Radio Days:

Media-Politics in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

In the recent excitement about the democratising potential of the 'new' electronic media, theorists have largely ignored the role of the oldest of the electronic 'mass' media, that is, radio. This paper suggests several parallels between the oldest and the newest electronic media in the transmission of anti-authoritarian politics in Indonesia. While the Internet aided sections of the civil society in subverting the state's control over public discourse, in the post-authoritarian politics, radio may remain by far the more significant technology of democratisation. Radio's importance is only in part explained by the economic limits on the distribution of the Internet in Indonesia. We need to look at the particular tessellation of culture, politics and technology in Indonesia to understand the role of radio in the articulation of local politics, in a democratisation process whose success depends on the politics of ethno-cultural decentralisation and devolution of power from urban elites.

This paper arises out of a reaction against the techno-triumphalism of the vast majority of writing about the Internet. But the paper is *about* a much older medium – the radio. And while it is embedded in the perennial questions of media studies (at least post-McLuhan) about the relationship between media technology and social exchange, this is a largely empirical account of one medium in one national context. I suggest that in the context of democratisation in Indonesia, radio has played and continues to play a role that the Internet cannot replicate – most importantly because of the socio-historical specificities of radio in Indonesia.

In terms of its broad analytical underpinnings, the paper draws on and talks to two quite different bodies of academic work: (i) theories of the relationship between electronic media and democracy; and (ii) area-studies analyses of the process of democratisation in Indonesia

i) Electronic Media and Democracy

In contrast to the meagre theoretical literature on radio (Miller, 1992) the Internet has taken the academic imagination by storm, dominated in particular by the utopian vision of 'virtual democracy'.[1] In Indonesia, the excitement about the democratic promise of the Internet preceded the actual arrival of the technology in Indonesia. (Sen and Hill 2000:194-202)

How far this 'cyber democracy' remains 'politics in a parallel universe' (to borrow a phrase from Ogden 1994) and how and to what extent virtual democracy of on-line activity is related to the 'material' one of the street and the ballot box is a common line of enquiry. When the so-called anti-globalisation movement can use the Internet to call thousands of young protesters out to the streets of Seattle (November 1999) or Melbourne (September 2001), the lines between virtual and real politics

seem to disappear altogether. In Indonesia, similarly, on the eve of the historic 1999 elections, Onno Purbo, US-trained engineering lecturer at Indonesia's premier Institute of Technology in Bandung and a self-proclaimed Net-Activist, called on the rebellious students to stay home and convey their feeling to the Parliamentarians on-line instead of marching out on the streets and confronting the army. Such elision between actions in cyberspace and in the material world is quite common to models of cyber democracy.

Yet there are no clear analyses as to the extent to which such global and national mobilisations draw on existing social networks, where the Internet is little more than a convenient tool. Globally coordinated movements of protest predate the Internet after all. In another generation the fax and the telephone seemed to be similarly effective weapons of war for middle class activists around the globe. Morris-Suzuki and Rimmer (2002) putting the current global protest movements in context, write of the ways in which the massive Japanese anti-Vietnam war protests used traditional broadcast and narrowcast media to organise nationally. 'International collaboration, meanwhile, was made possible by relatively cheap intercontinental airfares and airmail and, in particular, by increasing access to the international telephone network' (7). The movement's leader, Oda Makoto wondered then at the power of international phone calls: 'With just one phone call it is possible to conduct and coordinate action in many parts of the world. It seems that the various progressive groups of the world have not yet noticed this fact.' (Oda 1974, in Morris-Suzuki & Rimmer 2002:7)

In some ways, there is little new in the optimism that the Internet and the world wide web will set us free from the control of states and of multinational corporations and promote communication across all social and political boundaries.

As McChesney points out 'every major new electronic media technology this century, from film, AM radio, short-wave radio, and facsimile broadcasting to FM radio, terrestrial television broadcasting, cable TV, and satellite broadcasting, has spawned similar utopian notions. In each case, to varying degrees, visionaries have told us how these new magical technologies would crush the existing monopolies over media, culture, and knowledge and open the way for a more egalitarian and just social order' (McChesney, c1999: 119-120). Countering optimism, more and more research is drawing attention to online inequities, both between and within nation states. This is not just a matter of access but also a matter of capacity to use the access effectively. Summarising this body of work Anthony Wilhelm concludes: 'These observations are significant in underscoring a central dynamic of emerging communications networks, that some scholars choose to ignore, namely its complicity with and even subordination to accumulated economic and media powers'. (2000:39)

Crucially, however, the overwhelming majority of writers about the Internet return repeatedly to the Internet's capacity for interactivity, which distinguishes it from the broadcast media, radio and television. While the bad old media delivered to government and to business access to mass citizenry, the new interactive media delivers to all citizens the power of public speech. It is this generalised distinction between *broadcast* radio and *interactive* Internet that I want to question in the particular context of New Order and post-New Order Indonesia. I will argue that the *observable record* (to borrow a phrase from McChesney) of the oldest electronic media in Indonesia in comparison with the newest suggests that radio, over a long period of Indonesian history, has continued to breach both state censorship and corporate monopoly control and operated as a vector for public discourse and indeed that radio has provided a degree of 'interactivity' – one that we might call a socially

produced interactivity in contrast to the technologically given one of the Internet. This paper, then, pre-empts (and questions) some of the grounds for the current valorisation of the Internet's unique capacity to create a discursive (interactive) political space for civil society.

This is not an entirely new line of enquiry. Potts (1989 in Miller 1992), writing on radio in Australia argues that radio both 'speaks to the public' and 'lets the public speak' (6). In his discussion of talkback David Row (1992 following Crisell, 1986) suggests: 'The dyadic and triadic permutations of broadcaster/listener, broadcaster/caller, caller/listener and broadcaster/caller/listener, at once individual and collective and private/public, introduce both elements of voyeurism and activism to radio broadcasts' (16). My argument in this essay extends beyond talkback, however, and I will return later to a more situated discussion of radio interactivity that is being flagged here.

ii) End of the New Order in Indonesia

While there is widespread agreement that Suharto's power structure imploded from within (See Schwarz, 1999: chapter 11), to many who observed the dramatic end of the New Order, urban student rebels and professionals in the media, acting on behalf of discontented middle classes, seemed to be the heroes. But not for long. Within months the anticipation of a strong civil society, led by a civic spirited middle class, was dashed by spiralling ethnic and religious conflicts. John Sidel suggests that there may be serious limitations to the role of the middle class intelligentsia with its faith in liberal democracy, civic spiritedness, and tolerance 'against a backdrop of dangerously illiberal, uncivil, and sectarian mass politics' (Sidel 2001: 114) which has followed the fall of Suharto.

This gap between a mass-based democracy and the democratic ideals of the intelligentsia has a long history in Indonesia. In 1973, Liddle, writing of the urban middle class 'secular modernising intellectuals' in the transition from Sukarno to Soeharto, noted their fear of and ignorance about 'the masses' (Liddle 1973: 200). Two elements common to the intelligentsia (cutting across a variety of differences) identified in Liddle's account are worth recalling here: first, their sustained critique of mass-based party politics (pp. 182–7); and second, their conviction of 'the centrality of their own role' (p. 186). The convictions of the intellectual political actors could only have been reinforced in the three decades of Soeharto's Indonesia. New Order repression made any sort of mass politics impossible, and democratic ideals could only be developed and nurtured as an intellectual project in the relative security of university classrooms, small magazines, and later on the Internet.

John Sidel, a foreign observer of Indonesia and Indonesian social scientist Ignas Kleden have mobilised Habermas' notion of deliberative democracy – in somewhat different ways – to understand the nature of this politics of debate and discussion in Indonesia. If Sidel underscores the limitations of 'Habermasian discussions and debates on the seminar circuits and newspaper editorial pages of Jakarta' (2001: 114), then Kleden's conclusion that the current politics of Indonesia defies the Habermasian model is an instance precisely of the Indonesian intellectuals' rueful admission of the failure of *their* deliberative democracy. It is easy to see why the Internet would have been embraced by students and their wider support base, the urban professionals and intellectuals, against Suharto and his army, as the preferred weapon in a battle for the primacy of the deliberative/discursive modes over other modes of acquiring and exercising power. The ways in which critics of the Suharto regime used the Internet to defy government censorship is discussed elsewhere (Hill

and Sen, 2000). But if the civilised intellectual ideals of deliberative democracy contained in the *reformasi* movement of the 1990s are not easily reconcilable with the practices of a mass-based electoral politics of the street and even the parliament, which has followed the fall of Suharto, then do we need to ask also if their medium of defiance and deliberation, the Internet, is necessarily the medium of mass based democracy?

Prominent theorist of communication Neil Postman has suggested that in order to evaluate the social implications of a technology we need to ask 'what is a problem to which this is a solution'? (cited in Graham 1999:4) When such a question is raised about the Internet in the particular historical context of the last years of Suharto's reign, the answer is reasonably clear. For all practical purposes the Internet arrived in Indonesia in the mid-1990s, when intellectual dissent against the regime's censorship practices was already high. Although connectivity was very low (about 0.1% of the total population) even after taking account of public access points, the Internet allowed radical journalists to develop alternative networks of news, bypassing the censored media; it allowed human rights activists to be in contact with the outside world more cheaply and more easily than any previous mode of communication. But in post-Suharto Indonesia, with state censorship in tatters, what is the political problem to which the Internet is a solution?

Political parties which emerged within the formal electoral structure in Indonesia after Suharto did not embrace the Internet as their tool. In 1999 only nine of the 48 parties contesting Indonesia's first free and fair election in decades had their own website, and there appears to be no relation whatsoever between the use of the Net and electoral success. (Hill and Sen 2000: 131) But beyond formal electoral politics, democratisation (more than simply the fall of an authoritarian regime) is

often linked to the rise of the civil society as a third public sphere, autonomous of the market and more importantly of the state. In Indonesia, as elsewhere in Asia, the term civil/civic society is coming into increasing play in the discourses about democratisation, in particular via the language of international NGOs investing in 'civil society' programs.

This paper turns to the history of radio in Indonesia in order to understand the kind of discursive space radio can provide for the civil society, in particular in comparison to the Internet. In other words, I am concerned here not with the formal political organisation of parties and legislatures but with the role that radio has played in the diverse constellations of public (many to many) communication of citizens, and to make a judgement of the role that it might continue to play in Indonesia in the digital age. This is not a general argument about the nature of these technologies. Elsewhere in Asia, radio has been fully harnessed to the state's ideological purposes. In India, for instance, even after deregulation of the television industry in the 1990s, the national government had monopoly over the massive network of radio stations until 2001. In the last year or so however 150 FM stations in 40 cities have been licensed, some with foreign ownership, and restricted to deliver entertainment only.[2] In Thailand, in a partially deregulated media market, radio remains largely under the control of various military factions.[3] Clearly, in these circumstances radio cannot have the capacities which I am claiming for it in the Indonesian context. Indeed, this paper is grounded in the conviction that there can be no universal reading of the political consequences of any electronic medium and that their implications must be understood in the tessellations of technology, culture and politics in particular historical and temporal contexts.

Radio at the End of the New Order

Like many newly independent nations of Asia, the post-colonial Indonesian state had monopoly control over radio. But by the early 1960s, this control was eroded in a number of ways. Hundreds of illegal student radio stations emerged, broadcasting in a tiny range (sometimes little more than a handful of individuals operating from a private residence) but in direct competition to the national broadcaster, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI). Some of these became more directly politicised after the incidents of 1 October 1965[4] and were staffed round-the-clock by bands of student activists opposed to President Sukarno. One of the best known of these, Radio Ampera, set up by activists including brothers Soe Hok Gie and Arief Budiman, broadcast for a time from the home of Mashuri, then a next-door neighbour and trusted political ally of Suharto.[5] While technically illegal, anti-communist and anti-Sukarno broadcasts were not just condoned but often actively aided by ascendant factions of the military. While based at Mashuri's residence Radio Ampera, for instance, was openly protected by pro-Suharto troops.

Despite low transmission power and very limited audience reach, the existence of 'hundreds of "unofficial" stations ... on the air in the vicinity of the capital alone' (McDaniel 1994:223) effectively broke RRI's monopoly control over broadcasted information and interpretation of the fluid politics of the time. Radio Ampera, for example, chose to broadcast its leading news commentaries at 7 pm, precisely the time of the RRI evening news, thereby forcing listeners to choose. The student stations also flaunted RRI's ban on certain types of Western pop music, by broadcasting popular songs from prohibited bands like the Beatles and Rolling Stones. The strategy drew young listeners to the fledgling non-government radio in droves. RRI never regained its monopoly of the airwaves.

From the point of view of the new New Order state in 1965, radio had been re-invented – it was no longer the powerful medium of state propaganda under government control. It was a fractured medium, in the hands of small, localised groups, with small and diversified audiences. Three new categories of radio were legalised in 1970: commercial, community and local government – but the lines between them were never particularly clear.

The New Order state attempted to control this reinvented radio by three main means: licensing, restricting political content, and 'localisation' by which I mean forcing a particular definition on radio as 'local' and 'cultural' as opposed to RRI which was 'national' and 'political'.

Licensing: On the whole, unlike television, commercial radio licences were issued without centralised political interventions. In the 1990s there were over 700 registered non-RRI radio stations – and an unaccounted for number of non-registered ones. The government periodically carried out blitz or 'sweeping' (as it is known in Indonesia) to close down illegal operations – the large numbers of illegals picked up in these 'sweeps' suggests a complete failure by the Indonesian state to restrict the establishment of radio stations, particularly in regions with high degrees of discontent with the New Order state. (In Aceh, in 1996, for instance, thirty-six of the seventy private stations were found to be running with no permit and closed down.[6])

Radio was a successful medium in some sense, as the large numbers of legal and illegal stations suggest, but not in the sense of large commercial profit-generating success. Many local governments and military commanders maintained and supported one or another radio station. But unlike television, or the film industry or even the press, radio never became the target of large corporate commercial interests. In 1987 the Director General of Radio, Television and Film specifically ruled out non-

government radio stations from opening 'branches or agencies, whether using the same company name or a different company name'. In addition, he ruled that 'bodies operating non-government radio stations are not permitted to engage in other types of businesses apart from activities linked to the social function of radio broadcast itself'.[7]

Since the late 1980s Suharto family and friends had come to acquire an unprecedented financial control over print and audio-visual media. In the late 1970s, another member of the family, Sudwikatmono, had gained monopoly control of film import and distribution. While in the 1990s both Bambang and Tutut, the main media players amongst the Suharto children, started to acquire radio stations, their holdings (about half-a-dozen between them) remained small in an industry where other considerations (which become obvious in the following discussion) had produced a policy that worked against monopoly, corporate control.

De-politicisation: As indicated earlier, politics was the raison d'etre for the illegal radio sector at the beginning of the New Order. The government moved quickly to depoliticise it. Regulation (Peraturan Pemerintah) No. 55 on *Non-Government Radio Broadcasting*, which provided the framework for the New Order's radio policy stated that programs were 'not to be used ... for political activities'. The ban on political activities had three practical elements:

i) Private radio stations were barred from producing news and were obliged to relay the news broadcasts of RRI, the national government radio – initially the precise requirements were unclear, but later fixed at 14 times a day.

ii) There were to be no relays of foreign broadcasts.

iii) Stations were required to maintain recordings of all broadcasts.

The ephemeral nature of its broadcast, however, makes it notoriously difficult to monitor the programming content on radio. Live programs are almost impossible to censor. There were various regulations designed to prevent live broadcasts including a requirement that radio stations keep copies of all broadcasted material and not broadcast from outside the studio. However, the state had no capacity (and as later discussion will show, often no inclination) to monitor any of this, as hundreds of radio stations mushroomed around the nation, with many of them broadcasting 24 hours a day. In Yogyakarta in 1996, for example, the Department of Information section charged with monitoring local radio programs reportedly had only a single radio receiver to follow fifteen private stations in the city and did no more than check on the compulsory news relay from RRI.

Station owners and executives sought repeatedly to change the requirement to relay RRI news broadcast, not because of any critical political intent, but due to the widespread belief that audiences tended to turn radio off at times of such relay. Most private stations continued to employ staff with responsibility for covering 'current information' (informasi aktual), that is, in any other language, 'news' stories. Even senior government bureaucrats recognised that, in radio, 'although normatively there are limits, ... in fact they [radio stations] have extraordinary freedom'.[8] For stations in the outlying districts of the nation, the ability to broadcast up-to-date news in advance of the newspapers is seen as radio's leading edge. Even in towns which have their own dailies, national news (by definition news printed in Jakarta papers) is on the local radio before the newspapers from Jakarta arrive in subscribers' hands, often a full day after printing in the capital, and then only provided there had been no flight delays.[9]

In recognition of the appeal of news, the majority of Indonesian stations incorporated various kinds of 'discussion', 'information' or talk-back format programs dealing with recent political issues. Even Jakarta's Trijaya FM, owned by Suharto's son Bambang Trihatmodjo seemed to be constantly pushing the limits of censorship with its weekly 'Jakarta First Channel' program discussing controversial political issues, while being protected by the assumed immunity of its owner. Bandung's Radio Mara Ghita ignored perhaps the majority of broadcast regulations when it relayed various foreign transmissions for a period of days leading up to the fall of President Marcos in Philippines. In the last months of the New Order the ban on news and on outside of studio broadcast were flouted openly. On 27 July 1996, Radio Ramako broadcast on the spot reports of escalating violence triggered by the attack on the PDI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, led by Megawati, now President) headquarters, with its star presenter reporting 'live to air' via her mobile phone. This kind of live reporting from political rallies and riots became common practice for many stations in the final days of Suharto's rule. As at the beginning of the New Order, so at the end, the lines between political reporting on radio and political action were largely erased.

It was the New Order's practice to remind radio owners of the restriction on news whenever there were major controversial political events. There were stern reminders from the authorities soon after the 27 July 1996 riots in Jakarta. While overt discussions of the riots and their causes did cease briefly after the government's warning, most stations continued to report, through indirect references, on local repercussions of the events in Jakarta, by various means. For instance, UNISI radio, known for its appeal to university students, continued to provide advance notice of student demonstrations in the city under the guise of information about road closures

in its 'traffic' bulletins! Radio stations around the country, particularly with large student followings, used their broadcast not only to report the rapidly unfolding political saga, but also to provide various kinds of support for the demonstrators, in particular to announce impending gatherings of students.

Through most of New Order period, the Department of Information only intervened forcefully if a station's programming sparked some attention in the print media. In February 1995 Radio UNISI broadcast an interview with controversial psychic Permadi, concerning among other things, his predictions on one of the hottest topics of that time, the presidential succession. The interview sparked no immediate attention, but a recording of it together with a seminar given by Permadi at Yogya's premier Gajah Mada University, began circulating from hand to hand particularly amongst students. Two weeks after the broadcast, the interview was mentioned in Yogya's *Bernas* and Surabaya's *Jawa Pos* dailies. The Yogya city office of the Department of Information responded immediately to the press report, writing to UNISI management requesting a copy of the interview. The following week, the head of the regional office (kantor wilayah) of the Department, also wrote to UNISI claiming the broadcast 'had a broad impact and had been quite unsettling to all parties' and declared the station had broadcast '"political news" contravening regulations', which he then listed. He accused UNISI, in New Order-speak, of 'broadcasting information in a sensational tone, which could disturb National Security and give rise to unhealthy community opinions and [which] could unsettle the community.' The letter instructed UNISI to cease their '"City Info" program on which the interview had been broadcast, as it was identical to "Straight News"' [English in the original]. He then wrote to all non-government Yogyakarta stations condemning

recent 'deviations' from government regulations, instructing them to 'eliminate broadcasts which were vulgar, and with unclear motivations and direction'.[10]

The effect of these events was quite positive for UNISI, strengthening the station's reputation in the city as critical, 'stirring' (*mbalelo*) and informative.[11] A year later UNISI again breached the limits of censorship by broadcasting two extracts of a six-part interview with Sri Bintang Pamungkas, head of the unauthorised Indonesian Democratic Union Party (Partai Uni Demokrasi Indonesia, PUDI) but canned the remainder of the series after a telephone warning from the Department of Information. (Article XIX 1996:13)

Localisation: In Indonesian terminology the New Order had started with a 'wild' radio industry (industri liar[12]). Licensing was one mode of bringing it under state control, but as the continuation of 'liar'/unlicensed stations mentioned above shows, the New Order's capacity to control the establishment of radio stations was limited. The government moved to protect the state's monopoly over national broadcast, legislating to define non-government radio as a medium of 'local' 'cultural' communication. A 1971 Directive of the Communication Minister devolved the authority over non-government stations to the provincial governor and the local military command KOPKAMTIB. A Directive of the Minister of Information in the same year emphasised the local moorings of radio, stating that 'a broadcast is local, not national, in character', and that the 'nature, content and purpose of a broadcast reflects the local relationship with the conditions and growth of the area reached by the broadcast'.[13] After 1982 shortwave broadcast by private radio was phased out. Stations opted increasingly for the AM and, from 1987, FM bands, with clearer transmission over shorter distances.[14] Government regulation stipulated maximum

transmitter power, which limited the broadcast area to about 100 kilometres for FM and approximately 300-400 kilometres for AM stations. (Lindsay 1997:114)[15]

Implementation of government policy was the responsibility of the Regional Authority for the Development of Non-Government Radio (Badan Pembina Radio Siaran Non Pemerintah di Daerah, BPRSNPD, henceforth Regional Radio Authority) appointed by the Governor, and consisting of provincial bureaucrats. In 1978 this Regional Radio Authority was given wide-ranging powers to take 'preventive' and 'punitive' actions, including the withdrawal of permits and the closing down of non-government stations. The Regional Radio Authority was also responsible for vetting any 'broadcast material, which originated from abroad'. While private stations were obliged to relay news and other (unspecified) government broadcasts from RRI Jakarta, the local body determined precisely *which* materials were 'obligatory relay' (wajib relay) from RRI 'according to the interests of the region concerned'.[16] A slew of memos and regulations from Ministers and senior bureaucrats emphasised that non-government stations should give priority to programs 'whose materials are drawn from local regional cultures' and 'whose broadcast materials originate domestically and are appropriate to local conditions'.[17] In the 1990s some of the control over implementation of policy reverted to the cental government but radio remained, both in practice and in government policy, a much more 'local' medium than either film or television. The Broadcast Bill enacted in 1997, while noting the different spans of broadcast (local, provincial, regional, national) permissible for private television, reiterated that radio broadcast is always restricted to the area in the vicinity of the station.

This policy of 'localisation' had two interesting consequences: (i) it kept the commercial potential of radio relatively low and radio therefore remained in the hands

of small business and, in some instances, community groups and NGOs; and (ii) it embedded radio in local communities, tied to the needs and desires of its small, often linguistically and culturally differentiated, listening publics. In rural areas in particular the most popular radio shows tended to be traditional forms of oral entertainment, 'tailored to the local cultural tastes of each region'. (Astrid Susanto, 1978:237) As Jennifer Lindsay illustrates in her detailed study of radio and local identity in Indonesia, the 'persistent survival of private radio... indicates the vitality of the Indonesian tradition of local community expression through radio broadcasting'. (Lindsay 1997:115)[18] Popular stations, she argues, do not simply broadcast to a given geographical area; they attempt to create and maintain audience loyalty by manufacturing a communal identity and continually refining 'their own interpretations of what is "local".' (116) In contrast to film and television, where New Order policy virtually banned use of vernaculars, radio broadcasts used local languages extensively in all genres of programming.

The degree of specialised and localised service provided by private radio is exemplified in the tiny Radio Terunajaya in Pameungpeuk, Garut district, the sole radio station for four rural districts scattered along a thirty kilometre span of the southern coast of West Java. Located in a hilly region, with poor communication and transportation, far from asphalt roads, the station's special appeal is its broadcast of individual and community announcements. Villagers use the station to transmit urgent messages from one village to another in the secure knowledge that, with little alternative entertainment, someone in the target village is likely to be listening and able to pass on the message. Amongst its other regular broadcasts are Sundanese folktales and other fiction, and Indonesian and Sundanese pop music. Despite its small size, Terunajaya's more or less captive market of 140 000 enables the station to

survive commercially. Set up in 1991 with capital of Rp 100 million, it broke even after two years on the strength of its niche market and strong community identification.[19]

Terunajaya is one instance of what I would call the 'socially produced interactivity' of radio. In terms of creating a capacity for political communication for civil society, this social production of interactivity is as important as the technologically given interactivity of the Internet. Nor is this socially produced interactivity a phenomenon peculiar to this small isolated and rather odd little radio station. In Bandung, arguably the cradle of the Indonesian brand of cyber democracy, radio Mara promoted itself as the 'barometer of the dynamics of the population of Bandung'. The comment had initially come to the station's director from a regional military commander, as an explanation of why they tolerated Mara's hallmark talk-back shows, when these were in fact illegal! Mara, the commander had said, was the local military's regular source for understanding depths of local sensitivities over particular issues. Confirmed in the precise role in which the station wished to cast itself, as the voice of the local population, Mara later adopted the army commander's statement as part of its station profile. On the eve of Suharto's resignation, Mara announcers and newsreaders called on their listeners to peacefully demonstrate their opposition to Suharto by wearing a white ribbon. From then till Suharto's resignation, the station was inundated with phone-calls of support and supplies of white ribbon. A local businessman, reading this call from the radio station as a sign of support for the demonstrating students, contacted the radio station and, through it, became involved in supplying food and drinks to the demonstrating students.

Of course, the Internet newsgroups around the country were performing similar networking functions. But three important points emerge from the foregoing:

i)   In the context of New Order policy and politics radio has developed a capacity for interactivity. At the end of the New Order radio was not, and was not seen as, a tool of one-way communication with a mass audience. It was a medium where the audiences could and did speak back in a variety of ways – thus eroding the conventional distinction between the producer and the consumer in mass communication. It was a sphere where individuals and groups could anonymously and publicly express their ideas – it was in fact a perfect instance of a Habermassian public-sphere outside state and corporate control.

ii) Importantly, the public from the point of view of radio was potentially synonymous with almost the entire citizenry, in stark contrast to the minute reach of the Internet, restricted to a microscopic elite with the required literacy and economic capability.

iii) Social interactivity of radio was clearly geographically restricted to a very localised community – within the zone of broadcast into which each station was restricted. And even within that each radio station has only small sections of a segmented market. But it is this limitation which then turns the radio into a representational tool – a local coffee shop (to follow Habermass' analogy for public sphere), a town hall where the local community can exchange, formulate and express ideas, and ultimately take that local position to the national arena.

Mediating a new Democracy

On 5 June 1998, barely a week after the resignation of Suharto,Yunus Yosfiah, the new Minister of Information in the first post-Suharto government, removed all restrictions on private stations' producing their own news. In the chaotic explosion of

all media in the post-Suharto period, dozens if not hundreds of new stations have emerged since 1998. The website of the Private Radio Owners' Association, PRSSNI lists 780 member stations – but as membership of the association is no longer compulsory, this is clearly an incomplete list. A number of radio stations are now entirely dedicated to news and current affairs. A variety of national, local and international NGOs have become actively involved in either establishing new stations or linking up to existing ones. Two of the largest new radio networks belong to NGOs, and both are heavily supported by international donor agencies. Asia Foundation's largest single grant in Indonesia (up to 2001) was to a national network of radio stations led by Radio 78 H, with strong connections to the journalists and students who had been in the front-line of anti-New Order activism since the mid-1990s. Similarly the most visible aspect of the US-based Internews is its support for radio stations across the Indonesian archipelago – particularly notable as the organisation works primarily with the print media in many other newly democratising nations where it is active.

There is a great deal of overlap between sections of the population which self-consciously utilised the radio and those that used the Internet as vectors of political communication during the New Order. The urban students had been in the vanguard in establishing illegal radio in the mid-60s. In the 1990s the succeeding generation embraced the Internet, but they did so without giving up the radio. University students manned many of the illegal news and current affair programs of radio stations throughout the New Order period. Radio stations whose workers and audience were students and young professionals started to go on-line, as the new technology became available after 1996. Needless to say that the technological lines between the two media are fast disappearing everywhere. Radio stations in big cities are using the

Internet to broadcast on line, to advertise and to extend total quantity of broadcast material. In a context where all media seems to be converging into a new digital multi-media technology, the kind of concern about the specificity of radio in a particular nation, which is driving this essay, may well become out-dated. Nonetheless, my focus here on the specificities of radio as an institutional and technological practice raises a cautionary note about convergence.

It is clear from foregoing discussion that in New Order Indonesia radio was able to flout state controls and to provide a space for political discourse for sections of the society. The corollary to this is perhaps obvious: that even if we defined the problem of democratisation in Indonesia narrowly as the need to bypass state censorship, the Internet was neither absolutely essential nor the only tool of communication which answered this problem. Indeed, the ephemeral nature of radio broadcast, which makes it particularly difficult to investigate and hold to account those who produce and sanction what goes on air, made radio an excellent technological solution to the problem of censorship. Broadcasts just disappear into thin air; they leave behind no digital footprints, unless of course radio is linked into a digital platform. In that sense the digitisation of radio may well render it a less effective weapon against certain kinds of repressive regimes.

Democratisation however is not ensured simply by the fall of a repressive regime such as the New Order. The question with which this essay started was about the capacities of the media to underpin the formation of a strong civil society, necessarily fractured in itself but autonomous from both the market and from the state. And here issues of access are of vital importance. Through the period of the New Order, the level of ownership of radio sets had soared along with the expansion in the market for consumer goods generally, as Indonesia recovered rapidly from the

economic downturn of the 1960s. Between 1970 and 1980 the number of sets in use increased more than six-fold. In 1970, there were 2.5 million sets in use, in 1980 there were fifteen million and by 1994, 28.8 million.[20] More than 3.1 million portable radios were sold in 1995 alone, making Indonesia one of the largest markets for these products in the world.[21] Ownership rates per head of population are lower in Indonesia's rural areas, but at least in Java most households now own a radio. Ethnographic accounts of Javanese villages suggest that radio ownership in rural areas remains far higher than television ownership, or subscription rates for print media and that radio is the primary mass medium for much of rural Indonesia.[22] The contrast with the tiny reach of Internet, restricted to the cities, to the literate and the young is obvious. Indeed, in comparison to all other media in Indonesia, access of citizens to radio, both as producers and consumers, is less marked by indices of social hierarchy such as money, literacy and proximity to Jakarta.

Another related point of difference between the Internet and radio is important if decentralisation of culture and politics is to be a benchmark for Indonesian democratisation. New Order policy, driven in particular by the technophilic fantasies of Habibie during his term as the Minister for technology, developed the Internet as Indonesia's connection to the economic and scientific capitals of the world. It is well-known that the groundwork for the Indonesian information superhighway was laid by a generation of foreign trained technologists who benefited from Habibie's policies and largesse. The same 'Habibie-whizkids' who formed the first ISPs also supported the semi-underground Internet newsgroups as middle-class discontent peaked. These groups were often more connected to the international NGOs, expatriate communities living in the west, and professionals all around the world, than to their own hinterland of poor, illiterate, and *not necessarily liberal* masses, whose votes should count in the

exercise of any democracy, and whose voices are more present on the regional radio waves. Radio, by contrast, is the medium of the rural and the regional not only because of its distribution, but because the policies of the New Order precisely made radio the repository of local cultural politics. For Indonesia's fledgling civil society institutions radio(inter)activity may remain important for some time yet.

Endnotes

[1] This idea was first made popular by Rheingold's (1993) book *Virtual Community*, and has been since repeated endlessly.

[2] See http://www.startv.com/eng/pressrm_intro.cfm?press_seq=2 and

http://www.agencyfaqs.com/www1/news/stories/2001/07/16/2934.html

[3] See http://www.busakorn.addr.com/thaitcom/thaitcom-ownership.htm and

<http://www.rnw.nl/realradio/features/html/thailand.html>

[4] The New Order came into existence on 1 October 1965, when Generel Suharto defeated a coup by young army officers. Over the next few months Suharto unseated President Sukarno, became President himself and remained in power until his resignation in the face of massive demonstrations and economic crisis, on 28 May 1998.

5. See Harold Crouch, 1978, p.212. Arief Budiman describes his involvement in radio of this period in 'Umar Kayam, Dia yang tidak Menyerah' *Kompas Online*, 15 June 1997, circulated via <indonesia-p@indopubs.com> on 14 June 1997.

6. 'Sebanyak 36 stasiun radio siaran di Aceh, disegel', *Kompas*, 12 November 1996, p.10. Of course, given the separatist movement in Aceh, and the consequent break-down in law and order in many parts of the province, this large scale flouting of broadcast regulations may not be representative of the situation across the nation.

[7] Regulation no. 1050/RTS/RSS/K/1987, 20 August 1987 in PRSSNI (Indonesian Private/Commercial Ratio Broadcasters' Association) *Petunjuk Radio Siaran Swasta Nasional '95* p.479.

8. The former head of TVRI, Ishadi, is quoted in 'Perlu Regulasi di Bidang Penyiaran Media Radio', *Kompas*, 4 July 1996, p.10.

9. Operations manager for Radio Pesona Amboina 103 FM, for example, says one rationale for his station's establishment was its capacity to fill the information lag that had existed in Ambon because the newspapers arrive for sale on the streets in Ambon by 9 pm on the day of printing in Jakarta, but are not home-delivered to subscribers until the following morning. 'Penyaji Informasi Pagi Hari', *Kompas*, 18 December 1996, p. 19.

10. Quotations from: Kantor Departemen Penerangan Kotamadya Yogyakarta, No. 251/VI/a/1995, dated 9 March 1995; Badan Pembina Radio Siaran Non Pemerintah, Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, No. 04/BPRSNP/III/1995, dated 16 March 1995,signed by Hoetojo Hoerip; and Kantor Wilayah Departemen Penerangan Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, No. 300/[101]/K/III/1995, dated 20 March 1995, signed by Hoetojo Hoerip.

11. Tri Agung Kristanto, 'Radio Unisi FM Sarat Informasi', *Kompas*, 20 November 1996, p.22.

12 *Liar* means 'wild' as in 'wild animals'. But the term has been extended into political discourse to mean illegal, in the sense of things that remain beyond the legal system. For example, 'Barisan liar' often refers to irregular battalions that took part in the war of independence.

13. *Surat Keputsan Menteri Penerangan Republik Indonesia Nomor 39/KEP/MENPEN/1971 tentang Petunjuk-Petunjuk Umum tentang kebijaksanaan penyelenggaraan acara serta isi siaran bagi radio siaran non-pemerintah*, Bab II Ketentuan-Ketentuan Khusus, Pasal 4, Sifat Siaran, paragraphs (1) and (2).

14. Laws and regulations concerning radio broadcasting appear in PRSSNI, *Petunjuk Radio Siaran Swasta Nasional '95*, Pengurus Pusat PRSSNI, Jakarta, 1995 and other PRSSNI publications such as Sekretariat Pengurus Pusat PRSSNI, *Kumpulan Peraturan tentang Radio Siaran Swasta di Indonesia: Tahun 1970 s/d 1992*, PRSSNI, [Jakarta], 1992.

15. Lindsay, 1997, p.114, fn 40. These stipulations are widely disregarded, with Lindsay noting that, while FM transmitters should be no more than 100 watts, 'most FM stations broadcast with at least 5 kilowatt transmitters, and some as much as 20 kilowatt'.

16. Ministerial Directive SK No. 24/KEP/MENPEN/1978 and Appendix.

17. Instruction of the Director General of Radio, Television, and Film, No.09/INSTRK/DIRJEN/RTF/78.

18. Lindsay, 1997, pp.115-22, provides an excellent analysis of the local role of private radio, with several valuable case studies.

19. Dedi Muhtadi, 'Siarannya Terdengar Hingga Pulau Christmas', *Kompas*, 25 September 1996, p.19.

20. See Table 'Radio broadcasting: number of receivers, and receivers per 1000 inhabitants', Asia.WT0901.e on the UNESCO Statistics web site:

   http://www.unesco.org/general/eng/stats/asia.wt0901.e.96.html (sighted 19 June 1997).

21. Euromonitor, *International Marketing Data and Statistics 1997*, Euromonitor, London, 1997, p.389, Table 1413.

22. See, for example, Salamun (ed.), *Dampak Masuknya Media Komunikasi terhadap Kehidupan Sosial Budaya Masyarakat Pedesaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Directorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Proyek Penelitian, Pengkajian dan Pembinaan Nilai-nilai Budaya [Jakarta], 1992-93, p.13, 34 & 37. From the late 1980s onwards University of Gadjah Mada student theses in Anthropology routinely include media habits of rural populations. Almost all of these accounts support our observation here.

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