

Representations of Australia and Indonesia in each other's media and changes to Indonesian media since the fall of Suharto

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For most Australians and Indonesians the only perceptions they have of their neighbours are those that are portrayed in the media. Thus the media plays an essential role in how each nation views the other. For the sake of security, trade, friendship and cultural enrichment, harmony between the two neighbours is important, especially in the global climate of terrorism, fear and distrust. In the past, media images of both countries have been largely negative. The question of how each nation is portrayed currently in each other's news media and why they are portrayed as such informed my honours research project. This paper will draw on that research. Firstly, it will briefly present findings that show there have been some improvements in newsprint media portrayals of Indonesia and Australia this century.

As this paper is written specifically for a discussion workshop at a conference, titled Arts, Culture, and Political and Social Change Since Suharto, it will focus on the changes to Indonesian media since 1998 and how those changes have impacted on media content. Areas that influence news media content include press freedom, media law, journalists and media institutions, and media ownership. Indonesian media has experienced highs and lows in its rapid transformation. Although there are areas that need attention, the media on the whole has progressed but press freedom is under further threat.

Press representations

Through reviewing the research of several academics and analysts, such as David Reeve, Alison Broinowski, Rodney Tiffin, and Lambert Kelabora, I found images and perceptions of Australia and Indonesia in each other's media pre-2000 to be overwhelmingly negative on both sides. Given the occurrence of significant events and the considerable social and political changes that have taken place in Indonesia since much of that research, it follows that neighbouring perspectives could also have changed.

To address questions as to how Australia and Indonesia are currently portrayed in each other's newspapers, whether negative images persist and whether particular events have affected the way each nation is portrayed content analyses of articles from three case study periods were conducted. The samples were taken from two of each nation's newspapers: *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Jakarta Post* and the *Jawa Pos*. The first case study was a content analysis of articles from those papers in the first six months of 2005. The other two case studies were comparative content analyses of newspaper articles in the week following two significant events: the 2002 Bali bombings and the 2004 Boxing-Day tsunami.

In all case studies the Australian newspapers published substantially larger numbers of articles relevant to Indonesia than did the Indonesian newspapers publish in relation to Australia. This indicates that Indonesia tends to be more newsworthy in Australia than Australia does in Indonesia. Particular events that occurred in the 2005 period, and the major events of the Bali bombings and the tsunami generated both positive and negative articles. Such articles confirm theories that events affect media portrayals and that stereotypes that emerge in the media are closely related to the events occurring at the time.

The Bali bombings period generated a significantly large number of relevant articles in Australian newspapers, more than double the number of relevant articles in Indonesian newspapers. Although there was a higher percentage of negative than positive articles

regarding Indonesia in Australian papers, the majority of articles were categorised as neutral. Moreover, there was a higher percentage of neutral articles in both nation's papers than there was in the other case study periods. The negative articles reflect the fear and anger of Australians, and the high number of neutral articles reflects the cautious attitudes of governments and media at such an emotionally charged time. The Indonesian newspapers combined had only two negative articles. This shows the weight of responsibility felt by Indonesians because Australians as their guests were among victims of the bombings. Overall, there were fewer categories of negative images found in both nations' newspapers for this period.

In comparison to the other case study periods the tsunami week was the period in which each nation was most favourably portrayed. Additionally, the least number of negative themes or stereotypes recurred with the least number of occurrences.

In the 2005 period most of the 44 negative images found in pre-2000 representations of each nation reappeared. Furthermore, there were more negative articles than positive articles in both nations' newspapers. However, this is not surprising as news, especially international news, tends to be more negative (Lee 2000: 39; Galtung & Ruge in Perry 2002: 107-8; Obijiofor & Hanusch 2003: 146). The Schapelle Corby case generated a significant number of negative articles in both nations' newspapers. Security threats at the Indonesian embassy and consulate in Australia, and the attitude of Prime Minister Howard generated negative articles in the Indonesian newspapers. Conversely, President Yudhoyono engendered positive articles in Australian newspapers while issues of trade and security produced positive articles in Indonesian newspapers.

Overall, fewer negative images were found in all the case studies combined compared with those found in pre-2000 media representations, especially in the Indonesian newspapers. In the Bali bombings and tsunami periods in particular, Indonesian newspapers contained considerably fewer negative images of Australia and, on the whole, Australia was portrayed more positively than negatively. Similarly, *The Australian* newspaper portrayed Indonesia more positively than negatively for both these periods combined.

Summarily, in comparison with pre-2000 media representations this century saw a significant improvement in the way Australia was portrayed in Indonesian newspapers, and a minor improvement in the way Indonesia was portrayed in Australian newspapers. This result is reflective of the changes that have occurred in Indonesia since Suharto's rein, changes that influence the content of news media.

Changes to Indonesian media

The Suharto regime controlled the Indonesian media. Under Suharto the role of the press was as a partner to the government in nation building and promoting national unity (d'Haenens et al in Pit Chen Low 2003: 24; Romano 2003: 41). Thus there were harsh, but ambiguous, restrictions on what journalists were allowed to publish. Any breach of such restrictions could result in media outlets having their licenses revoked or publications being banned (Romano 2003: 49; Pit Chen Low 2003: 19). However, there have been many changes to the Indonesian press in the short time since the fall of Suharto in 1998.

Press freedom

As the Suharto regime started to crumble the press gave rise to the voice of dissent and were instrumental in bringing down the regime and nurturing the transition to democracy (Pit Chen

Low 2003: 25). The abolition of the press licensing system and the enactment of *Press Law 1999* under successive President Habibie saw press freedom flourish to extremes. The number of media outlets exploded. The biggest growth area was in radio stations, which expanded from 798 to 1500 reaching 90 per cent of the population. National television broadcasters more than doubled in number from 5 to 12, and there was an increase in the number of local television stations (Syah in *The Media Report 2005*). The number of print media publications swelled from 260 to 1881, but by 2002 the number had dropped to about 556 and was estimated at about 500 in 2005 (Luwarsa 2002a: 13; Luwarsa 2002b; Syah in *The Media Report 2005*). The press in Indonesia's fledgling democracy took on more of a liberal press fourth estate role.

Press freedom in Indonesia peaked in 1999 to the point of chaos. This newfound freedom was not without its drawbacks. The press has since been brought under more control by government and non-government bodies and also by self-regulation. In 2000 Indonesia ranked 57th out of 167 countries on Reporters Without Border's (RWB) world press freedom index (RWB 2002). It has since plummeted to the depths of 117th position in 2004 and clawed its way back to 102nd position in 2005 (RWB 2004a; RWB 2005). The main reasons for its drop in rank lie with government and army restrictions on media coverage in Aceh, the government's ousting of foreign 'critical observers', attacks on journalists, and criminal defamation laws that saw 20 journalists and activists jailed during Megawati's presidency (RWB 2004b; Human Rights Watch 2003). The decline in press freedom also stems from a difficult economic climate, which has additionally led to a deterioration of civilian control and calls for more government control of the media (Kovach 2004).

Unhappy with being criticised in press reports, both Presidents Wahid and Megawati sought to regain government control of the media. Megawati revived the defunct Ministry of Information, under the new name Ministry of Communication and Information, and tightened broadcasting laws and regulations (Panjaitan in Murphy 2001). These laws and regulations have been tightened even further by President Yudhoyono's government. The government, military, Acehese separatists and the police have restricted media coverage of Aceh by subjecting media workers to kidnapping, murder, beatings and intimidation. As well as such attacks bureaucratic restrictions have resulted in both local and foreign journalists unable to gain access to Aceh, or being banned and sometimes jailed for breaching supposed legislation (Human Rights Watch 2003). This has led to journalists, and informants, being unwilling to cover the situation there or self-censoring. However, in the wake of the 2004-tsunami and peace agreements between Acehese separatists and the Indonesian Government and military, the area was opened up more to media (RWB in Krishnan 2005).

Violence towards the press is now said to be one of the biggest threats to press freedom in Indonesia (Wicaksono in Margiyono 2003). Most of the attacks are at the hands of police, the military, mobs, and gangs of thugs hired by powerbrokers to intimidate journalists for the purpose of controlling publication of material concerning their interests (Wicaksono in Margiyono 2003). Mob violence against media workers makes up almost half the cases of attacks on the media (Alliance of Independent Journalists in Saraswati 2003). Media analysts suggest mob violence against media workers occurs because the Indonesian public are not yet accustomed to a critical press and do not yet understand the meaning of press freedom (Supryanto in Cordell 2002; Siregar in Saraswati 2003). People are still dissatisfied with the legal process for complaints against press and prefer to seek retribution themselves. This reflects the public's lack of respect for press freedom as well as for the legal system and law enforcement in Indonesia (Pit Chen Low 2003: 56). Connections between police, the military

and powerful figures in the justice department and business world mean that most reported cases of violence against journalists are not brought to justice (Luwarso 2002a; Pit Chen Low 2003: 57). As journalists self-censor and avoid writing about corruption and abuses of power their role of society watchdog is undermined.

Media Law

Media laws in Indonesia are also used to restrict press freedom. Indonesia has a different justice system to Australia and while there are similarities in media law there are also major differences (see table 1). Unlike Australia, freedom of speech and press freedom are guaranteed in Indonesia under article 28 of the constitution (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation 1998). Although Indonesia's *Press Law 1999* allowed for more press freedom, interpretations of that law and other legislation threaten to gag the press.

Table 1: Law and media in Indonesia and Australia

	INDONESIA	AUSTRALIA
Legal System	<p>Civil law or inquisitorial system: Derived from French and German models, where a panel of judges rather than a jury make decisions as to the guilt or innocence of a defendant.</p> <p>Judges conduct the enquiry into the truth of the matter, control the proceedings and dominate the hearing (Lindsay n.d.).</p>	<p>Common law or adversarial system: Derived from British system, also found in America and other former British colonies. Usually a jury makes decisions as to whether a defendant is guilty or not guilty. The system works on case law.</p> <p>Judges are impartial and act as referees in enforcing rules of procedure and evidence.</p>
Defamation	<p>Under civil and criminal law: Increasingly dealt with under the criminal code. This overrides the <i>Press Law 1999</i>, which stipulates that the Press Council is the mediator centre for media disputes but is yet to get legal recognition (Djajanto 2000; Dewan Pers 2004). Definition: is written or oral communication of offensive material to the public, deemed as four or more people.</p> <p>Punishable by fines and/ or prison sentence (Djajanto 2000).</p>	<p>Under civil law: There are provisions for criminal defamation but no journalists or newspapers have been convicted of this in recent times. Definition: a defamatory imputation with reference to the plaintiff communicated to at least one person other than the plaintiff</p> <p>Punishment is usually in the form of financial damages awarded to the plaintiff and can be very costly for the defendant (Press Council 2004a).</p>
Contempt in crime and court reporting:	<p>Sub judge contempt is non-existent or hardly applied. The source of the defamatory material is more liable than the publisher or journalist (Wicaksono, B 2004, pers.com., 1 October).</p> <p>There are few restrictions on filming and photographing in the courts</p>	<p>Under criminal code: Journalists are subject to strict contempt laws, such as sub judge and disobedience contempt.</p> <p>They are also subject to suppression legislation restricting publication of identities of certain subjects. And restricted to fair and accurate reporting</p> <p>Punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. (Pearson 1997)</p>

Indonesia's penal code includes draconian laws that can see journalists jailed for simply doing their job. Insulting the President or Vice President or being hostile towards the government is punishable by a maximum of six years in prison (RWB 2004b). Rather than the old form of suppressing free speech through licensing laws the state now surreptitiously uses the *Criminal Code* to muzzle the press (Makarim in Bayuni 2004b). As recently as May 2005 two editors of weekly tabloid *Koridor* were sentenced to nine months jail for defaming a political candidate and in September 2004 the chief editor of *Tempo* magazine was sentenced to one year's jail for defaming a business magnate (Committee to Protect Journalists 2005). However, all three remain free pending appeals (Wicaksono, B 2005, pers.com., 30 November).

Unlike Australia there are few restrictions on court or crime reporting in Indonesia. In daily news reports it is commonplace to see suspected criminals clearly identified, sometimes before being charged and often before they are brought before the courts. Journalists are also allowed to film and photograph court trials. On television an accused is often interviewed or shown confessing and re-enacting the alleged crime (Armando in Saraswati 2004b). Images of the victims of crime, including rape and murder, are also published. Victims of sex crimes, including children, are in no way spared from publicity. They are often filmed while giving their statements to police and are interviewed by media afterwards. However, much of this does not comply with the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission's (KPI) broadcasting standards that came into effect in August of 2004 (Saraswati 2004b). A year later, television stations continued to flout these standards (Hotland 2005). Media coverage of this kind in Australia is subject to contempt laws and other legal restrictions that can see journalists or publishers fined or even jailed. Indonesia does have contempt laws but the journalist is not held accountable as long as they attribute what is reported to the source, be it the police or the accused (Wicaksono, B 2004, pers.comm., 1 October).

Besides real crime reporting, in just one month the KPI received hundreds of complaints from the public about particular television programs that feature 'violence, domestic conflict, rape, eroticism, mysticism, horror, and the exploitation of women's sexuality' (Saraswati 2004b). Furthermore, stations broadcast adult programs at inappropriate times (Saraswati 2004b). In airing these programs many defiant television stations ignore KPI's broadcasting standards. This reflects changes in the generally conservative and religious nature of Indonesian society, but also demonstrates why sectors of society support the call for more government control of the media.

Journalists and media institutions

At the turn of this century an unfettered press in Indonesia led to an increase in journalists and media outlets and a proliferation of publications critical of almost anyone, especially members of the government and the military. Criticisms were often exaggerated, biased and unsubstantiated (Syah in Leach 2004: 16). From 1999 to 2001 sensationalistic reporting frequently inflamed communal conflicts (Luwarso 2000a; Syah in Leach 2004: 16). Media analyst Solahudin (in Goldner 2002) argues there was a tendency to heighten emotions and conflict in reports rather than provide objective accounts. Many of the thousands of new journalists were untrained and unaware a journalistic code of ethics even existed (Budyatna in Goldner 2002). Increasing competition and lack of journalistic professionalism in Indonesia continually poses a threat to press freedom (Luwarso in Pit Chen Low 2003: 58).

A combination of harsh economic conditions, untrained and underpaid journalists, and competition for advertising revenue has not only resulted in corruption, or 'envelope journalism', but also in biased and sensationalistic reporting. However, this does not apply to all journalists and news organisations in Indonesia. Lack of professionalism in Indonesian journalism is partly caused by fierce competition and economic difficulties. The poor economic situation in Indonesia means media outlets employ untrained journalists at low wages resulting in below standard journalism (Pit Chen Low 2003: 59-60). The free press era spawned scores of cheap, politically-oriented tabloids brimming with conspiracy theories, accusations, hyperbole, and graphic scenes of violence (Pit Chen Low 2003: 59). Hundreds of media companies were forced into bankruptcy, due to competition for advertising revenue (Pit Chen Low 2003: 59-60). Many news organisations rely on sex and crime stories with 'headlines that scream sensationalism' to boost readership (Harsono 2002). Pursuit of money is not only relevant to media organisations, media workers are also hard pressed. In 2004, even

university graduate journalists with more than two years experience were paid a paltry salary of less than \$A100 per month (Saraswati 2004a).

A corrupt practice originating from the Suharto era has carried over into democratic Indonesia. 'Envelope journalism' under Suharto's regime was a practice where government officials would give journalists envelopes full of money for favourable coverage, and now the practice allows media organisations to pay insignificant wages (Kovach 2004; Pit Chen Low 2003: 58-9). The temptation is too great for journalists to supplement their meagre salaries by extorting or accepting money from individuals, political parties, companies or institutions in return for biased or positive coverage, or for withholding negative portrayals (Kovach 2004; RWB 2004b; Solahudin in Goldner 2002). An extension of this practice is bogus or thug journalism. Bogus journalists form brotherhoods of 50 to 100 and work in groups, gatecrashing media events posing as journalists to get envelopes of money in return for promises of favourable media coverage (*The Jakarta Post* 20 March 2005). In whatever form, envelope journalism is still practised in Indonesia and undermines journalistic integrity, resulting in biased and misleading reportage.

Through a lack of journalistic professionalism and poor quality or biased news coverage people have subsequently become disillusioned with the Indonesian press (Pit Chen Low 2003: 55). The press is often blamed by politicians, media observers and the general public for inciting anger and conflict. Ironically, the hard-won freedoms gained by a press that was instrumental in the downfall of Suharto's authoritarian regime are now seen as a threat by sectors of Indonesian society that consider the press as hostile and too powerful (Luwarso 2002a).

Journalist and media organisations have since helped to curb the irresponsibility of journalists through education and training about rights and responsibilities of press freedom (Syah in Leach 2004: 16; Cordell 2002). The aim of such organisations is to get the media industry to self-regulate in order to avoid calls for the government to regain control of the media and the suppression of press freedom. However, they need to develop a style of Journalism tailored to Indonesia, as the Western model may be too aggressive in such a volatile nation (Pit Chen Low 2003: 72). Furthermore, earning the trust of the public through responsible professional reporting is not the only answer. The public also need to be educated on issues of press freedom in order to understand and appreciate its value.

Media Ownership

Three major privately-owned media groups dominate print media in Indonesia. These groups, Kompas-Gramedia Group, Jawa Pos Group and Surya Persindo Group, own publications at the national and regional level (Pit Chen Low 2003: 17). The groups are made up of a diverse range of businesses including magazines, publishing, radio, television, and online media. There are also some independently owned newspapers, although not as many as there were pre-1998, and about 100 weekly news magazines (Pit Chen Low 2003: 18). Most journalists from the independent media scene that flourished in response to the repressive media laws of the New Order regime now work in mainstream media or are financed by large foreign NGOs or multinational companies (Cordell 2002).

Under Suharto the majority of the 16 major press groups were affiliated with the palace or the ruling Golkar organisation (Sen & Hill 2000: 59). The regime had ultimate power over media and as such media coverage of the elections was traditionally biased. This tradition has continued since Suharto days and is directly related to the associations between media

companies and certain political parties (Pit Chen Low 2003: 28). Besides outside intimidation, the threat to independence of media in general elections can come in the form of media owners' interference in editorial policy (Menayang in Siboro 2004). Conflict of interest can be seen in the case of Surya Paloh, owner of media conglomerate Surya Persindo Group, and his political interests (Menayang in Siboro 2004), namely his long-term affiliation with the Golkar party (Tokoh Indonesia 2004).

Many of the media outlets today are owned by Jakarta's business elite, some of whom have close connections to the Suharto family and their friends (United States-Indonesia Society 2003). For example, a former partner of Suharto's daughter, Hary Tanoesoedibjo, owns more than 30 per cent of Indonesia's media (United States-Indonesia Society 2003). Almost all the national broadcasting firms have Suharto connections (Pacific Media Watch 2003). Other business magnates have shares in various media outlets; some have majority shares (in United States-Indonesia Society 2003). Such centralised ownership has been a concern of media watchdogs in that it may serve to stifle the diversity of opinions and perspectives in media content. The *Broadcast Law 32/2002* includes regulations that seek to restrict broadcasting licences to a single province and limit cross ownership of newspapers, radio and television stations in the hope of weakening the influence of the media moguls (Pacific Media Watch 2003). However, these regulations do not seem to have been enforced.

In the heady days of press freedom at the turn of this century Indonesian media were seemingly independent of outside influence. They relentlessly published material highly critical of all the powerful and influential institutions and interest groups (Bayuni 2004a). However, Luwarso (2002a) suggested that the business imperatives and political leanings of media owners influenced media content. The media stands accused of unfavourably manipulating public opinion of then President Abdurrahman Wahid till his ouster in 2001 (Pit Chen Low 2003: 29). Media bias again was apparent in the 2004 presidential elections that saw Megawati ousted and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono come to power (European Union Election Observation Mission 2004). This shows a swing in the balance of power between politicians and media owners in Indonesia from the media being dominated by the ruling party to media companies being more powerful. However, the diversified ownership of some of the leading news publications gives them more of an independent nature (Pit Chen Low 2003; 28). Perhaps that is why local journalists and election monitors argue that the press 'played a positive role in the 2004 elections by monitoring fraud, educating voters about political candidates, and helping to ensure a peaceful electoral process' (Committee to Protect Journalist 2004).

Conclusion

Press representations of Australia in Indonesian media and vice versa found that Australia is not of as much interest in Indonesian newspapers as Indonesia is in Australian newspapers. Compared with past representations of both nations Australian media portrayals of Indonesia have not improved significantly. In contrast, representations of Australia in Indonesia's media have improved substantially, indicating a change in the quality and nature of Indonesian media. In the years since the demise of the New Order regime Indonesian media has undergone a dramatic transformation. When restrictions were lifted the media landscape exploded with hundreds of new outlets along with thousands of new and mostly untrained journalists. Press freedom reached extremes in 1999. Although the press in Indonesia is freer today than it was pre-1998, press freedom has again been restricted. Media irresponsibility and lack of professionalism have contributed to the forces that worked together in reining in the press and curbing press freedom. Such forces include government and military restrictions,

intimidation and attacks on media workers and the use of criminal defamation laws. While some laws and regulations are strictly dealt with others, such as contempt and broadcasting standards, are too lax. This century has seen the Indonesian press mature through training, education and self-regulation. At the same time, a difficult economic climate has negatively affected the quality of media content. While the diverse ownership of some of the mainstream newspapers gives them an independent nature, much of Indonesia's media businesses are owned by elite businessmen who have ties with the likes of Suharto. Such power has influence over media content and politics. There have been positive changes to Indonesian media as well as some drawbacks. While the media is becoming more professional and responsible its freedoms are being eroded.

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