

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

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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 (pornoaski). 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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