

Globalizing Media and Local Society in Indonesia

Report >
Southeast Asia

13-14 September
2002
Leiden,
the Netherlands

Media can be defined as a meeting point of many conflicting forces in a modern society and is, therefore, a highly complex issue. The study of media has been conducted in a wide variety of disciplines, such as sociology, mass communication, cultural studies, political science, and anthropology. Although there have been numerous approaches and theories in media studies, we have not yet found any clear-cut satisfactory perspective. The workshop 'Globalizing media and local society in Indonesia' tried to grasp the complex and complicated mediascape in Indonesia, which has experienced drastic change in the last decade. The participants discussed various topics ranging from transnational Internet and national TV to local radio stations. Here we consider two of these topics, namely, the relationship between media and politics and the problem of globalization and localization, both of which are highly controversial in media studies in general.

By Makoto Koike

Some participants discussed the role of media in the collapse of the New Order in 1998. Based on interviews with television journalists, who had worked in the newsrooms, Ishadi SK convincingly described how they came to side with the people's Reformasi (reformation) movement against the owners of the TV stations, who were Suharto's children and cronies. The critical news these journalists broadcast hastened the collapse of the New Order, which had implemented the privatization of television. Merlyna Lim developed this theme, looking at how the newest technology, the Internet, played a crucial role in supporting the Reformasi and democratization movements. For example, the emails about Suharto's wealth, originally written by George Aditjondro, were published on a website launched by Indonesians in Germany. Some Indonesian students found Aditjondro's articles on the Internet and printed them for their friends and family. Finally, newspaper sellers got hold of them and sold photocopies of the articles on the street, and this controversial information spread widely in Indonesia. This is an interesting case in which a new medium and traditional medium were effectively combined. Merlyna Lim also considered the negative role of the Internet, and how it helped to fragment Indonesia into religious factions, focusing on the website of Laskar Jihad, an Islamic fundamentalist group.

This contradictory character of media dynamics in the post-Suharto era did not escape the participants' notice. From an optimistic point of view, the drastic political change brought about by the stepping down of Suharto paved the way for

more democratic and liberal media, which in turn led to the emergence of a 'public sphere' and 'civil society' in Indonesia. Edwin Jurriëns highlighted the role of private news radio in Java in representing the idea of civil society. On the other hand, Dedy N. Hidayat and Sasa Djuarsa Sendjaja showed vividly how the collapse of the New Order opened a Pandora's box of so-called hate media exploiting ethnic and religious conflicts in Ambon. Both speakers referred to mob attacks against media organizations. Veven Sp. Wardhana also discussed this problem, focusing on Islamic discourse on television programmes: it is very common for Muslim groups to rush to the television stations whose programmes they regard as unacceptable.

The actions of such Muslim movements are considered to be a response to the globalization of television contents. Though only a few participants overtly discussed media globalization, it is an undeniable element of the contemporary mediascape. Interestingly, the conference participants did not endorse the widely held belief that globalization is a recent phenomenon that creates uniformity, and one which is often seen to be conterminous with Americanization. On the contrary, media globalization and localization are concurrent phenomena. Amrih Widodo discussed the popularity of Indonesian *sinetron* (television drama) amongst the middle class, which is an example of the myriad localizing processes of global television. Latin American and Indian TV drama supplied the formula for *sinetron* as used by the most successful producer in Indonesia, Raam Punjabi, who is an Indonesian of Indian descent. His drama, *Tersanjung* ('Flattered'), has achieved nationwide popularity and is amazing-

ly popular with female audiences in the Javanese village where I carried out ethnographic fieldwork. In my own presentation, I explored the mixture of the global and local and the traditional and modern in rural Java today. Focusing on foreign television programmes from the perspective of a cultural anthropologist, Gareth Barkin analyzed the 'domestication' effect of subtitling and translation from English into Indonesian. The consumption of American dramas in Indonesia always entails this kind of localization process. For example, Trans Television broadcasts an American series, *Sex and the City*, which is well-known for its overt sexual themes and language. The translator re-wrote the text of the drama, guided by her understanding of national standards. Interestingly enough, this radical drama has so far escaped the wrath of Muslim groups.

In the province of Riau, which is very close to Malaysia and Singapore, local people watch foreign TV programmes and listen to radio from the neighbouring countries. Suryadi discussed how some private stations relay programmes from foreign radio stations even though the Indonesian government prohibits it. The relationship between this kind of transnational radio broadcast and the revitalization of the Malay ethnic identity is an interesting question which needs to be further researched.

We can, therefore, discern diverse global waves crossing Indonesia's national boundaries. Nevertheless, John Postill reminded us of the importance of nation states as cultural areas, based on his comparative study of popular media in Sarawak, Malaysia, and Bali, Indonesia. Essentially, we need more research into the dynamics of the global, national, and local in the wider Asian region, in which media and politics are increasingly intertwined. ◀

Prof. Makoto Koike is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at St. Andrews University, Osaka, Japan. As an affiliate fellow at the IIAS (4 February 2002 until 26 September 2002) he researched both the Indian contribution to the Indonesian media, cinema, and television drama and the local reception of mass media in a Javanese village.

koikema@andrew.ac.jp

Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia

Report >
Southeast Asia

31 October 2002
Leiden,
the Netherlands

May a woman serve in a position of authority over men? Is jihad licit in Maluku? Who are the upholders of orthodoxy? These questions have recently been put before Muslim scholars and institutions in Indonesia and have received answers in the form of fatwas. Fatwas are the pieces of advice from the perspective of Islamic law on topical issues affecting both individuals and society in general. Consequently they are important indicators within the discourse of religious authority. They were also the subject of last October's meeting of the Islam in Indonesia project, attended by some sixty participants, both from the Leiden scholarly community and beyond.1

By Nico Kaptein & Michael Laffan

Kees van Dijk's opening lecture introduced a variety of regional cases (Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia), highlighting the tension between religious authority as expressed in fatwas on the one hand and political authority on the other. It was shown that in some cases religious authority was invoked successfully to overcome political tensions, while in others it was not.

The following three papers addressed the question of why fatwas are requested. The first, delivered by Khalid Masud, was of a general theoretical nature and as such, illuminating for the broader theme. Masud discussed the Quranic origins of *istifta'* (the formal question posed in order to obtain a fatwa), its further development and institutionalization. Masud suggested that it is the *istifta'* rather than the resulting fatwa which reflects a community's political and social conditions.

Certainly this contribution meshed well with Jajat Burhanuddin's paper, which addressed the dialogue established between the Egyptian reformist

journal *al-Manar* (1898-1936) and the Malay-Indonesian *Archipelago*. By examining requests for fatwas addressed to *al-Manar*, Burhanuddin pointed out that there were three sorts of Southeast Asian petitioners: Malay-Indonesian students in the Middle East who seem to have formed the most important channels of transmission of 'Salafi' reformist thought to their homeland; persons of Arab descent living in Southeast Asia; and finally, Muslims indigenous to the region.

In the following paper, read by Martin van Bruinessen, Noorhaidi Hasan gave a contemporary account of how an Indonesian organization for Islamic propagation has used its links with conservatives in Saudi Arabia and Yemen to justify the formation of a paramilitary force. This force, Laskar Jihad, was dispatched to the Moluccas to wage jihad in 2000. The main crux of the paper did not revolve around jihad itself but interrogated the penetration of Salafi discourse in Indonesia and the networks of authority it has established. According to Noorhaidi, most Salafi groups had remained essentially apolitical until the crisis. He therefore

analysed the changes in this discourse and the role fatwas issued in Arabia have played in the process.

The three remaining papers each discussed influential bodies in present-day Indonesia that employ fatwas as part of their arsenal of authority. Nur Ichwan examined how the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) has attempted to play a proactive role in politics since its inception under Suharto. Focusing on what he calls its 'discursive products' – ranging from silence to fatwas – Ichwan argued that the MUI has attempted to guide the reformation process in post-Suharto Indonesia. Nico Kaptein then presented Syamsul Anwar's paper on fatwas of the Muhammadiyah movement. The most interesting case presented was related to whether a woman could serve in a position of authority over men. The resulting fatwa reinterpreted Prophetic traditions and Quranic verses with modern sociological interpretations, declaring that a woman could indeed be appointed. In doing so, Anwar argued that the fatwa reflects Muhammadiyah's attempt to promote a more dynamic understanding of religion differing from the estab-

lished views within the books of Islamic substantive law.

Next Michael Laffan described his recent encounter with a traditionalist organization that does employ such books. In July 2002, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) held consultative sessions to formulate topical fatwas. Laffan described the debates before examining how they have affected the language and substance of fatwas on such topics as the role of the sharia, and the permissibility of suicide bombs. Laffan concluded that the methodologies adopted, as well as the results and justifications, were uneven and show that whilst the membership might apply pressure to discuss an issue or to call for a fatwa, the resulting declarations are largely shaped by the political concerns of the executive.

The final session of the workshop was intended to provide an overview of the meaning of fatwas in the Indonesian context; the results suggested a wider relevance. The discussants returned to ask questions about what a fatwa is, and indeed how Islamic authority is constructed. Of particular

interest was the choice of terminology in the opinion released, and just how enforceable it might be, whether as 'a piece of advice' or, perhaps, a 'ruling'. Although many of the debates were not resolved last October, the project is making good progress. A selection of the above papers is being considered for publication. ◀

Dr Michael Laffan completed his PhD on the history of Islamic nationalism in colonial Indonesia. In January 2002, he joined the IIAS project on 'Islam in Indonesia', where he is concentrating on the competing discourses of traditionalism and modernism.
m.laffan@let.leidenuniv.nl

Dr Nico Kaptein is research coordinator of the project 'Islam in Indonesia', coordinator of the Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS), and current secretary of the Islamic Studies Programme at Leiden University.
n.j.g.kaptein@let.leidenuniv.nl

Notes >

- 1 The annual meeting of the KNAW/CNWS/ISIM-sponsored research programme 'Islam in Indonesia' took place in Leiden on 31 October 2002. For more information, see: www.iias.nl/iias/agenda/archief/31102002.htm
- 2 The term 'Salafi' derives from the phrase *al-salaf al-salih*, lit. 'the pious generation'. Confusingly, this is used both by followers of the modernist movement, led in Cairo by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, and the Wahhabiyya movement of Arabia, which is now effectively the state doctrine of Saudi Arabia.