

**EASA Media Anthropology Network
e-Seminar Series**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

**E-Seminar on Bart Barendregt's working paper
"Between m-governance and mobile anarchies:
Pornoaksi and the fear of new media
in present day Indonesia"**

(28 November – 5 December 2006)

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *Barendregt e-seminar starts now*

Dear all

I'd like to welcome you all to our EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar. The seminar will run on this mailing list from now until this coming Tuesday 5 December at 9 pm UK time. The presenter is Bart Barendregt from Leiden University and his very interesting working paper is entitled "Between m-governance and mobile anarchies: Pornoaksi and the fear of new media in present day Indonesia". You will find a PDF of the paper here:

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

The discussant will be Heather Horst who is a Postdoctoral Scholar at University of California, Berkeley. Heather is the co-author with Daniel Miller of "The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication" (Oxford and NY: Berg, 2006). She'll be posting her comments on this mailing list today (Tuesday) sometime in the afternoon/evening UK time.

After the discussant's comments have circulated the seminar will be open to all on this list. To post all you need to do is write directly to medianthro@easaonline.org, that is, NOT to me.

So it's over to Heather now.

Best wishes

John

Heather Horst (University of California, Berkeley)

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Message subject: *Barendregt Commentary*

Commentary on Bart Barendregt's paper "Between m-governance and mobile anarchies: Pornoaksi and the fear of new media in present day Indonesia"

for the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
Media Anthropology Network e-seminar 28 November – 5 December 2006

by Heather A. Horst (University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA)

In “Between m-governance and mobile anarchies”, Bart Barendregt examines the discourses surrounding pornography and mobile phones in Indonesian popular and public culture(s), with particular attention to the role that mobile phones play in the creation and imagination of Indonesian modernity. Barendregt begins by tracing a shift from the celebrated era of student protests to the more recent association of the cell phone with bombs and the emergence of ‘fragrant literature’. Written by Indonesian women, ‘Fragrant literature’ incorporates sexual and sensual content as well as pornographic imagery, content which appears to have become widely popular in the country. He further suggests that this transition reflects a wider move within Indonesian youth culture towards participation in pornography (ponoaski). The remainder of the article cites newspaper reports and “mobile porn stories” (p. 19) with attention to the interpretation of these stories as obscene and un-Asian. Barendregt contends that this discourse highlighting anxieties about the future of youth and the implications of tolerant attitudes towards sexuality reveals a larger morality crisis within Indonesian society.

In focusing on mobile phones and pornography in Indonesia, Barendregt aims to understand the underbelly of the mobile phone revolution in the developing world which in Indonesia (as well as the popular and academic literature) has often seemed more celebratory than critical of the potentials of new media for bridging ‘digital divides’. Avoiding a simplistic repudiation of pornography characteristic of media effects research, Barendregt asks what is particular about pornography’s expression in Indonesia while at the same time cautiously navigating how the public discourse as well as the shift from consumption to production or participation (see Ito In Press) in these practices may reveal wider trends, including the circulation of home-made videos and challenges that new media present to notions of public and private. Despite the very particular religious, social and political structures underpinning Indonesian society, the focus on pornography as well as new forms of engagement through mobile media parallels the widely publicized moral panics in the US and elsewhere concerning websites such as YouTube, Facebook or MySpace, sites accused of enabling or creating the spread of pornography and other controversial expressions of sexuality among youth.

One of the fascinating issues which emerge throughout the piece is the role of government intervention, ranging from requiring individuals purchasing pre-paid phone cards to arrests and confiscation of media devices to attempt to control the spread of pornography throughout the archipelago. Throughout the paper I began to wonder to what extent is the production, circulation and legal control of pornography a localized (or national) phenomenon? Is, as Barendregt suggests here, the emergence of mobile phone pornography a practice which occurs among Indonesian youth or does it extend beyond the archipelago? I also wonder to what extent is the particular interpretation of sexuality and modernity among Indonesian youth framed in light of transnational perceptions of Asian/Southeast Asian sexuality in the ‘West’. I find it interesting that these video performances, at least from the descriptions provided here, mirror some of the dominant stereotypes that circulate in North America (such as the ubiquitous Asian pornography booth at gaming conferences) and wonder if Indonesian youth are engaged in this transnational imaginary in their constructions of themselves as both mobile and modern. Moreover, given the extensive and highly developed practices

of SMS and spam messaging in the region, is it reasonable to assume that these three minute videos of pornography ‘for the masses’ and ‘by the masses’ may have a life beyond the social, religious and political and legal strictures of Indonesia as they move between mobile phone screen to computer or other portable device screen. How will continued convergence (see Jenkins 2006) of media change the scope of these practices?

Following on the above question, I would be curious to hear your (and others’) thoughts on the relationship between transience and permanence in new media. To what extent do Indonesian youth who casually photograph pictures of their breasts or allow videos of themselves to be taken at parties envision the ‘life’ of these events? Certainly in the interviews I’ve conducted with kids and parents on the Digital Youth Project (<http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/>) the vast majority of the teenaged girls and boys I have interviewed construct MySpace and Facebook pages for their friends rather than an amorphous, anonymous audience and, for this reason, may experiment and play with their online profiles in light of their intended audience. Many girls dress provocatively for their photos and work to look sexy or well-endowed in their photos, horrified and sometimes shocked at the thought of an adult looking at or finding pleasure in their image. Very few of the teenagers I have interviewed conceptualize the potential permanence of these sites. Returning to Indonesian youth, I wonder how long the mobile voyeurism and the short videos confiscated from the phones of students stay downloaded on phones, how temporary or permanent these videos are intended to be.

The paper is rich with examples of the way the mobile phone enters into public discourse and preoccupation. However I do feel that there are two areas which could be more fully developed. The first is related to the role of women in instigating the increase in pornography within the masses and I would like to hear more about the status of women in Indonesia as well as the relationship between women, Islam and nationalism. Certainly the ‘Fragrant literature’ movement suggests that women are very much at the forefront of these challenges to Indonesian sexual sensibilities as does the feminist resistance to the word ‘pornoaksi’ (p. 10). Alongside this, how is the reaction to (largely) female pornography viewed in relation to other sexualities. Here I am thinking of Tom Boellstorff’s work on masculinity and sexuality and the ways that these expressions may or may not incite fear and worry at a national level. I am also still left wondering about the vast numbers of Indonesians (Barendregt notes around 70 to 80 per cent, one of the lowest rates of cell phone penetration in Asia) who do not own mobile phones and where they figure into the decidedly urban contours of the community and imagination of modernity and sexuality Indonesia.

In conclusion, “Between m-governance and mobile anarchies” is a provocative and fascinating account of a country which, compared to the rather amorphous and broadly construed category of “Asian” countries, possesses a unique history which enriches our understanding of the region. It also resonates with discourses in other places and spaces—certainly pornography preoccupied Jamaican popular discourse surrounding the internet and sexual practices seen as ‘deviant’ within Jamaican society and many Christians in Jamaica perceive these practices as unwanted ‘imports’ from North America and Europe. I look forward to seeing Barendregt’s larger body of work which, I believe, raises important questions about the role of new media,

sexuality, religion and modernity in and beyond Indonesia and thank you and John Postill for the opportunity to discuss such an intriguing paper.

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John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *Over to Bart Barendregt*

Many thanks to Heather Horst for her discussant's comments on Bart Barendregt's paper "Between m-governance and mobile anarchies". It's over to Bart now for a response, after which you're all very welcome to join in the discussion.

John

S. Suryadi (University of Leiden)

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Message subject: *Re: Barendregt Commentary*

Bart's paper on "between m-governance and mobile anarchies" is fascinating. But in Indonesia, or in the orient in general, discourse on the 'danger' of western

technologies is not a new issue. This has been appeared since the colonial era, as represented, for example, in many early Indonesian literary works such as *Di Balik Tabir Gelombang Radio* by Muhammad Dimiyati (1939) and *Zender NIROM* by A. Damhoeri (1940). In the early 1900s the Dutch East Indies moslems reacted to the Koran recording in the phonograph discs, a western techology that, according to them, close connected with cafe, alcoholic drink, drunk, and profane (see Snouck Hurgronje, 1900, "Islam und phonograph", *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* XLII: 393-427). Concerning the mobil phone in contemporary Indonesia, there is also exciting to see the representation of Islam in HP. Thus for example, today many Indonesian moslems send the "ucapan selamat puasa" and "salam lebaran" using SMS and MMS. They use Indonesian, English, even the archaic local verses (such as pantun and syair). Others send SMS and MMS decorated with Islamic challigraphy. From linguistic and cultural perspectives, this phenomenon is interesting to be investigated further.

Suryadi

Bart Barendregt (Leiden University)

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Message subject: *reply to Heather's comments and over to you, list*

Dear list members, dear Heather,

First of all a big thanks to Heather for a very careful and thought provoking reading of my working paper; I think you raise some crucial issues in your discussion of it, and I will do my best to address some of them here (those which might be most relevant to our list here and now), hoping to come back to others at a later stage. Frankly saying, I am afraid I won't be able to answer all of your questions, relevant and good as they are, as some things at this stage still puzzle me as well. In that case I'll at least try to speculate a bit on what might be the context or future outcome in an Indonesian context, and hopefully others on the list might have comparative materials from their own or other societies to add to this.

As Heather points out I am indeed primarily interested in alternative readings of what is often dubbed the 'cellular revolution' (or for that sake, the focus on the much celebrated 'new' media in general), trying not to emphasize its newness and possible changes its use technology might bring about, but rather looking at continuities, failures/misreadings or unintended effects of it, and thereby the ways a particular technology (here the cell phone) and associated media practices are being domesticated: localized, Indonesianised and in some cases Islamised. We are in desperate need of a more critical reading of what has become known as the ICT4D discourse (ICT for development) especially as we as media anthropologist might have something to say on some of the top-down approaches of the near past ('lets give them Internet so they will have democracy', or the otherwise very well intended idea of some providers for inexpensive cell phones or laptops for the poor). Of course, this is much in line with

what Heather and Danny Miller are trying to do in their book on Jamaica, and for those on the list who did not read the book yet, I really would recommend doing so.

Talking about the cell phone in an Indonesia context, one of the fundamental characteristics that Heather also points out, of course is the sheer size of the country, it being an archipelago of a thousand of islands (and therefore due to geographical circumstances also lacking the needed infrastructure). This to a large extent explains the stark contrast observed when it comes down to the use of new and mobile technologies throughout the country. Whereas a lot of providers look at Indonesia as one of the potential Asian markets (with a population of almost 260 million) it's mostly the urban (middle class) population (on the better known islands of Sumatra, Bali and Java) which by now has access to mobile technology. The irony is that Indonesia is one of the first Asian countries to have launched a CDMA network, enabling third generation phones with all its fancy and much hyped services, but at the same time a large part of the country continues to be excluded from the cellular dream, or at least has to do its best to partake in a mobility that is increasingly defined as being mobile (hence the popularity which I mentioned in the introduction of black markets, cannibalized phones, cell phone crash courses, but also a huge industry selling second hand phones).

One of the issues Heather brings up is the wider move within Indonesian youth culture towards participation in pornography ('pornoaksi'). She wonders to what extent the production, circulation and legal control of pornography is a localized (or national) phenomenon? I would indeed very much doubt so, as I know similar things are at stake in, for example my own home country, the Netherlands, where hundreds of school kids are afraid to go to school each morning as pictures / videos of them are circulating. And then the Netherlands is a country which is a kind of fond of its sexual revolution. Meeting colleagues from Asia I know that similar things are however widely occurring in countries such as Singapore, South Korea or the Philippines. So in that aspect its more of an universal trend only the Indonesian context as I point out is particularly sensitive.

The point raised here about transnational imagery is an interesting one (Heather is mentioning the ubiquitous Asian pornography booth at gaming conferences), and one I honestly before had not yet thought of, but might be worthwhile to look at. As far as I can see (and I am not really sure if this answers Heathers question completely) some Indonesians are 'proud' (or at least very eager to get it) to have local porn being available now, whereas in the past pornography was either coming from the West or Eastern Asia. So yes, I am sure that there is a lot of copying practices going on, and most of these practices are modeled on what teenagers get from the Internet or other media (which blossom with the loosened media restrictions in post 1998 Indonesia). It's very likely that what they see as Western practices might provide them with the means to be modern and hip. Interestingly though, alternative readings of modernity come in here as well, even if it comes down to pornography. One of the latest trends over the last two years is the increase of 'Muslim porn' (a totally wrong term to use, I know); veiled girls or probably girls veiling themselves for the occasion, showing nude parts of their body in front of webcam or the inbuilt camera of their phones. It all the more seems exciting to young people as they see the bodies they might recognize as theirs

(I am thinking here of what Steve Kemper has once written on the popularity of Asian versus Western models in Malaysian and Sri Lankan advertising, 'they stand closer to us, and the bodily sensation makes it easier to relate to such role models'). With other words I suspect that pornography becomes normalized by Indonesians making porn for Indonesians.

Secondly: Heather discusses and I think, this might be very worthwhile looking at, the 'challenges that new media present to notions of public and private' or at least a continuous blurring of the two, which is increasingly felt by those studying new or mobile media (but is of course not unique to them, one might think here of overhearing others private discussions at the citizen band). This might even be related to the relationship between transience and permanence in the new media that Heather is mentioning elsewhere in her discussion and I indeed think this is a very important aspect to look at. To give one example, it's quite common anywhere in the world today to see or hear teenagers sharing nude pictures of themselves with their lovers, sending photos of genitals, boobs or whatever by cell phone at night, and 'normally' deleting such pics fast in the daytime. Such practices are by no means new, but what is of course new and to many problematic is the easy means by which what was once private now can be shared fast and easily with the rest of world, by putting such pics on the Internet or sharing them through MMS, weblogs or mailing lists (Heather is also mentioning related phenomena such as YouTube, or My Space). Sharing with others, intended or not, changes the temporal aspect and private character of such mobile expressions. In this aspect I think most Indonesian teenagers do indeed not envision the 'life' of such events until they become painfully aware of it (and that's of course what all the moral panic in the written press and news reels is about)? Here private sexual pleasure suddenly becomes pornography once being accessed by 'an amorphous, anonymous audience,' even if not intended in the first place. It's one of the things we increasingly have to deal with in a new media where 'prosumers' are taking over the stage I reckon (and I'll definitely read Ito's paper for this, thanks Heather for sharing it with us). On the other hand, and this might be more disturbing, at present its not those starring in the mobile porn clips who are really fond of themselves (to put it euphemistically) but its their friends, school mates or even whole campus who somehow take pride in them being put on the map as world wise, a little bit naughty but otherwise very hip. So in an Indonesian context it's partly about the new cellular possibilities which are seen as cool but even more so about the open expression of sexuality among teens now definitely being a marker of coolness and being modern.

A final comment to Heather: I do agree that we also must focus on other issues, and maybe in the next few days we'll find time for that. I am thinking about what you say about reactions to (largely) female pornography viewed in relation to other Indonesian sexualities or the relationship between women, Islam and nationalism (read the wonderful book by Susan Brenner on this topic I would recommend the list members) Although we might come back to this in the next few days it might for some of you be interesting to read a small piece I recently did on Islamic boys bands in Indonesia and Malaysia and the fear of the female voice, which exactly gets back to some of these issues as well.

You might find the paper at this address:

<http://www.ias.nl/ias/show/id=56157>

Once more thanks to Heather for some very contributing and remarks which have learned me to consider some other issues as well, and now over to the list to hear what they have to add.

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)

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Message subject: *Discussion open to all*

Many thanks, Bart, for that detailed response to Heather's comments. I suggest we now have a first round of brief comments and questions from the floor for Bart to take up in a day or two, along with Suryadi's posting.

John

Erkan Saka (Rice University)

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Message subject: *Bart's paper-modernity/sexuality/mobile technologies*

I sincerely agree with Heather's and Bart's interventions and although this is not the first study that focuses on the cell phone usages, I find it quite exciting. An attempt to provide alternative readings is also promising. I might later comment on these but to begin with I would like to focus on something else:

On page 5, Bart states that "modernity has become equivalent to mobility". In several locations being modern and cell phone usage is correlated but only at page 19 where the statement "sex is by many considered to be a life style....is called modern" offers the missing link, I believe. Sex and being modern is not unfamiliar for me from the Turkish context and although there is not much discussion here analytically there is more than ample cases of sexuality to link the use of cell phone usage with sexual activities and being modern.

As Heather suggests, when the above connections are related to the status of women in Indonesia as well as the relationship between women, Islam and nationalism, there could be exciting findings....

Erkan

Birgit Bräuchler (University of Munich)

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Message subject: *Methodology*

Many thanks for sharing this interesting paper with us, Bart. I very much enjoyed reading it.

I wondered whether you could tell us how you go about this research topic methodologically. Besides analysing newspaper reports on these issues, whom do you talk to, how are you approaching people, what is your 'target group', how do you get access to pornographic material spread via mobile phones and both to the 'senders' and the 'receivers', in which way do you yourself 'participate', do you try to follow 'the life' of single pornographic messages and how ... just to mention some of the burning questions I have.

Your project is a very interesting and important one, which is methodologically quite challenging in several ways and I would love to hear a bit more about that.

Many thanks!

Best,
Birgit

Daniel Miller (University College London)

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Message subject: *comments on Bart and Heather*

First, many thanks to Bart for this valuable paper, and an already highly significant discussion following Heather's comments. The first part of the paper focuses on the largely negative discourse surrounding the phone. This is, of course, discourse not description. Our work in Jamaica showed you can describe mobile phones either way. There was just as much evidence that the phone is used to cut crime as it is used to facilitate crime. The key book on the topic is *A Burgess Cellular Phones, Public Fears and A Culture of Precaution* Cambridge University Press 2004, an excellent study of the global phenomenon of mobile phone fear. This helps expand on Bart's point about its relevance to wider issues of modernity.

I suspect that in almost every region new media first developed through pornography, as was the case with the internet here in Britain. The most important academic response I felt was that of Don Slater participating in pornographic exchange, because it was the pornography itself that required ethnographic study. He was thereby able to show that pornography is actually used in many different ways from those we would expect and surprisingly often used to make highly moralistic interventions, which may well be the case also in Indonesia. In Heather and my recent study in Jamaica, pornography was

again prominent in mobile phone use. I was surprised by how many women seemed to have seen the ability to obtain internet through the phone as primarily a means to make collections of pornographic images on their phones. But at least in Jamaica we could show how this formed part of much wider networks of sociality and exchange that we call 'link-up'.

I suspect things get still more complex when it comes to the issue of pornography as self-exposure. Many journalistic references suggest that it is common for ordinary people in Britain to present pornographic images of themselves – the kind of 'reader's wives' scenarios, and one can see from this newspaper exposure that these are not just naïve school children but sometime respectable people such as school teachers who subsequently are discovered and lose their jobs. The question is why? What are the causes of this kind of exhibitionism, and how does it relate to wider debates about risk taking and ennui under conditions of modernity? That this is a dynamic debate is evident in the rise and rise of Paris Hilton whose story shows that one can now 'get away' with such accidental revelations and indeed become something of a star.

But the problem is to tease apart these instances of actual exhibitionism and its causes, with the much wider discourse about the mere possibility of such a practice. In countries such as Indonesia and Jamaica where there was heavy censorship but probably quite other worlds of sexuality within popular culture, one of the things surely being played with and commented upon is precisely the massive discrepancy between the public and private sphere. With the backlash of the public sphere creating this 'pornoaski'. This relationship between surface and appearance was there prior to the media exposure of it. I remember when working in Trinidad coming to understand that it was portly, very conservatively dressed Indian women who still had their thongs drying on the clothes line (exposing their inside to the outside) and were primary users of pornographic videos, according to the retailers. I used this as part of a general critique of the concept of superficiality in Trinidad and a failure to critique our assumptions about surface and depth.

Finally I think the problem that emerges with this paper is how we deal with pornography itself. Because on the one hand this is hugely important in its own right simply because we rarely acknowledge the centrality of sex to many peoples lives. But secondly because however, important in its own right, it has clearly been the major idiom for expressing much wider issues of freedom and emancipation in region after region, the ambiguities of which have been constantly debated within the feminist movement. Or, as in the discussion between Bart and Heather, other issues ranging from nationalism to Islam. The problem is that the two – sex as sex, and sex as idiom – are inextricably linked in the practice of pornography and for that matter in the practice of sex.

In short I think this discussion is hugely important and raises important philosophical issues about privacy and exposure, risk and containment that, as Bart demonstrates, makes it an excellent place to delve more deeply into how studies of the media expose much larger forces that erupt in the way people experience and respond to modernity.

Danny Miller

Peter I. Crawford (University of Tromsøe, Norway)

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Message subject: *Pornography and mobile phones, Bart's paper*

Dear list,

I have read Bart's paper with great interest but will not enter into a discussion of its main points but rather report from a current 'debate', related to some of the paper's issues, here from Denmark, the 'mother' country of pornography (Denmark was the first country to legalise pornography). In Denmark companies are not allowed to disseminate any material with pornographic or sexually explicit content to children. Yet a large proportion of teenagers download such material to their mobile phones, including 'hard' pornography. Although they in principle do not have access to such material they, creative and ingenious as they are, can easily find ways of doing so using their mobile phones. They cannot purchase pictures etc. using standard forms of payment such as credit cards because such forms of payment are open only to adults (18+). However, they have found a loophole; customers may use their mobile phones to pay for the goods, confirming the purchase through a text message. They are then billed from the mobile service provider without being revealed to the porn company that they are actually children. Although this practice has been known for several years, having been revealed by journalists from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, very little has been done to stop the practice, obviously because it is a lucrative business for both the porn providers and the mobile phone service providers. What's interesting is that the communication medium for the display of pornographic content, the mobile phone, at the same time serves as the medium of payment for and access to such content, the same technology but two different 'purposes'. And it seems quite certain that pornography stimulated the introduction of mobile phone services as a form of payment before it was used in other areas. The problem remaining that it has become an open door for young people who truly are the masters of a technology that to them has few limits (although we, the parents, may raise an eye brow if we are paying the bills!).

Regards,

Peter

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Message subject: *Oral sex*

Perhaps at this point in the e-seminar on Bart Barendregt's paper on mobile phones and porn in Indonesia, and while Bart gathers his thoughts on the first set of comments, we could start a second round of comments and questions that stretches into the weekend.

Following from Suryadi's point about the historical antecedents of these mobile genres and Birgit's methodology query, I was wondering about the epidemiology (Sperber 1996) of mobile phone genres such as porn, urban legends, rumours, etc, in an Indonesian context. How can these inherently unstable 'small genres' (Spitulnik 1996) be systematically studied within an ethnographic region (if I can bring in an old Leiden concern with cultural geography!)? What do they tell us about cultural continuities and discontinuities across postcolonial borders in the Malay-speaking world (Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Southern Thailand)?

I think it would be interesting, but logistically very difficult perhaps, to document what kinds of mobile materials make it across borders and which stay within national borders. Errington (1979) writes about 'traditional' Malay written stories (hikayat) whose assumptions and linguistic conventions are radically different from those in European languages, e.g. in Malay hikayat there are no temporal markers, so stories could be simultaneous, or the third episode may have taken place before the second. These and other stories circulated widely, becoming localised as they did, across the Indonesian Archipelago in the past. I suspect this may not apply to much of contemporary Indonesian mobile discourse, but in any case, what are the culture-specific generic antecedents, if any, of these small mobile genres? And how is their orality transformed and maintained by the conjunction of, say, mobile texts, images and voice, in the new porn genres?

Finally, is your study part of a wider Leiden project with other anthropologists, plus linguists, literary scholars, etc, into language and media in Indonesia? I seem to recall this programme was launched 4 or 5 years ago, and I'd be very interested to hear more about it.

Many thanks

John

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Bart Barendregt (Leiden University)

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Message subject: *Second round of mobile discussion / thanks for all your useful comments*

Dear John, Dear List

Thanks for all your useful, comments, questions and suggestions. I hope to take up some of these things while working on a final version of this paper, which hopefully will be a chapter of a future book on the whole subject. Here, let me briefly dwell on some of the issues raised by you all (and I apologize for not answering all of them.

Maybe, first of all a more general comment on methodology, as Birgit rightfully wonders how some of the data were collected and how more generally to do research on mobiles.

Starting with the second aspect I have to admit that due to mobile society studies' being a fairly recent field of inquiry, little discussion has yet emerged on how to do research on and with mobiles. Of course some of the possibilities (and ethical implications) came to the fore in a previous discussion between Birgit and Christine Hine. While talking about Internet ethnography some of the remarks here might be equally valid for doing research on other newer media. Another important point, which Danny and Heather also have made in their book, is that we should realize that mobile phones just another form of communication. And that we shouldn't be focusing too much on everything that is new about the new media, but also look at continuities and complementarities with older media and the social configurations they are part of. Of course the challenging thing of the mobile is its portability, it being a miniaturized technique (see also Michael Bull's work on the walkman and I-Pod) but also its enormous potential for personalization (or as some have said the shift away from old broadcast media to new prosumer media), which might bring an enormous challenge for us as scholars.

Another things, and here I might slightly disagree with Heather and Danny's otherwise superb book, is that a mobile phone in the years to come will surely evolve in many other things we can not yet imagine; a tool for micromanagement/an agenda, a multimedia player or digital camera, even Internet function. Phone and communication functions will be only one among many. We might therefore end up using methodologies traditionally being reserved for media analysis, gaming or, for that sake, time-keeping. As Gerard Goggin (2006) recently pointed out, we are desperately in need of alternative histories of the phone separating business strategies/visions, with the ways the device is actually being used on the ground by real life people.

My own focus is hence on the often unpredictable ways ordinary Indonesians use their phones, hence its partly focused as Heather points out on 'the underbelly' of Information society (black and second hand markets, phreakers, the phone as social make-up, etc), but also phenomena like mobile porn, which nobody could have predicted in the first place, at least not for Indonesian society. My own research has

mainly been focusing on central Java, especially the Yogyakarta region, as annually I am spending 3 months there supervising our anthropology students there doing fieldwork. This gives me the opportunity to work on own research by doing a lot of interviews at campuses as most students have a cell phone as compared to other people (although also some Javanese pedicab drivers use one know regularly to keep in touch with potential passengers) The urban focus might obviously color some of my data and a next step would be to do more interviews among people who do not own a cell phone yet or who are not yet within reach of a network (also outside of Java). I collect my data mainly by interviews, and by asking if I can roam through people's text messages, if they can show me some of the information stored on their phones, but also by looking at the interaction with older media, primarily the downloads for cell phones at internet cafes (being stored at a shared public disk, I do not know if this I very ethical to look at, though).

Of course 'the social life of information' IS a problem here that is more difficult to tackle. I do not yet have ways of tracing for example the circulation of mobile porn, where its starts, or where it ends, I can only ask how long such information is stored and why in the first place it is stored on a phone. Answering Danny's question on if the exchange of mobile porn is part of much wider networks of sociality and exchange I can only say that at least among school kids and students there is an eagerness to show each other the latest clips (porn an non-porn) or (shocking) pictures, partly as a means to be hip, but also as a means to socialize. In this case some of it might complement with older practice popular among Indonesian youth such as, for example, collecting lyrics of pop songs and sharing them with each other.

With regards to the circulation of mobile porn, I do pay attention to real practices, but as Danny rightly points out as well, this paper's focus is representation of and the discourse on mobile phone technology. With other words, the hopes, fears and moral anxieties it comes with. Hence I have looked at clippings in Indonesian language newspapers, news reels, but also cell phone magazines (both glossies and inexpensive tabloid versions) of which there are quite some in present day Indonesian society. I have also complemented this information by looking at mailing lists devoted to the topic, especially so called phreakers (cell phone hacker) sites where mobile porn is often up and downloaded.

Some of the contributors furthermore raised very useful questions: What are the causes of this kind of exhibitionism as Danny rightfully wonders? It might be partly the celebrities who are getting away with it and therefore a normalization of porn, even giving it some glamour. In the case of SE Asia one might also look at some local developments.

I think Danny's comments on superficiality are worthwhile looking into, and it is something I will do next in treating my Indonesian materials. I think Suryadi's point about the historical antecedents of the fear for the mobile phone are very important, again also for getting away of the newness of newer media. Besides the references Suryadi mentions (thanks mas!) it might be nice to refer to the work of Rudolf Mrázek (2002) who explains how the introduction of technologies had the capacity to defamiliarize and transform the routine into the extraordinary. John Pemberton (2002)

gives some good examples of this illustrating how the sudden appearance of steam technology in Java was interpreted in a religious way. Javanese peasants not only worshipped but also feared these first steam engines and made offerings to their machine's supposed spirits. THE reference on new media and the supernatural is probably Jeffrey Scone's 2000 book on electronic elsewheres. Also Raul Pertierra and I have a more general argument on this fear for new technology, in this case the mobile, in a just finished paper that soon will be published in a book edited by James Katz. We talk there about Indonesians and Philippine's text messages sometimes involving communication with the dead or other supernatural beings. It is not surprising since these multiple realities happily coexist in many Asian societies, we argue, including technologically advanced ones. The mobile somehow seems to have become a representation not only of modernity but also the uncertainties it brings along. Mobile phones present us with a not-yet crystallized technology that needs to be updated every two or three years, with consumers often hardly aware which generation of mobile technology they are using. The mobile phone ironically enough therefore seems to function as an anchor to a society that is constantly changing and increasingly mobile in character. Its portability roots a mobile identity (Barendregt and Pertierra 2007).

John's remark on cultural continuities and discontinuities across postcolonial borders is a very interesting one, which at present I can not relate to the mobile porn clips mentioned in my paper. As Suryadi, however, tells us the phone is (fortunately) also used for whole other things and especially things such as the cellular Al Quran, a streaming service provided by the firm of famous poster priest AA Gymn as well as a huge business in Mobile Muslim ring tones. Exactly such expressions seem to be more easily shared among borders as it coincides with the rise of other new Muslim media, and most notably a powerful Muslim middle class, which increasingly dominates the media.

Some of the small portable media that make it across borders at the moment are cassettes of accapella boys' band music but how similar processes are taking place for mobile phone contents is a very interesting question which I had not thought of yet, but which, with your permission John, I definitely will pay attention to in the near future.

In this sense the whole anxiety of participating in a modernity which is increasingly is defined in terms of mobility (the phone but also the social mobility of the new urban Muslim in this case) brings us back to the issue of Islam and nationalism, and most notably techno nationalism. Over the last years I have become intrigued by the rise of new projects undertaken by 'Islamic' nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia, but also a newly emerging transnational Muslim Malay youth culture which has been extremely successful in addressing questions of what it is to be a modern Muslim in Southeast Asia. I did a piece on that in the recently published Medi@Asia book by Holden and Scrase in which I among others talk about Malaysia's answer to Silicon Valley as represented by the Futuristic Muslim architecture in CyberJaya, (on which John can tell us much more). But also, the Islamic science fiction films Syukur 21; a movie which comes with the Muslim equivalent of former premier Mahatir's vision of Malaysia in 2020. Here a bright future is offered to Muslim Southeast Asia, a future

that flirts with the symbols of hyper-modernity usually referred to in science fiction, but also a culture that flirts with everyday symbols of modernity: hand held computers, cellular phones, and long distance learning. In many different ways the mobile might thus lend itself for a discourse on modernity, both (and inspired by the Asian Values debate) in a 'Western sense' with all the perversities that are supposedly part of it, such as pornography) but also as a powerful discourse on a Islamic inspired counter modernity as we see here. Such a discussion obviously deserves much more elaborate attention, so I stop it at here.

Finally, thanks to Peter for sharing your example from the 'mother' country of pornography with us (I always thought the Netherlands had that dubious reputation!, so at least I am relieved in that aspect)

A nice weekend to you all,

Bart

Some of the references mentioned:

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Pemberton, John, 2003, 'The Specter of Coincidence', In: Audrey Kahin and James T. Siegel (eds), *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O'Gorman Anderson*, pp 75-90. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program

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Message subject: *e-seminar ends Tuesday night*

Many thanks to Bart for taking weekend time off to respond to those postings, and a reminder to all that there's still plenty of time left till this Tuesday 5 Dec at 9 pm UK time for further brief comments or queries to our ongoing e-seminar on mobile phones in Indonesia.

Best

John

Daniel Taghioff (SOAS)

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Message subject: *Changing moralities*

Firstly, I'd like to echo that this is a very interesting paper, and that the subject matter is fascinating and timely.

I'd like to raise an area of concern though. There is clearly some level of discomfort or embarrassment associated, within this discussion, with the tension between a "parental" view and depictions of full on sex, (the discussion of whether Denmark or the Netherlands is the 'mother' country, and thus a relief from such discomfort, illustrates this).

But we should not take up a parental view too quickly. I am reminded of some of Foucault's comments in a history of sexuality. There are clearly disturbing aspects to youth and porn, but there is also another angle to consider.

Foucault pointed out that the freeing up and opening up of [sexual] discourses implied new forms of regulation as practice became subject to greater public/inter-peer scrutiny.

It is easy to fall into the 'swinging' sixties liberalised consumer society type discourses, but it is important to remember that in the west these social changes also accompanied the emergence of new moralities and disciplines, as some things became OK, other taboos emerged (like picking on homo-sexuals and so on).

Now to avoid transposing 1) our own discomfort and embarrassment (to whatever extent it exists) about porn, and 2) our own discourse on "sexual liberation" and its dangers, it might be worth looking at the new norms that are emerging amongst the youth that are engaging amongst these practices. Are there some things that are decidedly not "OK" for them, what kinds of normative and disciplinary discussions do they have, and how is this related to their expressions of sexuality.

That way perhaps we might credit them with agency and the ability to self-regulate, as well as focussing on the external moral outrage that might wish to regulate them.

I think that might be something to complement this fascinating paper.

Daniel

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Message subject: *moral discourses and access*

Hello to all the members of the list, and thanks to Bart for the very interesting paper.

I agree with Daniel's suggestion to look at the way those who circulate porn material through mobile phones set their own rules and create a moral discourse that regulate their actions. I would find a more detailed description of the categories they use themselves as a very interesting element to contrast to the public discourse. More in particular: what are their reactions to the prosecution of pornography (or any practice identified by the term) on mobile phones by the authority? How do these people think morally of what they do? Are they partly ashamed of what they do and, on the other hand, what exactly are the discourses of liberation they bring forward and where do they come from (as for example the 'Fragrant literature')?

I was really amazed by the fact you were able to interview students on an issue that seems so sensitive and controversial at present in Indonesia. I was just thinking that, for example, school kids might be doing the same things in the place in which I was carrying out my fieldwork in Malaysia and that maybe, just because the media might have decided to silence the issue, I might have been totally unaware of the practice. Could you tell us more about how you were able to get people to talk with you about the matter? Sorry for asking so many questions near the end of the time allocated for the seminar, but I have been waiting for your answers to the first round of questions and after that I still wanted to know more about your really interesting paper.

Best,

Fausto Barlocco

PhD candidate

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Gavin Rees (Bournemouth University)

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Message subject: *e-seminar: track-ability and Western backwardness?*

I am a new person on the list. I am going to introduce myself more fully in a separate posting, but in short: I am doing research on how journalists in the UK handle emotionally difficult material, trauma, violence etc.

It has been fascinating to follow the discussion so far. I hoped to make more detailed comments, but now I find myself up against the closing deadline without access to the right bibliographies. The following, I am afraid, is composed more of personal observations than citations from well-conducted ethnographic research.

As important as the similarities between Asian and Western discourses on phone use are, I am struck by the discontinuities Bart's paper suggests. Some UK discourses about phone use hinge more on the phone as a possible instrument of control, rather than one of freedom.

Compared to the sprawl of the Indonesian archipelago, the UK is a small collection of Islands in a fixed territory. Benedict Anderson talked about how maps invited Indonesian politicians to fantasise that the solid blobs of colour referred to stable national entities. The projection was stronger than the reality. Here the converse might be true. Arguably people tend to underestimate the power of the UK State, when in fact its power saturates the land right up to the borders. (The blob on the map is solid pink.)

The "War on Terror" has put discussions about the extent of state power back into the public sphere. In newspaper reports, it is the mobile phone that is often the object responsible for the downfall of many "terrorist suspects" and criminals. It is track-able, a point at which the state can reach into your pocket or purse. In fact, all text messages and emails are intercepted by GCHQ and filtered for suspicious terminology. That is something that only journalists and security people tend to know about in detail, but even the most disconnected of newspaper readers will be aware that levels of CCTV surveillance have increased over the last few years. Popular TV shows focus on police helicopter crews and CCTV handlers. Urban areas in the UK are said to have the highest densities of cameras in the world. (The speed with which the police have identified a list of people they wish to interview in the Litvinenko case may have surprised a few security "experts" in Russia.)

Perhaps one dominant stress in the UK, then, is on "track-ability" rather than "mobility" in Bart's specific sense of the word. When people talk about freedom or "mobility" with reference to the mobile, they are referring more to freedom from the office: one can work at a cafe. What they are not talking about is the possibility that mobile phones create new possibilities for connection. Of course, parents do have concerns about what their children are doing with new technology. But all the focus is on the internet, not the mobile, as the potentially transgressive and threatening medium. Research by Ofcom, the UK telecommunications regulator suggests that most adults have limited knowledge about how to use their own phones, and it appears (as yet) no sense of what kids could be doing with theirs. (See http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/medialit_audit/medialit_audit.pdf. It also has useful statistical data on how important mobile phones are to 16-24 year olds.) There have been stories in the tabloid press here about "happy slapping", kids filming other kids attacking strangers, but as far as I am aware

very little about the exchange of sexual imagery. This could be because it doesn't go on much, or it could be because parents haven't caught up with it yet. Perhaps too it does not play very easily into our constructions of childhood. The sexual aggressor in tabloid imagery is supposed to be the lone adult male. It is OK for kids to be portrayed as violent tearaways, but not as sexually active ones. We can expect a lot of tabloid nashings and wailings when they catch onto the phenomenon.

This brings up another potential inversion: perhaps the West is usually behind the East when it comes to the adoption of consumer electronic technology. When Japanese school kids were spending vast amounts of money texting their friends in the mid 1990s, pundits in Europe were saying they doubted that it would ever take off here. They said the same thing about mobile phones that could send photos.

Japan would be an interesting comparative example. Bart's description of new Indonesian manifestations of sexual modernity are phenomena that have already been extensively written about in relationship to Japan. In connection to Heather's point it is good place to look for cross-border transmission.

Some commentators might want to argue for Japan's radical alterity and exclude it from the category Asian altogether, but its inclusion would play havoc with the idea of "Asian values" as a stable terrain. Japanese TV family dramas tend to be popular throughout Asia. The stress on Confucian values, respect for the family, indulgence towards raising children, concern for tradition, belief in animist presences (i.e. ghosts – as in the mobile phone scares) do, I am told, play well with audiences in South Korea and other Asian countries too. On the other hand, Tokyo and Osaka, not West Hollywood, were the centres which first gave rise to a multi-million dollar gonzo-porn business. Although, I don't have any detailed knowledge about it, I suspect that much of that material would have found its way into Indonesia on vhs, before the prevalence of the internet as the conduit for pornography.

At the height of the bubble economy at the end of the 1980s Western journalists caught onto this and a number of articles and books came out purporting to be shocked at the pornographic consumption patterns of middle-aged Japanese men. (Although one might add that they also tapped rather effectively into the desires of the journalists who wrote them.) In the early 1990s the Western media picked up on enjo kosai (compensated dating). Schoolgirls were meet men through "phone clubs", with whom they would exchange varying levels of sexual activity for money and consumer goods. (Louis Vuitton handbags were described as totemic items in the Japanese Media.) So what's originally Asian then – the stereotype of a physically innocent culture, unburdened by Judaeo-Christian guilt (cf. Bali?), or the embarrassment and fury of families who have discovered that their daughters have been selling themselves for luxury handbags?

Many contemporary films from all the way across East Asia (China, South Korea, Singapore and Japan etc.) of the type that win prizes at international film festivals portray Asian youth as experimenting with vivid forms of hyper-sexuality. And often the mobile phone is the tool that facilitates such transgressions. To follow up on Daniel's point that sex is sex and it is also an idiom: in the Japanese example, sexual

content in films has been connected to radical politics and seen as a way of challenging the control of the state. But to what extent are these films representing realities, or pandering to art-house tastes? (If anybody is interested, I could find references.)

Heather asked about the role of women in these phenomena, and Daniel raised the question of prosumers. It would be interested to know the patterns of involvement in viral videos. Are people (subjects and makers) participating on a one-off basis, or are they envisaging continued participation and even careers? Perhaps connected to websites as points of sale.

Bart's and others observations about the collision between the debates on political Islam and the place of pornography are fascinating. I urge Bart to write more on this. It could help to unscramble a lot of sloppy thinking about the social contexts Islamists operate in.

Best wishes,

Gavin

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Message subject: *e-seminar closed; next e-seminar (Larssen)*

Well, on that final note from Gavin Rees, I'd like to close our e-seminar on mobile media practices in Indonesia by thanking Bart Barendregt for discussing his fascinating research with us, Heather Horst for her discussant's comments, and all other participants. As usual a PDF transcript of the session will be up on our website shortly, courtesy of Aga and Philipp.

Our next e-seminar will run from 23-30 Jan 2007. The presenter will be Urban Larssen who is about to complete an anthropology PhD at Stockholm University on Romanian journalists, a project supervised by Ulf Hannerz.

In the meantime, feel free to use the mailing list for your announcements, calls for papers, intros, discussions, etc.

Finally, our online bibliography is in need of updating and expanding; please spare 10-20 min. if you can to email us new contributions!

Many thanks

John