



FROM MONOLOGUE TO DIALOGUE

RADIO AND REFORM IN INDONESIA

EDWIN JURRIËNS

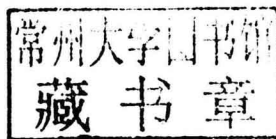
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FROM MONOLOGUE TO DIALOGUE

'To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends,
everything ends.'

M.M. Bakhtin 1984a:252.

Cover illustration: A host reading a request from a listener at the community
radio station Pamor in the Parangtritis area south of Yogyakarta, 2002

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Facts and fiction

When journalism has been stifled, literature has to talk. Because journalism talks facts, while literature talks the truth. Facts can be embargoed, manipulated or covered with black ink, but the truth appears automatically, as a reality. Journalism is bound by 1001 restrictions – from business to politics – to present itself, but literature's only restriction is honesty itself. Literary books can be banned, but the truth and literature become one with the air, immune to criticism and irresistible. To cover the facts is a political act, to cover the truth is the most stupid thing on earth that man can do. (Seno Gumira Ajidarma 1997:1.)

According to the Indonesian writer and journalist Seno Gumira Ajidarma (1997:7), 'the truth' that is found in literature functions as a type of 'meta-journalism', revealing the mechanisms behind journalism. Literature would be able to explore and comment on journalism, and other things in life, because it is fiction that is not bound by any rules but the rules of literature itself. In other words, it is literature's relative boundlessness that facilitates the truth to emerge. Journalism, on the other hand, would not be able to comment on itself because it is supposed to be about nothing but facts. Ajidarma (1997:1) rightly points out the irony that these facts, in spite of their alleged nature, actually vary with different political and economic interests.

Ajidarma's anthology of short stories *Ketika jurnalisme dibungkam sastra harus bicara* ('Literature has to talk when journalism has been stifled', 1997), from which the quote was derived, was published during President Suharto's totalitarian New Order (1967-1998). During this regime, which was characterized by a climate of censorship and self-censorship of the Indonesian press, there was indeed a need for literature to talk and tell the truth. Elsewhere (Jurriëns 2004) I have analysed examples of 'talking' verbal art in West Java during the late New Order, including the television drama 'Inohong di Bojongrangkong' ('The leader of Bojongrangkong', a fictional West Javanese village), the musical genre of Pop Sunda (Sundanese pop music) and the radio programme 'Dongeng plesetan' ('Tales of punning'). These media expressions addressed the issue of the globalization of West Javanese society by providing

artistic meta-commentary on the role and impact of the media, amongst others. During the same period, journalists also made use of literary techniques such as allusion and parody to inform people about politically sensitive issues in an indirect manner, relatively safe from censorship and bans.

This is not to deny that literature, apart from containing 'the truth', can also become a vehicle for 'facts' in Ajidarma's sense. For instance, the Suharto regime exercised propaganda and deliberately engaged in the 'aestheticization of politics' (Benjamin 1977:42) by using attractive and thus convincing verbal art such as *wayang golek* (wooden puppet theatre) (Weintraub 2004) rather than, or in addition to, less alluring information genres such as news bulletins. This book seeks to demonstrate that 'the truth' and 'facts', rather than being universal and unchangeable, take different forms under different social and historical circumstances, and that contemporary Indonesian journalism also has the capacity to be 'honest' and meta-journalistic.

The book will focus on changes and continuities in the field of journalism since the 1998 fall of Suharto and start of the process of social and political reform known as Reformasi. Although this period of 'transition' has left many economic, legislative and other major problems unresolved, it has certainly contributed to a greater freedom of speech in Indonesia. Ironically, this new freedom seems to have deprived some verbal art of its socio-critical vigour. For example, West Javanese audiences have complained that media productions like 'Inohong di Bojongrangkong', Pop Sunda and 'Dongeng plesetan' have outlived their social and artistic ideals and are now more concerned with their commercial viability and marketing strategies. At the same time, however, exciting developments have taken place elsewhere in the creative field. In Indonesian literature, for instance, young female authors have given expression to Reformasi as a kind of Bakhtinian 'carnival' by giving unconventional attention to the body and sexuality, thereby undermining the traditional canon and reversing the hierarchy of the literary establishment.

New forms of creativity can also be found in the field of journalism. During the New Order, the officially approved journalism was the regime's interpretation of development journalism – which, in effect, was government propaganda – although journalists also attempted to make readers and audiences read or listen 'between the lines' by using allusive, quasi-literary journalistic devices. Since Reformasi, journalists have received the legal and political space also to develop or re-develop other concepts of journalism, including meta-journalism. This emancipatory tendency has been accompanied and sometimes stimulated by the development of various new communication technologies, such as satellite systems and the Internet. Returning to Ajidarma, one could say that in an era in which Indonesian journalism is stifled to a lesser extent, it is much more capable to speak for itself. Unfortunately, the other, negative side of Indonesia's new freedom of speech

is that journalists have been increasingly confronted with violent threats from militant groups in society, and often struggle to live up to the ethical standards of their profession.

Radio journalism, the public sphere, dialogism

This book will specifically focus on contemporary Indonesian radio journalism, which has been shaped by, and made significant contributions to, the socio-political process that led to the fall of Suharto and initiated the call for reform. Its dynamics have been influenced by the end of state-ruled Radio Republik Indonesia's (RRI, Radio of the Republic of Indonesia) monopoly on the production of news programmes in 1998. This officially allowed commercial and other non-governmental radio institutions to develop their own journalistic ideas and practices. Some of these institutions had already tested the limits of New Order state control by combining news with genres less vulnerable to censorship, such as talk shows, music programmes and radio plays.

I will discuss how the radio institutions in interaction with their audiences have attempted to envision and realize a virtual, but at the same time very concrete, space for people to meet and publicly discuss matters considered relevant to the society in which they live. This Reformasi-type of 'radio-active' publicness will be compared with Jürgen Habermas' notion of the 'bourgeois public sphere'. Although I will also analyse radio programmes on general social issues, special attention will be paid to journalistic ideas and practices with a meta-journalistic character, which provide a direct sense of the intensive process of both journalists and audiences exploring and negotiating the boundaries of the new press freedom.

I will also argue that the new ideas and practices, in triggering audience engagement in journalistic affairs, constitute a reaction against the New Order official culture of 'monologism' – which was precisely aimed at keeping audiences at a distance – and share characteristics with a Bakhtinian type of 'dialogism'. This dialogism is broader and goes beyond mere participation in 'normal' dialogue, as it also concerns the 'ideological becoming' of the participants involved. Although dialogism can manifest itself in literally dialogic conversation, here it also refers to journalistic concepts, programme genres and institutional organization forms specifically constructed to enhance media literacy and thus ideological awareness of the public. The whole process of Reformasi could not exist without these concepts, genres and organization forms, and their analysis will make real and tangible what is meant by the seemingly vague and broad ideas of freedom of speech, social reform and democracy, which have been so often and loudly propagated in Indonesia in recent years.



The Balinese radio station Global FM presents itself as the mediator of dialogue in the public sphere, 2001

I will try to promote dialogue myself by identifying, respecting and talking back to the sources that informed this book. Part of this approach is that I will restrict the use of the omniscient narrator style and avoid irony altogether. Even in times of postmodern and postcolonial concerns with 'the Other', Western scholarship on Indonesia sometimes still displays a rather distanced, cynical or patronizing view of the country and its people, or merely reads as an intellectual exercise for the author's own sake. With its focus on media and everyday life, this book is also meant to increase the acceptance and appreciation of cultural studies among Indonesia scholars.

I will focus, to a certain extent, on the success stories of Reformasi in order to provide a clear picture of the motivations and achievements of the actors behind the process. In spite of an academic trend to downplay the process of reform and to over-emphasize the continuities between the New Order and post-New Order periods, and in spite of the many problems Indonesia still has to deal with – environmental destruction, human rights violations, the journalistic problems mentioned earlier – the one achievement that has been outstanding and cannot be denied is the enhanced freedom of the media, including radio.

This book consists of nine chapters. Chapters II and III explain the political and historical macro-contexts of late- and post-New Order radio journalism, and include an exploration of notions such as Reformasi, dialogism and public sphere. Chapters IV to VIII analyse the intermediate and micro-levels of specific institutions, journalistic concepts and programme genres. The chapters discuss different groups of actors in Indonesian radio journalism and show that the boundaries between those groups have been questioned and undermined in times of reform. Chapter IX, the concluding chapter, summarizes the contributions of these groups to Reformasi.

Chapter II will provide a short historical overview of the development of the medium of radio in Indonesia. It will also introduce the Bakhtinian concepts of 'heteroglossia', 'carnival' and 'dialogism' in order to describe the cultural climates in which radio developed during the New Order and Reformasi. I will argue that alternative creative forces during the New Order were in constant heteroglossic interaction with the culture officially approved and propagated by the government. The alternative forces paved the way for Reformasi, which in Bakhtinian carnivalesque manner has partially succeeded in reversing power structures in society. Actors in the field of (radio) journalism have attempted to provide a dialogic answer to the monologism of New Order's official culture by engaging audiences in news production and enhancing their media literacy and ideological awareness.

Chapter III will analyze how radio journalism, taking advantage of the reduction of state power in the wake of Suharto's fall, has contributed to the creation of a public sphere where Indonesian civil society is able to manifest

itself. I will discuss several relevant sources that have introduced the idea of the public sphere in the Indonesian media and compare their approaches with those of Habermas, arguably the most original thinker on the public sphere. I will address RRI's attempts to change from a state institution to a formally public organization, but also identify 'publicness' as a value rather than a media category. In fact, I will demonstrate that media segmentation and commercialism have been crucial factors in spreading ideas and practices of publicness in the Indonesian radio scene.

Chapter IV will discuss the transition from the New Order interpretation of development journalism and control of media institutions and professional organizations, to post-New Order radio institutions and journalistic concepts that partly live up to Habermas' idea of the bourgeois public sphere. At the same time, I will provide a critique of their 'bourgeoisness' and also put the local character or 'Indonesianness' of Reformasi into perspective by demonstrating the influence of foreign media organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the restructuring of the Indonesian media landscape.

Chapter V will explore a specific genre of radio journalism, the interactive current affairs talk show, which has a highly dialogic character in at least a literal sense. Several of the key actors in the post-Suharto radio-active public sphere will be identified, including hosts, reporters, invited experts, listeners, editors and gate-keepers. I will also explain how the genre can function as a so-called 'oppositional' public sphere, which – unlike Habermas' bourgeois public sphere – is oriented towards the process rather than the outcome of discursive interchange.

Chapter VI will focus on the discursive and practical consequences or impact of the interactive radio shows. It will discuss how interactivity has contributed to the development of the concept of 'multi-sided journalism' as a specific manifestation of Bakhtinian dialogism and an alternative to New Order's monological journalism. It will also identify how interactivity has provided solutions to practical problems ranging from relatively small affairs such as car thefts to more complex issues such as sustainable development. Finally, it will analyse the impact of the interactive shows on listener identity and 'ideological becoming', particularly in terms of regional awareness and media literacy. At the same time, it will illustrate that Habermasian fears of the 'refeudalization' of the public sphere are certainly not without grounds in an Indonesian media landscape where commercial and ideological interests often clash with the interests of the public.

Chapter VII will specifically focus on the role of listeners participating in interactive radio discourse. The case of the commercial news station Global FM in Bali will illustrate that listeners in post-Suharto Indonesia have not only been invited and taken the opportunity to talk about social and political

affairs, but also about the rights and responsibilities of the actors involved in public discourse, including the radio listeners themselves. Their conversations with hosts, reporters, experts and other participants are not only dialogues in a literal sense, but also in terms of Bakhtin's 'ideological becoming' or Ajidarma's meta-journalistic 'truth'.

Chapter VIII, the chapter before the Conclusion, is about so-called community radio, which constitutes a 'third way' alternative to both government and commercial radio. In community radio, audiences have the opportunity not only to participate in radio discourse and programme production, but also to get involved in media management and ownership. I will argue that community radio completely reverses traditional, hierarchical relations in radio communications and comes close to Bertolt Brecht's ideal of *Umfunktionierung*, or the 'refunctioning' of radio into a genuinely 'two-way' medium. At the same time, I will demonstrate that community radio is not necessarily more public or dialogic than government or commercial radio, but may in fact hide the ideological role of mediation and represent a false nostalgia for the 'aura' of unmediated communications.

Words of gratitude

This book is based on a diversity of sources, including scholarly literature, personal interviews and recordings of radio programmes. The majority of the programmes date from 2001 and 2002, and include genres such as news bulletins, live reports, interviews, talk shows, features and editorials. The programmes were produced and broadcast by radio institutions in or near the capitals of six Indonesian provinces – Jakarta (Special Capital District of Jakarta), Bandung (West Java), Yogyakarta (Special District of Yogyakarta), Surabaya (East Java), Tabanan (Bali) and Padang (West Sumatra).

I conducted six months of field research between 2001 and 2003 as part of my affiliation as postdoctoral fellow to the research project 'Indonesian Mediations; The Imaging and Imagining of Community in Post-Suharto Indonesia' at Leiden University. This project was part of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) research programme 'Indonesia in Transition'. I received additional funding for field research from the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO). I did part of the editing when I was a research fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden, in early 2008. I wish to express my gratitude to my dearest colleagues from the Indonesian Mediations project – Patricia Spyer, Ben Arps, P.M. Laksono, Emma Baulch, Katinka van Heeren, Wiwik Sushartami and Jos Janssen – the Indonesia in Transition programme man-

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After being appointed as lecturer in Indonesian Language and Culture at The University of New South Wales in Canberra (UNSW@ADFA) in 2004, I continued working on the book with generous financial support from the university. Many thanks to Minako Sakai, Paul Tickell, Ida Nurhayati and other staff at UNSW@ADFA for hiring me, introducing me to the Australian academic world and making me feel at home. UNSW@ADFA has proved to be a relatively secure and peaceful place for academics to develop their teaching, thinking and writing on a continuous basis, without being disturbed too much by the bureaucratic and competitive demands of the contemporary academic system. The city of Canberra has also provided a healthy natural and social environment, which completely undermines the tired cliché of the urban capital that forces people into hasty, consumerist lifestyles.

Special acknowledgements are due to the scholars, media practitioners and institutions in Indonesia who helped me with the research, particularly Veven Sp. Wardhana, Masduki, Errol Jonathans, Hince I.P. Pandjaitan, Christiana Chelsia Chan, Jaringan Radio Komunitas Yogyakarta, Global FM, Suara Surabaya, Unisi, Mara, Kantor Berita Radio 68H, Internews Indonesia, the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung and the Indonesia Media Law and Policy Centre. I dedicate this book to them as an expression of my admiration for their creative and often courageous work. Finally, my sincerest regards to my wife, daughter, family, extended family and friends, for all their love and support.

CHAPTER II

Reformasi and the medium of radio

This chapter will introduce the two key themes of this book: radio and Reformasi. The first part of the chapter will provide a working definition of Reformasi and address several cultural-historical factors that contributed to the role of radio as a medium of socio-political reform. These factors include the medium's long history and wide availability in Indonesia. The second part will give a conceptual analysis of Reformasi and explain how – rather than why – radio journalism has contributed to reform.

As Reformasi can only be understood in relation to the regime to which it was opposed, the second part will first give a picture of the cultural climate during the New Order. Using the Bakhtinian metaphor of 'heteroglossia', it will describe the tension and interaction between the official culture promoted and propagated by the Suharto government on the one hand, and the alternative, unofficial cultural practice in society on the other. A second Bakhtinian idea, 'carnival', will be introduced to illustrate how the forces that were present below the surface of officialdom during the New Order have been released during Reformasi. Finally, a third Bakhtinian idea, 'dialogism', will be used as a concept for the analysis of the specific way contemporary radio journalism has attempted to break with the monologism of official New Order culture, namely by engaging audiences and making them media-literate and ideologically aware.

Why radio?

In historical, sociological and political studies on Indonesia, Reformasi is usually described as a socio-political process aimed at ending malpractices associated with Suharto's New Order regime – such as the vices represented by the popular acronym KKN, which stands for *korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme* ('corruption, collusion and nepotism') – and introducing social, political, economic and cultural reform towards a more open and democratic society (Schwarz 2004:xiii-xiv, 308-10). The process was initiated by oppositional groups during the late New Order and officially sanctioned by the political

successors of Suharto. The urge for reform was strengthened by the economic crisis that had severely hit Indonesia and the rest of South-East Asia since mid-1997 (Schwarz 2004:337-48).

The most visible and persistent social actors calling for reform were the students (Schwarz 2004:354-8), while the main channel for expressing the need for change were the audio-visual media. After the step-down of Suharto, the media and other physical or virtual meeting places have remained a central institutional pillar on which Indonesia's public sphere 'under reform' is based. Thoughts on Reformasi have been expressed and debated by individuals and groups in public spaces such as university campuses and *warung* (food and coffee stalls), during mass manifestations such as rallies and demonstrations, and in all types of political, religious or social organization. The media that have been used for the dissemination of reformist ideas include newspaper articles, radio and television programmes, Video Compact Disc (VCD) recordings, mobile phone conversations, e-mail messages and Internet websites, and works of art such as literary writings, paintings, sculptures, music concerts and theatre performances (Spyer et al. 2002:177-82). The Reformasi goals of curbing government interference in and control over society, and enhancing people's freedom of speech and organization, are served not only by specific media content, but also by the very facilitation of physical and virtual forums for ordinary people to express and distribute their ideas in public.

Quantitative data suggest that radio was the most popular medium towards the end of the Suharto regime. According to figures of Badan Pusat Statistik (Indonesian Central Agency for Statistics), in 1995 69.4 per cent of the 45,653,084 Indonesian households owned a radio set. On the assumption of an average of five users per set, there would have been an audience of more than 158 million radio listeners (Hincal P. Pandjaitan et al. 2000:14). The same agency calculated that 43.4 per cent of the households owned a television set, which, on the same assumption of five users per set, implied an audience of more than 98 million television viewers, while the total readership of newspapers and magazines was estimated to be around 72 million (Hincal P. Pandjaitan et al. 2000:14). Radio's popularity and strategic and influential role as a channel of reform is due to features that are partly technological in nature and partly cultural – referring to the specific ways in which the medium has been explored and exploited in Indonesia – such as the orality and aurality of radio programmes, the relatively low price and portable size of radio receivers, the high speed and large reach of broadcast transmission, and the possibility for listeners to interact in on-air discourse (Masduki 2001:1-8).

Due to the aurality of radio programmes and the inexpensiveness and portability of radio receivers, radio can be enjoyed by different groups in different localities, including illiterate people in the remotest of sites, who do not have access to the print media or other information and entertainment