

# Globalizing Media and Local Society in Indonesia

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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. ◀

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