

# From *War-net* to Net-war: The Internet and Resistance Identities in Indonesia

MERLYNA LIM\*

## ABSTRACT

For decades following independence, informational media in Indonesia developed parallel with the interests of the state that made use of the media as a means to legitimize and maintain its identity as a progressive “developmental state”. The Internet, which came to Indonesia during the early phase of the political crisis in the 1990s, economically and politically has risen to become an alternative media that is no longer under state control, thus bolstering civil society in its resistance to state and corporate domination. Based on Indonesia’s experience, this paper describes how the Internet provides means for popular resistance to the dominant paradigm.

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## INTRODUCTION

When the technology known as the Internet suddenly appeared in Indonesia, the technology came in contact with the concept of “society” that in turn used and transformed this technology in unique ways. The Internet has accordingly been developing in Indonesia with its own unique practices and characteristics, transformed by localized power structures related to the three spheres in society, namely, the state, the corporate economy, and the civil society. How does the transformation process work and why does this process happen in certain ways? What drives the actors who are involved in the transformation process to manipulate processes in such ways? Why does society seek to re-shape the Internet?

\*University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands and Social Construction of Technology (SCoT) Research Group, Raya Dayeuh Kolot 1, Bandung 40256, Indonesia. E-mail: merlyn@bdg.centrin.net.id

All these questions must be answered in the specific context of contemporary Indonesian history, namely, the end of the “developmental state” of Suharto’s authoritarian New Order, and the struggles to create a more democratic society in a global information age. The central thesis of the arguments presented here is that technological transformations are imbedded in power relations, and that localities — nations, cities, and communities — are sites of the nexus of state, corporate, and civil society struggles over the choice, use, and transformation of technologies such as the Internet. No one source of power is pre-determined to ‘win’ in these contests. Rather, dynamic tensions continue in an open-ended process of historical change, which, as an open-ended trajectory, allows human actors to make a difference. The Internet, as a technology of informational and symbolic linkages in civil society, allows for the possibility of people making history locally and globally (through cyberspace in both instances). Yet countervailing forces may well inhibit the rise of civil society at this crucial juncture in time. Whichever way society develops, the Internet as a societal interface will nonetheless be transformed through its interplay with local power systems.

In the relations among state, corporate, and civil societies, a focal point of power contests is the creation and assertion of identity, seen as an implicit driving force for transforming technological processes in Indonesia. Thus, by locating the Internet in the nexus of the three spheres, viz., state, corporate economy, and civil society, with the identity as a focal point, this paper will sketch a framework for exploring the interplay of these forces and begin to build a framework with evidence from the experiences of Indonesia.

#### SHAPING THE INTERNET IN INDONESIA: THE ACTORS’ AGENDA

Although the Internet is global, in a national context the technology is always localized through the power relations that, despite the presumed erosion of the nation-state, remain formidable. The interplays between these power relations determine and are influenced by the configuration of the Internet technology through time. The Indonesian context has its own social, cultural, political, and economic landscape where the seeds of the Internet grow. This landscape is the historical context of the interplay of power relations that created the specific configuration and impinges on the future development of what can be called the Indonesian Internet.

While in some authoritarian countries the state can exert high levels of control over Internet access, in Indonesia the state has long been strongly allied with corporate business interests. Thus, the pattern is more complex than in purely authoritarian, command economy-driven countries. All of these actors, viz., the state, the corporate economy, and civil society want

Indonesians on the Internet, yet for different reasons. While civil society wants free and equal access for all citizens, the government wants people on the Internet to be controlled in terms of which technology they choose and how they use the Internet, thus making it easier for the regime to remain in power. On the other hand, business wants to enhance its power by having people on the Internet to create markets. To people at large, however, the Internet offers forms of social engagement outside of state surveillance and offers forms of e-commerce that favor them as consumers. For the regime in power, it seeks to ensure its own survival. For business, the Internet is a potentially powerful venue for asserting exchange values and the co-modification of culture, social relations, and all forms of human interaction, including those over cyberspace. Each sector thus has its own agenda. These agendas together shape the form of the Indonesian Internet.

### *Agenda: Internet and Identity*

Agenda formation can be seen as a means of identity. Why do all of these actors (state, corporate, and civil society) create their own agendas? The answer is to control identity through production and manipulation of images, symbols, and ideas. This agenda is about controlling images or the formation of identity, which often uses cultural meanings and symbols transposed to the image of the state as the principal source of societal guidance.

Thus, we can refer to Castells' elaboration of the concept of identity as a driving force in contemporary world history (Castells, 1997).<sup>1</sup> He argues that forming identity is a universal human experience and fundamental source of meaning and it gives "symbolic identification" that links a person or a group to her/his/its actions. This can be individual identity, but Castells is concerned with collective identity among individuals and how it is being formed in resistance to globalization and the rise of network societies.

Castells divides the forms and sources of identity into three types:<sup>2</sup>

- Legitimizing identity introduced by dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination.
- Resistance identity generated by those who are in positions/conditions of being devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination.
- Project identity, when people build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure.

<sup>1</sup> Castells, M. (1997) *The power of identity: The information age — Economy, society, and culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Naturally, identities that start as resistance may induce projects and, in the course of history, may also become dominant, but history is not linear and the values or identities must be viewed in the context of historical moments. Castells further argues that “civil society” emerges from legitimizing identity because it brings together the “apparatuses” that actually prolong the dynamics of the state because they are deeply rooted among people. In contrast, resistance identity leads to the formation of ‘communities’ and may be the most important type of identity building in our society. It “constructs forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression”.<sup>3</sup> This can become a project identity aimed at transforming society through collective action against a dominant identity.

Following this framework, the following section looks at the shaping of the Internet based on various actors’ agendas in relation to the forms and sources of identity in the manner of Castells in order to understand the process of social change through the dynamics of identity embedded in Internet communications.

### *The State Agenda*

Concerning the state’s agenda in Indonesia, the question is posed: What drives the state to create it? The answers are found in how the state maintains and perpetuates its existence. The regime governing the state can only exist if it is able to perpetuate itself materially and legitimate itself with the people or society (Habermas, 1981).<sup>4</sup> Thus, these factors become the two principal catalysts for the state to create its agenda with regard to, in this case, Internet technology and its uses.

*Regime finance.* The first catalyst is about how the state must have money or financial sustenance. This drives the state to either create state-owned enterprises or ally itself with business to generate wealth through rent-seeking (not infrequently corrupt).

The Indonesian state is a very dominant actor that owns all of the public services in order to keep capital in its ambit. The existence of state-owned companies (such as Telecom and Indosat for telecommunications) is one of the many manifestations of how the state seeks to provide institutions and technologies that serve as financial sources for maintaining government power.

Besides the existence of state-owned businesses, the state also regulates monopolies, which in turn support the state materially. This agenda was exceptionally strong within Suharto’s New Order government. In addition to its blatant cronyism, the state under Suharto created monopolies of all

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas, J. (1981) New social movement. *Telos* 49 (Fall), 33–37.

sorts in the production of basic resources in major industries supplying the state-owned companies, particularly in the public services sector. For example, the ownership and operation of Indonesia's satellite system is still highly monopolized. Up until the early 1990s, firms whose major shareholder had been the government dominated the Indonesian market. Even when the system privatized, for the most part it was just Suharto's clans that were included in the game (Barker et al, 2001).<sup>5</sup>

All of this was defended as necessary for national development. The presumed scarcity of capital in Indonesia was used to justify the need for the state to be a leader in economic development, even to the extent that the military was given a developmental function beyond that of security and defense — the so-called dual functions of the military. In addition, monopolies were given to very powerful capitalists in Indonesia, as well as to members and allies of the Suharto family. The regime then began to perpetuate itself by using the state to create economic enterprises, many of which, however, were very inefficient. It was only a matter of time before such entities encountered severe problems, especially as the economy was being opened by outside pressure from the World Bank in order to allow free trade and to attract foreign investment in the Indonesian economy.

Similarly, the state, through state-owned companies, tries to dominate the Internet and its attendant commerce.

From Fig 1,<sup>6</sup> we can see the central roles played by the mega-companies Telecom and Indosat. Telecom's absolute telephony monopoly means that there is no way for dial-up Internet users to avoid using Telecom's service. At the same time, Telecom is also the dominant player in non-dial-up service for the Internet. On the other hand, the existence of Indosat as the only company that provides the international connection makes it the portal for reaching the global Internet. This means that all Internet service providers need Indosat to connect to the global Internet (AT&T and CBN get connected directly to the Internet) using non-Indosat service, but only with Indosat's forbearance.

However, the civil society is not so easily manipulated with these rules of usage. According to Fig. 1, we could see that the JCSAT is also competing with Indosat as a gateway to the global Internet. This Japanese satellite is available thanks to the efforts of civil society (Purbo and Computer Network Research Group (CNRG) from ITB) that struggles against state monopolies. Purbo and CNRG created their own identity

<sup>5</sup> Barker, J., Argo, T., Lim, M., Rip, A., & Yulianto, S. (2001) *Social construction in the Indonesian context nr. 95-CS-03 (final report)*. Enschede: University of Twente.

<sup>6</sup> Lim, M. (2001) The history of Internet in Indonesia. In Barker, J., Argo T., Lim, M., Rip, A., & Yulianto, S. (Eds) *Social construction in the Indonesian context nr. 95-CS-03 (final report)*. Enschede: University of Twente.

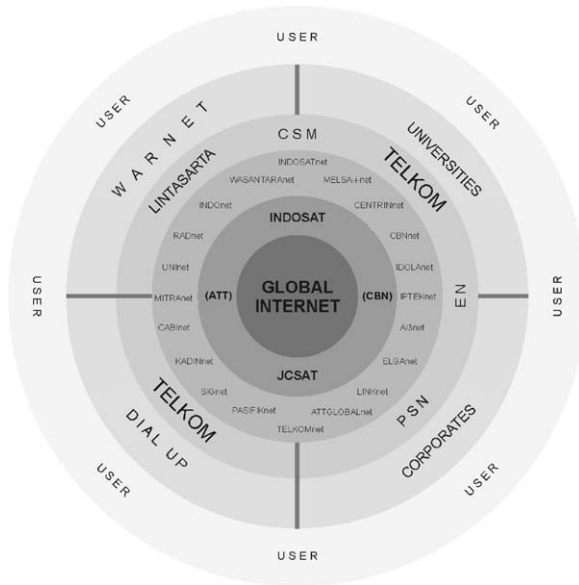


FIGURE 1. Concentric spheres of Internet access (Author's research, 2000).

that is independent from the state. They labeled their movement as a “guerrilla movement”, which reveals the resistance to the legitimate institution (noting that the state controls the board of rectors in the university).<sup>7</sup> By utilizing Japan's concern about the digital divide, Purbo and CNRG connected with global actors (Japan Corporation Satellite and WIDE Japan) which had a global project (the Asian Internet Initiative Project)<sup>8</sup> to create a mass base for the Internet; they accordingly transformed the resistance into a proactive project, and successfully placed themselves on equal footing in the power structure with the state business, Indosat.

While in the past the state could totally limit possibilities for members of civil society to access the exclusive networks of the regime's crony capitalism, the Internet opens up communication and information channels that makes it a powerful tool for the marginalized, especially for the ones who really know how to use its potential. Thus, it gives opportunities to civil society to vitiate the rigid position of the state.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Personal interview, 2000.

It is crucial to note that the state is now in crisis, and that its agenda with the Internet must now be pursued in a different way. In the past, the implicit social contract with the developmental state was that the state would deliver economic growth and material improvements to the people in exchange for civil society's docility (Douglass, 1994).<sup>9</sup> The economic collapse of 1997 broke that social contract and the Suharto regime subsequently fell in 1998. Regime maintenance now requires more autonomy be yielded to the private sector. In addition, the regime must also appeal to democratic principles in IT uses. All the while, the state still tries to control ways of access and forms of technology, but that technology is, in fact, slipping beyond the state's grasp as both the corporate world and civil society begin to use and transform it.

*State-society (legitimization).* To survive, the state always needs legitimization by the "people"; the state creates agendas that seek to instill a strong identity for these segments of society with the interests of the regime. National integration, national development, and the Pancasila ideology of unity through diversity all become by-words for legitimizing the state's identity by compressing state, nation, and people into a hegemonic image of Indonesian society.

The control over communication and information flows has been very important and seen as a strategic tool for national integration under the state's ideology and identity. Since the time that Suharto took over the government leadership in 1966 until he was compelled to resign in May 1998, Indonesia was a nation of people deeply censored through overt control and manipulation of all media of information, entertainment, news, and education. During this era, the government could easily ban or shut down all publications that displeased it.

How Suharto put the Minister of Information<sup>10</sup> within his cabinet and gave him the power to control the flows of information is actually a crime if seen from the perspective of the ideal of the liberal state. The existence of the Ministry of Information within the state altogether legitimized state control of thinking and expressing ideas.

However, unlike other media, the Internet is not so easily controlled by the state or any other single interest. The flow of information on the Internet is just too overwhelming, making state control Sisyphean. Moreover, the Internet is a new technology; thus, the capability of the

<sup>9</sup> Douglass, M. (1994) The Developmental State and the Asian Newly Industrialized Economies, *Environment and Planning A*, 26, 543–566.

<sup>10</sup> The infamous Minister of Information of Indonesia, Harmoko, had been the New Order's powerful tool for controlling state information, thus ensuring that all information had its origin exclusively in the state.

state to control it is limited and state rules and regulations cannot be enforced. The complexity of technology and the lack of infrastructure make the Internet all the more difficult to control.

The Internet makes global–local direct contact possible, thus making information available from abroad that was previously not accessible in Indonesia. This has undermined not only the ability but also the legitimacy of the state in controlling information. When citizens are made aware through the Internet of all sorts of alternative sources of information that is not dangerous to their well-being, the idea of allowing the state to control the Internet is rejected, either overtly by public acts of resistance or covertly through underground information networks using the Internet.

The famous mailing list, *Apakabar*, is a perfect example. Started by an American, John McDougall, *Apakabar* forwarded Indonesian-related news articles to its subscribers all over the world. Most of the information it obtained was not available within Indonesia because it was controversial and very critical of the Indonesian New Order regime. As it developed, it became one of the main sources for uncensored news and discussion on Indonesia.<sup>11</sup> In 1996–1998, this list became a major irritant for the army and the Department of Information, and helped to establish the Internet's reputation as a radically free medium (Hill and Sen, 1997).<sup>12</sup>

The rise of civil society supported by the Internet successfully overthrew Suharto. The effort of civil society did not end with the demise of Suharto's regime; it continues and re-emerges through everyday practices of civil society in the post-Suharto era. It keeps struggling to gain the power to create alternative spaces for identity and civic life outside of, and often against, the agenda of the state and of business.

The rise of civil society on the Internet has undermined the legitimizing identity of the state, thus pushing the state into a legitimization and identity crisis. Now the state can no longer use the style of the past (banning, censoring); instead it must act as if it is a friend of open communication. The government under the fourth president, Gus Dur, no longer had a cabinet-level Minister of Information. Yet some actors within the state still believe in resurrecting the power of the past formula. Some raise the issue of pornographic and negative influence of the Internet to threaten society in order to gain back control over the information. In other words, for some, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

The state still tries to find its way in manipulating and controlling the Internet, yet at some level it realizes that there is no way to totally control the Internet. Thus, some segments of the state try to resolve the identity

<sup>11</sup> Personal interview via emails, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Hill, D & Sen, K. (1997) Wiring the warung to global gateways: The Internet in Indonesia. *In Indonesia*, No. 63 (April 1997), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, pp. 67–89.



crisis by re-creating state identity via new images aimed at regaining the loyalty of Indonesians by bringing them back to 'imagine their nation'.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Corporate Agenda*

Within the semi-capitalist (i.e., state capitalist) system of the Indonesian New Order under Suharto, business could enjoy the patronage of the state as long as it could supply the state materially or bolster the state's domination over society. Under Suharto, it meant that by including Suharto's clan and cronies in their businesses, the expanding business sector could be sure that it had a bigger market portion than might have been possible under an open economic system.

At the beginning of Internet development in Indonesia, the corporate sector and the state needed each other in order to sustain their identities as benefactors of the Indonesian people. Both state and corporate interests worked together to get people into their agenda, ultimately using the Internet by making it available to more people as a technology to deliver identity messages as well as to expand the reach of both the state and corporate economies.

But once the technology was available to civil society, then it could not be totally controlled by the state. As demands for more freedom of information and far more input into government grew in the late 1990s, the state saw the media and its new technology, the Internet, as a danger to their identity and thus created other strategies to win the market; the corporate sector, for its part, began to distance itself from the state. Under the World Bank and IMF, pursuant to neo-liberal ideological structural reforms, the corporate sector began to establish its own identity as the promoter of a new consumer society. The Nusantara-21, which altogether tries to create the state identity and at the same time to legitimize the national project for corporate interests, is a different strategy. Another possible scenario is that the state and the corporate sector begin to separate their agendas and each goes its own way.

With the post-colonial society of Indonesia linked to global capitalism, the economic crisis of the late 1990s was the outcome of cronyism and global finance capital. The corporate economy has not yet found a way to build its agenda in a new form. The ISPs that emerged like mushrooms in 1996, just died tragically in 1997 due to the economic crisis. No matter how much corporate interests pushed the selling of products to society, the economic crisis had made most Indonesians unable to afford subscriptions to

<sup>13</sup>The formation of a National Telematic Team under Megawati in 2000 (which was finally disbanded due to the lack of knowledge on telematics) and the creation of national telematic framework (like the USA National Information Infrastructure) Nusantara-21, were among the state's attempts to re-build its identity.

ISPs. At the same time there was no way to lower the fees over that state's monopolistic telephony system.

### EVERYDAY FORMS OF THE INDONESIAN INTERNET: WARNET, UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

While the state and corporate agendas have been simmering in one pot, the rise of civil society has come to challenge their hegemony. When the crisis came in 1997, the state agenda (partly through the national telematic project) and corporate agenda (the emergence of ISPs) collapsed. But young people within the society managed to side step the crisis by innovating the *warnet*. These young people pioneering the *warnet* in Indonesia (among the pioneers are Purbo and CNRG-ITB) innovated this Internet access technology in order to advance their agenda, which is to provide low-cost or affordable Internet access for society (Lim, 2001).<sup>14</sup> Another implicit agenda is to create a resistance identity against state control and domination of the state-business and corporate sector. That is, the *warnet* has become symbolic of freedom from the state, though it remains highly ambivalent about its relationship with the corporate economy.

*Warnet*, *warung*<sup>15</sup> Internet, a small place equipped by several computers hooked to the Internet and rented on an hourly basis, has become the new frontier where Indonesians create and re-create their identity, searching for self-respect, belonging, and the confidence to engage with fellow Indonesians beyond the purview of the state (see Figs. 2 and 3). Even in a society still marked by limited access to IT technology, the fast-growing popularity of *warnet* is a testament to the growing awareness of its capacity to offer an alternative means of creating personal identity through social interaction.

While the state's attempt to manipulate and control the Internet is full of holes, some segments of civil society — particularly youth — thus understand the Internet even more than the state, and are able to find their way through the labyrinth of technological nets contained on the Internet, allowing them to strengthen their identity via *warnet*. Fully dominated by young people, the *warnet* becomes a seemingly unremarkable yet altogether formidable source of resistance through identity creation by well-educated youth.

Yet the forms of resistance that happen on *warnet* can be seen just as resistance itself and some "legitimized actors" may see it just as an ordinary young people's style in order to seek their identity. These "everyday forms" of

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>15</sup> The term "*warung*" is usually used for a very simple place where people from the middle and lower classes could buy some food and gather with friends or family while eating the food.



FIGURE 2. The face of Warnet, Bandung (Author's photo, 2001).

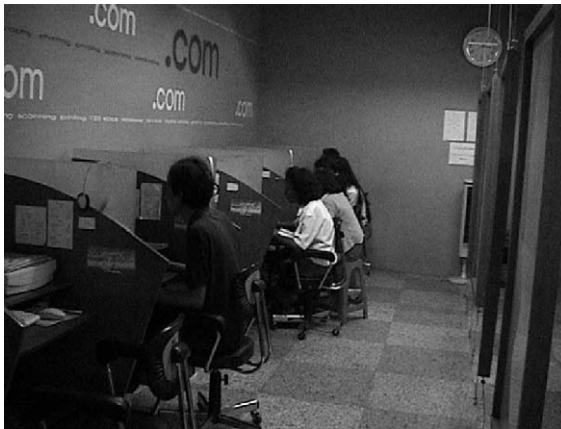


FIGURE 3. The inside of Warnet, Bandung (Author's photo, 2001).

resistance are critical to, and perhaps the most significant form of, class struggle. For Scott (1985),<sup>16</sup> this resistance can be intentional, non-intentional, individual, coordinated, and in fact anything members or subordinate groups do to help themselves. Yet it may not necessarily result in large-scale social movements but nevertheless serve as resistance to disempowerment.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, J. C. (1985) *Weapon of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Some examples provided in this section show how the resistance identity is fully embedded into the existence of *warnet*. It is important to understand at this juncture that the Internet is not merely a set of technologies or hardware/software. It is an integral part of a social process, a process that is always in motion and must be analyzed as such. It is not just a person sitting at a computer typing away on a keyboard and looking at a screen but an extension of social exchanges transmuted in binary form and reconstituted in words, symbols, and images. Thus, the transformation of technology on the Internet is in the act of use, not simply in the satellite or computer factory or the software in the machine. In the selective use of the *warnet*, the Internet is being channeled into new directions, with old pathways abandoned and new ones created. Thus, if the government monitors email, users find technologies to bypass surveillance. If spam attempts to fill the screen, ways are found through technology and software to marginalize it. In this way, technology is actively used to create room for different identities, and at the end of the day, technology is itself transformed.

Because the *warnet* was born without the interference of state and corporate agendas, society sees the *warnet* as the zone where it can act freely, openly, and democratically. However, the *warnet* should not be romanticized as a virtuous sanctuary of social good and harmony. Civil society is itself complex, and Internet users are not always the most enlightened or well-intentioned people. Socially irresponsible acts, such as violence of one identity group against another can and is promoted on the Internet. At the same time, resistance alone does not easily counter hegemonic tendencies of global capital or the state–corporate nexus. The main point is that the flowering of the Internet within civil society is itself fraught with pitfalls and misdirection, antagonisms, and even violence.

As a free zone, *warnet* becomes a place that gives the feeling of doing somewhat beyond the state's control. During the struggle against Suharto's government, *warnet* was the major source of "forbidden" information like short-wave foreign news broadcasts, campus rumor networks, and transmission of faxed and photocopied underground bulletins — all contraband information not carried by Indonesia's mainstream media.

When the government started to expand to *warnet* business, this really bothered some young people on the Indonesian Internet because the invasion of the state into the *warnet* meant that "*warnet*" no longer belonged to the youth — the civil society as they imagined it. Some of these young people, who called themselves Indonesian hackers, created a resistance identity by "hacking" the Wasantara *warnet*. Yet the term hacking here just refers to the attempt to steal the password of an administrator to set the billing system so the *warnet* users could set the amount he/she wants to pay no matter how long he/she uses the Internet in the *warnet* mode. But why did these "hackers" just try to hack the billing system of Wasantara and not other *warnet*

systems? And why did they publish the method for hacking on the Web?<sup>17</sup> The answer is because they needed to gain their resistance identity over the power of the state. They need notoriety in the public's eye, not as evil or illegal actors, but as sources of resistance to state-corporate hegemony.

The free zone character of *warnet* could also reveal resistance in the corporate arena. An apparently irresponsible act happened when the person with the initials "ES" started to bid in an e-Bay auction on many computer products at the last minute and won those auctions. He tried to manipulate the sellers by using a false credit card number and a false mailing-address. The result of this manipulation is that all sellers lost dollars in operational costs and had wasted time and effort. Due to this act, for sometime e-Bay banned Indonesians from its auctions. The Indonesian cyberians who felt disturbed by this action tried to find ES by tracing his access and found out that his geographical location could not be traced since he always accessed the Internet in order to manipulate e-Bay auctions through some *warnet* in a small town in central of Java.<sup>18</sup> This person had, perhaps inadvertently, created a resistance identity which could be seen as being destructive and as a misinterpretation of the freedom of the Internet through irresponsible action.

Yet, one should also consider how commodity relations occupy the Internet and what kind of identity challenges and limits they generate. Certainly not heroic in any way, such acts are not isolated from monopoly pricing by the global corporate world and the feelings of being exploited and taken advantage of in the so-called developing countries. It can also be a product of rising expectations, as the Internet glorifies commodities and the identities of their users through advertisements, all the while keeping them economically out of the reach of the people producing the goods in Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia.

While the two prior examples show that resistance identities could sporadically emerge, re-emerge, appear, and disappear within the context of the *warnet*, the last example will show how the resistance could transform into a project.

It was early 2000 when Onno Purbo started the mailing list as a forum to discuss the *warnet*-related issues. The mailing list, *asosiasi-warnet@yahoo-groups.com*, grew quickly, consisting of more than 500 members with about 50 postings per day. This list became the place where *warnet* operators

<sup>17</sup> Personal (informal) interview supported by emails in *paumikro@itb.ac.id*, *cmeinel@techbroker.com* and *idlinux@linux.or.id* (Jan-March 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Source: various Indonesian mailing lists (*fiii@yahoogroups.com*; *genetika@yahoogroups.com*; *doIT@topica.com*; *indoIT@topica.com*; *telematika@yahoogroups.com*).

discussed and solved the problems of moving from the monopoly of Telecom into the daily technical problems. They sometimes also did an on-line consultation here. They also jointly tried to solve some technical problems that happened on *warnet* by communicating with other operators.<sup>19</sup>

Through this mailing list, Purbo and other “*gurus*” received invitations from the *warnet* in many cities to speak at workshops and seminars about the *warnet*. Most of these events were pursuant to discussions on the list. The agendas and topics of workshops were also discussed openly on the mailing list. While the association was virtual, many real activities were undertaken by this association. It had a motto: “the association is virtual, the fight is real”.

Everything seemed to work well in this virtual association, but the need to have a real and legal forum remained. Thus in May 2000, the active members of this mailing list met and legally established the Association of Internet Kiosks in Indonesia (AWARI, 2001).<sup>20</sup> Following the association’s birth, the agenda is still arranged “virtually”. The resistance against the state (Telecom) is found in the discussions and conversations on the list. Thus, the association created the project of building an alternative to the state run system. The boycott against the rise in the telephone tariff, which was followed by a street demonstration, the boycott against the Minister Act about the licensing of the Internet industry, and other resistance actions, had positive results. The mailing list also discussed and successfully proposed a revision to the national telecommunications law, thus allowing *warnet* to operate without permission from the Department of Communications. Meanwhile, at the local (neighborhood and city) levels, unaffiliated *warnet* associations have also emerged in response to two needs: the need to prevent price gouging and to organize the sharing of bandwidth (Lim, 2001).<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper elaborates on the thesis that all technology is a product of social relations and institutional arrangements which are localized through the structures of social power and processes of social, political, and economic change. This paper attempts to conceptualize localization as being contingent upon relations among the three major spheres of power: the state, the

<sup>19</sup> Personal interviews with some *warnet* operators, by SCoT Research Group, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> AWARI (2001) *Tentang Awari: Sejarah Asosiasi Warnet*. <http://www.warnet.or.id/1,01,4,07,00.html> (the link was available when the initial research was done in June 2001).

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 6.

corporate economy, and civil society. In Indonesia, the Internet was projected into these relations from a global system and has been transformed by the specific constellations of relationships among these three sources of power.

As a technology, the Internet is more than simply a neutral source of information. For purposes of the discussion here, it is more importantly a source of images, ideological symbols, and representations of power. As such, the Internet becomes part of a network of sites of social, political, and economic contests over these representations and the power they manifest. While each type of actor is driven by a different agenda, the common contest is one over the construction of identities. Whether it is the construction of symbols, the beneficence of the state, advertising to gain consumer loyalty to name brand commodities, or the assertion of affinities based on place, religion, or social solidarity among segments of civil society, Internet technology is being shaped by contests over identities.

In the specific context of Indonesia, the period 1997–1998 represented a watershed in the social construction of the Internet. Previously, the Internet and its technology was caught up in the control and the ideology of the developmental state that used the Internet to process and disseminate information and symbols that were politically acceptable. The state itself promoted a form of cronyist corporate capitalism in which it was heavily and, through the Indonesian presidential clan, personally invested. With the Asian economic crisis and, in Indonesia, the parallel discrediting and fall of Suharto's New Order developmental state, new relations surrounding the Internet quickly emerged. The most important of these has been, first, the rise of civil society as a political force in Indonesia and, second, neoliberal reforms allowing for greater autonomy and the increasing presence of the (global) corporate economy. Since 1998, new forms of access to the Internet have emerged from civil society projects. At the same time, the corporate economy is pushing consumer identities through e-commerce such as Hotmail, AOL, e-Bay, and other forms of identities based on market exchange. For its part, the state has tried, with limited success, to recapture control while simultaneously re-inventing its identity as a democratic institution.

The case studies of the *warnet*, or Internet café, in Indonesia, reveal this new era in the social construction of the Internet. Well-educated youth frequent these cafés, where they form networks across a given city, Indonesia, and the globe. Most of these linkages seem innocuous, mundane, and prosaic. Yet in many ways, they also form patterns of resistance to domination and the increasing hegemonic forces stemming not only from government attempts to control society but also from the penetration of global capital and the types of identities this insinuates through media such as the Internet. As resistance, it is an open question whether these daily encounters in

cyberspace will effect change in Indonesia, namely, whether they will lead to proactive social projects of continuing reform. What is clear, however, is that the rise of civil society is transforming the ensemble of technologies of the Internet and the environments of cities hosting it, especially in the form of the *warnet* and the programs being developed by groups of citizens for its use.