

RRI: Radio, Reformasi, ‘Indonesianness’

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Publicness, media(tors) and the migration of concepts

I want to focus on one particular notion that has been very influential in Reformasi discourse, namely the notion of publicness, as reflected in ‘public space/sphere’ (ruang/ranah publik, ‘public values’ (nilai-nilai publik) and ‘public media’ (media publik). The stress on ‘publicness’ during Reformasi can be seen as a reaction against the authoritarian/monological style of government during the New Order. I will trace some concrete genealogies of this notion, which represent the dynamism of Reformasi as a practice and an ideal. My argument is that the ‘Indonesianness’ of Reformasi should be problematized, and that Reformasi should be seen as a specific, simultaneously local and translocal, configuration of the interlocal migration of concepts and practices.

In the field of radio, there are some very clear examples of direct cooperation between international and Indonesian organizations: US-based Internews has founded its own Indonesian radio news agency branch, UNESCO has stimulated the development of community radio, commercial stations relay programs and receive journalism training from the BBC, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, Radio Netherlands and others, the German NGO Friedrich Naumann Stiftung organizes journalism contests for local stations, the Asia Foundation sponsors the radio news agency Kantor Berita Radio 68H, etc. In this presentation, I will not discuss the macro-level of immediate foreign financial support or ideological influence, but focus on the role of Indonesian intellectuals and activists in the field of the electronic media, particularly radio, as the mediators and re-creators of foreign ideas.

The Depok School: Monitoring the media

One of the groups that has put much effort in introducing the idea of publicness and public media in Indonesian society since the fall of Soeharto is a group of scholar-activists affiliated to Universitas Indonesia’s Communications Department. They call themselves the ‘Depok School’ (Gazali 2002a:ix, Gazali 2002c:55), which refers to the location of the department of their affiliation, the Depok suburb in South Jakarta. More interestingly, the name is also a

clear allusion to the Frankfurter Schule, the school of thought of which Habermas, one of the main thinkers on the public sphere, is considered to be a late representative.

The members of the Depok School, including Victor Menayang, Effendi Gazali and Dedy Hidayat, are all internationally schooled Communications scholars, with links to universities in the US and Europe. The central thought of the Depok School is that media institutions can only be genuinely public- or community-oriented if they also accept supervision and evaluation of their activities by the public. This supervising and evaluating role of society should be formally acknowledged and organized in the form of an Institute for the Supervision of Public/Community Media, which should reflect the diversity of the public or community involved (Gazali 2002a:ix, Gazali 2002c:55).

It should be noted that the Depok School makes a distinction between organizations that are publicly owned and organizations that serve the public interest, emphasizing that serving the public interest is the responsibility of any media organization, whether governmental, commercial or community-oriented (Gazali 2002c:53). Although public funding can be one important aspect of anchoring a broadcasting organization in society, the publicness of broadcasting also has to be measured against other aspects, such as whether it is accessible to the public, involves the public, and is accountable to the public (Gazali 2002b: 41-44).

The members of the Depok School define publicness or the public sphere (*ranah publik*) as such, as a “public space” that is situated in-between the communities of the economy and the state, where the public conducts rational discussions, form their opinions, and also monitor the government’ (Hidayat 2002:15; see also Gazali 2002d:85). This notion of the public sphere is based on the work of Habermas and its interpreters, in particular Craig Calhoun (1992). Since 2001, the Depok School has spread the notion in Indonesian society through their research and workshops in 10 Indonesian provinces. In the field, they have co-operated with about 200 NGOs, universities, media organizations and regional parliaments (Effendi 2002a:ix).

Although the Depok School claims the idea of a supervising institution for public and community broadcasting organizations, others have spread similar ideas at the same time as them, or even earlier. For instance, the Community for Indonesian Public Television (Komunitas Televisi Publik Indonesia, or KTVPI), a group of scholars and media practitioners (including Garin Nugroho and Ashadi Siregar) who attempt to help transforming TVRI from a government medium into a real public medium, also argued for the establishment of an independent institution to monitor TVRI’s broadcast content and finance

(Siregar 2000:10). In a 2000 publication, the Media Law Department of Internews Indonesia also argued for a Broadcasting Committee (Dewan Penyiaran), which, similar to Depok School's Institute for the Supervision of Public/Community Media, should consist of a group of representatives that reflect the diversity in a community and have the task of monitoring the people involved in community radio initiatives (Tabing 2000:133).

Media literacy and the oppositional public sphere

These different proponents of the concept of Indonesian public media have all in common that they stress the need for independent bodies to supervise the media. In other words, they make it clear that in times of Reformasi it is not enough for the media to be independent, fulfil their 'Fourth Branch' function and become watchdogs of the government and the other powers in society. Instead, the media should be critical about themselves and be accountable to the public. This has not only been translated in the foundation of formal organizations such as the Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia, an independent supervising body for broadcast media, which has been officially acknowledged by the 2002 Broadcasting Law, but also in attempts to raise general 'media literacy'.

These attempts are made in interactive talk shows, for instance, in which listeners do not only have and take the opportunity to hold politicians or businessmen directly responsible for their deeds, but also have conversations with the hosts and other listeners about issues such as their own interactive performance and the format of the talk show. There are many great examples such as the contests for best listeners and off-the-air 'Jumpa Pendengar' events organized by Global FM in Den Pasar, Bali, a commercial station of which the listeners try to live up to slogans such as 'Don't be Unwilling to Talk' and 'Improve Your Talk'. I have discussed these manifestations of 'publicness' on the discursive level of radio journalism in other presentations, therefore I restrict myself here to the more conceptual level and the role of activists and scholars in disseminating and re-creating ideas of 'publicness'.

The groups of scholars and activists mentioned do not just repeat Habermasian ideas about the public sphere, but also make them compatible to the Indonesian Reformasi situation, especially by emphasizing those aspects of media supervision, media literacy and media self-reflexivity. In the original Habermasian concept, the public sphere is rather result-oriented: people come together in an accessible, institutionalised space in which they have rational discussion in order to reach consensus. However, by stressing the need for independent monitoring bodies, and by institutionalizing community radio, producing interactive talk shows, organizing listener contests etc., the Indonesian media scholars, activists, producers

and audiences discuss and negotiate the possibilities of communication itself. According to Livingstone and Lunt, who have written about interactive talk shows on television, they represent the ideals and practices of a so-called oppositional public sphere rather than Habermas's bourgeois public sphere.

The 'oppositional public sphere' is a space where a diversity of views is expressed, sometimes compromise - rather than consensus - is reached, and accounts of lived experience in the life-world are validated (Livingstone and Lunt 1994:160-161; see also p.26). According to Habermas, this alternative type of public sphere is corrupted and refeudalized because it allows the representatives of official power to engage in direct dialogue with normal citizens, thereby transforming publicness into public relations (Livingstone and Lunt 1994:174; see also p.p 26-27). Livingstone and Lunt argue, however, that the dialogue as manifested in audience participation programs 'may also afford opportunities for accountability, the identification of contradictions between policy/expertise and everyday life, space for ordinary people to generate and validate common experiences, and so forth' (Livingstone and Lunt 1994:174). The interactive programs and the oppositional public sphere in general do not represent a public unified by the successful outcome of communication between different parties, as would be the case in the bourgeois public sphere, but rather diverse publics exploring the *possibilities* of communication (Livingstone and Lunt 1994:32).

'Mengawal Kebebasan Pers': On-the-air media education

The organizations discussed do not only attempt to reach the public and create a critical attitude towards the media through formal workshops or legislation, but also through creative media productions. For instance, the Indonesian Media Law and Policy Center (IMLPC), which was formerly part of Internews Indonesia but has now become independent (in line with the Internews policy), in cooperation with the Jakarta commercial radio station MsTri and the Indonesian Press Council (Dewan Pers), has produced a series of CDs titled 'To guide/safeguard the Freedom of the Press (*Mengawal Kebebasan Pers*). These CDs have been distributed to radio stations all over Indonesia, and contained programs about themes related to press freedom and the role of journalists, presented by the media lawyer and head of IMLPC, Hinca IP Pandjaitan. Themes included 'Violence Against the Mass Media by the Masses' (June 2001), 'How to Recognize a Real Journalist' (August 2001), 'Who holds Responsibility in a Talk Show' (June 2001), amongst others, which referred and responded to concrete problems in Indonesia's self-proclaimed transitional phase from authoritarianism to democracy.

For instance, in the program 'Who holds Responsibility in a Talk Show', Pandjaitan discussed a case in which Metro TV had published medical health reports about President Adurrahman Wahid. The central theme of the program evolved around the ethical question whether Metro TV and its informants could/should rely on their right of conveying information, or whether their behavior was an offence of other legislation that said that one is not allowed to offend the President of Indonesia.

The Program titled 'How to Recognize a Real Journalist' was also about the ethics of the journalism profession. It was about so-called *wartawan gadungan* or 'fake journalists'. *Wartawan gadungan* use fake press cards, pretend to write stories about certain people or events, and then force the interviewed people to pay money for the story that will never be published. Pandjaitan provided the public with practical and legal information about how to recognize and deal with those fake journalists. Indirectly, it also criticized the practice of 'real' journalists who ask money from their interviewees in exchange for publicity, in order to earn something in addition to their, often meagre, official salary.

The final example, the program 'Violence Against the Mass Media by the Masses', was about audience rather than journalist behavior. It analysed why at times during Reformasi groups of people expressed their anger at the media by threatening journalists or destroying media offices. The program discussed and defended the rights and function of the press, and warned the public about the sentences for violent behavior against the press. Pandjaitan also informed the public about alternative, non-violatile ways of expressing their dissatisfaction with media reports, such as their 'response right' (*hak jawab*), including the right to demand for rectification.