transvestites can still express themselves and carry out their work as artists. As an artist, the transvestite has contributed his work by expressing his intuition through costumes, appearance, make-up, and performance presentations. This conclusion is in line with Dewi Sinta’s argument:

“...Raminten Cabaret Show has no specific agenda, such as justification for the LGBT phenomenon. We are here purely for entertainment as performers; we also do not condone cross-dressing behaviour but position talent as complete artists...”
(Dewi Sinta 2023)

The position of the transvestite and his social body is a form of art that deserves to be appreciated. Transvestism does not carry a justification mission for any phenomenon; instead, the transvestite offers his professionalism in the social sphere as an artist.

Transvestism Body Transformation

Transformation, according to the Indonesian Dictionary, means a change in form, function, nature, and so on. Transformation can be carried out with certain goals or circumstances. Transformations in social phenomena can indicate an underlying need; developments over time and technology can also encourage someone to transform. The development of the times has given rise to new identities in society, one of which is related to the presence of transvestism.

Transvestites have their own personal reasons for their behaviour, for example, the demands of work. In some theatre scripts, characters are written as transvestites, such as *The Party* by Slawomir Mrozek, *Bom Waktu* by Nano Riantiarno, *Delilah Tak Ingin Pulang Pesta* by Puthut EA, and others. This demonstrates that within performance contexts, gender identity transformation is a relatively common practice, particularly in avant-garde and experimental theatre where gender fluidity serves artistic and narrative purposes.

This research’s identification and analysis of transvestite body transformation operates within specific methodological and ethical boundaries that must be clearly articulated. The analytical framework employed here does not, and cannot, make moral judgements about transvestism as a social phenomenon, nor does it attempt to identify or categorise transvestite behaviour

in performers' daily lives outside the performance context. The scope of analysis is strictly limited to the artistic domain. Specifically, the professional practices of body transformation undertaken by male performers who present feminine personas within the bounded space of the Raminten Cabaret Show stage.

This limitation is both methodological and ethical. Methodologically, the research examines body transformation as a performance technique, an artistic craft, and a form of professional labour within the entertainment industry. The analysis focuses on observable transformation practices (costume, make-up, gesture, movement) and their effects within the performer-audience relationship during staged performances. Ethically, the research respects the complexity of gender identity by acknowledging that conclusions about transvestite body transformation as artistic practice do not extend to claims about performers' gender identities, sexual orientations, or personal lives.

Furthermore, this research recognises a fundamental distinction that shapes its entire analytical approach: unless individual performers have formally and legally transitioned to female gender identity through recognised legal and medical processes, they remain biologically and legally male individuals who employ feminine presentation as a performance technique. This distinction is not a judgment but a recognition of the difference between theatrical cross-gender performance (transvestism as artistic practice) and transgender identity (a fundamental aspect of selfhood that exists independently of performance contexts). The performers at Raminten Cabaret Show are professional artists who skilfully construct feminine stage personas whilst maintaining their male biological and social identities, as evidenced by their own statements during interviews and their behaviour outside performance contexts. This research, therefore, analyses the art of transformation itself, rather than making claims about gender identity or personal authenticity.

Transvestites undertake various efforts to transform gender identity, some requiring considerable effort. The efforts include habit formation, model introduction, and new element application. Transvestite transformation can be identified through perspective, body construction, and gender identity attributes. These components are essential for identifying transvestite behaviour.

Construction of the Female Body

The construction of the female body by transvestite performers at the Raminten Cabaret Show reveals a critical paradox in contemporary Indonesian performance culture. Whilst the technical processes of body transformation employed at Raminten may appear distinctly modern in their commercial theatrical context, the fundamental practice of cross-gender embodiment is not modern at all. Rather, transvestism has deep roots in Indonesian traditional performance forms, including Ludruk, Gandrung Marsan Dance, Lenggèr Lanang, and others, where male performers have embodied feminine characters for generations as an integral and valued aspect of cultural performance.

The crucial transformation that has occurred is not in the practice itself, but in its social positioning and reception. Traditional performances that employed transvestite performers enjoyed cultural legitimacy and social acceptance as part of community ritual and entertainment traditions. However, as discussed in the introduction, these traditional forms have been increasingly marginalised, with transvestite performers facing accusations of immorality and deviance when their practice is decontextualised from traditional frameworks. The Raminten Cabaret Show, therefore, represents not a modern invention of transvestite performance, but rather a contemporary heterotopic space that recuperates and recontextualises traditional cross-gender performance practices within an urban commercial entertainment framework.

This historical dimension is essential for understanding why body construction techniques at Raminten focus on creating a feminine illusion rather than claiming authentic female identity. The performers are continuing a performance lineage where masculine bodies have always been visibly present beneath feminine presentation, a doubling that was traditionally understood as artistic skill rather than gender deviance. What distinguishes the contemporary context is the collapse of traditional performance spaces that once legitimised such practices, making commercial venues like Raminten Cabaret Show among the few remaining heterotopic spaces where this performance tradition can survive and be economically viable.

The body is a different thing and is separated from the context of appearance. In this discussion, the body is specifically assumed to be the male body, which is constructed as a female body. The addition of artificial breasts and hips significantly changes the shape of the transvestite body. This affects movement patterns and the audience's view of the transvestite. The body that is formed and the audience's view of the transvestite constitute a strong indication that the Raminten Cabaret Show stage has become an intimate space for transvestism. The Raminten Cabaret Show stage has become part of the transvestite's female body. This can be seen directly through analysis of a man's body in contrast with a woman's body.

Transvestites with female bodies appear to have unlimited access in the eyes of the audience. Large and small movements presented by transvestites become audience focal points. Audiences not only imagine but also feel that transvestites are typical women. This perspective benefits transvestites as Raminten Cabaret Show performers. Conversely, transvestites do not simply present bodies; they learn the body movements of the characters they imitate.

The process of learning feminine body movements involves systematic observation and practice of specific female performers. Transvestites study video recordings, attend live performances, and practise distinctive gestures, postures, and movement patterns associated with their chosen characters. This learning process extends beyond superficial mimicry to encompass understanding of emotional expression through physical movement, demonstrating the sophisticated nature of their artistic craft.

Costumes are also an important part of supporting the transvestite's appearance on stage. Clothes that have been specially designed give a luxurious impression to the transvestite body. *Sebokan* (fake hips) as well as fake breasts are used by some transvestites to shape the female body. This is further enhanced by using layered stockings to soften the body shape (Suzzaravina, interview, 29 April 2023). The use of elegant colours also helps create the atmosphere of the Raminten Cabaret Show stage. In addition, the wig worn by the transvestite is styled to suit the performance on stage, such as the headdress and wig worn by Mamuk Bohay during his performance.

Feminine Attributes

The transvestite fundamentally has a male body and appearance; therefore, supporting components are needed to perfect their appearance. Putting on make-up is one of the most important things to support appearance. The men's faces that were originally there are given make-up with a distinctive accent to give the audience the illusion that they are women. The make-up used includes base powder, loose powder, eyeshadow, eyelashes, lipstick, and others. The use of these make-up tools is not only to beautify oneself but also to create an impression, such as the make-up used by Aipta Sasmi, Suzzaravina, and Rebecca Carter. The impression of make-up is necessary due to an attempt to imitate or resemble a public figure. Imitative actions performed by the transvestite constitute a directed strategy through a mature concept.

Putting on make-up can be used as an action to dramatise a moment; this is necessary to gain tension over the ongoing conflict. It is not only dramatisation that occurs, but the transvestite also beautifies himself in the truest sense to resemble a woman.

In an interview, Acipta Sasmu reveals the depth of preparation required for transvestite performance. The adjustment to wearing high heels represents not merely a costume choice but a fundamental alteration of body mechanics and movement patterns. Walking in heels requires balance adjustment, stride modification, and posture changes that collectively transform the performer's physical presence. This transformation process demonstrates how social constructions of femininity become embodied practices that transvestites must master to achieve convincing performances.

Transvestites maintain stages for presenting female bodies on stage. Previously non-existent habits are trained to facilitate stage acting. Referenced habits include wearing high heels, walking methods, styling techniques, and related practices. The body serves as the primary capital of the transvestite, constructed and created as a stage product or performer. High heel usage, synonymous with women, requires extra effort because transvestites must dance, run, and perform stunts on stage.

Transvestism Body on Raminten Cabaret Show Performance

The previous power has constructed social identities for men and women. This then influences a further context, namely how one dresses. People in certain areas have agreed on how to dress for men and for women. Men are constructed to be working bodies, which means a firm and flexible appearance. Differences occur in the female body, which is constructed as a narrative of sexuality; this is what causes women to be closely related to sexuality (Kertamukti, Nugroho, and Wahyono 2018, 234). Foucault calls this event the dialectic of the body of power; according to Foucault, the body is closely related to ongoing power (Fitriya and Dwiningtyas 2017, 5).

The body of power includes symbols used to identify social identity, be it gender, caste, position, and so on (Syafiuddin 2018, 151). The symbol that is widely used to identify gender in society is hair; a statement that men should have short hair and women should have long hair. This then becomes a normative assumption for some groups of society. Normative assumptions ultimately become limitations, even violations, for individuals with appearances that conflict with their gender. Violations committed will be given social sanctions in the form of ostracism and ridicule (Arfanda and Anwar 2015, 95).

The Raminten Cabaret Show, whilst functioning as a heterotopic space that enables transvestite performance, simultaneously operates with implicit hierarchies regarding which transformed bodies are most acceptable or successful within its performance framework. These hierarchies reveal underlying tensions between the egalitarian rhetoric of artistic professionalism and the practical aesthetics of commercial entertainment that shape performer reception and career success.

Luna Kamarie's case exemplifies these contradictions. Luna maintains visible facial hair, specifically a beard, as a distinctive identity marker, explicitly rejecting conventional feminine beauty standards. As she stated during interviews, her beard represents personal uniqueness rather than imitation of singer Conchita Wurst, and she proudly identifies as "a queen" when on stage (Luna Kamarie, interview, 29 April 2023). Luna's assertion of queenly identity whilst retaining masculine signifiers suggests a performance philosophy that embraces visible gender contradiction rather than seamless feminine illusion.

However, Luna Kamarie's self-presentation raises critical questions about the hierarchies of acceptability operating within Raminten Cabaret Show. Does Luna's retention of facial hair and her proud queenly self-identification represent the most acceptable body of transvestism in this performance space, or does it mark her as occupying a more marginal position precisely because she refuses complete feminine transformation? The contradiction between claiming queenly status (a position of authority and perfection) whilst maintaining the most visible marker of masculinity (facial hair) suggests either a radical artistic stance that redefines what transvestite performance can be, or an acknowledgement that complete feminine illusion remains unachievable or undesirable for her particular performance persona.

The two photographs of Suzzaravina included in this article (Figures 1 and 2) speak powerfully to the question of bodily acceptability hierarchies at Raminten. Figure 1 depicts Suzzaravina during general rehearsal, presenting in a masculine appearance with visible male characteristics such as casual clothing, no make-up, and natural male body contours. Figure 2 shows Suzzaravina in full performance transformation, impersonating Bunda Corla with a complete feminine presentation with an elaborate costume, sophisticated make-up, constructed feminine body shape, and feminine gestures and styling expression.

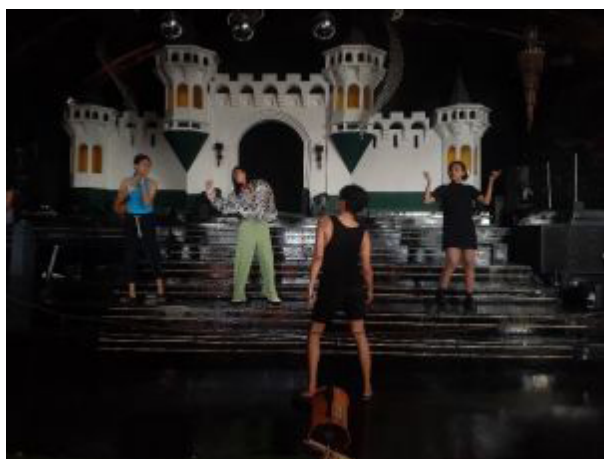


Figure 1 Suzzaravina on general rehearsal with real visual look

Source: Author's collection



Figure 2 Suzzaravina impersonates Bunda Corla with body transformation on performance stage

Source: Screenshot from Suzzaravia Instagram (2023)

These contrasting images do not merely document transformation processes; they implicitly argue for a particular understanding of what constitutes successful transvestite performance at Raminten. The complete transformation visible in Figure 2 suggests that the most acceptable and successful transvestite bodies are those that achieve maximum feminine illusion, where masculine origins remain known to the audience but are visually minimised or temporarily erased during performance. Suzzaravina's transformation represents the artistic ideal, a masculine body so thoroughly reconstructed through costume, make-up, gesture, and styling that audiences can suspend disbelief and engage with the feminine persona as if it were complete.

Comparing Suzzaravina's approach with Luna Kamarie's reveals differing philosophies regarding the visibility of masculine embodiment within transvestite performance. Suzzaravina's transformation prioritises seamless feminine illusion. Luna Kamarie's retained beard, by contrast, insists on visible masculine presence even during performance, refusing the complete visual transformation that Suzzaravina achieves. These differing approaches raise questions about whether both strategies are equally valued and rewarded within Raminten's performance economy, or whether there exists an implicit hierarchy favouring performers who achieve more complete feminine transformation.

The evidence suggests that whilst Raminten Cabaret Show rhetorically embraces all its transvestite performers as professional artists deserving equal respect, practical hierarchies of acceptability likely exist based on transformation completeness, aesthetic beauty standards, and audience reception. Performers like Suzzaravina who achieve highly convincing feminine illusion may receive greater audience approval or more performance opportunities than those whose presentations remain more visibly marked by masculine characteristics. This would indicate that even within the heterotopic space of Raminten, normative beauty standards and gender presentation expectations continue to exert disciplinary power, shaping which transvestite bodies are most celebrated and economically successful.

Transvestites clearly violate dressing norms between men and women, but the Raminten Cabaret Show has become a space for transvestites to exist between masculinity and femininity. The Raminten Cabaret Show has become a means for transvestites to realise their social identity in alternative spaces, specifically, feminine identity. Based on previous analysis, transvestites not only construct male bodies into female forms but have also created new identities as women on the Raminten Cabaret Show stage. This enables transvestites to disregard normative boundaries regarding dress ethics.

Interview results indicate that most transvestites understand masculine dressing norms and ethics, but these can be set aside when on stage. Required stage professionalism demands that transvestites can become anything through various methods. Transvestites attempt to find special approaches to deliver their best performances. Appearance related to dressing norms and ethics ultimately becomes unnecessary because audiences prefer performance quality when they resemble women. This represents equality for transvestites, audiences enjoy the show, and transvestites can express themselves through their appearances.

In social contexts, transvestites recognise that their behaviour is not accepted by wider communities. Transvestites, as Raminten Cabaret Show performers, recognise specific corridors that differentiate daily life from performance. These built corridors determine moments for masculine or feminine dressing, becoming important points for creating expressive spaces for transvestites.

Jiah Sunrise, one of the transvestites at Raminten Cabaret Show, stated familiarity with the terms *bencong* and *banci* long before becoming a performer (Jiah Sunrise, interview, 16 May 2023). Understanding minority positioning motivates transvestites to deliver maximum performances. Luna Kamarie maintains thoughts of releasing various assumptions about herself. When on stage, she maintains a perspective on her identity: "I am a queen" (Luna Kamarie, interview, 29 April 2023). Based on this statement, transvestites attempt to create power spaces in the Raminten Cabaret Show through their social identities as performers.

CONCLUSION

Transvestites undertake transformations to gain social position, subsequently affecting their existence as artists. The expected position is not as actual "women" but rather as professional performers. This conclusion is evidenced through transvestite denial by not covering masculine body signs. Evidence includes maintained facial hair, masculine vocal registers during informal interactions, and explicit acknowledgement of their male biological identity during interviews.

Transvestite privileges at the Raminten Cabaret Show extend beyond commodity realms, providing income. This can be observed through the number of artists involved in the Raminten Cabaret Show. In this manner, social patterns for marginalised artists actually find space in the Raminten Cabaret Show. The venue provides economic opportunities and social recognition that are otherwise unavailable to transvestites in conventional Indonesian society.

Power relations influence transvestite positioning in social space, enabling equal artistic viewing regardless of gender position. This establishes transvestites as complete artists whose work must be appreciated. Transvestites can control their male bodies to appear on stage in female form. The Raminten Cabaret Show serves as a means for transvestites, making their movement successful in gaining social standing.

Through Foucault's analytical lens, transvestites at the Raminten Cabaret Show utilise women's bodies as politically as men's bodies to dominate the stage and audience. This political use of the body represents what Foucault terms technologies of the self—practices through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects and transform their own existence. The audience has been mastered by truth discourse through entertaining performances, changing perspectives, whilst granting recognition to transvestites as artists.

The research demonstrates that body transformation serves as a mechanism for power negotiation, enabling transvestites to move from marginalised social positions to recognised artistic roles. This transformation occurs not through denial of biological identity but through strategic deployment of feminine attributes within controlled performance contexts. The Raminten Cabaret Show thus functions as a legitimate space where alternative gender expressions can flourish whilst maintaining social and economic viability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP), Ministry of Finance, Republic of Indonesia, under scholarship grant number 202407111105676, awarded to Delfin Febriansyah. The authors gratefully acknowledge LPDP for its financial support, which enabled this research to be completed and published.

REFERENCES

- Arfanda, Firman, and Sakaria Anwar. 2015. "Konstruksi Sosial Masyarakat terhadap Waria." *Jurnal Administrasi dan Kebijakan Kesehatan Indonesia* 1(1): 93–102.
- Benford, Robert D. 2013. "Dramaturgy and Social Movements." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, edited by Donatella A. Snow, Donatella Della Porta, Bert Kländermans, and Doug McAdam. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm075>
- Butler, Judith. 2011. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203828274>
- Darwin, Muhadjir. 1999. *Maskulinitas: Posisi Laki-Laki Dalam Masyarakat Patriarkis*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada.
- Dewi Sinta. 2023. Interview by Delfin Febriansyah. Yogyakarta, 27 April 2023.
- Dhona, Holy Rafinka. 2019. "Analisis Wacana Foucault Dalam Studi Komunikasi." *Journal Communication Spectrum* 9: 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v9i1.2026>
- Fajarwati, D. S. 2021. "Brand Image dan Reputasi Melalui Customer Capital (Studi Kasus: Pertunjukan Raminten Cabaret Yogyakarta)." *DESKOVI: Art and Design Journal* 4(2): 7–11.
- Fitriya, Alvi and Hapsari Dwiningtyas. 2017. "Hubungan Kuasa Komunikasi Panggung Penyanyi Dangdut." *Interaksi Online* 6 (1): 1–9.
- Gelarina, Diyala. 2016. "Proses Pembentukan Identitas Sosial Waria di Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah Yogyakarta." *Jurnal Kajian Islam Interdisipliner* 1(1): 31–59. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jkii.v1i1.1057>
- Hidayat, Achmad Fahmi. 2020. "Peranan Travesti pada Pertunjukan Ludruk." *GETER: Jurnal Seni Drama, Tari dan Musik* 3(2): 42–52. <https://doi.org/10.26740/geter.v3n2.p42-52>
- Jati, Fardi Prabowo, Cucu Mukhosiyah, and Hanifah Febriani. 2021. "Pengakuan Identitas Waria di Indonesia (Studi Kasus Waria yang Berhadapan dengan Hukum di Yogyakarta)." *Masalah-Masalah Hukum* 50(3): 254–264. <https://doi.org/10.14710/mmh.50.3.2021.254-264>

- Jiah Sunrise. 2023. Interview by Delfin Febriansyah. Solo, 30 October 2023.
- Kertamukti, Rama, Heru Nugroho, and S. Bayu Wahyono. 2018. "Komunikasi Visual: Fantasi Tubuh Wanita Kelas Menengah di Instagram." *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 16(3): 231–246. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkk.v6i2.17925>
- Kurniawan, Rahmat, and Zubaidah. 2023. "Konsep Diskursus dalam Karya Michel Foucault." *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 6(1): 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v6i1.42940>
- Luna Kamarie. 2023a. Interview by Delfin Febriansyah. Yogyakarta, 27 April 2023.
- Luna Kamarie. 2023b. Interview by Delfin Febriansyah. Yogyakarta, 29 April 2023.
- Manja Sari, Novi, and Indriyati Eko Purwaningsih. 2012. "Hubungan Kebermaknaan Hidup dengan Penerimaan Diri pada Kaum Waria di Yogyakarta." *Jurnal Spirits* 3(1): 76–84. <https://doi.org/10.30738/spirits.v3i1.1127>
- Mills, Sara. 2003. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203380437>
- Prajoko, Novelita Previa. 2017. "Transformasi Identitas Pecinta Barbie pada Wanita: Studi Fenomenologi Transformasi Identitas Pecinta Barbie." Undergraduate thesis, Telkom University.
- Sebastian, Tanius. 2016. "Mengenal Fenomenologi Persepsi Merleau-Ponty tentang Pengalaman Rasa." *Melintas* 32(1): 94–115. <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v32i1.1927.94-115>
- Smart, Barry. 1985. *Michel Foucault*. New York: Routledge.
- Subagyo, Joko. 2011. *Metode Penelitian dalam Teori dan Praktek*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- Sugiyono. 2022. *Metode Penelitian: Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sukamto, Agus. 2016. "Aktualisasi Identitas Kaum Waria dalam Pertunjukan Ludruk." *Dewa Ruci: Jurnal Pengkajian dan Penciptaan Seni* 6(2): 324–344. <https://doi.org/10.33153/dewaruci.v6i2.947>
- Sutrisno, Langen Bronto. 2020. "Drag Performance oleh Javanese Cross Gender dalam Cabaret Show di Yogyakarta." *TONIL: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema* 17(2): 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.24821/tnl.v17i2.4409>
- Suzzaravina. 2023. Interview by Delfin Febriansyah. Yogyakarta, 29 April 2023.
- Syafiuddin, Arif. 2018. "Pengaruh Kekuasaan atas Pengetahuan (Memahami Teori Relasi Kuasa Michel Foucault)." *Refleksi: Jurnal Filsafat dan Pemikiran Islam* 18(2): 141–155. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v18i2.1863>
- Terre, Edi Riyadi, Gadis Arivina, Moh Yasir Alimi, and Neng Dara Affiah. 2013. *Manusia, Perempuan, Laki-Laki*. Jakarta: Komunitas Salihara–Hivos.
- Thanem, Torkild. 2022. "The Death and Rebirth of Transvestism." In *Schizoanalysis and Trans Studies*, edited by Ciara Cremin. London: Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350174825.ch-008>
- Wahyudi. 2019. "Kontestasi Para Waria dalam Pertunjukan Ketoprak Lakon Ande-Ande Lumut oleh Paguyuban Seni Sedap Malam Sragen: Sebuah Kajian Performativitas Gender." Thesis, Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta. <https://doi.org/10.24821/tnl.v16i2.3238>
- Wandi, Gusri. 2015. "Rekonstruksi Maskulinitas: Menguak Peran Laki-Laki dalam Perjuangan Kesetaraan Gender." *Kafa'ah: Jurnal Ilmiah Kajian Gender* 5(2): 239–255. <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v5i2.110>
- Wardani, Agista Nidya. 2018. "Hegemoni Maskulinitas dalam *Under the Greenwood Tree* karya Thomas Hardy." *SATWIKA: Jurnal Kajian Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial* 2(2): 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.22219/satwika.v2i2.7988>
- Wardani, Herlina Kusuma, Andayani, Djoko Sulaksono, and Kundharu Saddhono. 2019. "Tragedi Kebun Tebu: Pengaruh Perubahan Sosial pada Pertunjukan Ludruk." *Jurnal Masyarakat dan Budaya* 21(3): 355–370. <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v21i3.782>
- Yutanti, Widiya and Rahadi. 2022. "Makna Simbol dan Identitas Travesti dalam Tari Gandrung Marsan Banyuwangi." *Jurnal Partisipatoris* 4(1): 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.22219/jp.v4i1.28158>