Searching for Digital Citizenship: Fighting Corruption in Banten, Indonesia

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The expansion of digital technologies and social media in Indonesia shifts practices of citizenship from a formal institutional level toward a more informal digital space. This paper presents the emerging results of research on digital citizenship in Banten, Indonesia, focusing on how new forms of citizenship are brought into being through digital acts that are defined as speech acts uttered through the use of social media. The paper follows digital acts of citizens in anti-corruption campaigns against the patrimonial and clientelistic regime of Banten's political dynasty that are predominantly staged on Facebook and other online platforms. These digital acts produce and intensify affective publics through which forms of digital citizenship are enacted in opposition to the corrupt dynasty.

Keywords: Banten's Political Dynasty; Corruption; Digital Acts of Citizenship; Facebook; Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia today is among the top five countries with the highest number of social media users in the world (Ambardi, 2014). A number of studies have looked into how social media are used in the context of civic activism in Indonesia (Lim, 2013; Nugroho & Syarief, 2012). However, most of the examples of civic activism projected in these studies focus on the notions of participation and mobilization rather than on the formation of digital citizenship in the course of encounter between the state and its citizens in the social media (Isin, 2008; Lazar, 2008, p. 3; Neocosmos, 2009). If there is a focus on political agency formed through Internet-based civic activism, it mostly refers to activism of civil society organizations. Yet, to equate civil society organizations' activism with "citizens in action" (Nugroho, 2011) turns the notion of citizenship into something that is formal and programmatic. On the contrary, the expansion of new information and communication technologies and the growth of social media use have shifted both the meaning and practice of civic engagement from a formal democratic level toward a more informal level of "unorganized citizens" (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove, 2005, p. 182). Citizenship, in this sense, can be considered to be an "un-official, subjective, meso-level activity, taking place in a variety of sites" (Papa & Milioni, 2013, p. 27), including social media, and associated with performative activities, such as posting, commenting, liking, sharing, and so forth.

This paper presents the emerging results of the author's dissertation research examining the emergence of digital citizenship in Indonesia not simply as the ability to participate in an online environment of prescribed ethical behavior (McCosker, 2014; Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2008), but as a set of acts that designate political subjects emerging from the encounter between the state and its citizens on the Internet and in social media (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). These sets of acts are conceived of as digital acts that are all speech acts uttered through online activities such as blogging, messaging, emailing, tweeting, posting, liking, and commenting (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND TACKLING CORRUPTION

This research focuses on emerging forms of citizenship in the discourse on corruption that appears on social media platforms in the region of Banten, Indonesia. As suggested by Gupta (1995), it is the discourse of corruption that "turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined" (p. 378). By digital acts such as reporting, posting, and commenting on corruption and on Banten's dynasty issues, people "construct the state symbolically and define themselves as citizens" (Gupta, 1995, p. 389).

Banten is a province in Indonesia that is characterized by the rise of a political dynasty and localized patronage network facilitated by the ongoing decentralization process (Nordholt & Van Klinken, 2007). The term political dynasty refers to the patrimonial and familial connections of elected public officials who dispose of a clientelistic network of local strong men, or *jawara*, and business associations (Hidayat, 2007). Banten's political dynasty grew when Ratu Atut was elected governor of Banten for two subsequent periods (2007-2012; 2012-2017) and the other members of her family took up important positions in the local government. This created incentives for corruption.

Anti-corruption activists have been investigating the dynasty's corruption cases since the foundation of the province of Banten in the year 2000. Some of these cases became not only a burning issue in local mainstream media but also a trending topic in social media. News, discussions, comments, and campaigns continue to appear today particularly on Facebook sites such as *Fesbuk Banten News* (FBN) – a citizens' journalistic page in which users recognize themselves as *warga* (citizens) of Banten. Postings, comments, and discussions among these *warga* relate to their ambitious desire to dismantle all corruption cases involving Banten's political dynasty. Founded in 2010, FBN is one of most consistent and well-known citizen journalists' social media pages in Banten. It currently has 73,000 fans, mostly from the capital city of Banten, Serang; about 500,000 readers per week and a ratio of 2,000 to 20,000 readers per post. Using a journalistic approach, FBN has become the social media platform that opens space for users to enact digital acts of citizenship.

Acts of Witnessing

One of the digital acts performed by the citizen journalists is the act of witnessing (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). Citizens openly state what they perceive about corruption and

the dynasty's political mal-practices. In the most-commented posting about the dynasty's political campaigns and strategies to win the governor election in 2011, citizen journalists of FBN witnessed how members of the dynasty, especially Ratu Atut, used underhanded campaign strategies including money politics.

Figure 1. Fesbuk Banten News Posting on Local Election Campaign. *In English: Do you want to have a healthy and fast-growing baby so that he/she can vote for the next local election…? Please eat this GOVERNOR branded breast-milk companion biscuit. The biscuit has been circulated in the nearest community health center . . . .* (figure by the author).

Citizen acts of witnessing injustice are particularly recognizable in their postings related to the corruption cases of Banten's political dynasty. Citizen journalists of FBN shared information about the following cases: discretionary social assistance grant corruption case, Ratu Atut's bribery case, BPK (*Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan*, or The Supreme Audit Agency) audit report case, Ratu Atut's corruption in Pandeglang elections, medical equipment procurement case, housing grant corruption case, Pandeglang regent's bribery case, and many more.

Acts of Flaming

One of the features of citizen journalism using social media platforms like FBN is that it not only enables citizen journalists and other users to perform acts of reporting or witnessing but it also facilitates the active participation of the 'audiences'. These 'new' audiences no longer represent passive recipients of information but actively participate in its reproduction by making comments, liking, or sharing this information.

Analysis shows that the highest number of comments on postings on corruption cases in FBN can be categorized as 'acts of flaming' with the main targets being Atut and Banten's political dynasty. Flaming is defined as an act of "displaying hostility by insulting, swearing or using otherwise offensive language" (Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010, p. 1537 in McCosker, 2014, p. 205), or simply expressing "disagreement or an alternative opinion or humorous play" (McCosker, 2014, p. 205).[1] The acts of flaming staged against Ratu Atut and the dynasty involve vitriolic speeches combined with irreverent and, sometimes, humorous expressions, as in the words of one Facebook user:

> **Riri Anjayani** atuutt bisanya cuma ngurusin muka aja dasar tukang korupp.ngaca dong tuhh muka u dh ky muka babiii
> October 12, 2013 at 11:34am · Like · 👍 2 · Message

Figure 2. Screen Capture of a Comment on Fesbuk Banten News. *In English: Atut is only capable of taking care of her own face. You are a damn corruptor. Look at your own face in the mirror, it looks like the face of a pig.* (figure by the author).

These rants and vitriolic expressions of *warga* aimed at *dinasti* (dynasty) are also dominant in all comments on postings of corruption and the dynasty, which can be seen from the following diagram of the words most frequently used in FBN. As Figure 3 shows, *dinasti* (52%) and *warga* (42%) are the two most frequently used words in FBN. As such, these two terms become significant in FBN's digital speech. Moreover, the words of *dinasti* and *warga* have a substantial link in their context of co-occurrence, as it can be seen from the example in Figure 4.

The relation between the dynasty and citizens is antagonistic. Citizens are the ones who are opposed to the dynasty. Yet, in the middle of these two opposing words there is a huge cluster of harsh or vitriolic words such as *tolol/bego/goblok/koplok* (stupid/moron), *taek* (shit), *bacot* (shut your mouth), *bangsat* (bastard), *edan/gelo* (crazy), *monyet* (monkey), *babi* (pig), and *geuleuh/muak/mual/seneb/seuneub* (disgusted).

CONCLUSION

These emerging findings suggest that acts of witnessing and acts of flaming are the most dominant digital acts of *warga* uttered against *dinasti* in social media in the region of Banten. This emerging form of digital citizenship is essentially affective since it is enacted and manifested through the use of predominantly vitriolic words.

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1   See also Marc Caldwell's (2013) approach to 'acts of flaming' in online news forums by relating present notions of cultural citizenship to the concept of play.

Figure 3. Words-Cloud of Most Frequently Occurring Words in FBN's Postings and Comments. (figure by the author using Nvivo 10's word frequency query of texts in selected sources of FBN' postings and comments on Banten's political dynasty and its corruption issues from June, 2010 until June, 2014).

Figure 4. Screen Capture of Comment on Fesbuk Banten News. *In English: Those who protest will suffer ..? How if they fight ?? Who will lose ? If they hurt who will pay for the treatment ..?? Please think carefully ?? The corruptors are the one who will be happy . . . How much they will pay you .. ?? I am a citizen of Banten, not all citizens of Banten are in favor of Atut's dynasty .. they're so corrupt ??.* (figure by the author).

As Isin (2008) suggests, this kind of "hostile acts, as well as hospitality, indifference, love, friendship are not reducible to citizenship, but they can be intertwined with citizenship in significant ways" (p. 19). In this sense, online acts of flaming can be seen as an integral part of emerging forms of digital citizenship in the political context of Banten. Following the words that reflect the antagonistic position of citizens toward the dynasty, I choose to call these emerging digital citizens 'disgusted citizens'. They are *warga* who are disgusted (*seuneub/enek/geuleuh/muak*) by a corrupted *dinasti* or degraded governments. These preliminary findings point to those new forms of (digital) citizenship that go beyond dominant theoretical frameworks that define ideal citizens as making decisions based on reason. To understand these new expressions, one has to account for the mediated and affective elements of communication and of

how citizenship is perceived, experienced, and practiced in and through digital social space.

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