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chapter five

The bearable lightness of democracy

Ariel Heryanto

Now that Indonesia is entering the second decade of the post-New Order era, under the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono government (2004–09), Indonesians and analysts of Indonesia should have a better sense of what democracy might mean and entail than they had in 1998. Analysts may differ on the question of whether or not contemporary Indonesia is a democracy and on what basis this term can be defined. Rather than performing another round of conceptual debates on what constitutes a democracy in the abstract, this chapter proceeds with the *a priori* assumption that Indonesia *is* a democracy[1] in order to offer two paradoxical observations. First, in contrast to the generally pessimistic view among Indonesians and their observers alike, I wish to propose that Indonesia is more liberated and democratic than has been generally acknowledged.[2] Second, in what may seem contradictory to the first point, I wish to argue that Indonesia's liberalisation and democratisation does not necessarily mean that all is or will be good. This argument will be presented in a section below in response to the widespread and uncritical valorisation of democracy in academic and non-academic analyses of contemporary Indonesia.

Because I have been an academic and have grown up under the heavy weight of the New Order authoritarian government, I see Indonesia as having achieved more than is generally recognised by Indonesians and foreigners alike. Who should be credited with this achievement is a different question and one that can only be partially answered in this chapter. Admittedly, today's Indonesia is not quite what many were expecting during the final years of the New Order period. Indeed, some of the serious problems from the New Order era have persisted. In some areas, such as money politics, corruption and the poor functioning of the justice system, these problems appear to have become even worse. But it is a serious mistake to consider the two periods (before and after 1998) as two disconnected histories and to judge which is better. Many of the problems in Indonesia today are the direct and indirect consequences of what happened before the last decade.

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The New Order and the governments since its decline have operated under significantly different circumstances. While each of these governments started in unfavourable moments (the aftermath of political and economic crises), the New Order enjoyed a great amount of material, military and diplomatic support from the world's major advocates of liberal democracy as part of their strategic moves against the Communist/Socialist bloc during the Cold War. The New Order government brutally eliminated nearly all of the key figures and institutions of its predecessor and fiercely suppressed much of the nation in order to clear the ground and launch its own militaristic development projects during the Cold War.

In contrast, successive post-New Order governments have tried to rebuild Indonesia in a democratic fashion and have done so with much less assistance from the international community. The democratic rebuilding of Indonesia has proved to be more daunting than it first appeared. This is largely a result of the interference from many elements of the New Order elite that survived the 1998 reform movement and have since managed to hijack the outcomes of the reform. Because of the damage done by New Order elites before and after 1998, Indonesians in post-New Order period have had to pay a great price to rebuild the nation. A comparison of the period of the New Order and what has followed must take these historical factors into consideration. Unfortunately, this has proved to be a difficult task for more than a few observers. In fact, many seem to have ignored this problem. Nothing has illustrated this problem more vividly than the mass media coverage of Suharto's critical illness and his death on 27 January 2008. The forgetting of the New Order's state terrorism (Heryanto 2006) and the continued manufacturing of a glorified history of the New Order period are sources of the sense of distress, disillusionment and apathy that can be seen currently among many Indonesians. This malaise is also felt amongst those formerly active in supporting the 1998 reform movement. Another source of this sense of distress, disillusionment and apathy has to do with the myth of democracy as produced and reproduced by analysts of Indonesia. The rest of the chapter will focus on these distinct but interrelated problems.

Demoralisation in democracy and the freedom to express it

Failure to understand the important historical connectedness between Indonesia before and after 1998 has led more than a few to nostalgia for the orderliness of the New Order under Suharto. One recent opinion column in *The Jakarta Post* is entitled 'Why Indonesian people are losing interest in democracy?' (Harijanto 2008). A pessimistic view was more pronounced in the early 2000s. In their longing for a strong ruler, some people chose to remember the past selectively. That is, they emphasised the supposed political stability of the era

and the economic growth, ignoring how these were achieved and their costs. They lamented the apparent rise of crime and violence, the stalled economy, all of which they blamed on the rise of Indonesian liberalisation, reform or democratisation.[3]

When Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono—a New Order general—won the presidential elections in 2004, many believed it was a popular expression of disappointment with the disorder since the fall of Suharto and desperation for a return to firm leader with a military background. Working next to the President is an assertive Vice-President, Jusuf Kalla, a New Order tycoon and a top leader of the New Order political machinery, Golkar. The former general has not been a firm and strong leader at all. In fact, he has been considered disappointingly indecisive and slow on too many important issues. These include the impasse with the investigation into the murder of Munir, the aborted establishment of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, and the mishandling of the Sidoarjo mudflow. Kalla, on the other hand, has been noted to be remarkably assertive, but often for the wrong reasons. This has raised more worries than assurance among Indonesian reformists and pro-democracy supporters.

The current government can claim little credit for whatever progress has been made in developing Indonesia. There are many problems for which this government must take partial or full responsibility. However, notwithstanding these shortcomings, it is highly contentious to suggest that Indonesia's past, under the New Order, was a better time than what has unfolded since the downfall of the New Order. It is true that Indonesia today is indeed full of problems, but, to say the least, so was Indonesia under the New Order. There is one significant difference though; during the New Order there was no freedom at all to acknowledge and openly discuss the problems that existed.

Today, politics in Indonesia has become noisy, tiring, time-consuming and hopelessly boring. But, so is politics in most other liberal democracies. If politics in some of the world's oldest democracies has lately become occasionally more interesting, this may have something to do with the fact that these countries have become less democratic and more authoritarian, especially after the 11 September 2001 attack in the US.

Notwithstanding the general economic and political performance of the state and private sections that fall short of the naïve and ambitious expectations of the pre-1998 reform movement, Indonesians have enjoyed freedom of expression at a level comparable with most liberal democracies, and perhaps even higher than is found in some of them. The following account illustrates this point. I will juxtapose my account with new and old problems in this area, which should serve as useful counters to my largely positive narrative.

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One of the most positive trends since the fall of the New Order has been the strengthening of freedom of expression. While many aspects of this new freedom have been noted by observers, its scale and significance may not be fully recognised and appreciated. We have seen the spectacular growth of the media industry in Indonesia. During the economic crisis a decade ago, when unemployment soared, the mass media was the only industry that recruited more employees. Some companies even doubled their revenue during this period (Hill 2007:10). With the removal of repressive state agencies and policies in 1999, the mass media has become an even more robust institution.[4]

In 1999 President Abdurrahman Wahid closed down the Department of Information—the main propaganda and censorship instrument of the New Order. In the following year, the number of licensed print media publications jumped from 289 to around 1,600. Fewer than half of these publications would survive, however, for reasons that were mainly financial and managerial. The number of private-run television networks has now more than doubled since the end of the New Order era. More than 50 local television stations have spread out across the archipelago, some in ethnic languages; nationwide networks include programs in English and Mandarin.

Another development that demonstrates the remarkable progress of media liberalisation is the new legislation that guarantees the constitutional freedom of media expression. Press Law No. 40/1999 and Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002 are the result of hard-won legal achievements of broader pro-democracy groups and experts and professionals in the mass media. Under the new Press Law, the newly-established Press Council is responsible for safeguarding press freedom from external intervention, for drafting and supervising the implementation of a journalistic code of ethics, and for seeking resolutions to public complaints on news reports. Members of the Council consist of independent individuals from relevant backgrounds—journalism, management, and academia. Pursuant to the Broadcasting Laws, the government established the Indonesian Broadcast Commission as an independent, state regulatory body on 26 December 2003. The Broadcasting Commission has more power than the Council, and for some media practitioners, its power is excessive and unconstitutional.[5]

The Broadcasting Law No. 32/2002 has suffered legal challenges from associations of media companies, some of which have gone as far as the Constitutional Court. Even after the Court handed down a verdict that satisfied all contending parties in July 2004, new disputes among the Commission, media companies and the government arose over the more procedural issues of a technical enforcement. As a social institution, the media still face a long battle. Regardless of the final outcome of this legal battle, it is fair to say that Indonesia has made giant steps towards liberalising the media. The battle itself is testimony to the scope and quality of Indonesia's newly-acquired liberal democracy.

It must be admitted, liberalisation has not been even, nor has it meant the same thing to all people. Reform in the print media has been more difficult. While the liberated television has been heavily criticised and censured, mainly for its sensationalism (through showing 'pornographic', 'uneducational', and 'violent' images), the print media have been a frequent target of legal threats and libel cases. Unlike the Broadcasting Law, the new Press Law governing the print media has enjoyed barely any recognition or effective power. Despite significant increased remuneration for journalists and greater freedom for their professional associations, journalists have not been much better protected at their places of work than than they were during the Suharto era. Management as well as individual journalists continue to be subject to assault, intimidation and violence from state and non-state agents.

On 20 February 2008, the Depok State Court found Bersihar Lubis, a senior journalist with the daily *Koran Tempo*, guilty for using an 'offensive' word—*dungu* (stupid)—in an opinion column dated 17 March 2007.[6] The word was used to describe the Attorney-General's decision to ban the government-sponsored history textbook for secondary schools, because it did not conform to the New Order's official history of its rise to power in which the Indonesian Communist Party is blamed for the so-called 'abortive coup attempt' in 1965. Such prosecutions occurred frequently during the New Order, victimising hundreds of citizens. Seen as a legally-flawed trial, the 2007 case provoked angry protests from many media outlets, journalist associations, the National Commission of Human Rights and individuals. Although these protests did not succeed in getting the case dropped or the defendant's acquittal, they seemed to have a significant impact upon the presiding judges in their decision making and sentence mitigation. The court sentenced the defendant to one month's imprisonment, but he didn't actually have to spend any time in jail; instead he was given a three-month probation period of good conduct.

A more alarming incident is the Supreme Court decision on 13 September 2007 in favour of Suharto in his legal battle against the magazine *Time* over its coverage (24 May 1999) of his allegedly ill-gotten wealth. Suharto had previously lost the case twice when it was investigated by the Central Jakarta District Court and then by the High Court upon the plaintiff's appeal. Overturning these decisions, the judges of the Supreme Court, chaired by a retired army general, demanded that the magazine and its seven journalists print an apology and pay Rp1,000,000,000 (US$106 million) to the plaintiff. *Time* has decided to continue the legal battle against the Indonesian ruling.

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Before the above ruling, Indonesia witnessed another dispute between Tomy Winata and Indonesia's most prestigious news magazine, the Jakarta-based *Tempo*, and its sister daily *Koran Tempo*. In late January 2004, the South Jakarta court declared the daily *Koran Tempo* guilty of running a libellous report and discrediting a New Order tycoon, Tomy Winata, who was suspected of having interests in a wide range of industries, including illegal gambling. The court ruled that the accused had to pay compensation, the unprecedented amount of US$1 million, and to make a public apology in eight newspapers, six magazines and 12 television stations, including the international broadcasters, CNN and CNBC, for three consecutive days. It also ruled that failure to comply would entail a further Rp10 million (US$1,190) per day fine. This shocking verdict came within weeks after the same daily was found guilty in a separate libel case filed by another New Order tycoon, a textiles manufacturer, Marimutu Sinivasan. In this verdict, the judges demanded that the daily print an immediate full-page apology, the contents of which would be decided by the plaintiff, in 20 newspapers, 12 magazines, and nine television networks, or again, face a fine of Rp10 million (US$1,190) per day.

But it has not stopped there. The daily *Koran Tempo* belongs to the media-holding company, the Tempo Group, whose principal publication, *Tempo*, was sued by Tomy Winata and Marimutu Sinivasan in other libel cases. The total compensation that Mr Winata was seeking in six separate libel cases from the holding company amounted to Rp342 billion (US$40.7 million). In September 2004 Bambang Harymurti, *Tempo*'s Chief Editor was sentenced to one year imprisonment in a newly-added defamation case filed by Tomy Winata. He was released pending an appeal and was acquitted on 9 February 2006 by the Supreme Court.

This all suggests that Indonesia's democratisation is gradual, with intermittent setbacks, but, overall, I argue that it has been consistent in its progression. Unfortunately, in most of the cases above, only the setbacks were widely reported in the media, especially outside Indonesia. The familiar aphorism 'no news is good news' has also been attested to in the case of the controversial publication of the Indonesian version of *Playboy* and the anti-pornography bill. While reporters of the commercial media were compelled to cover the attack by some Islamist groups on the *Playboy* office building and the legal indictment of the editor for allegedly publishing indecent material, none of them was interested in reporting the court's decision to declare the editor not guilty, which has put an end to the controversy. The extremely popular television show Newsdotcom, also known as 'Republik Mimpi', became news in Australia only after its stinging parody of the current and former heads of state in Indonesia drew a legal threat

of defamation from the Minister of Information.[7] At the same time, Abu Bakar Bashir who remains little-known in Indonesia, has become an icon of terrorism in the foreign media.

Democracy and liberalisation are not the same thing. Even if we focus our discussion on liberalisation, we can safely argue that freedom of expression in Indonesia deserves more recognition than is usually noted, let alone appreciated, both inside and outside Indonesia. The degree to which media liberalisation in Indonesia has generated better quality journalism is open to debate. Disagreements often originate from different sets of expectations or bases for comparison. Are we comparing the performance of Indonesia's media today with that of the media under the New Order? Or are we comparing it with its counterparts elsewhere in the region? Or are we comparing what they have actually produced with what we think they could and should have produced? These are difficult questions. A search for a satisfactory answer is beyond the scope of this chapter.

With rare exceptions, such as the work of Krishna Sen and David Hill (2000), most scholarly studies on Indonesia's media present an unbalanced portrayal, which emphasises the dark sides—bribery, censorship, and assaults against journalists—and which is based on a set of highly questionable presumptions and the sense of superiority of someone coming from a liberal democracy. The following two sets of issues illustrate my point.

First, frequent disputes and controversies in Indonesia, following the provocative attempts by the powerful to silence critics or to repress media, are too often confused with the reality. These repressive attempts are generally assumed to be effective and all-consuming, leading analysts to conclude that the Indonesia mediascape is dominated by repression. It does not usually occur to the analysts that these controversies may, in fact, demonstrate how the newly-liberated media crusaders have successfully pushed the limits of their new liberty to the farthest possible extent; an extent most likely uncommon or unseen in liberal democracies elsewhere, most notably during the enforcement of draconian laws in the so-called 'War Against Terrorism'. Alternatively, the controversy may simply be an index of the frantic desperation and the unpreparedness on the part of the intimidated elite and the conservative segments of the population in dealing with newly and aggressively liberalised media.

The fact that such controversies have taken place, often over an extended period, with great passion, and involving a huge number of citizens with diverse backgrounds demonstrates the dynamics of a robust democracy so lacking in many societies where liberal democracy is more often assumed and mythologised, and seldom tested. Interestingly, a lack of such controversy has

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been widely interpreted against a double standard. There is usually a quiet, but deeply running, assumption in English-language analyses that the absence or lack of controversy over issues of freedom of speech in liberal democracies is unequivocally a sign of well-protected freedom of speech, rather than a sign of a range of possible situations, including public disempowerment, apathy or the dullness of the media. But the same lack or absence of controversy is usually assumed to be evidence of severe repression of civil liberty, when it is identified in countries like China or Singapore.[8]

All the above requires a critical re-examination of the powerful and insidious assumptions underlying the many familiar analyses of contemporary Indonesia in the broader context of its history and democratisation. A set of problematic assumptions and prejudices, plus the general overlooking of the historical connectedness between the New Order period and what has followed, appears to be responsible for the widespread disappointment in post-authoritarian Indonesia among citizens and their observers alike. Another possible source of such low morale is intellectual in nature, namely problematic assumptions about inherent qualities of democracy, to which the next section will be devoted.

Democracy as fetish[9]

While sharing the general wisdom that democracy remains the best model of governance that we know today, I find it both surprising and worrisome to see how discussions of democracy—both among scholars and others—in the past few decades have commonly made far-reaching assumptions about the merits of democracy. This is especially true when such discussions take place among people who see themselves as members of a liberal and democratic community of some sort, analysing other societies. On the basis of an extensive review, Julia Paley (2002:469–96) suggests that one notable set of exceptions to that general observation can be found among recent works in anthropology and others with some anthropology-derived insights. It is hard to resist the suspicion that self-delusion or ethno-centricism may be at work among many democratic-minded people of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.[10]

Surely, the term 'democracy' means different things among a range of people. It is also used differently for different purposes. For instance, among many political activists across Asia, the term 'democracy' has often been used in their banners, slogans, or in naming their groups and their goals. Understandably in such situations, democracy is evoked without the need, intention, or invitation that it be examined in any critical or scholarly fashion. In these cases 'democracy' is taken for granted as a kind of magic wand to solve many kinds of problems; a tool that is assumed to be inherently unproblematic in itself.

But, even within that specific domain of activism, it remains to be explained why 'democracy', instead of other key terms, should have been chosen by a wide range of activist groups with different and contradictory interests in their banners, rallying cries and slogans, as well as in their choice of name. I suspect this has something to do with the already authoritative—perhaps hegemonic—status enjoyed by that term, as a result of its use by the more powerful and privileged institutions and members of social groups (including scholars, journalists, and politicians), regardless of whether or not they have intended it to achieve that status. Perhaps there is no conspiracy or concerted propaganda to bring 'democracy' to its current salience, but one cannot assume that the term's prominence is purely accidental. While these privileged groups often distinguish themselves from the activists, and although they claim and have enjoyed the respect of others for speaking 'truth' in a disinterested, measured and critical manner relative to activities in their street rallies, their use of 'democracy' is barely distinguishable or any more critical than the activists.

'Democracy' is but one of the most recent terms in the series of key terms in Indonesian studies. In the last few decades it has enjoyed the status comparable to that of 'development' in the preceding decades in the middle of the 20th century, and 'modernity' before that. For nearly 100 years, countries like Indonesia have been an object of scholarly analysis by Indonesians and foreign observers alike, primarily as a case of a people lacking something deemed to be unproblematic and universally desirable, which 'the West' can assist it in getting. Until about the 1960s, Indonesia was studied primarily as a country that needed, but lacked, 'modernity'. For roughly the next two decades, Indonesia was primarily described as a 'developing' country, implying its presumably regrettable lack and its predestined future, namely industrialisation and incorporation into world capitalism. Now it is a country that is seen primarily as having the potential to be the world's third largest democracy, if it follows in the footsteps of established 'modern', 'developed' and democratic nations on the other side of the globe.

Both in Indonesia and in Indonesian studies, there has for too long been too much adulation of democracy as a kind of promised land, or as a gate that leads to heavenly peace, prosperity and happiness. The democratising realities of Indonesia, as elsewhere around the globe, have betrayed and contradicted this powerful myth among scholars, journalists, activists and many others. (For a review of 'democracy deficit' across the Americas, European Union and beyond, see Paley (2002:470)). But old habits do not die easily. Of the few scholars to escape from the spell of this myth, the late Daniel Lev was one with special expertise on Indonesia. 'No-one', he warned us, 'should fall into the trap of supposing that it is the real thing, or even that the real thing is desirable' (2005:351). He contended that the term democracy should 'probably be banned

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or a charge levied on its use by serious students of politics' (2005:349). But as he explained, it is not easy for any one of us in a liberal democracy to give up the delusion of democracy because it make us 'feel better about ourselves' (2005:349), while pitying or despising others who live in what appears to us as undemocratic societies.[11]

According to Paley (2002:473), during the Cold War 'democracy functioned ideologically as the antithesis to Soviet communism and was deployed in US foreign policy…After the Cold War…democracy [was linked to] free market economics.' So hegemonic has the propaganda of democracy become that even those who have been frequently and unfairly attacked as dangerously undemocratic feel the need to develop a counter-argument within the framework of the attacking party. I cannot remember how many times I have discovered, with unease, serious and lengthy papers prepared in earnest by colleagues and students alike to the effect that Islam and democratic values are not or not necessarily incompatible. 'The Indonesian case is not often enough cited as proof, if proof were needed, that Muslim-majority countries can create democratic political systems' (Ward 2007:15). It is as if Islam is respectable and credible only if it is proven to be 'democratic', and only after the world recognises this.

As should be clear from the foregoing discussion, the problem with democracy is not that it comes from a foreign land and is incompatible with what the New Order state spokespersons propagated as Indonesia's authentic political tradition (Bourchier 1997:157–85). Rather, the problem with democracy lies in the fact that it has not been universally accepted either as a concept or as practice; it was not even accepted in Western Europe until about a century ago. To quote Arblaster (1994:7):

> For most of its long history, from the classical Greeks to the present day, democracy was seen by the enlightened and educated [in the West] as one of the worst types of government and society imaginable. Democracy was more or less synonymous with 'the rule of the mob'.

It should be no surprise that for a long time in many Asian countries, a significant portion of the people are prepared to compromise their freedom of expression and association for added prosperity in a political order that outsiders disparage as 'authoritarian' in character (for Southeast Asia, see Hadiz (2000:10–33) and Stubbs (2001:37–54); for Burma, see Alamgir (1997:333–50); for China and Taiwan, see Shi (2000:53–83)). One would suspect that this inclination is by no means peculiarly Asian; under similar circumstances others might well do likewise.

The success of propaganda for democracy and the fantasies it inspires has most likely been a source of disillusionment and distress among analysts when

looking at today's Indonesia. Unless that myth is adequately deconstructed among Indonesians, we continue to live and work in the delusion of 'democracy jihad'.[12] In the years to come, as industrialisation expands and consolidates, the Indonesian media, like its parliamentary politics, will likely become more dull, commercially driven, and lacking in controversy. Until then, I would still see Indonesia as being in a state of bearable lightness of democracy.

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Notes

1 The author is grateful to Andy Fuller for his editorial suggestions and comments on an earlier version of the essay. The title of this chapter is indebted to Milan Kundera's *The unbearable lightness of being* (1984).

Indonesia is clearly democratic within the 'minimalist' definition of democracy and more democratic than many in Asia-Pacific region. The phrase 'minimalist definition of democracy' refers to some of the most basic and formal elements of democracy that constitute the necessary conditions. These elements include open, regular, regulated and independently-administered elections to choose and change governments, through a relatively fair, transparent and free contest for votes among competing political parties within the bounds of previously-agreed rules and procedures. These necessary conditions are deemed insufficient by others, especially advocates of the so-called maximalist definitions of 'democracy', who also disagree among themselves with regard to what additional elements should be included in a definition of 'democracy' to make it more acceptable. However, as will be elaborated in the next section, contemporary democracy in Indonesia has more qualities than the minimalist definition requires. Suffice it to note here that, in contrast to liberal democracy in countries such as Australia, Indonesia's elections are not compulsory and yet they have always attracted no less than 90% of eligible voters to cast ballots. The fact that certain anti-democratic elements continue to exist in post-authoritarian Indonesia (just as in most liberal democracies whose democratic status is often taken for granted) does not invalidate its status as a fully democratic nation.

2 Not even a modest survey of recent literature is intended here. For a random selection of the recent reviews, misgivings, and assessments which emphasise the imperfection of Indonesian democracy, see Andrew, Roesad and Edwin (2005:53–77), Freedman (2007:195–216), Kim, Liddle and Said (2006:247–68), Slatter (2006:208–13) and Webber (2006:396–42).

3 According to one survey in late 2003 conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute some 60.3% of 2,160 respondents (from 372 villages and cities in 32 provinces) preferred Suharto's New Order political system to the current one. Only 25.2% of respondents had the opposite view. A separate survey a month earlier by Charney Research of New York and AC Nielsen Indonesia and commissioned by The Asia Foundation resulted in a similar outcome; 53% of eligible voters in the 2004 elections 'preferred a strong leader like former president Suharto, even if this meant that rights and freedoms would be reduced' (Kurniawan 2003; Gazali 2003).

4 Facts and figures in this and the next four paragraphs have been presented in an earlier version (Heryanto and Hadiz 2005:251–75).

5 The Commission not only has the power to set the code of ethics for practitioners in radio and television broadcasting, but also has purview over a wide range of regulatory matters, including media ownership, licensing, and penalties for irregular practices. In reaction to these new constraints that threatened their will to retain power and reap huge profit, some within the media industry have alleged that the Commission has shown an inclination to be as repressive as the New Order's Department of Information.

6 The court found the defendant guilty under Article 207 of the Penal Code (offensive statements to state officials). In the past, the New Order government penalised hundreds of journalists, artists and student activists for violating a series of 'hate-sowing' articles inherited from Dutch colonial law dating from the early 20th century. These articles survived a series of amendments during the first few years of post-New Order period. Some, but not all, of these articles were eliminated by the Constitutional Court on 5 December 2006, the day before the same Court annulled the formation of the National Commission of Truth and Reconciliation.

7 See the special report by SBS TV on 6 June 2007. It is significant how host George Negus introduced the report on the Indonesian controversy with the following words: 'In Australia, political satire has had an incredibly rich history. Then again, we have been a democracy for over 100 years. But apparently, to our north, our giant neighbour Indonesia—not even a decade since the fall of the Suharto dictatorship—finds itself glued to a television show that actually lampoons the nation's politicians.' For an analysis of the program, see Jurriëns (2008).

8 I recall a minor disagreement I had with a colleague in Brisbane in 2004 about the significance of the banning of the three Jakarta weeklies (*Tempo*, *Editor* and *Detik*). Like many observers before him, he saw the incident with alarm, believing that it showed the New Order regime had both the power and interest to take back the promise of political openness once offered to the people. In contrast, I saw the incident as a new light of hope signifying the regime's panic in the face of a crisis of elite cohesion and legitimacy and its desperate attempt to restore the appearance of being in control.

9 The phrase 'democracy as fetish' was used by Begoña Aretxaga (2000:48) in a different context and with different meanings in her analysis of Spain, and commented on by Paley (2002:477).

10 The other side of the coin is corruption. This is another important key term in the study of contemporary Indonesia. Not unlike democracy, corruption is used liberally far and wide by many analysts to explain what is wrong with Indonesia, barely (if at all) with a moment of self-doubt or critical examination of whether something is wrong or corrupted in the concept of corruption itself as an analytical tool. Anthropologist Nils Bubant is aware of the risk of such uncritical analyses of cases in Indonesia (2006: 427). However, despite his own awareness, Bubant attributes increased corruption specifically to 'new democracies'.

11 'The less we know about a country or region or group', Lev (2005:346) noted, 'the more likely it is that [terms such as democracy]...will shape what we think we know.'

12 The term 'democracy jihad' first came to my attention in the writing of Aung-Thwin (2001:483–505). Although I find Aung-Thwin's phrase useful, I do not necessarily agree with many points in his analysis of Burma.

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