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Contesting the Female Body, Modernity and Globalization

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ABSTRACT

This article takes a look back in the 2006 when the Indonesian House of Representatives proposes a bill against pornography and porn action. It further examines the contested position of female body in Indonesia in the light of globalization. The article particularly argues that female body has become a symbolic contested site of globalization and modernity. In the era of the very rapid changes it seemed Indonesian government was struck by moral panic due to modernization and globalization which obviously have brought about changes in the fabrication of the society. They are worried of the decreasing belief of the society in the tradition as argued to be manifested in the changing of bodily presentation. However, such perception is gendered as they emphasize on the presentation of female body.

Key words: gender, body, contesting site, globalization, Indonesia

As indicated by the title, this article is to question in what ways the female body is becoming a symbolic site of contests about globalization and modernity. In the attempt to answer the question, the article is to take a country specific case in which the Indonesian House of Representatives members proposed a draft of a bill against pornography and porn action early in 2006.

The article is structured as follows. First, a brief historical background of the bill will be presented to give a preview on why the bill has been considered as essential by the government and the DPR and how the reason is gendered. Furthermore, the background will be followed by a closer examination on the bill and the debate surrounding it. It is important to see what the bill is actually up against in order to finally come to the argument that it is regulating not only the body in the pornography business, but also the body in the day to day life. I argue that such regulation is aiming at the unified interpretation and presentation of the body. Further, the paper will proceed with the discussion on modernity and globalization. How they are defined? And how they are related? More specifically, how the South East Asian countries, including Indonesia, perceive modernity and globalization. The last part is the discussion on the body in relation to modernity and globalization in Indonesian context.

Finally, the article will conclude with the notion that the Indonesian government is struck by moral panic as they witness modernization and globalization bring about changes in the fabrication of the society. They are worried of the decreasing belief of the society in the tradition as argued to be manifested in the changing of bodily presentation. However, such perception is gendered as they emphasize on the presentation of female body.

The Anti Pornography and Porn Action Bill and its Controversies

Due to the hardly found scholarly articles discussing the drafting of the bill, this paper relies much on the news reports from news paper and magazines, except for the bill itself. However, reports are sorted on the basis of the credibility of the news sources.

Several reports refer to the freedom of press gained post Soeharto downfall as the trigger of the proposition of the bill. Such theory has been popular since the first time the draft was introduced in 2004. Junaidi (2004), for example, in his report suggests that the downfall of the authoritarian regime led by Soeharto in 1998 has given a way to freedom and changes. In one way, the freedom is translated as manifested in the proliferation of production and circulation of mass media. To some extent, it means the press has won their liberty and independence in reporting without being haunted by the specter of authority-imposed ban, just like what has been

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experienced by several news providers such as De Tik magazine during the reign of Soeharto. However, there is concern that this freedom of press has also given a way to publications which gained profits from exploiting women’s sexuality. Furthermore, another manifestation of the freedom is the easy access to the pornographic materials, such as videos, books and tabloids which have been openly traded in public.

Jason Tedjasukmana (2006) also echoes the theory by suggesting that in the post Soeharto era, Indonesia has become a more open society, with a more liberated press but on the other side of it, the new liberalism has brought with it cheap sex videos, magazines and tabloids. Moreover, saucy programs being aired on the national television. These phenomena, as reported by Tedjasukmana, have invited serious reaction from some groups of Indonesians who are worried of the current moral direction of the country. Reportedly, Juniwati Maschun Sofwan, the leader of the Committee to Eradicate Pornography, an independent lobbying group, states, "The availability of pornography has reached alarming levels … It has become a social disease." (quoted in Tedjasukmana 2006).

More serious reaction came with the plan of official launching of Playboy Indonesia magazine on 07 April 2006. The magazine dedicated to adult male readers sparked massive resistance despite the promise given by the publisher that the Indonesian version of Playboy would not feature naked women. The resistance was from several aspects of the society, especially from the hard line Muslim. The resistance was manifested in massive protests, in which protesters portrayed the magazine as the manifestation of the attack launched by the decadent West against Islam. The notorious Islamic vigilante organization, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) even raided the vendors selling the magazines in some parts of Indonesia (Mark Forbes Herald Correspondent in Jakarta 2006) and they even attacked the Playboy Indonesia headquarter in South Jakarta in April 2006 (Zao 2006). So great the resistance was that the magazine headquarter had to be relocated to Bali, where it was given a place to operate by I Gusti Ngurah Harta, who strongly opposed the idea of having the anti pornography and porn action bill (Zao 2006).

The rise of Inul Daratista to fame as a singer is also considered triggering the birth of the anti pornography and porn action bill. She is often related to the porn action due to her style of dancing, known as the drilling dance. A couple of reports indicated that the House of Representatives have called experts, artists and many others to present their insights on the bill, especially on what constitutes pornography and porn action. One of the people summoned was Rhoma Irama, a well known figure in Indonesian music industry, who openly criticized Inul by saying that her dancing style was overtly erotic; thus, Rhoma Irama urged the bill soon to be passed for the sake of morality (Junaidi 2004 The Jakarta Post 11 February 2006).

Early in 2006, the draft was formally introduced to be deliberated by the House of Representatives; the deliberation was to be conducted by the special committee, led by Balkan Kapale of the Democratic Party. He expected that the bill would be ratified and passed in June 2006 (Rachmadi 2006). Fronted by the question why the bill was made one of the top priorities in the DPR work in 2006, Syafriansyah, a member of DPR from the Muslim United Development Party (PPP) said that at the moment the country’s morality was in decline; the bill was to be passed to prevent the nation from going to hell collectively (Anwar 2006).

As the bill itself, it is composed of two big divisions, one regulating the production and circulation of pornographic materials and the other regulating the actions considered inciting sensuality. There are 93 articles divided into 11 chapters. While many agree that pornography has no place in Indonesia, they are concerned with the unclear definitions of key terms employed in the bill, which might lead to different interpretation and eventually cause havoc in the enforcement of the law, and the repressive nature of the bill (The Jakarta Post 06 February 2006). Furthermore, this paper is also concerned with several controversial articles related to porn action such as the following: (1) Article 25 criminalizes exposing body parts deemed to be sensual or instructing others to do so in public; however, there is clear definition which parts they are and there is no clear definition of the term public. While the article is deemed to be self explanatory in the explanation part of the bill, there is an explanation for article 4 related to the sensual body parts; they include genitals, thighs, hips, buttocks, navel and women's breasts, either partly or wholly exposed. The actions, according to article 79, can be punished for at least 2 years of imprisonment to 10 years at the most and/or fined for IDR 200 million to 1 billion; (2) Article 27 criminalizes lip kissing in public or instructing others to do so. There is no exception to legitimate couples or anything of the sort. The actions, according to article 81, are punishable for...
1 to 5 years of imprisonment and/or IDR 100 to 500 million of fine; (3) Article 28 criminalizes erotic dance in public or instructing others to do so. On the explanation part of the bill, it is defined that erotic dance is rhythmic body movements, which does not comply with the concept of choreography and emphasize on the sensuality of the body so that those movements can be suspected as arousing the libido. Such actions, according to article 82, are punishable for 18 months to 7 years of imprisonment and/or IDR 150 to 750 million of fine.

In the draft of explanation of the bill, especially in the first section which comprises the reason of the passing of the bill, it is explicitly stated that religiosity and the eastern cultural values are the main logic. Furthermore, the explanation draft also gives an emphasis on the modernity and globalization. It is stated:

"In the era of modern life and amid global distribution of information these days, the threat against the (traditional) fabrication of Indonesian society is becoming more serious. The development of information and communication technology has eased the production, distribution and consumption of pornography materials. Moreover, modern lifestyle has caused the shift of (traditional) values, which is signified by the increase of society's permissiveness against the porn actions. Such tendency (of moral decline) has caused the weariness among the religious community …" (Republic of Indonesia, Draft of Explanation for the Anti Pornography and Porn Action Bill 2006, section 1).

From the above, it can be argued that the bill clearly links modernity, globalization and the body, especially the presentation of the body. While it does not clearly distinguish the notions of modernity and globalization, it argues that the two bring unwanted impacts, such as the erosion of traditional values as manifested in the proliferation of pornography and porn action, which have worried the religious group.

Ghani (2006) reports the bill received support from mainly from the Muslim groups, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two biggest Muslim organizations in Indonesia. The support was indicated in their participation and the attendance of their leaders in the support rally in May 2006. Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, the country’s highest Islamic authority) also showed their stand in the march. About 100,000 people turned up to the streets of Jakarta to show their support for the bill.

Besides support, there were also groups opposing the bill. As reported on The Jakarta Post (12 May, 2006), the artists and the cultural groups also resisted the bill; they even suggested that the DPR should drop the bill as it will lead to the canning of the hard-won freedom of expression. Furthermore, they also argued that the bill would place the country’s diverse cultural tradition at imminent risk. To voice their concern, they held a rally involving around 500 activists, wearing colorful traditional costumes, on 11 May 2006.

The tourism groups, such as those from Bali, had their vision that if the bill were to be passed, its impacts on the tourism industry would be much bigger than the previous two Bali bombings (Anwar, 2006). It would scare the tourists from sunbathing on the beaches of Bali as the bill highly likely would criminalize exposing body parts considered sensual, which would very much be subjected to each and every law enforcers’ interpretation. Such uncertainty in law enforcement would make the number of visitors to Bali more dwindling.

As for the women's group, they argue that the bill clearly targets women rather than men. As reported in The Jakarta Post (06 February, 2006), Vivi Widyawati Mahardika of the Mahardika Women's Working Group argues that the repressive nature of the bill imposes not only limitation but also criminalization of women's sexuality and most of all, the bill tends to place women in the position of perpetrators regardless the many facts where they are being victimized in the process.

As a concluding remark for this section, the drafting of the bill has been revolving around the issue of the body presentation in the media, such as magazine, and the so claimed artistic performance, such as dance. From the discussion, it can also be inferred that the reasons around the issuing of the bill is gendered. It is the presentation of women's bodies which has been considered defying the values, especially the religious ones, so far adhered by the country and they are considered as the results of the Westernization process embedded in the globalization and modernity. To preserve the traditional culture, the DPR sees the need to regulate the body. However, the attempt to regulate the body is argued as directing towards a unified interpretation and presentation of the body.

Now it leaves the question how modernity and globalization is related to Westernization, and most of all to the shifting of values, from the traditional to
the so called "modern". The following section will elaborate this issue in more details.

Modernization, Globalization and Cultural Change

This particular section is to find the relation between modernity and globalization as well as to find out how these concepts are perceived in the Southeast Asian region, especially Indonesia. To begin this discussion, it is necessary to define the two terms.

According to Alvin Y So (1990: 34), modernization is to some extent a process of Europeanization or Americanization. It is a process in which nations develops an attitude of complacency towards Western Europe and the United States of America, known as the West, because they are perceived as having superiority in economic prosperity and democratic stability. Since the West is considered the most advanced nations in the world, other nations attempt to follow their path in industrialization and democracy with the rationale that they can be economically prosperous and politically stable just like the West.

In terms of how modernity affects the fabrication of society, Inglehart and Baker (2000) argue that modernity which is featured by economic development through the process of industrialization highly likely drives cultural change.

"Industrialization leads to occupational specialization, rising educational levels, and eventually brings unforeseen changes – changing gender roles, attitudes toward authority and sexual norms; … and less easily led publics. Determined elites in control of the state and the military can resist these changes, but in the long run, it becomes increasingly costly to do so and the probability of change rises." (p. 21)

The changes occur as the non Western nations which look up to the economic prosperity and political stability of the West attempt to emulate the modernization path undertaken by the West. In a sense, there is an attempt to leave the stage of tradition and to aim at modernity, which is ultimately translated as being westernized.

Does the departure from tradition to the modern Western lifestyle apply in Southeast Asia, which includes Indonesia? Barbara W Andaya (1997), in studying the modernization process taking place in the Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, agrees with notion of modernity implies Western influence and the weakening of beliefs and practices associated with traditional culture, and such notion is evident in the process of modernity taking place in the region. However, she argues that the Southeast Asian societies operate on the assumption 'what comes from the outside can be adapted to their own environment.' (p. 406) In other words, the Southeast Asian societies still see the currency of tradition and they do not think that adopting the Western culture wholesale is the best path to take towards modernization.

Now, let us move to the discussion of globalization. There is no agreement on the definition of globalization. However, according to Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004), despite the controversies, there seems to be growing consensus on the features of globalization. Pieterse argues that the first commonly understood feature of globalization is that it is being shaped by technological changes, especially the one related to the information and communication. The changes in this field has formed a very significant part of globalization infrastructure in terms of finance, capital mobility and export-oriented business activity, transnational communication, migration, travel, and civil society interactions.

Pieterse's argument is in line with McLuhan's thesis (quoted in Watson 2004: 146–147) on the collapse of time and space and the formation of global village. He argues that the invention of and popularization of electronic media, especially television, has made the human society pass a critical threshold. The ability to accelerate global communication has shrunk time and space, so that distant events or trends can easily be brought to the immediate attention of people on the other side of the globe. Such instant communication, further predicted by McLuhan, would lead to the formation of a global village, and thus put the parochialism and nationalism to an end.

Furthermore, to the extent how the global distribution of information brings changes to the local culture, Watson (2004: 149) quoted a work of a Chinese anthropologist who recorded that upon the familiarity of the Chinese with the American detective TV series, Hunter, in the early 1990s, there was a change in the attitude of the people of the northern Chinese province towards authority; for instance, there was an ordinary farmer who fiercely protested the police for their inability to produce an arrest warrant to support his arrest over a minor altercation. This indicates the trend in some parts of the world can be globally distributed with the
advanced development of information technology and can have the potential of bringing change to the recipient culture.

Then, how modernity and globalization are related? Borrowing Anthony Giddens's argument (1990: 63–64), it will be argued here that "modernity is inherently globalizing." Since the notion of modernity is exportable, as argued by Andaya (1997), it is then possible to share it with other parts of the world. With the advancement in the communication and information technologies, the sharing of the values of modernity is even more likely to happen.

**Situating the Body in Modernity and Globalization: Indonesian context**

Human body operates in two realms of experience: physical and social; the two realms of experience constantly exchange meanings so that each reinforces the other (Douglas, 2005). For example, the physical experience of the body indicates body heat or cold, it will reinforce the social experience to wear particular clothing. However, the exchange meaning of the two realms cannot totally liberate the body to express itself. In the case of being hot or cold, the social experience of the body indicates what type of clothing is considered socially appropriate to be worn in each occasion. In short, the body can be argued as very limited medium of expression.

Furthermore, Douglas (in Fraser and Greco eds., 2005) also argues that "human body is always treated as an image of society and … there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension." (p.79) Therefore, to discuss bodily interpretation and presentation as independently physical is impossible. The body bears social meaning and is often referred as the mirror of the society. Thus, the way the body is interpreted and presented relies heavily on the social construct operating in a particular society. The sense of appropriateness of presentation of the body can be related to the notion of morality.

Julia Suryakusuma (2004: 217) argues that the female bodies have entered the discourse of modernization and globalization in Indonesia since the reign of the two previous orders, led by Soekarno and Soeharto respectively. During those times, female body presentation in public was 'regulated' through the promotion of kebaya as the national costume for women. Kebaya is a traditional Javanese blouse, which is usually accompanied by tight wrap of kain, worn around the waist to the ankles. Such design of attire makes women's movement constrained, not flexible. However, this kind of presentation of female body has been deemed as morally very appropriate so that it is worth the title of national costume.

Symbolically, Suryakusuma (2004) argues further, the wearing of kebaya and kain signifies gender difference as despite the many variants of traditional costume for male, the Indonesian men's national costume has been the western suits. Here, it can confirm how the Indonesian positions the West. The superiority and modernity of the Western men is emulated in the clothing of Indonesian men, while the women have been directed to the realm of tradition. Further, it can be argued that Indonesian position modernity as masculine domain, while tradition is the feminine domain. Women are seen as the guardian of tradition who will ensure the life of traditional values despite the social changes taking place along with modernity and globalization.

In a sense it implies the notion of balancing modernity and tradition. Male, as in any other patriarchal societies is relegated to the public sphere to directly participate in the course of modernity. It is symbolized by their adherence to the Western value of clothing. While aware that modernity and globalization do not bring only positive advancement, there is the need to balance between modern and tradition. Therefore, women are relegated to the domestic sphere symbolized in the adherence of more traditional values of clothing. However, such perception of the women's nature is arguably based on the bodily capacity of child bearing. Women are assumed to have the natural capacity of caring and nurturing; thus, their main responsibility should be dealing with raising the children and transfer the traditional values to the next generation. In other words, women have been relegated to the responsibility of cushioning the negative impacts of modernity and globalization.

This reminds me of how constantly the New Order regime indoctrinated women to stay in the domestic sphere. The Order launched massive campaign to keep Indonesian women at home. One of the most influential campaigns was the formalization of *Dharma Wanita*, an organization of civil servants' wives. This particular organization was made as the mouthpiece of the government back then to prevent women from 'abandoning the family' and actively being involved in the economic pursuit (Suryakusuma 2004: 132). In 1984, the New Order government began to acknowledge the need of women to participate in public. However, their participation was only recognized in the notion of multiple roles of women (Suryakusuma 2004: 130).
It implies that the domestic sphere must still be made priority before embarking on the decision to participate in the public.

Hence, it can be seen how limited women's movement has been during the Old Order and moreover during the New Order. Therefore, when the liberation movement toppled the authoritarian regime of New Order in 1998 and soon changes took place in the fabrication of society, the long-held patriarchal discourses were in the state of moral panic, a state in which a society is in fear of moral laxity as a result of the threats imposed by a certain thing or individual (Thompson 1998: 1), to find the presentation of female body so totally different from the previous era. The proliferation of pornographic materials and the so called porn actions committed in the broad daylight, such as lip kissing in public, erotic dancing and others of the sort is attributed to the decline of morality.

The DPR has seen that the globalization of information and communication has brought a threat to the traditional values of morality. They assume that the female bare body, presented in the magazines and tabloids proliferating upon the hard won reformation in 1998, is the bad result of globalization. The media are assumed to have influenced the Indonesian women in presenting their bodies in public, which is categorized as morally degrading. Thus, they see the need to formulate regulation to get the women back in the 'right' path by passing the anti pornography and porn action bill.

However, referring to what Inglehart and Baker (2000), modernity also brings unforeseen changes such as the less easily led public. Thus, when the DPR introduced the bill, there have been various reactions from the society. If the DPR persists on passing the bill to be a law, I am afraid that it will take a big toll on the nation.

In conclusion, the body is indeed central to the debate of modernity and globalization in Indonesia. As can be seen in the case of the anti pornography bill, massive reactions of support and resistance have been flourishing in Indonesia. This paper has come to the conclusion that the Indonesian House of Representatives, DPR, sees the female body as the manifestation of morality. The 'bare body' symbolizes the open border of information across the globe; it has the potential to erode the society's belief in tradition. For that reason, the DPR assumes they need to regulate the body representation, especially the female bodies to cushion the negative impacts of modernity and globalization.

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