UNDERSTANDING INDONESIAN NEWS MEDIA CULTURE IN REPRESENTING DIVISIVE ISSUES

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Abstract

This research looks at the culture (daily practice) that Indonesian news media has to follow in representing divisive issues. Mass media and divisive issues are inseparable. The representation of divisive issues in the Indonesian news media is the result of a complex construction process which incorporates cultural, political economic and industrial factors. Particularly, it is very much influenced by the rise of the idea of civil society. It has also driven the new idea of freedom of the press in Indonesia. The press becomes more critical in reporting an issue. Media policies also experienced significant changes. Government communication policy only regulates the press in order to ensure they obey codes of ethics and law. To this extent, controversial and highly divisive issues are managed and represented according to the internal policies of the media organizations, rather than the directives of government. At the same time, the mass media has to consider various factors in reporting sensitive and potentially divisive issue. In this research, in-depth interview was conducted to some Indonesian news media editors and journalists to understand how the media develop their editorial policies and what need to be considered in reporting divisive issues. Further, some news of divisive issues were analyzed to identify how cultural, political economic and social conditions are treated differently in constructing news.

Keywords : *media culture, representation, divisive issues*

INTRODUCTION

Mass media has been described by Campbell as "the cultural industries-the channels of communication-that produce and distribute songs, novels, newspapers, movies, internet services, and other cultural products to large numbers of people" (2003, p.6). Based on this definition, mass media can be seen as a conduit through which information about culture is transmitted to potentially sizable audiences. Mass media, news media in particular, work through the dissemination of messages to public. In countries where democratic values are upheld and people have the right to seek, own, and disseminate information, the responsibility to inform the public has enabled the press to freely inform news without fear of being banned by the government. This condition, coupled with the fact that news media is chiefly an economic institution, has contributed to the significant presence of divisive stories in the news media. While the media seeks to inform its publics and provide the sort of democratic Fourth Estate functions described by Thomas Carlyle, it has also been subject to the interests of cultural and political contentions (Prayudi, 2011).

Media representation of an event is generated through complex cultural and institutional processes. The media, in fact, is best understood as a set of relationships through which meanings are generated and shared through a given social formation. Thus, meanings are generated through producers and institutions and their interactions with audiences and their cultural and governmental contexts. As Jeff Lewis notes—

... The media is not just a conduit for the transfer of meanings from the central corporation to audiences; the media are part of a generalized context and interplay of meaning-making. The media do not exist 'out there', but are immersed in the everyday practices and meaning-making of individuals and communities across the globe: they are a significant resource in the formation and construction of contemporary culture(s) (2009, p. 4).

The news media, more specifically, produces its meanings in terms of a pre-existing corpus of knowledge, knowledge that is always positioned and bound to particular contexts and modes of cultural politics. While aspiring to present a version of 'the truth' and valuable information, the news media is nevertheless captive to the same cultural, intuitional and political process that affect all mediation.

To this extent, the news media institutions and the news, information and entertainment they generate is strongly influenced by factors from inside and outside an organization's own institutional framework. While these ideas are now well understood (Lewis, 2005; Turner & Cunningham [Eds.], 2002), it is particularly important for a reading of volatile areas of human experience and reporting, particularly in conflict and dispute.

The development of Indonesian mass media in the reformation era experiences an interesting significant moment where the press no longer need a publication permit from the government and is freer to report news that is critical toward the government. Nevertheless, as politically Indonesia is still in the transition process toward a more democratic, 'civil' state; there are times where the press must also pay attention to issues that are either too critical or sensitive toward government or other interest groups within society.

This is exemplified in the case of Jawa Pos (Java Post) daily in 2002 when supporters of President Wahid occupied office of the *Post* for publishing a cartoon that was considered insulting to the President. In another case, in 2003 the Minister of Manpower who was one of PDI Perjuangan leaders threatened the Rakyat Merdeka (People Freedom) daily for not insulting President Megawati. The Indonesian press then must incorporate all these factors in constructing news reporting on terrorism. They have an obligation to report the news to the public; at the same time, however, news organizations must

account for government policies, organizational policies, and pressure from other interest groups must be taken into account in producing news.

News media coverage of an issue is principally a journalistic work that cannot be separated from various influences such as the state, culture, editorial policy, and the mission of media institutions. Media institutions need to consider all of these factors if their reporting is to represent the events accurately (Prayudi, 2010, p. 3).

This research looks at how Indonesian news media institutions represent divisive issues like *Suku* (ethnic)*, Agama (*religion*), Ras* (race) *dan Antar-golongan* (inter-ethnic) or SARA. As stated above, variety of factors affect the way the media represent an event. It attempts to define and analyse the construction of meaning of the news representation of current divisive issue in Indonesia. Analysis will be focused on the interplay of cultural or historical, political and industrial factors that create news media culture which contribute to the production of news.

METHOD

The essential aim of this research is to examine the interplay of various factors—historical, cultural, and political—in the reporting of specific terrorist events in Indonesia. As an expansive and trans-disciplinary framework, Cultural Studies

encourages such examinations as it seeks to explore the complexity of textual meaning making.

The significant advantage of a Cultural Studies approach for this study is that it provides a range of heuristic options. Textual analysis situates a text and its meanings within an historical, cultural and political context. While such analyses must rely on a series of what Fredric Jameson (in Kellner & Homer, 2004) calls 'secondary texts'—that is the literature that surrounds and describes these contexts—researchers also have an opportunity to conduct primary research with media professionals. Thus, this research employs historical, in-depth interview and textual analysis stratagem for this research in order to expose the complex lineage of factors that contribute to the representation and meaning of terrorism as generated through these three news publications.

Using this system of textual analysis of news items, I analysed how the Indonesian news media represented the issue of terrorist attacks and to what extent the Indonesian news media had the willingness to portray the seriousness of the government in managing the event as part of the 'fourth estate' role of the press through the interplay of cultural, political and organisational factors. Emphasis was given to headlines and text of news items that were considered important. Though

only some part of the news items analysed were presented, principally the analysis covered the whole texts of the news items to extract stronger evidence.

DISCUSSION

The potential of SARA and terrorism as divisive issues in Indonesia

New Order's politic of SARA and its impact to Indonesia

Indonesia is known of its diversity in ethnic, race, religion and inter-ethnic. Realising this condition, Suharto's New Order government had introduced the concept of nationalism through various policies. According to Anderson (1990), from the late nineteenth century on, this nationalism expresses a fundamental drive to solidarity and unity in the face of the disintegration of traditional society under colonial capitalism and other powerful external forces. Nationalism of this type is something far stronger than patriotism; it is an attempt to reconquer a primordial oneness (p.37). It represents a form of national self-assertion; that is, the search for a form of articulation to express national identity through integration and nation-building programs.

It is also the formation of national goals that influence all political life. Nationalism also involves the rejection of all forms of discrimination, whether it is racial discrimination and or social-cultural discrimination (Kleden 2001).

Indonesia nationalism under Suharto's New Order regime had turned into an 'ideological reason' to justify the need for uniformity in order to sustain its power. Beneath the banner of development programs, Suharto stressed the importance of national integrity and stability. Discourses of ethnicity, religion and race within society should not be exposed as the consequence of nationalism. Plurality and heterogeneity within Indonesian society were seen as threat toward Suharto's power and his aim of reshaping Indonesia to more closely resemble a Javanese kingdom. However, in order to assure the oneness of the nation, the idea of nationalism was imposed through the instrument of violence (the military), rather than through increasing the awareness of the need for nationalism after the colonization era. Suharto also introduced the policy of SARA which aimed to diminish the significance of issues surrounding ethnicity, religion and race. In this context, society was required to show their support and loyalty to the state by accepting the development process and suppressing ethnic differences and concerns. A military approach was enforced to ensure the obedience of society (Prayudi, 2003, pp.28-29).

SARA policy was introduced by the New Order regime in the early 1970s in

order to limit and control public interpretation of all socio-political conflicts that may endanger national stability. The SARA acronym represents *suku* (ethnicity), *agama* (religion), *ras* (race) and *antargolongan* (inter-group) issues. Although ethnic, religious, race and inter-group diversity was integral to the character of Indonesian society, SARA issues were labelled by the government as the 'embryo' of disintegration. SARA policy was underpinned by the notion that conflict between groups within society will provide an opportunity for particular groups to secure their own interests, which might be at the expense of the national interest. Further, the conflict may lead to subversive actions (Katjasungkana; Kartika and Mahendra 1999).

The state apparatus created conditions to suppress issues of ethnic identity, religion, races and inter-groups. Meetings, discussions and writing about SARA were considered threats toward national integrity and were therefore banned. Krisnamurthi (2002) argues that the politics of SARA introduced by the New Order regime through repressive power, either directly or indirectly, was a politics of isolation of the elements of ethnic, religion, race and inter-group within the life of nation and state. Further, the concept of SARA itself is in conflict with the principle of democracy as it rejects notions of plurality and it demands uniformity from what is essentially a pluralistic society (Mukhan 2002).

Theoretically, the concept of SARA contained some contradictions. If it is true that relations between ethnic groups are full of potential conflict which could easily trigger ethnic violence, each member of a particular ethnic group would prefer to stay in his group and limit his contact with members from other ethnic groups, and even stop all relations if necessary. This view, according to Kleden (2001), carries two sociological consequences. *First*, it is impossible for a pluralistic and heterogeneous Indonesia to become a 'society' as people who are used to living side by side without noticing ethnicity of others will seek to return to their ethnic group. Social life in the open society will become a relatively closed communal life. The political impact is that ethnicity will become a medium to hide instead of a medium for people to express themselves politically.

Second, the formation of civil society will be impossible, as this kind of society demands openness and the growth of new initiatives. The concept of SARA influences each ethnic group to reluctantly accept initiatives regarding other ethnic groups. If they respond with resistance, they will have to face a repressive approach from the army. As a result, this creates unwillingness in society to respond to any alternative

points of view. Politically, democratic life becomes harder as there will be no opinion difference. Opinion difference is considered to be a sensitive and dangerous issue. Meanwhile, conflict of interest can only be solved through violence.

The successful of Suharto's regime in enforcing the politic of SARA, which some were done through military approach, had resulted in the anxiety of society to discuss any SARA related issues. Society was not educated to accept diversity. This condition had become a time bomb which explodes in the reformation era.

The fall of Suharto's regime after massive demonstrations sponsored by student movements, and the recent case of Indian ethnic demonstrations in Malaysia demanding equal roles in all aspects of citizen life. These events have raised several interpretations of the concept and role of civil society and the democratization of political life. As Porio (2002) notes, civil society movements have utilized different political and cultural schemes to advance their claims for democratic space and share of societal resources. Emerging from the various nation-states in the region, these cultural schemas are shaped by their different political-economic contexts and level of integration to the global systems of capital and information and communication technology.

Although Indonesia has entered a reform era, the political dynamics indicate that this country is still searching for the best format to build a more democratic nation. This uncertainty is evidenced by the fact that during the first five years since Suharto's demise Indonesia has been governed by three presidents (B.J. Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri). On the other hand, members of *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (House of Representatives) and *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* (People's Advisory Assembly) have become increasingly influential over the executive government. Meanwhile, the reform period has provided new opportunities for many political interest groups to gain political influence for the benefit of their particular constituencies. This can be viewed as part of a broader reform era trend characterised by greater political freedoms. Importantly, this has allowed people to express themselves in a variety of ways, even to criticize the government, without the fear of being captured by the state military apparatus (Prayudi, 2010:101).

Within this openness condition, SARA policy was automatically eliminated.

People suddenly find their time to express their own opinion about SARA, which sometimes can be considered excessive. An attempt to understand SARA conflicts or violence that occurred during or

after the New Order regime must be put into a social and political context. It's unlikely that serious and widespread violence, as in the case of 1999 ethnic violence in Sambas, West Kalimantan province, would have occurred just because two youngsters from different ethnic groups were involved in a fight unless there had been deeper sentiments about ethnicity planted in the mind of society. Or else as in the case of clash that had occurred between Sunni and Syi'ah followers in Sampang, Madura August 2012.

Terrorism in Indonesia

Before the year 1997, Indonesian people could only see bombing events through television. After that, they became not only the spectators but also the victims of terrorist bombing events. According to the research and development division of *Kompas* news media, from the year 1997 to 2002, there were 64 bombings in Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Makasar, Palu and Yogyakarta. Prior to the Bali bombing in 2002, the motivations of the bombings, appeared to have been revenge for the massacres of Muslims by Christians in Indonesia – Maluku, North Maluku and Poso (Central Sulawesi) where communal conflict erupted in 1999 and 2000. With a few exceptions, such as the attack on the residence of the Philippine ambassador in Jakarta in August

2000, the targets were mostly churches and priests.

Since 2001, there has been a shift in the choices of bombing target. The selection of places to attack which can be classified as having links to the interests of Western people increased markedly. Radical Islamic groups became more interested in waging *jihad* against the domination of Western governments either through globalization or modernization which they believe to have contaminated Muslims' lives. On 22 August 2001, the Indonesian police found cardboard suspected to contain a bomb outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. Two and a half months later, on 6 November 2001, a bomb exploded nearby a swimming pool area of the Australian International School. From that time on three large-scale bombing events occurred in Bali and Jakarta and claimed hundreds of lives. Based on the police investigations, all these three bombings have been associated with the work of *Jemaah Islamiyah* (Prayudi, 2010, p.84).

In Indonesia, American president Bush's campaign on terror and his famous statement "Either you with us or with the terrorists" triggered some radical Islamic groups to retaliate using political violence. These historical circumstances also mark the change in political ends of radical

Islamic groups like *Jemaah Islamiyah*. According to a prominent ICG report—

The U.S.-led war on terror now appears to have replaced Maluku and Poso as the main object of JI's wrath, especially as those conflicts have waned, and the targeting in Bali of Westerners, rather than Indonesian Christians, may be indicative of that shift (Asia Report No. 43, December 2002).

It is evident that there is a causal relationship between political turbulence and transition to democracy and the frequency of bombings in Indonesia. Within a wider context, the rapid political changes that have been taking place at the national, regional as well as international levels, in particular after the events of 11 September 2001, have contributed to the rise of radical Islamic movements in the region. The capture of radical Islamists and groups suspected of involvement in terrorist activities in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines is evidence of the widespread activities of radical Islamic groups in the region.

These circumstances have changed the way foreign observers look at Islam in Southeast Asia and Indonesia in particular. Before terrorist events occurred in Southeast Asian countries, Islam in Southeast Asia was generally recognised for its peaceful and moderate ideological position. Islam in Southeast Asia was treated as compatible with modernity,

democracy, human rights and other tendencies of the modern Western world (Azra, 2006). Even in the 1990s Southeast Asian Islam was dubbed by leading international media such as Newsweek magazine as "Islam with a smiling face" (Newsweek, 23 September 1996). Since the occurrence of terrorist events, especially the Bali bombing, Islam in the Southeast Asia has been associated with radical movements and the region where many Muslims live has been regarded as a "terrorist haven". This changed perception can also be attributed to the amplification of the issue by both international political analysts and the global media. Ramakhrishna and Tan, for instance, question whether it is accurate to suggest that the region is a "terrorist haven" (2003, p. 2).

Nonetheless, media labelling clearly oversimplifies the issue. Whilst it is true that there is growing tension between radical Islamism and the governments of some Southeast Asian countries, the radical Islamists involved in terrorist activities are in a small minority compared to the total number of Muslims living in the region. Importantly, the role of media institutions in shaping the public perception of terrorism and facilitating a 'state of terror' cannot be underestimated. Given the influence of the media in this regard it is too early to firmly say whether the

Southeast Asia region has become a "terrorist haven".

Before the 2002 Bali bombing, the existence of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* network was denied by the Indonesian government. Even the former Indonesian vice president, Hamzah Haz, refused to accept the statements of foreign governments claiming Indonesia was a terrorist haven. These presidential assertions combined with the turbulent political conditions of the transition period to democracy meant that the police and intelligence bodies paid little attention to terrorism and radical Islamism until the Bali bombing. Although some terrorist acts such as the Christmas Eve bombings in 2000 alerted police to the problem, the restructuring process that occurred within the police institution itself after separation from the army in 1999 contributed to the inability of the police force to react to the emerging problem of radical Islamism. These bombing events signalise the rise of radical Islamism in Indonesia.

Further attempt is necessary to understand the causes of radical Islamism and the reasons why some radical Islamic groups have employed a violent approach to express themselves politically. However, it is a bit difficult to examine the relation of terrorism and radical Islamic groups in Indonesia in detail in this paper. Thus, further detail of this issue can be found in my doctoral thesis with the title *Terror In Indonesia: Terrorism And The Representation Of Recent Terrorist Attacks In Three Indonesian News Publications Within A Context Of Cultural And Social Transition,* 2010, RMIT University, Australia.

In sum, SARA and terrorism can be considered to be divisive issues that had the potential to occur in Indonesia. In relation to this, Indonesian news media must consider all these factors if their news are to be considered credible.

Press in the Transition Indonesia

The past fourteen years have witnessed the changing role of the press in Indonesia. The press has both played a major role in influencing the political turbulence of the transition period and, ironically, has itself been affected by the changing political and cultural landscape. The reformation era in Indonesia, signified by political succession, has impacted significantly on the Indonesian press. There is no direct government control, no political pressures from the government security apparatus or political interest groups who might have direct relationships with the government. Instead, the press has become one of the new powers to ensure that the reformation agenda of democratisation is accomplished.

A new phenomenon which occurred with the rise of civil society was the increase in interest groups in the form of political parties, NGOs and social groups. Some groups adopted positions in support of the state and were prepared to participate in the development process along with the government. Others acted as the opponent of government, criticising government policies and acts seen to be irrelevant, undemocratic or only of benefit to government officials.

The discourse of civil society in which citizens are given opportunity to collectively express their interests, ideas, and achieve mutual goals in order to democratise society has driven the new idea of freedom of the press in Indonesia. The freedom of the press refers to citizens creating and expressing their opinion within the context of public or aesthetic matters. Freedom of the press is actually one dimension of human rights where society has the right to obtain the information (right to know) needed for shaping and building free thoughts and opinions on one hand, and the right to express their thoughts and opinions on the other hand (right to expression). These rights are principally protected by Universal declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19). These two rights strongly relate to the free availability of information, both public and aesthetic information (Siregar 2000). The freedom of the press is basically the realization of people's sovereignty and democratic life.

The emergence of the freedom of the press was also based on political history where the press had failed to play its role as the early warning system for the state. Under the New Order government, instead of acting as the early warning system for the state, the press had been used as the instrument of political agitation within society. Excessive power of the state had made it impossible for the press to criticize, suggest and warn government regarding its policies that may endanger national stability (2010, p. 139).

As with press institutions, media policies also experienced significant changes. Under the New Order authoritarian press system, the government determined media and editorial policies were required to be congruent with government communication policy. Meanwhile, under a more libertarian press system, the capital owner and editor will determine media policy. The editorial policies of big press enterprises like *Kompas, Media Indonesia* and *Tempo*, strongly relate to their mission statement and the objectives of the founding press enterprises. The press sets its own standards of accuracy, fairness and equity. Government communication policy only

regulates the press in order to ensure they obey codes of ethics and law (Prayudi, 2004).

After the fall of Suharto, the press became more open and less afraid of reporting issues that may relate to the government. The replacement of the Press Act and the elimination of press banning signify the emergence of freedom of the press in Indonesia. These conditions have important implications for the press institutions reporting policies regarding sensitive issues like terrorism or SARA.

Nevertheless, this has not meant that the press is able to smoothly play its ideal role as the fourth estate and be responsible to the public for disseminating fair and balanced news. There are some significant challenges that affect the freedom of the press in the reformation era. First is pressure from social groups within society. As the consequence of the liberalizing of controls on public speech, all groups suddenly have the freedom to express their aspirations, some of which have adopted methods of violence to force their aspirations upon others. Unfortunately, press institutions have become the target of such misinterpretation of freedom of expression. This condition was expressed by Managing Editor of *The Jakarta Post* in an interview I conducted in August 2006 as follows:

Yang menjadi tantangan ke depan yang ditakutkan bukanlah intervensi pemerintah secara langsung tapi bagaimana hubungan antara pers dengan masyarakat. Hubungan ini sekarang sedang berkembang. Sekarang yang ditakuti adalah adanya kelompok dalam masyarakat yang mengambil hukum di tangan sendiri (The Jakarta Post Interviewc, 2006).
[What becomes the future challenge is not the direct interference from the government, rather the relationship between the press and society. This relationship is evolving into a new paradigm in the reformation era. What now worries the press is that there are groups within society that take the law into their hands.]

There have been cases where press institutions were targeted by some social groups who regarded the news reporting of those press institutions as insulting to their leaders or groups. The occupation of *Jawa Pos* daily in Surabaya by the supporters of President Abdurrahman Wahid in 2000 encouraged other groups to replicate this move when they disagreed with press reporting. In this case supporters of Wahid protested the graphic that appeared at the front page of the daily on 6 May 2000 edition which intimated Wahid's involvement in corruption. The news report itself, entitled *PKB Gerah, PBNU Bentuk Tim Klarifikasi*, sought to clarify both PKB and PBNU on the issue of KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism) by Wahid's government.

In early March 2003, *Tempo* magazine's office was occupied by hundreds of people. They claimed that they

acted on behalf of Tommy Winata, a business man who had been reported by *Tempo* magazine to be responsible for the conflagration of *Tanah Abang* market, the biggest market in Jakarta. Another similar case occurred by protesters against *The Jakarta Post* daily. In 2006, *The Jakarta Post*'s office was occupied by *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defender Front). They objected to *The Post*'s editorial that included FPI as one of the radical Islamic groups in Indonesia that had adopted a violent approach to their political activities.

This condition has become a new challenge to the freedom of the press in the reform era. Along with the government, the press has an obligation to educate society about the role of the press. If groups or people within society assume that the press has produced unfair and unbalanced reports, they could use 'the right to answer' (*hak jawab*) in the media, through dialogue, or through other legal avenues such as defamation instead of using violence.

Thus, despite the fact that there are cases where the press has to face demands from non government parties; it can be concluded that after the fall of Suharto, the press became more open and less afraid of reporting issues that may relate to the government. The replacement of the Press Act and the elimination of press banning signify the emergence of freedom of the press in Indonesia. These conditions have

important implications for the press institutions reporting policies regarding sensitive and divisive issues like terrorism or SARA. For instance, he research that I conducted for my dissertation, I found that *Sabili* news magazine dared to question security authority policy over the issue of the capture of some Islamic activists suspected of having involvement in terrorist activities. *Tempo* news magazine, on the other hand, gave an in-depth analysis of some Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) that have taught Islamic ideology considered to be radical. Both issues would have been unlikely to appear in the news media during Suharto's New Order (Prayudi, 2010:141).

News Media Culture and Divisive Issues

As stated earlier in the introduction section, any attempt to understand the way the media represent an issue must be put into social, political and cultural contexts. All of these contexts then give the foundation for the news media in representing issue. The daily practice of this activity will then form the news media culture. Thus, to answer the research question that I raised at the beginning which is how the culture (daily practice) that Indonesian news media has to follow in representing divisive issues, I examined the social, political and cultural aspects.

Reformation euphoria had brought the issue of freedom of the press to the surface. Along with the democratisation of social and political life in the early stage of Habibie's government, the substitution of the decree of Minister of Information No. 1/1984 with the decree of Minister of Information No.1/1998 allowed the national press to do its own news gathering, news editing and news presenting, free from the state pressure and threats. The policy of SIUPP (permit for press publishing) for the press was eliminated as it was considered to be against the freedom of democracy. These political changes were immediately followed with adjustments within press industries in terms of editorial policies and orientation from state-oriented to society-oriented journalism.

The elimination of SARA policy had also changed the way the press portrayed related issues. The press applied more open and clear reportage which enabled them to report the political dimensions of SARA violence without being worried about prohibition by the government. Whilst under the New Order regime, press reporting of SARA issues, reformation euphoria had made it possible for the press to do investigative or in depth reporting in order to present more facts to the readers about the event. According to Simaremare (2001),

"With the existence of freedom of expression and freedom of the press…, press institutions start to present news that contain pros and cons, critics, facts that expose the acts of power holders that against democracy, acts of government apparatus that against the law, unequal practices in all fields, suppression of human rights and so on. All news are presented within the spirit of openness that are oriented to create democratised social and political life and the enhancement of national economic restoration."

Although press involvement in a conflict or violence is inevitable as the result of its information dissemination role, the press must accommodate opinions, claims or demands from all parties involve in the issue in order to demonstrate its objectivity and to maintain a neutral position. To enable this, the press set its own self-censorship and self-regulation based on a journalistic code of ethics, press law and institutional ideological foundations.

The Jakarta Post's representation of divisive issues

The Jakarta Post has a distinctive cultural, political and institutional-professional history—all of which contribute to the ways in which the newspaper reports and represents news events. Popularly known as *'The Post'*, this newspaper plays a significant role in the history of Indonesian news media. First published on 25 April 1983, the new English daily is unique, not only in its

goals, which is to improve the standard of English language media in Indonesia, but also in bringing together four competing media publishers (*Suara Karya*, *Kompas*, *Sinar Harapan* and *Tempo)* into producing a quality newspaper with an Indonesian perspective. Ten percent of equity (later increased to 20 percent) was provided as a collective share of all employees (http://www.thejakartapost.com/online_med ia_kit).

The objective of the news publication is to cater for the fast growing foreign community in Indonesia with English language. The objective is also to present to the public a newspaper of the highest quality that would provide its readers with all the news that was not only fit to print, but that would deepen their insight into the very workings of this vast archipelago, its people and its government, as members of the great family of nations. According to its own public pronouncements, this newspaper employs the highest standards of professional journalism, seeking to influence public opinion within and outside Indonesia (Prayudi, 2010, p.155). Thus, what role does news media play in representing divisive issue like SARA and terrorism? What are their policies in dealing with this issue?

Principally, the two news media under study—*The Jakarta Post* and *Kompas* dailies—choose to play the role as

storyteller in representing the issue of terrorism. It was done by implementing the 5W+H formula, up-side-down pyramid, news values and worthiness as part of the professional journalistic standard. Nonetheless, the representation of sensitive issues such as SARA and terrorism requires more news media consideration. The facts of events were written as information based on a set of frameworks which state that the news reported should not mislead its readers or condemn people or parties involved in the matter. It should hold the presumption of innocence, place the matter in the way it really stands, involve the choice of relevant and balanced news sources, and always confirm the information gathered. Thus, as Cultural Studies proposes, the news media institutions cannot ignore the interplay of various levels of influence of organisational as well as cultural and political influences.

The condition of the freedom of the press in the era of reform can be seen from the reportage of some terrorist attacks and ethnic violence. When the events occurred, all news media under analysis reported the events as their main stories. *The Jakarta Post* and *Kompas* dailies, for instance, placed the news for several weeks on the front page. Interestingly, in the issue of terrorism, the press dared to report the issue explicitly, considering the facts that the perpetrators claimed to have launched the

attack in the name of religion which was a sensitive as well as divisive issue. This condition would have been unlikely to happen during the New Order era.

Despite playing the role as the storyteller; different vision, mission, and contexts of the two news media had resulted in the different editorial policies in representing divisive issues. *The Jakarta Post*, as an English edition daily and posits itself as the reading for foreign readers in Indonesia, commits itself to stand for all and stays neutral from any parties in times of conflict. Its establishment by four competing media publishers (*Suara Karya*, *Kompas*, *Sinar Harapan* and *Tempo)* has made it easy for *The Post's* editorial board to set its own editorial policies. As Managing Editor of *The Post* states—We have a strong editorial stand. We are taking no sides except in terms of our primary principle which is to present news based on professional journalistic standards. Although the acts of terrorism were conducted by radical groups who proclaimed their acts in the name of Islam and there were some Islamic groups who disagreed with some western news media reportage that tended to put Islam on the corner, *The Post* professionally reported the events without having any intention to discredit any particular groups or religions.

To do so, we reported the events by interviewing some Islamic leaders and asked their opinions of the claims of some perpetrators' acts of terror that what they did was part of jihad. We don't use the word 'Islamic terrorist'. To us, terrorists are terrorists! We have to consider how the reportage of the events may bring some impacts to society. For instance, the acts of terror have violated human rights of other people. Thus, we cannot ignore the development within society as the press is principally the representation of society.

In playing its social and political role, *The Jakarta Post* daily reported how the government, police and intelligence agencies' responded to the terrorist events. These were done by quoting the statements of the officials and then contrasting them with statements from other social and political observers. In other words, *The Post* adopted a posture of 'balanced reporting', allowing the readers to judge the different perspectives that were presented. Moreover, besides reporting the events, the news media also criticized the way the government agencies dealt with the events through the 'checks and balances' principle. *The Jakarta Post*'s reporting of the issue reflects the freedom of the press within the context of Indonesia.

Representing divisive issue like terrorism, however, according to *the Jakarta Post* is interesting. The perpetrators of acts of terror need news media to amplify their threat and convey their messages to

government; the news media functions to both inform the public and maintain its commercial viability through the re-telling of dramatic events in an engaging and forceful way. In this way, the media is both a servant and director of information and its public. This situation is described by Miller as follows—Terrorism and the media are entwined in an almost inexorable, symbiotic relationship. Terrorism is capable of writing any drama-no matter how terrible-to compel the media's attention... Terrorism, like an ill-mannered enfant terrible, is the media's stepchild, a stepchild which the media, unfortunately, can neither completely ignore nor deny (Geissman, cited in Tuman, 2003, p.115).

In particular, *The Post* focused on how the government, police, military and intelligent agencies investigated the events and discovered the perpetrators of the acts of terror. This is signified by the intense reporting of all the issues above. The choice of this perspective is strongly related to *The Post's* objective as a newspaper of the highest quality that became the main print news media for foreigners who lived in Indonesia and to provide an Indonesian perspective to what *The Post* and other people in Indonesia regard as the western-centric reading of Indonesia generated through western-based news outlets. One example of the textual analysis is as follows—The government issued two

government regulations in lieu of law late on Friday that it says the country needs to crack down on terrorism following the Bali carnage.

President Megawati Soekarnoputri signed the unprecedented regulations just before midnight, implying heated debate within her Cabinet in the process. The announcement was rescheduled at least twice, with officials saying certain changes had to be made to the original drafts.

Opposition to the regulations is precisely based on this principle of retroactivity, which goes against both general legal principles and the amended 1945 Constitution. Critics also fear human rights violations resulting from the enforcement of the new regulations... (*RI issues regulations to fight terrorism, The Jakarta Post*, 19/10/02).

Through these forms of reportage, *The Post* tended to combine its representation of how serious the Indonesian goernment dealt with terrorism and national security. Government policy on terrorism and national security appeared in the 2002, 2003 and 2004 news coverage. From the two news items above, *The Post* explicitly highlighted two aspects on this issue. The first was the issuance of regulations to deal with terrorism; and the second was the opposition to the regulations due to anxiety over the possibility of this regulations being used to capture Islamic

activists without any proof. The placement of the two news items at the front page and the use of straightforward English writing style indicate how *The Post* perceived these issues as pertinent for Indonesians and foreigners to know.

The representation of the issuance of regulations to combat terrorism indicates *The Post*'s support to and at the same time critical attitude toward the government's seriousness to fight terrorism. Terrorism has become a global issue. Moreover, the Southeast Asia region has been accused of becoming the hot bed for terrorists. The capture of some of radical Islamists suspected of being connected with terrorist activities in some Asian countries—Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia—and the fact that Muslims are dominant in the region has attracted global attention to the region. Therefore, how the governments of the Southeast Asian countries deal with the issue of terrorism will automatically become an international focus.

Through this representation, *The Post* wanted to show to its readers how the Indonesian government dealt with terrorism and national security following the Bali bombing and some terror attacks afterward. Nonetheless, this may imply the government's reactive approach instead of a pre-emptive one. In other words, the implied meaning of this representation is

the unreadiness of President Megawati Sukarnoputri's government in preventing the acts of terror from occurring. The statement of Vice President Hamzah Haz in some occasions before the bombing that there were no terrorists in Indonesia indicates this. The reporting of his statement had somehow influenced public opinion as to whether terrorists really existed in Indonesia (Azra, 2006). Even until the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004, news media still reported the debate over the issue.

The principle of fairness appeared through not only the support of the issuance of the regulations, but also the warning given to government agencies of the consequences of the implementation of the regulations. According to the National Editor of *The Jakarta Post*, who preferred to appear anonymous in this study, when asked about *The Post* policy in reporting the issue above—We hold on to the journalistic ethical code and exercise caution not to write news that may play one party off against another. We employ the checks and balances principle. We report the news in such a way not because of pressure from any particular group, but because of part of professionalism and freedom of the press that was gained through a long struggle.

In sum, the strong editorial stand also appeared through the separation between the capital owner of *The Jakarta Post*

institution and the editorial board to assure the high quality of news reporting. Within this new political atmosphere, *The Post* claimed that it was able to play its ideal role as the press, despite the fact that there may be some obstacles from other parties.

Kompas' representation of divisive issues

The establishment of *Kompas* newspaper was initiated in 1964 when Frans Seda, chairman of Catholic Party, saw it as a way to influence public opinion. With P. K. Ojong and Jakob Oetama as the journalists, together they founded *Kompas* newspaper on 25 June 1965. Noticing a number of newspapers labelled as anti-Sukarnoist and having an anti-communist tone had been closed down, *Kompas* tried to accommodate this fragile political condition. It succeeded in riding the political storms of 1966 and generally supported the emergence of the New Order at a time when certain right-wing Catholics played significant roles as intellectuals and ideologues. *Kompas'* proximity with Catholic Party continued till 1971 by which time the links between newspapers and political parties were generally slackening as the government tried to dilute sectional loyalties (Hill 1994). Since then, *Kompas* had become an independent national newspaper, though many people still believe that *Kompas* continues to carry the voice of Catholics.

The crystallization of political powers in the 1970s in the hands of Suharto's military regime had increased political pressures from society. Along with social and political powers, *Kompas* also played significant role in criticizing government. It developed critical editorial policy toward government policies. Some crucial issues highlighted by *Kompas* during this time were corruption, the development of the Indonesian Miniature Park and the politics of development. As a result of its critical position, *Kompas* was banned along with other six newspapers in 1978. Since then, *Kompas* tended to apply more careful journalism.

Kompas responded to that vulnerability with a strategy of massive diversification and reinvestment through the 1980s. By the Beginning of the 1990s *Kompas* had an empire of around thirty-eight subsidiaries, known collectively as *Kompas-Gramedia* Group (Sen & Hill 2000). The expanded *Kompas-Gramedia* Group dominates the publishing industry and has been one of the top forty conglomerates in the nation (Hill 1994). This syndication publishes twenty daily, weekly and monthly newspapers, tabloids and magazines with more than 2 million circulations per month. It monopolizes 20% of the total amount of publishing in Indonesia (Hanazaki 1998). On the basis of an independent audit conducted by the

Prasetia Utomo & Co Jakarta and the calculation set forth in the publication of Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) in Sydney, Australia, *Kompas* circulation settled to the figures of between 450,000 and 500,000 (*Kompas* Information Media, *Kompas: A Friend in Changing Times*). Thus, how does *Kompas* incorporate vaiours vactors in representing divisive issues?

As noted above, both *the Jakarta Post* and *Kompas* positioned themselves as the storyteller. In representing divisive issues in Indonesia, *Kompas* prefer to portray them as a human tragedy. The emphasis on a humanitarian perspective signifies that *Kompas* concerned about this issue. It can also be related with *Kompas'* motto '*Amanat Hati Nurani Rakyat*' or 'the Mandate of People's Consciousness'. It represents *Kompas'* mission to reflect people's conscience so that, as the infrastructure of democracy, they can develop, build and mature themselves. *Kompas* also has a vision '*Ikut Mengembangkan Saling Pengertian Dalam Masyarakat Majemuk*' or 'Participate in Developing Understanding within Plural Society' which represents *Kompas'* willingness to mediate people's propensity and aspiration as part of the educational process to stimulate creativity (*Kompas* Booklet). News items exhibiting a humanitarian perspective, for instance, appeared as follows:

Baby Savitri Had to be the Victim

Mas'un (20), didn't understand why his daughter, Savitri (2), his beloved wife, Musrifah (17), and his brother, Farid (40), had to be the victims of mass brutality. Early on Friday (19/3) his village, Sungaipalai, Pemangkat Sub Dsitrict, Sambas District, West Kalimantan Province, was surrounded by hundreds of mass. Tens of houses were burnt and people were murdered.

"Why isn't the guilty person brought to justice if he breaks the law? Why must my daughter, wife and brother that have nothing to do with it have to also responsible for it?" said Mas'un with weak voice…. (Kompas 22/03/1999)

Hundreds of Houses Burnt

…Violence that erupted since early last week had caused death of 110 people. This is unofficial amount considering some dead bodies that were abandoned in the forest or directly buried by local people. While the sum of houses burnt from seven districts reached up to 1,800 units….

Health conditions of thousands of victim of Sambas violence who evacuate to Pontianak were in apprehensive condition. Hundreds of refugees were attacked by diarrhoea, fever, and pneumonia. Most of those who got sick were children.

According to a doctor, the attacks of these diseases were caused by their weak condition, less nutritious food and unclean environment in the settlement. This condition was worsened by stress. From Friday to Sunday, the sum of refugees that required medical treatment reached to 299 patients…. (Kompas 22/03/1999)

These two news items presented a broad perspective to *Kompas* readers based on their social values about the impact of the violence and how the government managed the violence. The first news item above, for instance, implies the police un-readiness in anticipating the possibility of the attack toward the Madurese by mass brutality though they were in the police headquarters. Whereas the second news item represents the description of the misery that one of the victims of the violence had to bear. This representation of human tragedy is then strengthened with the coverage of the victims of the violence that had to live in poor and unhealthy condition. It is noteworthy that to achieve this humanitarian perspective, *Kompas* interviewed all possible news sources that might relate to the issue. The goal is to obtain complete and as objective as possible the description of the event.

It also implies that the transition government should have acted more quickly to stop the violence that resulted in the loss of lives and properties. The 1999 ethnic violence was the most prolonged violence that had ever occurred in West Kalimantan and the most extensive in terms of refugees that had to evacuate and properties lost.

The change of reportage style as the result of political changes can be seen from the mention of the numbers of people murdered in the violence in the headlines, which in some cases were based on journalist's observations. Under the New Order regime, it would have been unlikely to find these sorts of headlines or the amount of people murdered unless from the government sources, as it would be considered to be exacerbating SARA issues.

There were significant differences in the reportage style and political interests that affected the way the press portrayed the issue. *Kompas* applied a more open and explicit reportage style and slowly left its old Javanese reportage style. This can be seen from Malarangeng (2001) analysis of *Kompas* editorial in the transition era in which it had functioned as the watchdog of the state. Brave, sharp, and explicit criticism was directed toward the president. The same style is found in the research that I did on the analysis of the coverage of the 1999 ethnic violence in Indonesia (Prayudi, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The dynamic change within Indonesian politics, mainly the changes of national leadership and the rise of civil society, and the impact of the openness era post cold war had provided an opportunity for the press to report divisive issues such as terrorism and ethnic violence without the worry of being banned. However, freedom of the press did not automatically make the press forget its responsibility toward the public.

One significant change that occurred in the life of the Indonesian press after the fall of the authoritarian regime and the strengthening of civil society was that it became more critical toward the government. Government news sources were no longer considered the only legitimate sources. A larger proportion of coverage included other sources and the content could contradict the discourse the government tried to develop.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated that divisive issues in Indonesia are formed and represented through the interplay of cultural, social and political factors. As it is represented in the two news media publications studied in this research, terrorism and ethnic violence as divisive issues are both a generic cultural condition and a description of particular acts of political violence. The media is directly implicated in this interplay of effects, and the ways in which 'terrorism' and 'ethnic violence' are presented as news to a media organization's specific constituency. In the period of Indonesia's transition, these conditions and actions are particularly threatening. They continue to endanger the nation's social progress and the very foundations of media freedom and sense of social and cultural progression.

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