Natasha Berting   Graduation Thesis   Words: 8348

Making silences on social media

On the new censorship of online spaces,
in Indonesia and elsewhere

Contents

Introduction

As a publisher and a digital native, I have always been intrigued by the way netizenship informs citizenship, and vice versa. Growing up in Indonesia in the 1990s, I saw a positive correlation between the two—where the emergence of network culture seemed to coincide with and contribute to the nation's transition to democracy. Indeed, the first few years of post-authoritarianism Indonesia was marked by a sense of optimism; and a common faith in the Internet as a technology of freedom (Lim, 2017).

For a while, the utopian vision held up. Throughout the early 2000s, the country enjoyed a period of swift diversification and deregulation of its media industries. After decades of military rule, freedom of expression was now within reach for most Indonesians; and thanks to the social Web, so too was the freedom to connect. By 2018, at least 130 million of us were active Internet users, spending an average of 3,5 hours on social media every day (We Are Social, 2018). Today, platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram—and the codes and customs that come with them—have become deeply embedded in many aspects of Indonesian public culture.

However, recent years have seen a wave of religious and political conservatism sweep across the region. Rising tensions between political factions and ethnic groups are now putting renewed pressures on freedom of expression in the country. In the last five years alone, the state has intensified its censorship activities, drawing up new, stringent laws on precarious issues like defamation, blasphemy and pornography (Heryanto, 2018). Online, social media platforms once hailed for their promise of digital democracy, are becoming heated battlegrounds. As a result, the space for alternative ideas, utterances and bodies seems to be shrinking.

It's apparent that deliberate and creative activism is needed to help vulnerable netizens in particular resist the rising pressures of state and self-censorship online. Thus, in an attempt to talk back to these problematics, this thesis aims to address at least two questions. Learning from the specific context of Indonesia, how do old and new forms of censorship manifest themselves in contemporary social media spaces? And, through unpacking how silences are made—and sustained—on these platforms, what responses become available to us as media makers and users?

Part 1
Old Wounds

To understand the current state of censorship in Indonesia, we first have to consider the volatile history of media power in the country. What does freedom of speech mean in this specific, post-colonial context? And crucially, what is the experience of dissent in mainstream media?

These questions are essential, because in Western contexts, the right to free expression is well established as an important tenet of democracy, and of the notion of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). However, the role of media freedom in Indonesian civil society remains unsettled and regularly contested (Steele, 2011). In the last century alone, opponents included the Dutch and Japanese colonial powers which were finally ousted during Indonesian independence in 1945, and the authoritarian regime of President Suharto, who stayed in power from 1966 until 1998 (Ricklefs, 1993). Throughout these critical times in Indonesian history, censorship was actively exercised by the state across both practical and psychological dimensions. To place our discussions on freedom of speech in context, this section will examine some of these mechanisms, and the key political and cultural events that have brought us to where we are today.

Censorship is defined as the act or system of practice suppressing, limiting, or deleting objectionable or any other kind of speech.
(Deibert, 2008, p. 139)

NO OPPOSITION ALLOWED

First, it's important to take a close look at the role of mainstream media in President Suharto's Indonesia. A respected military figure, Suharto became President amidst extreme social upheaval in 1966 and remained unchallenged in office until 1998. In his three decades of uninterrupted rule (an era known as the 'New Order'), he sought to unify the country and was successful in bringing about a period of economic and political stability (Elson, 2002). But the price of success was high, and Suharto's legacy is one marred by violence, corruption and extensive human rights abuses (Shubert, 2008). Nicknamed 'The Smiling General', he was charming but lethal—and actively censored dissent in the Indonesian press. Writing about

that time, journalist Andreas Harsono says: "No opposition was allowed. Disagreement usually ended up in violent crackdowns" (1996, para. 12). Under government orders, editors were known to have blacked out entire pages of newspapers as they went to press (Dhyatmika, 2014). And though not always successful, by treating public criticism as a direct threat to national security, Suharto was able to present any act of retaliation as valid and necessary.

One of the New Order's main weapons in maintaining legitimacy and spreading propaganda was the powerful 'Ministry of Information'. Through this governing body, Suharto was able to closely monitor and restrict both domestic and foreign media (Aspinall, 2010). As a result, while living standards in the country rose, media freedom dwindled. Furthermore, whenever citizens protested, the state would respond by extending its censorship policies (Sen, 2011). In 1984, a law was passed requiring all publishing bodies to possess a press operating license which could be revoked at any time by the Ministry of Information (Aspinall, 2010). Over the next decade, the government used this legal precedent to scare private media owners into submission and to close down dozens of newspapers (Sen, 2011).

Next to editorial control of what was being reported over the news, Suharto also maintained economic control of the domestic entertainment industry. Under his rule, media ownership was dominated by just a few names in his elite political circle (Ida, 2011). Television in particular became an influential tool for controlling public opinion and nation-building, favoured by Suharto for its narrative weight and unparalleled reach (Kitley, 2003). From its first transmission in 1962 until 1989, the state-owned service *TVRI* enjoyed a total monopoly over television broadcasting in Indonesia. Playing into cold-war tensions, subjects like communism—and to some extent, feminism—were censored and made taboo, affecting cultural attitudes for decades to come (Wieringa, 1995).

However, by the 1990s the growing Indonesian middle class was becoming restless with Suharto's autocracy. Buffeted by the winds of globalisation and strained under a looming economic crisis, the government's grip on both politics and social issues was starting to loosen (Philpott, 2000). During this time, Suharto tried to keep control of mainstream media using the same tactics of bureacratic interference and violent intimidation. In

fact, as recently as June 1994, the government shut down prominent news weeklies *TEMPO*, *Detik* and *Editor* after they published critical reports on Suharto's military spending. In the aftermath, journalists and protestors were thrown in jail. Reporters would go on to openly admit that self-censorship had become a professional ritual (Harsono, 1996). It is clear that under Suharto's leadership, entire generations of Indonesians were brought up in a media culture where free speech had become more of a risk than a right.

A SINGULAR IDENTITY

Besides the legal and the political, we must also consider the psychological and sometimes invisible dimensions of censorship. Suharto in particular was adept at shaping collective memory—and to some extent—revising history. The most striking example of this is the media blackout of the 1965 anti-communist purge, in which an estimated 500,000 to 1 million Indonesians were systematically and violently murdered by the state (Kwok, 2017). The massacre occurred at the height of the Cold War, triggered by an attempted coup which was blamed on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In retaliation, Suharto's army proceeded to imprison and kill every PKI party member and suspected leftist in the country (Heryanto, 2018). This state-sponsored witch-hunt resulted in the elimination of every communist faction in Indonesian politics, and the decimation of the country's ethnic Chinese minority (Wieringa, 1995). It is also the event which legitimizes Suharto's ascent to power. Though today, this episode has been declared one of the bloodiest mass killings in modern history, Suharto's tight control of the media means it has been all but erased from the nation's collective memory (Heryanto, 2018).

In this context, it was cinema which became the most popular and influential medium in Suharto's propaganda machine. Throughout the following decades, the state sponsored the production of dozens of films on the 1965 tragedy, including the persuasive *Pengkhianatan G30 September* (Noer, 1984), a 4,5 hour epic which glorifies the actions of the military and vilifies their opponents. For most Indonesians, this film became the primary source of information on the events of 1965. At the same time, history

textbooks were rewritten, edited by the same pro-government historian who penned the original inspiration for the film (Renaldi, 2018a). In this way, media censorship in the time of Suharto was not merely a tool for erasing certain narratives, or even whole segments, of Indonesian society. It also allowed the state to replace these narratives with 'the official version' of events, and proscribe any kind of social criticism as subversive and communist (Wieringa, 1995). As post-colonial scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains:

> *Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance). (1995, p. 26)*

For a country as diverse as Indonesia, these silence-making mechanisms were exceptionally useful in establishing (and maintaining) a singular identity for the nation and its citizens. While this may have helped create political stability at one time, it has also resulted in various deep-seated social issues. To this day, the events of 1965 remain one of the most sensitive in Indonesian history, and the public discourse around it is marked with both wilful amnesia and misinformation (Renaldi, 2018a).

THE CONTROL OF CULTURE

The tendency to forget rather than confront certain parts of our history, adds another dimension to the effectiveness of censorship in Indonesia. Practiced for long enough, repressive policies become quickly assimilated into our culture, which is traditionally hierarchical in the first place (Collins & Bahar, 2000). Following this, it's important to note that when it comes to freedom of expression, state control represents only one facet. Both religion and tradition have always played an important role in the public life of Indonesians, and it's useful to to look at how power and censorship manifests itself in our prescribed social and cultural values.

To begin, we should bear in mind that Indonesia consists of hundreds of distinct native ethnic groups, spread across some 16,000 islands. The largest and most politically dominant group are the Javanese, who make up some 40% of the entire population (Philpott, 2000). Like most South-East Asian cultures, Javanese can be described as a 'shame society', as opposed to a 'guilt society' (Collins & Bahar, 2000). Popularized by cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict, the distinction lies in the way that morality is constructed and used. In guilt societies (often Western), internal structures take precedence: like that of individual authority and conscience. In shame societies, external factors are more important: how does your community see you? In Indonesia this manifests itself in social structures in which pride, politeness, honor and collectivity are central cultural values, shaping everything from conflict-management practices to politics and art (Vanhoe, 2016). Under the New Order, these principles were mobilized to support relations of hierarchy and deference, and to constrain individuality (Collins & Bahar, 2000). Suharto's rhetoric was powerful and simple: if 'being Indonesian' meant a return to traditional values, then to speak out in any kind of insubordination was to mark yourself as *un*-Indonesian.

It's also worth looking at the ways that traditional beliefs and customs affect the expression of gender roles in Indonesia. Censorship, whether formal or informal, is always attached to dynamics of power, and in a patriarchal society, it tends to disproportionately affect women, limiting their public activity, voice and agency (Collins & Bahar, 2000). In a series of letters written at the turn of the twentieth century, R.A. Kartini, considered Indonesia's founding feminist, laments the rigid structures and institutions of Javanese womanhood. As both a member of local aristocracy and a subject of Dutch colonialism, her freedoms were heavily restricted:

> *All our institutions are directly opposed to the progress for which I so long for the sake of our people (…) But we Javanese women must first of all be gentle and submissive; we must be as clay. (Kartini, 1921)*

During her time, practices like polygamy and child marriage were customary in Indonesia, while girls' education was practically nonexistent (Woodward, 2015). While many of these traditions have evolved or disappeared with time, gender roles in Indonesia continue to be impacted by

the whims of politics and religion.

Ultimately, these forces make for a complex media landscape. Throughout the periods of Dutch Imperialism, Independence, and the New Order, censorship was fundamental in shaping both political power and national identity in Indonesia. But after decades of repression, the mid-90s had become a time of mass public discontent. This was the stage on which, in 1998, the combination of a financial crisis and a student-led protest movement finally forced Suharto to resign from office; and the country entered a new era of democracy (Philpott, 2000). At precisely the same time, a digital revolution was moving across the region, bringing with it a stream of new tools and networks, from the E-mail to the World Wide Web. Knowing this, my next question is: How did the expansion of Internet culture affect freedom of speech in post-New Order Indonesia? In the next section, we will look at the ways in which digital media technologies have transformed the public voice in Indonesian society.

Part 2
New Media

First, a concession: the relationship between the Internet and democracy is anything but straightforward. Since its globalization, it has been hailed as a tool for freedom and in equal measures denounced as a machine of control (Chun, 2006). While debate continues, the fact remains that at the end of the twentieth century, the overthrow of several authoritarian governments across Asia coincided exactly with the dramatic spread of this new medium (Sen & Hill, 2011). In Indonesia, the development of Internet technologies in the mid 1990s was a boon to both free speech advocates and political activists. By breaking media monopolies, allowing anonymous communications and providing unfiltered flows of information, the emergence of the Internet in Indonesia was—at least—a catalyst to its political revolution (Lim, 2003). But how exactly was media reform accomplished, and where does it stand today?

FROM THE WARNET TO THE REFORMATION

To understand the Indonesian Internet we have to begin at its smallest but most popular access point: the *warnet*. Short for *warung* Internet (Internet café), these hybrid spaces first appeared in 1995, bringing independent dial-up connections to the wider Indonesian society (Warf, 2013). Often built on top of existing cultural sites, for example as extensions to local food halls or minimarkets, the *warnet* represented more than just an entry point to cyberspace. During the last years of the New Order, they also provided a civic space for dialogue, and for the production and consumption of alternative public discourse (Lim, 2003). This social component made the *warnet* especially effective in supporting grassroots citizen action. Connected as they were to traditional network structures, information was able to spread beyond the computer and throughout the neighborhoods. Suddenly, those with limited power were able to access previously unavailable information, and to challenge the hierarchies of 'old media'.

Following this, it was students and journalists who were the first to truly exploit the Internet in Indonesia, using it to communicate and organize

Fig 1. A warnet in Bandung, 2001.

against the control of the state. Underground mailing lists became a powerful new tool to share controversial information like news related to the Indonesian Communist Party, details of Suharto's wrongdoings, or even reports by journalists who were shut out of the mainstream media (Harsono, 1996). The most popular of these served daily dispatches with links to critical sources, and most crucially, with instructions on how to further disseminate the information via fax and print-outs (Lim, 2003). By 1998, controversial documents (including a list of Suharto's wealth) had spread through the lists like wildfire, circulating from *warnet* to *warnet* and photocopy to photocopy (*ibid.*). As the pressure mounted, it became clear that old tactics of censorship could no longer hold these new networks of information. In May of the same year, Suharto resigned; opening up the path to a fully-fledged Indonesian democracy.

In the years that followed, press freedom practically exploded across Indonesia. A new period of reform had begun, characterized by a process of democratization and decentralization (Sen, 2011). Within months, the newly appointed President Habibie overturned the draconian licensing regimes of the New Order. In 1999, a landmark Press Law was passed, which limited the power of the government and guaranteed the fundamental principles of freedom of expression (Steele, 2018). As Suharto's Ministry of Information was abolished, local and alternative media institutions flourished (Ida, 2011). Journalists and citizens alike remember the end of the 90s as a politically and culturally transformative period. Thanks to these chaotic but progressive years, Indonesian media culture was finally becoming more diverse.

A NEW GENERATION OF NETIZENS

Over the next decade, the Indonesian media landscape continued to change rapidly. Spurred on by the rapid growth of tech industries in Asia, and the rising population of the urban middle class, mobile phone and internet usage skyrocketed in the early 2000s (Heryanto, 2018). As the nation continued to develop its political identity post-Suharto, the digital sphere expanded dramatically, providing new platforms of dialogue between high and popular culture; mainstream and alternative activities. Today, with a user base of over 130 million people, Indonesia has the largest and fastest growing Internet economy in the region (Singh, 2018).

But what are these users doing online? Studies show that like many of its post-colonial neighbours, Indonesia has taken to social media with exceptional fervor (Abbott, 2011). By 2012, 90% of online activities in the country were devoted to browsing social networking sites, with Facebook, Youtube and Instagram as the dominating platforms (Hapsoro, 2018). In fact, Indonesia now has the fourth largest number of Facebook users in the world, and the third largest for Instagram (We Are Social, 2018). In comparison, traditional mass media in the country now seems sluggish and elitist—most of them owned by the same 12 companies, many with direct affiliations with political parties (Tapsell, 2017). Considering this, it's unsurprising that so many Indonesians wasted no time in flocking to the social Web.

Meme culture in particular has become inseparable from Indonesian public discourse, thanks to its polyvocal nature, its accessibility and its knack for subversion. Memes also encapsulate a fundamental aspect of modern digital culture: sharing. In her 2014 book, Limor Shifman defines memes as groups of digital items with common characteristics, which are self-aware and socially constructed, then transformed via the Internet by many users. She goes on to say that, "Although memes spread on a micro basis, their impact is on the macro level: memes shape the mindsets, forms of behaviour and actions of social groups." (p.17) It is this link between self and the collective, the personal and the political, which have made memes such successful channels for humour and social criticism, especially in a culture which is traditionally non-confrontational.

In Indonesia, they have also been extraordinarily effective in bringing politics to the masses (and vice versa). The rise of Internet culture has in itself changed the way we perceive political participation, as something that was once a practical and formal activity (of voting, for example) to something that includes more informal interactions like commenting on news

items or following meme accounts (Hapsoro, 2018). But it was not until the 2014 presidential elections when satirical memes took on a central role in Indonesian politics; becoming a driving force in the intense contestation between the two main candidates, Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo (Wadipalapa, 2015). Later, in 2017, election-memes once again performed as a distinctive means of discourse in the Jakarta gubernatorial election. By bringing with it the codes of pop culture, memes were making Indonesian politics—and crucially, political dissent—more accessible, especially to young people.

All things considered, networked media culture has proven to be a vital political force in Indonesian civil society. Vital, because of its range and velocity, and political, because its position as the vernacular media of the masses will always be contested by the mainstream institutions which precede it. In Indonesia, this tension is made more acute by the latter's historical role as purveyors of propaganda and censorship. But what happens when these mechanisms evolve? While facilitating freedom of expression, social media is now also being used to promote unprecedented forms of surveillance, spread misinformation, and support the rise of online radical groups (Lim, 2017). Knowing that technology in itself is never neutral (Haraway, 1991), we must ask not just what social media *does,* but also how it works, and for whom.

Part 3
Backlash

Today, the optimism of the so-called Reformation era is on the wane. Twenty years after the explosive onset of both democratic and media freedom, Indonesia is facing yet another crossroads in its political and cultural evolution. This time it is the rise of conservatism and political Islam which pose a challenge to our hard-won freedom of expression (Heryanto, 2018). The effects are at times confusing and alarming: while media usage and access to information in the country seems to be growing, the scope and diversity of discourses seem to be shrinking. In fact, according to a recent index on media freedom, Indonesia was the worst-performing country in 2017, falling by 20 places in the global rankings from 48th to 68th position (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). In this section, we will take a closer look at the current state of freedom of speech in Indonesia, paying special attention to the formal and informal silencing mechanisms which play out online.

BLOCKED SITES AND BLURRED BODIES

Precisely because the Internet has been so valuable to freedom of speech in Indonesia, it has in itself become a target for censorship and regulation. This is a phenomenon which extends throughout the region and can be traced back to the period directly following September 11, 2001. Since then, governments like China and Singapore have increased surveillance activities online, erecting firewalls an arresting cyber-dissidents (Gan, Gomez & Johannen, 2004). In Indonesia, it was not until 2008, amid rising religious and ethnic tensions in the country, that selective blocking of some websites began.

In the first reported case, the government placed a temporary ban on all file-sharing video websites, including Youtube, in an attempt to censor the anti-Islamic film, *Fitna*. The government cited fear of unrest within the nation as the reason for the ban, a justification they would come to use regularly over the next decade (OpenNet Initiative, 2011). Later the same year, two controversial legislations were passed: the Electronic Information and

Transaction (ITE) Law, and the Anti-Pornography law, which gave the Indonesian government authority to prosecute against the dissemination of any content they considered "negative" or "culturally inappropriate,"—terms so broad that it includes everything from terrorism to defamation and nudity (Freedom House, 2017). Furthermore, the 2008 bill presents a bafflingly loose definition of what constitutes pornography, "to the point of criminalizing actions such as the kissing of lips in public, the display of sensual parts of the body, or any form of art perceived to be explicit" (OONI, 2017, para. 40). Here we see how easily the censorship of media in Indonesia becomes a censorship on behaviour.
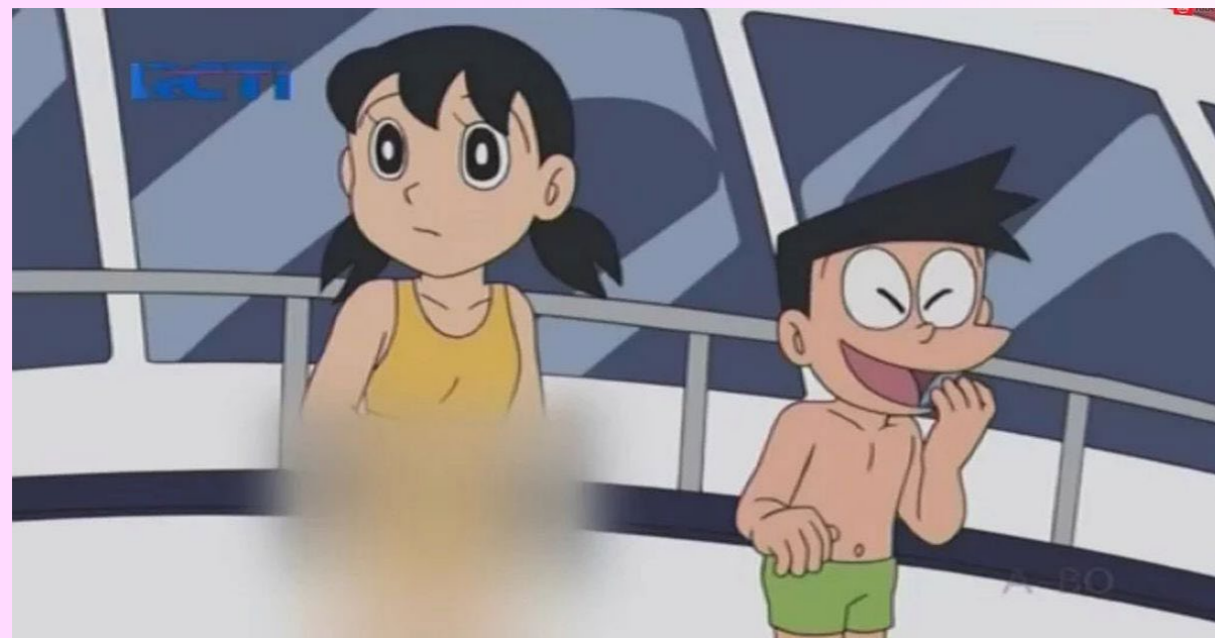

Fig 2. Screen capture of TV censorship on Doraemon cartoon, 2015.

Fig 3. Screen capture of TV censorship on Hindu statue, 2016.

Today, web blocking continues to trouble Indonesian activists and netizens alike. Try to access pop culture touchstones like Vimeo, Tumblr or Reddit and you'll be greeted with a government block-page. In January 2018, a new filtering system was launched which crawls the web and issues alerts whenever "negative" or "pornographic" material is found (Davies, 2018). Casting with such a crude net means that these activities are especially harmful to fragile communities who depend on the Internet as an alternative space for self-actualization. Indeed, this system is routinely utilised in the censorship of gay and lesbian content on the Indonesian Web (Widianto, 2016).

Censorship in the realm of film and television broadcasting has also been on the uptick in the last several years. Using the same rhetoric of protecting 'decency' and 'public dignity', the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission have amped up their surveillance activities, again with disproportionate scrutiny on sexuality and nudity. In 2015, scenes from several cartoons including *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Doraemon* were blurred to hide the bodies of female characters wearing swimsuits (Siddharta, 2017). In 2016, during a segment on a local travel show, broadcasters censored the breasts of a statue depicting a Hindu goddess (Khoiruddin, 2016). While the incident was ridiculed in memes and messageboards across the country, accountability remains scarce. To this day, many governing institutions seem more concerned with controlling the female image, than tackling breaches of journalistic ethics (Siddharta, 2017).

MEDIA AND MORALITY

It's clear that in comparison to the political censorship that characterised the New Order, the current landscape of media control in Indonesia is more focussed on social and cultural regulation. This supports the recent shift in Indonesian civil society towards a more conservative religious identity. Thanks to an amalgam of national and transnational forces, the moderate brand of Islam which Indonesia was once known for (and which I clearly remember from my childhood) is becoming increasingly more extreme. As another presidential election approaches later this year, one question looms larger than any other: Where are we headed as a nation, if we no longer agree on secularism nor democracy?

In this loaded atmosphere, where both sides of the political spectrum are scrambling to gain favour and influence, discourse around what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' media is treated as wider issues of public morality. As media theorist Jennifer Lindsay describes,

The proscriptive role of religion in determining clear rules of behaviour, of determining guidelines of right and wrong, found a match in the proscriptive role of media regulation, which establishes clear guidelines about what can and cannot be shown, to whom, where, when and under what conditions. (Lindsay, 2011, p. 188).

Clearly, when the boundaries between mediated and non-mediated worlds become blurred, the desire to control one cannot be separated from the desire to control the other.

For this reason, to talk about censorship in Indonesia today is to open up an increasingly complex can of worms. It's no longer enough to look at the regulatory actions of the state, or indeed at the destabilizing role of new media technologies. We must also consider less visible kinds of oppression, because it is in this space where self-censorship eventuates. Against the backdrop of intense political contestations, Indonesian citizens are increasingly policing themselves and each other. Fear—of scandal as much as of punishment—becomes the single most potent editorial force in this honor-shame society, influencing everything from what journalists write in the papers to how women dress in the streets (Tapsell, 2012).

This message is reinforced every time a high-profile detractor is jailed. In 2016, the incumbent governor of Jakarta became embroiled in the most heated blasphemy case ever to play out in the public sphere. The politician in question, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as Ahok, is progressive, Chinese-Indonesian and also the city's first Christian governor in nearly fifty years. Though loved by many on the left, his unconventional identity made him a controversial figure. Playing into religious and ethnic intolerances, his opposition mounted a smear campaign on social media. Tensions escalated quickly, coming to a head in December 2016. In reaction to a single remark Ahok had made about the Quran, hundreds of thousands of Indonesians marched in Jakarta, demanding that he be arrested for allegedly insulting Islam (Lim, 2017). Once again, social media played a central role in the events that followed. Using hashtags such as #aksibelaIslam (action to defend Islam), #aksibelaQuran (action to defend Quran), and #penjarakanAhok (jail Ahok), his opposition flooded news feeds in the country. By the time of his trial, facts had been thoroughly obfuscated and stakes had become desperately high. In the face of a divided country, would President Joko Widodo, once an ally to Ahok, be brave enough to step in? Or would Ahok be martyred to placate the angry masses? In a controversial decision, the courts ultimately sided with the mobs and sentenced the governor to two years in jail.

DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

Cases like these point to the immense social and political influence of organized Internet commenters, cybertrolls and paid posters. Using sophisticated networks of sock-puppet accounts and automated bots, political parties around the world are quickly learning to wield social media and its click-driven algorithms as a weapon. In the 2016 US presidential election, Cambridge Analytica turned trolling into a service: aggregating more than 80 million Facebook users' data to analyze, mobilize and then exploit specific audiences on the platform (Watts, 2018). In Russia, "troll armies" with multimillion-dollar budgets are waging opinion wars on behalf of the Kremlin (Sindelar, 2014). At the same time, it has been reported that in China state-sponsored social media operatives are responsible for posting nearly half a billion comments a year (Nichols, 2016). And today, advocates for President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines continue to run some of the most effective disinformation campaigns in history, led by groups of up to 800,000 members (Ressa, 2016).

In Indonesia, low levels of media literacy add more fuel to the fire. A recent study found that at least 62% of Indonesian netizens have received fake news items via hard-to-police chat services like WhatsApp, while 92% of respondents received them on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube (Renaldi, 2018b). The largest known group responsible for spreading this kind of incendiary material in Indonesia call themselves the Muslim Cyber Army (MCA). Members describe MCA as a shadow or-

ganization, with no central office or leader, working in the legal grey area to deliver coordinated political and religious campaigns across popular platforms. One of its most notable activities, is the harassment and intimidation of individuals deemed to have insulted Islam online (Juniarto, 2018). Immediately following the blasphemy proceedings against Ahok in 2016, the MCA started a closed Facebook group which encouraged members to add names to a list of 'People Wanted by the Muslim Community'. The MCA have also been known to manufacture offensive imitation profiles of their critics, and even to mobilise the accounts of dead people (*ibid.*).

Through mass confusion, these operations are able to divide and conquer almost any issue. In Indonesia, religious fundamentalists have become the local equivalent of America's alt-right: just as adept at online disruption and manipulation, waging cyberwarfare right under the noses of most netizens (Lindsey, 2018). And just like the alt-right, their activities affect more than electoral politics, spreading populist and supremacist ideologies throughout all levels of society.

ON CYBERMISOGYNY

Women are particularly vulnerable in this social media culture, not least because the Internet continues to be a male-dominated space. In Silicon Valley offices, in troll farms and even in the scholarly discourse involving online deviance, men outnumber women consistently (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2015). This becomes immediately more problematic, when we realize that online toxicity victimizes women in particular and gendered ways. In 2014, the so-called 'Gamergate' controversy brought this issue into the spotlight, as a number of prominent female gamers endured a vicious campaign of cybermisogyny that included death threats, rape threats and doxxing (the leaking of private information) (Webber, 2017). Meanwhile, a recent study conducted by Amnesty International found that on average, a woman is abused on Twitter every 30 seconds (2018).

In Indonesia, where gender norms are so closely linked to religion, Islamist conservatives increasingly police women's voices, bodies and images. In viral videos and through emphatic memes, self-appointed religious leaders deliver dramatic sermons about the right and wrong ways to perform

Fig 4. Screenshots of Youtube videos: 1) "Types of women that should be eliminated" 2) "Measuring a woman's faith by her Hijab"
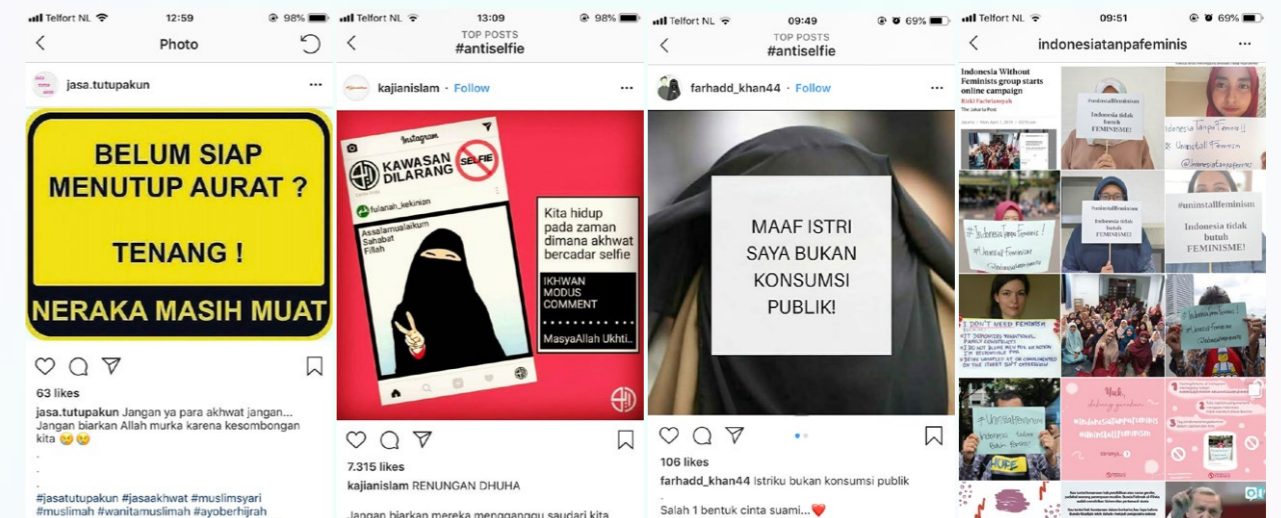

Fig 5. Screenshots of Instagram posts: 1) Post by account-deleting service, "Not ready to cover your aurat? Don't worry! There's still space in hell" 2) and 3) Posts under the hashtag #antiselfie, promoting "antiselfie zones" and encouraging followers to comment and shame selfie-posters, Image saying "Sorry my wife is not for public consumption!" 4) New (2019) hashtag and account: #Indonesiatanpafeminis or "Indonesia without feminists"

womanhood. As part of the rhetoric, girls are repeatedly instructed to cover their *aurat* (parts of the female body considered shameful and private), marry young and even renounce education. Feminists are labeled 'anti-Islam', while at the same time, old taboos like interfaith relationships, are reinstated with vigor. On Instagram—one of the fastest growing platforms among Indonesian women—dogmatic hashtags like #antiselfie, #indonesiatanpapacaran (self-described as "A movement to erase pre-marital dating from Indonesia") and #pemudahijrah (youths renouncing sinfulness) are gaining momentum.

I've even come across an entirely new industry peddling so-called 'account-deleting' services. They target young Indonesian women who have recently started wearing the hijab, and tell them that they must remove

all traces of their previous, 'unholy' lives—including any pre-hijab photograph or profile published online—lest they be punished in the afterlife. This literal erasure of the images of women is yet another example of how censorship has become entangled with the language of intimidation and even revisionism. As a result, more and more netizens are learning to steer clear of sensitive topics online. In a survey I conducted with Indonesian social media users in December 2018, 60% of respondents say that they engage in self-censorship when conversations turn to religion or politics (see Appendix). Respondent #1 (female, age 25-34, Catholic), explains:

> *I avoid the subject of religion and politics on social media. Because if someone disagrees with you, you could be bullied. You might even be threatened with death.*

Furthermore, even though 65% of respondents say that they come across extremist content "often" or "very often", 75% believe it's best not to confront or engage with said content. But between the suggestions to "just skip it", "report it" or to reduce time on social media entirely, there is a sense of dilemma. As one respondent put it: "It's a choice you have to make. Do you want to voice your opinion and face intimidation or not?"

Stories like these emphasize that online censorship is a social activity, as much as a technological one. Platforms that once felt emancipatory are devolving into zero-sum games. Indonesian media theorist Merlyna Lim explains the phenomenon as such: "While encouraging freedom of expression, social media also emboldens freedom to hate, where individuals exercise their right to voice their opinions while actively silencing others" (2017, p. 1). Knowing this, it's more important than ever that we gather modes of resistance. By unravelling the silencing mechanisms we use on each other, could we learn to reclaim part of these hostile spaces for ourselves?

Part 4
Interventions

Unfortunately, self-censorship is a difficult habit to dismantle, both online and offline. With some minority users withdrawing partly or completely from the internet, we risk losing yet more of the public sphere to those who scream the loudest. So how can we, as publishers and media activists, intervene? Can we offer new understandings of censorship in the modern era or suggest radical ways to redress the balance? The final section of this thesis aims to sketch out some potential frameworks for beating censors at their own game.

OLD AND NEW APPROACHES

In recent years, governments and activists alike have been scrambling to address the pitfalls of social media. One line of thought involves pushing tech companies to take more responsibility for what is posted on their platforms (Scott, 2018). However, this has proved largely ineffective. While some companies respond by upping the use of human moderation and third-party fact-checkers, little is being done to change the fundamental business model behind these platforms (Tufekci, 2018). As a matter of fact, almost every social media giant has said it would cooperate with local government agencies to block content on a case-by-case basis (Tan, 2017). In this way, transparency and accountability are becoming more difficult to uphold.

I would suggest that we are doing all citizens (and the Internet) a great disservice when we ask the Zuckerbergs of the world to be the ones to draw the line between free speech and online safety. So, regulatory action aside, what other approaches are available to us as artists and free speech advocates? What existing tactics can we look to, and can we share them with the average netizen? Perhaps, when in troll spaces, we should do as the trolls do. Or can we make allies of existing methodologies, learning from the handbooks of pranksters, hackers, whistleblowers and gamers?

To begin with, we should note that efforts to 'protect the Internet' go back decades. The term 'hacktivism' was coined in 1994, and even before

then, skilled computer users and critical media warriors have been responsible for some of the most radical Internet technologies, from open source/free software platforms to P2P networks and encryption systems (Deibert, 2008). Today the movement includes tools that support anonymous communication online, systems that circumvent censorship and support privacy and alternatives to mainstream social networks, such as Mastodon and Telegram.

While these approaches focus on the creation of new technologies, another strategy is to disrupt by infiltrating those which already exist. In China for example, anonymous activists have begun using blockchain to both spread and document censored material (Singh, 2018). Another interesting case is the well-known project *Politwoops*. This web-based tweet-tracker combs the accounts of well-known politicians, and records every deleted post. The resulting archive uses Twitter's own streaming API to comment on the accountability and transparency of some of its most influential users (ProPublica, 2019).

Similar tactics of redirection and reframing are also being used to intervene in conversations within social networking apps. In Myanmar, where pervasive hate speech online has fueled violent attacks on the Rohingya population, one citizen initiative is developing the practice of 'counter-speech'. This response involves direct, organized counter-messaging campaigns on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, using specific language to undermine and defuse harmful speech acts (Benesch, Ruths et al, 2016). In emphasizing a social and discursive approach, these methods avoid regulatory actions like censorship or takedowns.

DO FEED THE TROLLS

In Indonesia, efforts to address oppressive and extremist content online still seem scattered at best. One approach favored by activists seems to be one-to-one combat against right-wing radical groups on social media. Loosely affiliated volunteers take to their laptops, smartphones and internet cafés to counter propaganda machines by the Islamic State and its local supporters. Their methods are straightforward and aimed specifically at reaching young Muslims vulnerable to radicalization. In a recent

interview, one volunteer said that his work includes the making of anti-extremist memes, countering negative interpretations of religious quotes, conversing with pro-ISIS accounts and training others in social media literacy (Varagur, 2016).

However, without explicit support from the government, organized trolls continue to outnumber and outmanoeuvre our activists. Knowing this, some have taken to the old maxim of: if you can't beat them, join them. Or at least, learn from them. This is where the practice of ideological trolling emerges. This approach differs from more traditional forms of social media activism in that it openly embraces the more deviant aspects of cyberwarfare. Instead of censorship, correction or silence, its practitioners respond with irreverence, irony and inversion.

One example that comes to mind is the case of Anonymous, perhaps the world's most well known collective of trolls turned political activists. Rising out of the depths of 4chan bulletin boards, its adherents wear many faces, shifting easily from mischievous trolling raids to high-profile political operations (Coleman, 2014). In the last decade, its members have become key players in global struggles like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Today, the group's unpredictable identity remains one of its defining characteristics:

Anonymous has no consistent philosophy or political program. Given that Anonymous's ancestry lies in the sometimes humorous, frequently offensive, and at times deeply invasive world of Internet trolling [...] it is remarkable that the name became a banner seized by political activists in the first place. (idem p. 3)

But in one way or another, it has. And with this in mind, one question for further study might be: where do the activities of trolls and Internet activists intersect with the activities of the average Internet user? In particular, can trolldom—the behaviour, the job, the archetype—offer new territories or tools for oppressed voices on the social Web? In the case of Indonesia at least, there's a satisfying symmetry in the idea that to counter moral censure, we might turn to the tactics of deviants. Could artistic interventions help facilitate this work?

TACTICAL MEDIA

The concept of tactical media, with its mix of creative subversion and subversive creativity, might offer some grounding here. According to one of the key theorists of the discourse, Geert Lovink, tactical media is: "What happens when the cheap "do it yourself" media are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture" (Garcia and Lovink, 2007, para. 1). Partly stemming from the counterculture of the 1960s, tactical media use is interventionist by nature and often deals with the performative or visual reversal of media power. It is also characterized by a certain transience—a sense of "hit and run, draw and withdraw, code and delete" (Meikle, 2008, p. 370). These qualities are exemplified by the notorious stunts of The Yes Men, who are often described as the ultimate tactical media practitioners (Lawless, 2018). For artists and activists looking to lay bare the hidden structures of technoculture, tactical media is thus a useful framework to keep in mind.

A sense of the theatrical—and of the performance of media as an important mode of cultural criticism—also underpins the more recent movement of social media art. This practice is often decribed as a descendant of the 90s net art movement; its artists working "within the confines of corporate-controlled social media sites in an effort to distort and question exactly those confines." (Kerr, 2017, para. 2) Social media's pervasiveness is perhaps one of the key reasons that artists from Ai Wei Wei to Constant Dullaart have been compelled to question its inner workings and outward impact. The latter's 2015 piece, titled *The Possibility of an Army*, is a particularly evocative critique of the artifice of social media engagements. Using automation tools on remote servers through hundreds of proxies around the world, Dullaart created thousands of fictitious profiles on Facebook, using the real names of long-dead mercenaries who fought in the American Revolution (Dullaart, 2015). By challenging Facebook's security measures, Dullaart's "fake army" draws attention to the platform's questionable policies, while discussing the social and economic value of our online identities.

Another project which makes use of the digital proxy as a vehicle for critique, is Sarah Ciston's *ladymouth*. Inspired in part by the work of the Fembot Collective, *Ladymouth* is a feminist chatbot which crawls Reddit

Fig 6. Screenshot of *Ladymouth* interaction on Reddit (Ciston, 2019)

for misogynist language, then responds in opposition with quotations from feminist theorists (Ciston, 2019). By inserting itself in places where it is not welcome, the chatbot acts as both a provocation and a spectacle, demonstrating the risk and emotional labour of presenting as female online. At the same time, its non-humanness asks important questions about the role of the technological body and the collective voice in feminist digital activism. As Ciston explains: "Perhaps the absurdity of trolls yelling at machines can make trolls yelling at women seem absurd again too." (*idem*, para. 8)

BUT DOES IT PLAY?

Critics may discredit these kinds of interventions as ineffective, or even misguided. Indeed, creative activism—as sharp or spectacular as they may be—will never be able to solve the problems of any platform or network culture on their own. But, to borrow from the discourse of tactical media, we can also suggest a different line of questioning:

To ask of these projects 'Does it work? would be to tap into such questions as, Has it raised public awareness and support? Has it affected government policy? However, to ask instead, Does it play? would be to tap into quite different sorts of questions—questions that point toward the creators or participants and toward the users of the project. (Meikle, 2008)

From this perspective, focus is shifted from fixing media's ills, to critically and creatively changing the way you or I might engage with it. In response to networked harrasment, this could mean expanding one's media literacy or experimenting with new responses, attitudes or identities.

As Maddison and Scalmer point out in their book *Activist Wisdom* (2006), expressive forms of activism can be especially effective in challenging personal and public complacency.

This approach, with its emphasis on the civic imagination, is in line with Mary Flanagan's method of critical play. Writing about the intersection of game design, art and activism, she regards play spaces as an important site for the production and consumption of culture, community, language, work and leisure. As she puts it:

> *Play is, by definition, a safety space. If a designer or artist can make safe spaces that allow the negotiation of real-world concepts, issues, and ideas, then a game can be successful in facilitating the exploration of innovative solutions for apparently intractable problems. (2009, p. 262)*

At this point, it's also interesting to note that games have long been used by both artists and activists as critical media. In China for example, multiplayer video games are already being used as 'benign transport' for sensitive information, allowing players to bypass government firewalls and transmit data during gameplay (Griffiths, 2015). At the same time, online game culture relates closely to social media culture in that it too struggles to address the cybermisogyny of its users. In response, artists like Angela Washko have taken to performing subversive, feminist social experiments within popular games like *World of Warcraft*. In her 2012 project, *The Council on Gender Sensitivity and Behavioral Awareness in World of Warcraft*, she repurposed the social features of the game to facilitate discussions between players on the topics of feminism and gender-based discrimination. (Washko, 2017).

Critical interventions like these may be especially useful in the context of Indonesia, where the world of gaming takes us back to the meatspace of the *warnet*. In recent years, the *warnet* has evolved into becoming sites for the modern LAN party, favoured by young boys and men in particular who gather there to play sessions of online games like *DOTA* and *League of Legends*. In this gendered space, a feminist tactical intervention or social

Fig 7. Screenshot of *The Council on Gender Sensitivity and Behavioral Awareness in World of Warcraft* (Washko, 2012)

critique performed in-game, could potentially impact the local culture of players out of it.

With this in mind, could the lens of play also offer meaningful approaches for challenging power structures on social media? As arenas go, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are already as massively multiplayer as they come. Mechanisms like role-playing, in-game quests and even the management of cooperative versus competitive actions, also naturally exist in social media culture. Only here, skilled players win attention instead of points, identify with hashtags instead of clans, and outmanoeuvre moderators instead of gamemasters. As we close out this chapter, I suggest that the methods of critical play can help us in further unpacking these parallels. Especially in countries that are more sensitive to dissent, the safe space of games could be a valuable tool for inviting average netizens to engage more freely with issues of networked oppression and manipulation.

Conclusion

It's a sad fact that since I've started writing this paper, censorship in Indonesia has only become more problematic. In the last month alone, a bill has been drafted to limit the creation of music and lyrics that bring in negative influences from foreign cultures (Llewellyn, 2019). A few weeks later, Indonesia's most populous (and most conservative) province, West Java, announced new restrictions on when certain English-language songs can be aired on television and radio, citing concerns over 'vulgar' and 'inappropriate' material (Reuters, 2019). While this latest round of assault focuses mainly on pop culture, it's plain that on the whole, attacks on freedom of expression are becoming more frequent—on and offline. At the same time, political divisions in the country are becoming (and being made) more caustic than ever. Though this is a global issue as much as an Indonesian one, it is especially concerning in a country with such a short history of democracy, and such a long heritage of media control.

For a while, social media offered young people in Indonesia a valuable platform to engage with these questions. Since the beginning of the Reformation era, millions of us have used it to connect with others, share personal and political views, consume news, produce memes and engage in wider public discourse. However, it has become evident that the very mechanisms that make social media a megaphone for some, are also what make it a muzzle for others. Today, platforms like Facebook and Instagram are sites of daily power struggles between mainstream and alternative identities, louder and quieter voices. And in Indonesia, where media control veers quickly into religious and moral control, questions of who is included and who is excluded in these spaces are especially urgent for anyone perceived as female, queer, non-traditional or otherwise 'other'.

I put forward that this is where tactical and subversive modes of comment section activism can intervene. Because outside of changing the medium itself, what we can do is change how the medium is performed: from the gestures we adopt, to the characters we assume. Knowing that social media is neither neutral nor a truthful mirror to society, we can stop treating it as such. And instead of looking away, we can look towards the trolls and the bots, the professional disinformation and the fake outrage, in

an effort to better understand our ideological opponents. By engaging in a more direct and disruptive approach, we might be more equipped to cultivate new practices of resistance and resilience online. For female netizens especially, there's much to be gained in stepping outside of our reactionary relationship to social media, and learning to engage with the mechanisms that try to police or silence us. In any case, it is more important than ever that we critically redefine our understanding of censorship, and the political, cultural and technosocial frameworks which support it. Because today, censorship is easy to outsource; and what the state allows in the media, easily affects what an algorithm allows in its feed, and even what we allow in each other.

Appendix

The following survey was conducted using the online SurveyMonkey tool between December 27th 2018 - January 10th 2019. Wherever necessary, responses in Indonesian have been translated into English. In these cases, every effort was made to maintain the integrity of the response.

On censorship, feminism and social media in Indonesia

1. What is your gender?

Respondent #1: Female

Respondent #2: Female

Respondent #3: Female

Respondent #4: Female

Respondent #5: Female

Respondent #6: Female

Respondent #7: Female

Respondent #8: Female

Respondent #9: Female

Respondent #10: Female

Respondent #11: Female

Respondent #12: Female

Respondent #13: Female

Respondent #14: Female

Respondent #15: Male

Respondent #16: Female

Respondent #17: Female

Respondent #18: Female

Respondent #19: Male

Respondent #20: Female

2. What is your age?

Respondent #1: 25-34

Respondent #2: 35-44

Respondent #3: 25-34

Respondent #4: 25-34

Respondent #5: 35-44

Respondent #6: 25-34

Respondent #7: 25-34

Respondent #8: 25-34

Respondent #9: 25-34

Respondent #10: 35-44

Respondent #11: 18-24

Respondent #12: 18-24

Respondent #13: 65-74

Respondent #14: 18-24

Respondent #15: 25-34

Respondent #16: 25-34

Respondent #17: 18-24

Respondent #18: 25-34

Respondent #19: 18-24

Respondent #20: 18-24

3. What city do you currently live in?

Respondent #1: Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #2: Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #3: Depok, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #4: Auckland, New Zealand

Respondent #5: Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #6: Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Respondent #7: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #8: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #9: Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia

Respondent #10: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #11: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #12: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #13: Netherlands

Respondent #14: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #15: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #16: Netherlands

Respondent #17: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #18: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #19: Jakarta, West Java, Indonesia

Respondent #20: Washington, D.C., United States

4. Which religion do you identify with, if any?

Respondent #1: Catholicism

Respondent #2: Christianity

Respondent #3: Islam

Respondent #4: Islam

Respondent #5: Islam

Respondent #6: Hinduism

Respondent #7: Protestantism

Respondent #8: Islam

Respondent #9: Islam

Respondent #10: Islam

Respondent #11: Islam

Respondent #12: Islam

Respondent #13: Catholicism

Respondent #14: Islam

Respondent #15: Islam

Respondent #16: Catholicism

Respondent #17: Islam

Respondent #18: Islam

Respondent #19: Islam

Respondent #20: Islam

5. How would you describe freedom of expression in Indonesia today, compared to 20 years ago?

Respondent #1: The freedom to speak or express yourself on social media or other media in Indonesia isn't complete. These freedoms are still regulated through bylaws and legislations. And these freedoms are prohibited from containing any elements which may divide national unity. They are also beholden to morality. In my personal opinion, censorship institutions in Indonesia currently act in a legal grey area. They censor cartoons wearing bikinis. They censor smoking. All in the name of protecting the morality of our society; and to avoid seeing women's aurat (a close-minded way of thinking, in my opinion).

And then, on social media, if we voice our opinions, those can be taken down too. We get warnings that our words about politics or religion are breaching sensitive topics. So it feels like here, freedom of speech is only protected when your speech fits within society's norms.

In my opinion, politics and religion are extremely sensitive topics in Indonesia today. Make a small comment about religion, and you'll be reported for insulting religion. Even declaring yourself as an atheist on social media can land you in hot water for 'going against' our national principles. But what is sure is that even this level of freedom is already more than what we had 20 years ago, when we couldn't even criticize government workers.

Respondent #2: Freedom of expression is still lacking, and the media is still influenced by certain political interests. However in the last 10-20 years changes have been made for the better.

Respondent #3: Compared to the New Order, clearly there is more freedom now. But there seems to

be an increase in vigilante groups working to limit these freedoms, both online and offline.

Respondent #4: I feel that media freedom is expanding, but in a way that could potentially lead to the shrinking of said freedom.

Respondent #5: Better than during the New Order, but still limited.

Respondent #6: At the moment, freedom of expression is expanding. At times, it's even getting out of control — and causing lots of conflicts online.

Respondent #7: Freedom of expression on social media in Indoesia seems to be quite good. Indonesian netizens are so creative with their comments :). But when it comes to TV, there are some strange regulations. Whenever they censor programmes for being too sexy or too violent, I think it actually makes kids even more curious.

Respondent #8: Reasonably good.

Respondent #9: I think that the media Indonesia has become quite advanced technologically. Because of this, it's become easier for the media to take advantage of those of us who are not fully literate.

Respondent #10: It's gone too far.

Respondent #11: It's reasonably free, though of course, when it comes to mass media, there is still some overzealous censorship. For example, the censorship on LGBT characters on television. And I think that freedom of expression expanded so quickly after the New Order, that some of us are now struggling to deal with negative forms of expression (hate speech etc.)

Respondent #12: In my opinion, freedom of expression in Indonesia has risen significantly, when compared to 10 years ago. These days, we have a lot of online media which can act as channels for exchanging opinions and ideas.

Respondent #13: Things are becoming more transparent.

Respondent #14: As time goes on, freedom of expression is undoubtedly expanding. Social media has played a very influential role in giving people the agency to express themselves, whatever that expression may be.

Respondent #15: Freedom of expression in Indonesia seems to be on the decline, especially in the last few years, as religious conservatism continues to rise. As a result, we have a society which doesn't know how to deal with differing opinions.

Respondent #16: I think in the post-Suharto era it has changed a lot in a very gradual way, especially concerning LGBTQ and religion.

Respondent #17: It's still limited. There are many legal provisions which restrict it. Especially online.

Respondent #18: I think that freedom of expression in Indonesia has developed a lot. I think publishers feel free to express their opinions, and this is one of the reasons why the creative and communication industries have grown so much. On the other hand, there's a lack of understanding of the deeper meaning of freedom. Freedom of expression does not mean freedom to judge.

Respondent #19: It's getting better, thanks to social media.

Respondent #20: I wouldn't know personally since I have not lived in Indonesia since the 90s. From what I've noticed in social media, it seems like for the most part people can express themselves but there are thousands more who will tell them not to.

6. How important is freedom of expression to you?

Respondent #1: Freedom of expression is important to me… and I long for an Indonesia that is safe from those who try to provoke issues about religion and politics. I definitely feel a sense of worry about our safety in the future.

Respondent #2: Quite important.

Respondent #3: Very important.

Respondent #4: Very important.

Respondent #5: Very important. Freedom of speech is a human right.

Respondent #6: It's important, as long as it is regulated.

Respondent #7: Very important!

Respondent #8: Important.

Respondent #9: Very important.

Respondent #10: Very important.

Respondent #11: Very important.

Respondent #12: Very important.

Respondent #13: Important.

Respondent #14: Very important. Nevertheless, it's important that there is control and discussion.

Respondent #15: Very important.

Respondent #16: Important.

Respondent #17: Very important.

Respondent #18: Important. As a human being and as a Muslim.

Respondent #19: As an aspiring writer, it's quite essential to be able to voice ideas that might be taboo or controversial.

Respondent #20: It's very important. People need to speak freely in order to combat structural oppression.

7. What role does social media play in your daily life? What do you like / dislike about it?

Respondent #1: I use social media every day — mostly Whatsapp, Instagram and Facebook. Usually to stay up to date with friends and family.

Respondent #2: It changes.

Respondent #3: It's the first thing I check when I wake up :) I like how fast information spreads through social media, and how democratic it is, as everyone is able to participate. Sometimes it gets tiring, but I've come to rely on it both personally and professionaly. The thing I don't like about it is dealing with stubborn and righteous netizens, and people who spread hoaxes.

Respondent #4: It plays quite a big role in my daily life. What I like most about it is its speed and its accessibility. What don't like about it, is how it promotes the idea that everyone is entitled to confront you with their opinions, corner you, hurt you, or otherwise engage in the "othering" of minorities.

Respondent #5: I like to use it to access information about current issues, and connect with new friends. What I don't like: the cyberbullying.

Respondent #6: Accessing information through social media is very important to me.

Respondent #7: I use it as a hub for information and to communicate with friends and family who live in other cities. What I like about it: when it is used for social movements. What I don't like about it: when it is used to spread "black campaigns" in politics, or hoaxes involving SARA.

Respondent #8: I use it for finding recipes.

Respondent #9: I use social media as a mode of communication with relatives who live in different areas or countries, as a site for socialisation, and to obtain various kinds of information. What I like about it is the educational content I find, and what I don't like are posts that lean towards the pornographic, or that harras a certain religion or person.

Respondent #10: I use it to get information.

Respondent #11: I use it as a stress reliever, and as a way to access information (sometimes I feel like it's faster than Google). What I don't like are the posts and comments which promote hate speech or spread content which are not based on facts.

Respondent #12: I use social media as a mode of communication with friends, especially those I haven't seen in a while. One of the things I like most about it is how many people you can reach with it. What I don't like about it, is when people use it to compare and compete with each other. Like on Instagram, which so many people use to show off.

Respondent #13: I use social media for reading and passing along news which I find interesting.

Respondent #14: I use it to communicate with friends. To expand my network. For entertainment. Promotion. Expression.

Respondent #15: To socialize with friends, follow current events and exchange opinions with others.

Respondent #16: It's a way for me to connect to friends and family, to get inspired and be exposed to new ideas, thoughts and events.

Respondent #17: It's a source of information and entertainment.

Respondent #18: Social media's role in my daily life is a place to share news and upates with old friends.

Respondent #19: I use social media to stay updated and to connect with old friends. Love the ease of information, and ease of connecting with others. Hate how easily shallow information travels, and anonymous personas are created.

Respondent #20: I use social media as a way to connect with other people. I love that I get to meet so many different people. I don't like how sometimes interactions can be quite surface level.

8. Do you ever engage in self-censorship online? Are there subjects you tend to avoid?

Respondent #1: Yes. These days, I avoid the subject of religion and politics on social media. Because if someone disagrees with you, you could be bullied. You might even be threatened with death. So I engage in self-censorship to avoid useless debates.

Respondent #2: Yes. I avoid discussions about race, religion.

Respondent #3: Yes, of course. As frustrated or angry as I get, I don't like to curse or argue ad hominem on social media. Sometimes I avoid issues relating to SARA (tribes, religion, race and inter-group relations), but other times I actually make a point to debate other netizens on this topic.

Respondent #4: Yes, I have. Even though I myself am Muslim, I tend to avoid discussions about radical and conservative Islam. I also avoid conversations with people who are adamantly close-minded. It makes me tired.

Respondent #5: Yes. For example, any critique or discussion regarding extreme Islamist organisations like the FPI (*Islam Defender's Front*).

Respondent #6: Yes, I do.

Respondent #7: No.

Respondent #8: No.

Respondent #9: To be honest, I'm not sure I fully understand what self-censorship online entails. But I do keep most of my activities private (only for those on my friend list). And usually I avoid subjects which involve politics or which discriminate certain religions.

Respondent #10: Yes, I do.

Respondent #11: Yes. I restrain myself from cursing on the internet, because I don't want to make other people uncomfortable. And the subject I avoid the most is religion.

Respondent #12: Yes, I censor myself whenever discussions involve religion.

Respondent #13: No.

Respondent #14: No.

Respondent #15: Because of my job, I avoid discussions that involve politics, law or any other contentious issues.

Respondent #16: Sometimes I actively refrain from posting comments, out of fear of unwanted consequences… So that means "swallowing" my comments when I read articles online or facebook regarding sexual harrasment, religious intolerance or the death sentence in Indonesia.

Respondent #17: Yes. I prefer to skip posts which are bloody in nature. Like murder or assault.

Respondent #18: Yes. For now, the subjects the avoid are those which promote consumerism.

Respondent #19: Yes. Recently I avoid being exposed to political content on social media.

Respondent #20: Yes, in a sense. I'm not "openly queer," though if people ask individually, I will say that I'm a queer Indonesian Muslim. People still struggle with understand how those multitudes can exist in one person.

9. Do you think the culture of censorship in Indonesia has a particular impact on women?

Respondent #1: In my opinion, yes… There is more and more pressure for women in Indonesia to cover their aurat. I'll give you an example. This is something that happened recently: a Muslim mother wrote a complaint to a local clothing company, saying that their recent commercial featuring girls in short pants was 'too sexy' and thus damaging to the morality of the nation and its children. She set up a petition to take the commercial off the air. Under pressure, the company complied. Meanwhile, things which used to be freely accepted, like breastfeeding in public, are now being denounced as pornographic.

Respondent #2: Possibly.

Respondent #3: Yes, clearly. And because women seem to be more at risk for ad hominem attacks, I think many of us prefer to voice our opinions in private (via DM), rather than in public. As a Muslimah who doesn't wear the hijab, I often experience these kinds of attacks whenever I express any opinion on social media which challenges the mainstream understanding of Islam.

Respondent #4: Yes, because so much of what is censored deals with the very bodies and freedoms of women.

Respondent #5: Yes.

Respondent #6: Not sure.

Respondent #7: It seems to me that nowadays, if a woman presents herself as sexy on any kind of social media, she'll have to deal with comments or harrassment from people of certain religious backgrounds. This is different to how things were in the 80s and 90s. Back then, we were more free to express ourselves, and women looking sexy was not seen as a negative thing.

Respondent #8: Yes.

Respondent #9: Possibly, because I think that women are the most abused group on social media.

Respondent #10: Yes.

Respondent #11: Yes, censors on parts of women's bodies, for example. Their implicit message is that women's cleavages or thighs should not be seen in public.

Respondent #12: Yes.

Respondent #13: Yes.

Respondent #14: Maybe. Because in actuality there should be some limits in what we can express. Not everything should be shared. That's why some censorship is necessary.

Respondent #15: Yes, because censorship in Indonesia often treats women as objects.

Respondent #16: Yes.

Respondent #17: Yes, definitely. Sometimes it protects, other times it restricts. The more you censor something, the more visible it becomes.

Respondent #18: Yes.

Respondent #19: It's a bit counterproductive. Instead of blocking thoughts, censorship emphasizes the unwanted thoughts.

Respondent #20: I think it makes it so that women who are interested in expressing their sexuality can't do it fully.

10. Whose stories or voices do you think are missing or suppressed in Indonesian media today?

Respondent #1: I think women's voices, especially victims of sexual abuse, are those which are the most suppressed. Mainly because their clothing is often regarded as provocative. Also, the voices of disabled persons, especially those who come from working class or lower.

Respondent #2: Minority groups.

Respondent #3: Women who challenge the mainstream, LGBTQ+, rural and poor population and other marginalized communities.

Respondent #4: Traditional indigenous peoples, transgender communities and sex workers, and people with leftist ideologies.

Respondent #5: Women, and the LGBT community.

Respondent #6: Women's voices.

Respondent #7: Women's voices.

Respondent #8: The people's voice.

Respondent #9: The voices of people who are powerless or lacking a significant role in society.

Respondent #10: Rural communities.

Respondent #11: The voices which are underrepresented are those of our LGBT and disabled friends. Their stories are suppressed because many Indonesians still see homosexuality as a disease, and disability as a taboo. I also think women's voices are still suppressed. Even on our own issues, we are not given a lot of space to move or express ourselves.

Respondent #12: Women's voice.

Respondent #13: The voice of the poor and working class.

Respondent #14: Women's voices, and children.

Respondent #15: Women, LGBT community, minority faiths.

Respondent #16: People critically questioning the role of politics in addressing the growing religious oppression in Indonesia nowadays.

Respondent #17: Minority groups. Like those who are non-Muslims.

Respondent #18: Yes, minority groups.

Respondent #19: Stories from people who choose to be balanced or not pick sides (in terms of political election) are being suppressed. People are being pushed to choose between two sides and not choosing one will invite frowns or namecallings.

Respondent #20: I think queer women aren't allowed to be as open as, say gay cis men in Indonesia. Certainly, there's still stigma around being LGBT+ in Indonesia, but there's familiarity with seeing openly gay men, especially in Jakarta. For women, there's not as much room to be as open about their sexuality. So, unfortunately, it seems like queer Indonesian women's voices get lost in the mix.

11. Do you see yourself as a feminist? Why or why not?

Respondent #1: Yes. Because I do not like to be looked down on by men. As if as a woman, all I am capable of is taking care of chilren, cooking, shopping and cleaning the house. I want to be seen as an independent woman, and feminism is a way to defend ourselves from inequality and harrassment.

Respondent #2: No. I'm not very active in these things.

Respondent #3: Yes. I agree with the principles of intersectional feminism, which promotes equality for all people, regardless of gender, race, social class etc.

Respondent #4: Yes, because I support gender equality, freedom of speech and the affirmation of minority voices.

Respondent #5: Yes, because I want gender equality and justice.

Respondent #6: Yes. To me, being a feminist isn't just about being a strong woman, it's also about having the rights to make decisions, especially in the personal / family domain.

Respondent #7: Yes, because women are capable of so much, so they should have the same rights as men do.

Respondent #8: Yes, because I am a mother.

Respondent #9: Yes.

Respondent #10: Yes, I like to wear makeup and be fashionable.

Respondent #11: Yes. Because I refuse to be stereotyped just because of my gender. And I'm a girl-support-other-girls-supporter.

Respondent #12: Yes. Because until now, I still see the inequality and injustice that women in Indonesia have to deal with.

Respondent #13: No, because of how I was educated in the 60s.

Respondent #14: No. Because I don't think that feminism makes sense for all aspects of my life

Respondent #15: Yes, because I think men and women should have the same rights and chances.

Respondent #16: Yes, because I fiercely believe in the need to emphasize the role that women play in today's society and seriously address gender equality.

Respondent #17: No. I think men and women are the same. We don't need any special treatment.

Respondent #18: Yes. If by feminist, you mean someone who respects and appreciates women.

Respondent #19: No. I don't see the status quo as being a huge problem. Though I agree that balance in pay should exist for men and women, and I also see catcalling as a problem.

Respondent #20: Yes. I'm a feminist because I believe in justice for marginalized genders. I also believe that rethinking femininity and masculinity will benefit everyone.

12. Recently, platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have been used to spread propaganda, fake news and even hate speech. What do you think we can do to resist these trends?

Respondent #1: I often see this happening. Sometimes I get frustrated and want to post a comment, but I always end up restraining myself and my fingers. I just keep my opinions and views to myself.

Respondent #2: Not sure.

Respondent #3: I think it's important for us to participate and make ourselves heard against those who preach radicalism and intolerance. In Indonesia, those people are still the minority, but they make a lot of noise. And the majority who stays silent is the majority who should prepare to become the minority.

Respondent #4: The two methods I've tried include: reporting content so that they are taken down and directly responding to the content in question, in order to spark a debate. Sometimes I even call on my friends to help support me in the comments. But these kinds of arguments are hard to win.

Respondent #5: Create counter-narratives and take precautions not to spread said propaganda.

Respondent #6: Delete these kinds of content.

Respondent #7: The easiest thing we can do is to not re-share this content. Instead, we can choose to share only positive content.

Respondent #8: We can participate and comment too.

Respondent #9: We must be critical when reading news stories which spread on social media. Because we can't be sure that the truth is being told. We should also learn not to be too easily provoked or baited emotionally.

Respondent #10: We can post about the consequences which may arise.

Respondent #11: Just this morning I watched a Youtube video about fact-checking and click restraining. I think that as netizens, what we can do is talk more about the phenomenon of hoaxes, hate speech and the like.

Respondent #12: Certainly, we need to become more critical netizens. We shouldn't be too quick to believe news items with only one source. We shouldn't become judgmental netizens, but netizens who are able to analyse data to a high standard, and whenever necessary, do our own research.

Respondent #13: We should be selective in the news we consume, and try to avoid hoaxes.

Respondent #14: We should begin by improving the ways we engage with social media. We should be more critical and shrewd when it dealing with problems or debates. Don't judge too easily, or be too confrontational. Everything should be faced with a bit of wisdom.

Respondent #15: We should use the same medium to counter these tactics en masse.

Respondent #16: We should especially educate young children to learn to keep an unbiased perspective on this.

Respondent #17: Just report it.

Respondent #18: We should read more, and act collectively.

Respondent #19: One of the best methods is to not get worked up. Or just skip the posts. Also, it's good to know how these people write, and just observe them.

Respondent #20: I think there definitely needs to be more education and training about news literacy, how to spot good sources and bad ones. Sometimes patience can help but most times, disengaging if possible is an important option.

13. How often do you come across extremist or intolerant content on social media?

Respondent #1: Very often.

Respondent #2: Often.

Respondent #3: Often.

Respondent #4: Very often.

Respondent #5: Very often.

Respondent #6: Often.

Respondent #7: Very often.

Respondent #8: Often.

Respondent #9: Often.

Respondent #10: Often.

Respondent #11: Often.

Respondent #12: Very often.

Respondent #13: Sometimes.

Respondent #14: Sometimes.

Respondent #15: Sometimes.

Respondent #16: Sometimes.

Respondent #17: Sometimes.

Respondent #18: Sometimes.

Respondent #19: Often.

Respondent #20: Almost never.

14. How do you normally react to this content? Do you ever engage in debates online?

Respondent #1: If it was posted by a friend, I would unfriend them. I don't want to participate in debates. I would report the post.

Respondent #2: No, I don't normally participate.

Respondent #3: When I have the time and the emotional energy, I engage in debates.

Respondent #4: I report it, and if I have the time and energy I'll argue with them.

But lately I feel like those debates are just a waste of time.

Respondent #5: I have engaged in debates before, but only when I have the energy. It's a choice you have to make. Do you want to voice your opinion and face intimidation or not?

Respondent #6: I don't react or participate.

Respondent #7: I once participated in a debate on social media, and in the end it was me who got reported!

Respondent #8: No, I don't react.

Respondent #9: For me, it's enough to observe. I don't participate in arguments. And if it really bothers me, I can just skip it.

Respondent #10: I have engaged in debate before.

Respondent #11: Usually I react by sending the post to a close friend, with whom I can safely discuss more sensitive issues. We like to to this privately because we know we'll be at a disadvantage if we join the debate in the comment section. I personally never engage with any debates or arguments in public. I don't want to give in to that kind of anger.

Respondent #12: What I usually do is report the account. I never participate in online arguments. When it comes to toxicity, I just block it.

Respondent #13: No, I don't participate.

Respondent #14: I just observe. I never participate in debates because I don't like to.

Respondent #15: No, I only observe.

Respondent #16: I try to refrain from it, out of fear to be honest…

Respondent #17: Just skip it.

Respondent #18: No, I don't participate.

Respondent #19: Rarely. It's a waste of time and energy.

Respondent #20: I don't come across this content because I surround my feed with views that are similar to mine. It's a matter of safety. There's no reason for me to engage in something that wants me dead.

15. What do you think could be done to make social media a safer space for women?

Respondent #1: I don't think there's such thing as a safe space on social media. But we can defend each other. For example, we can collectively report offensive posts so that they are taken down.

Respondent #2: Not sure.

Respondent #3: I think there are almost no safe spaces for anyone on social media. The exception might be some closed or locked groups on Facebook/Line/Whatsapp or Instagram. But even there, there's always the risk of infiltration.

Respondent #4: The problem is, neither social media nor the Internet was built as a safe space for women. And most women don't have the time to argue on social media. So we are outnumbered.

Respondent #5: We need to educate people on how to engage with social media in a positive way.

Respondent #6: Again, we should delete abusive content and block profiles which engage in harrassment of women.

Respondent #7: You could set your social media accounts to private, if you want to avoid stranger accessing it.

Respondent #8: Not sure.

Respondent #9: I think it's important that users learn to be more careful with their privacy and their posts. Platforms could also be doing more to prevent fake accounts. For example by adding new requirements for verification.

Respondent #10: Reduce time on social media.

Respondent #11: I think it's important we educate ourselves on how to behave in both online and offline spaces. We have been taught to keep our manners in front of other people, but now we need to learn about keeping our manners even when you're a thousand miles away from each other.

Other than that, I think that trolling, cyber harrassment, or sexist comments will not stop unless we fight back. I think, as women, we need to learn how to encounter such things, in a proper, but all-kill mode. And don't forget the "report" button. I've done a lot of reporting of hate accounts.

Respondent #12: First, it's probably better if we only use social media with people who we actually know. So, use the private account feature.

Respondent #13: We could set up forums which are explicitly for women.

Respondent #14: Protect your social media accounts. Filter what you share, and what you don't. Spend less time on social media and more time on reading books.

Respondent #15: We need to raise more public awareness around the issues of gendered abuse and harassment. This needs to happen first and foremost in formal education, so that this knowledge becomes more mainstream.

Respondent #16: Raise awareness about it online, in schools, through media campaigns. There needs to be a counter-movement to establish a solid intolerance for online trolling and abuse.

Respondent #17: We need to raise awareness about harrassment on social media, so that netizens know to control their behaviour.

Respondent #18: Maybe this needs to be done systematically.

Respondent #19: Maybe gather keywords used by trolls and create a blacklisting app for those keywords?

Respondent #20: Social media won't be a safe place for women. The issue has never been tech — tech is merely a platform that has allowed for the ills of the world to become more known. And especially if people in tech are not trained in humanities or don't care about justice, moderation will never be effective. All women can really do is surround themselves with allies.

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