In 2014, the majority of Indonesian voters elected Joko Widodo as the seventh Indonesian president. Widodo won the president seat with the campaign promise of ensuring the state’s presence in the everyday lives of the Indonesians, something that the previous regime purportedly could not assure. One way to translate this promise is to ensure the intensification of the state’s presence in places deemed as marginal and neglected. Thus, Widodo promised to finally materialize the promise of post-authoritarian decentralized development paradigm by stressing that he seeks to develop Indonesia from its margin. While margin can mean anything, Widodo has a very cartographical conceptualization of what constitutes the margin: the Indonesian border space. Thus, under Widodo’s administration, state officials reamplify border development paradigm conceived by the Indonesian National Planning Agency in 2005, that is to transform the Indonesian border from the backyard into the front yard of the nation.

This repositioning of the border within the national imaginary signifies two things. First, the Indonesian border space is currently a backyard of the nation, and thus occupying a deficient condition. Second, the border space needs improvement to ensure its propriety to occupy the ideal position as the front yard of the nation. These points can only be understood in a culturally-specific logic of common architecture norm in Indonesia. The front yard of the house is commonly understood as representative to the quality of its inhabitant and it belongs within the public space. It is in the front yard that the house owner would place its well-managed garden. Meanwhile, the backyard belongs in the private space and is nothing visible from outsiders unless the house owner grants permission to it. For this reason, the backyard often serves for dirty work such as laundry, clothes drier hangs, and kitchen. Thus, this analogizing of the territory as a house, and its edges as the front yard, is a way for the current administration to problematize the border as a deficient object in need of developmental intervention.

The state presence on the Indonesian border space is characterized by circular temporality, in that, it waxes and wanes over time (Eilenberg 2012). The election of Widodo marks a moment of waxing state presence on the Indonesian border space. I argue that this moment of waxing state presence marks the aesthetic turn in Indonesian border governance. This aesthetic turn is characterized by the intensification of appearance and aesthetic judgment in informing governing decision regarding the border space. Furthermore, I argue that this turn becomes a structural failure when it results in the spotlighting of certain geographical spots on the border while neglecting the others, especially the rural border area. Amid the celebration of the successful border governance, lives in the rural border area is characterized by infrastructural disconnection and violence. The condition of being exposed to structural violence, however, does not end the
possibility of political actions. In the last part of the paper, I argue that infrastructural ruins which are emblematic to the continuation of the state’s structural violence in border village inaugurate space for the possibility of generative political action.

THE AESTHETIC TURN IN INDONESIAN BORDER GOVERNANCE

In this section, I argue that the election of Widodo marks the aesthetic turns in Indonesian border governance. By aesthetic turn, I am referring to the increasing reliance of sensorial perception, aesthetic judgment, and appearance in formulating ruling decision regarding border development. Elsewhere, Asher Ghertner names this technique of governance as “ruling through aesthetics” (Ghertner 2015). I pursue this argument to continue the political anthropologists’ tradition to investigate different modalities of ruling (see Hull, 2012; Masco, 2014; Shoshan, 2016), especially techniques that are beyond the grid of rational and calculative technique of governance (see Foucault, 2004; Scott, 1998).

In order to demonstrate this argument, I will look at the Widodo’s hallmark technique of ruling, blusukan. As a technique relying on high-level state official direct visitation to development sites, I pin down Widodo’s election as the marker of aesthetic turn of Indonesian border governance. In that, blusukan relies on high-level state officials’ aesthetic judgments to inform governing decisions. Blusukan differs with the usual high-level official ceremonial visits for blusukan does not only disrupts the scalar formation of places, but also pregnant with the potential of further surprise visits. The latter, I argue, produces a panopticon effect, meant to minimize the possibility of stalling projects.

THE STRUCTURAL FAILURE OF THE AESTHETIC TURN: A SERIES OF INFRASTRUCTURAL VIOLENCE ON A BORDER VILLAGE

The president or high-level state officials cannot be everywhere at every time. There are places they cannot or fail to visit for many reasons. This simple fact points to the limit of aesthetic technology of rule. In this section, I look at such limit by looking at the non-immediate violence that it begets. I argue that the aesthetic turn in border governance excludes the concern of infrastructural disconnection in other border spaces, especially in the rural border area. This silencing of infrastructural disconnection is not only a form of infrastructural violence, but also a form of structural violence. To demonstrate this argument, I will slowly narrow my geographical focus from the national scale to the sub-national scale and later to the village-scale.

I will look at the baptism of border crossings lauded as the icon of successful border governance and argue that this hypervisibility (the logic of spotlighting at the expense of erasure) constitutes the perpetuation of infrastructural and structural violence on border villages. I will make this argument by exploring the life of beautified border crossings in state publication and state officials’ speech. Furthermore, I will juxtapose this exploration with a series of infrastructural ruinations in a border village lauded as a future economic border pole.

THE GENERATIVE EFFECT OF INFRASTRUCTURAL RUINS

In this section, I attempt to go beyond the discussion of infrastructural violence by illustrating how such a condition can be politically generative for the people who are exposed to this form of violence. In so doing, I draw some scholarly thoughts on the issue of failure, infrastructure, and ruin to analyze my ethnographic engagement in Long Nawang village.
Here, I propose to investigate infrastructural time as circular, oscillating between ruin and renewal (Gupta 2018). I argue that through looking at the infrastructural time this way, we can consider the generative political effect of ruination that is driven by the future of infrastructural renewal. I will illustrate this argument through my investigation to the rise of development watch apparatus in Long Nawang village. Mainly, I will look at how this organization works towards tricking the infrastructural time, from ruin to renewal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Youth and Social Life of Chemicals
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This medical anthropological study consists of comparative ethnographies of how youth use chemical and pharmaceutical compounds in everyday life to manage not only pleasure, but also sex, moods, vitality, energy, work, appearance, and health. Contemporary anthropological theory tends to focus on the body as text, in the process diminishing its material significance. With the focus on what bodies culturally represent and their symbolic meanings, representation has been privileged over materiality and embodied experience, with little consideration for how bodies are lived, both socially and biologically.

A handful of sociological and anthropological studies have given us insight into what chemicals do for youths in their everyday lives. They help generate desired gendered subjectivities (such as