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Cyber-civic space in Indonesia

From panopticon to pandemonium?

The Indonesian experience shows that the internet can be a double-edged sword in facilitating democratisation. Responding to the debate about whether the internet leads to democratisation, is an Orwellian menace to democracy, or is a facilitator of global capitalist hegemony, this paper shows that these questions cannot be resolved in the virtual world of the internet itself. Rather, they are played out locally through struggles revolving around the creation and assertion of identities that coalesce and galvanise actors into contests of power and control over the public sphere. To better understand the outcomes of the localisation of the internet, the Indonesian experience is traced through two recent episodes: the student movement leading to the downfall of President Suharto in 1998, and the more recent rise of the Jihad Troopers. Whether the internet will be sustained as a cyber-civic space or will instead strengthen the tendency towards perpetual resistance and political crisis is the outstanding question in Indonesia today.

The internet and the promise of democracy

The global expansion of the internet vastly expands opportunities for the communication and cross-fertilisation of ideas across territorial boundaries, and holds new promises for empowering people, promoting economic growth, reducing barriers to political participation and giving civil society a greater voice vis-à-vis the state, political elites and corporate interests. From this optimistic perspective, the internet is associated with 'freedom' and 'democracy'. In the extreme, proponents paint a techno-dream of the internet as a newly emerging public sphere in which people gather without the need for propinquity to politically organise, discuss and collectively resolve issues of the day.

At the other extreme, the internet, like the telescreen that George Orwell envisioned in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), is seen to pose a threat to democracy through the ways in which governments and big business use it to

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manipulate users and create identities with the state and consumer products. Graham (2000)—whose term 'premium networked space' includes transport, telecommunications and other infrastructures customised to the needs of powerful users and their spaces—also casts the internet as an apparatus that tends to increase the gap between the powerful and the powerless. Still others see violent 'communes of resistance' rising from within and threatening the very existence of civil society, as they appropriate cyber-technology and its informational flows to organise aggressive responses to the perceived injustices of global capitalist hegemony (Castells, 1997).

The question of whether the internet is the creator or killer of civil society and democracy has no unequivocal resolution in the abstract. Rather, answers will emerge from historical experiences in specific local contexts. When the internet comes to a country such as Indonesia, localisation processes occur that transform its electronic signals into potent social meanings that then interact with local power constellations to reshape the political landscape.

The discussion here focuses on the civic space dimension of the internet by sketching a framework for exploring its spatial-sociotechnological transformation in the context of the rise of civil society in Indonesia. Two historical episodes are used: the May 1998 student movement, and the subsequent emergence of the Jihad Troopers. In the first instance, in the mid-1990s non-governmental internet providers began to create a new kind of civic space—a cyber-civic space—which appeared to allow Indonesian people to participate actively for the first time in the public sphere of political decision making. Yet, as the second case illustrates, the internet also allows other, less civil elements of society to rise and destabilise both civil society and the nation-state.

Civil society, civic spaces and identity

The localisation of the internet in much of the contemporary world has three important dynamics: the rise of civil society and the push for political reform, the creation of physical and cyber-civic spaces for the practices of civil society, and the formation of and struggles over identity. Concerning the first, although the concept of civil society has been developed from the earlier writings of Locke (1690) and Hegel (1967), the use here emphasises de Tocqueville's (1969) idea of voluntary association and Gramsci's (1971) separation of civil society from both the state and economy in the public realm. As argued by Friedmann (1998), the key to the existence of civil society is its degree of autonomy from the state and the corporate economy. Over the past few decades, the rise of civil society has become a singularly prominent political phenomenon as people around the world, including Indonesia, have joined movements to gain autonomy from oppressive states through democratic reforms (Douglass and Friedmann, 1998). Although globalisation plays a key role in the broader political economy of the rise of civil society through, for example, access to information beyond the nation-state, the struggles in the rise of civil society are highly differentiated through varied historical processes in the development of localised socio-political institutions.

Despite such positive trends, however, authoritarian regimes continue successfully to resist civil society movements in many parts of the world. Equally daunting is the appearance of sectarian organisations from within civil society that seek to dominate or even eliminate non-believers or perceived 'outsiders'. In addition, one must consider the erosion of both state and civil society organisations by the influence on political, economic and social life of non-democratic institutions such as the World Trade Organization, which make decisions on global–local relations in favour of global corporate interests.

Whatever the outcome, the rise of civil society relies upon a second but often neglected facet of localisation: the creation of civic spaces. The term 'civic space' is used here instead of 'public space' to clarify the need for spaces in which civil society can engage in its daily practices of voluntary association. When seen from a political perspective, the availability of civic spaces is a basic requirement for democratic practices in any society (Douglass et al., 2002). Following on from the insights of Lefebvre (1991) and Foucault (1979), rather than being simply a pre-existing given or a backdrop for social action, the production of space— particularly civic space—is an active dimension of social life and change. In this context, the internet can be seen as a potential civic space in which civil society can flourish independently from the state and the corporate economy, and can also engage in political action.

Society–technology–space relations revolve around a third dynamic: identity formation. Creating identities is a universal human experience and a fundamental source of meaning and social power. Collective identity formation—identities shared among individuals—is a primary driving force in contemporary world history (Castells, 1997). Identities are the sources of resistance to globalisation and the rise of network society, which in the current era is manifested by the spread of information technologies, in particular the internet. According to Castells (1997, 8), collective identities take three principal forms:

- *legitimising identities* created by dominant institutions in society—notably political regimes in control of the state apparatus and their followers—to extend and rationalise their rule;
- *resistance identities* generated by those who are being devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination; and
- *project identities* that go beyond resistance to attempt actively to redefine positions in society and, in so doing, transform relations of power in the prevailing social structure.

Resistance identities play a critical role in fostering the rise of civil society in the face of oppressive states and the hegemonic tendencies of global corporate capitalism. These identities become the moral fabric that unites people into communities of 'collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression' (Castells, 1997, 9). They can also develop into projects that seek to change the course of history by overthrowing existing regimes or creating alternative communes at the margins of society and territorial spaces.

Although it often arises from resistance identities, the sustenance of civil society ultimately requires the regulatory powers of the state. In this sense,

resistance or project identities must transform into identities that legitimise the new status quo, bringing together deeply rooted apparatuses that prolong the routines of state–civil society relations. In the Indonesian case, the internet played a crucial role in creating resistance identities that galvanised civil society to overthrow the government of President Suharto. In the aftermath, however, continued resistance has created identity projects that are not necessarily leading to a new period of national legitimisation, but are instead threatening the vitality of civil society and the state.

Suharto's panopticon: capturing civic spaces by the state

Suharto, whose reign of power as the 'New Order' President of Indonesia lasted from 1966 to 1998, built a 'panopticon' of constant surveillance over the national territorial space. Originally proposed by Jeremy Bentham (a British philosopher) in 1843, the panopticon—literally 'all-seeing place'—was a prison constructed from a circular array of cells. Each cell had a small window in the back that illuminated prisoners from behind, allowing guards to view them continuously from an observation tower in the centre. The tower had special shutters to prevent the prisoners from seeing the guard, meaning that the panopticon was designed to allow the one-way observation of every prisoner. Each prisoner would constrain his own behaviour in the knowledge that a guard *might* be observing his every action, regardless of whether anyone was actually watching at all (Fig. 1).

Foucault (1979), in his book *Discipline and Punish*, drew on this idea of controlling space, and used the panopticon as a metaphor for the oppression of the individual by the state in modern society. Foucault observed that control no longer required physical domination, but could be achieved by isolation and the constant possibility of surveillance.[1] By constructing a national system of surveillance the state can see without being seen, exponentially expanding its control through the fear of its presence, which is greater than its actual physical capacity to enforce its rule. Such was the case in Indonesia.

President Suharto sought to create such a panopticon of surveillance and fear through written, verbal and hidden rules that controlled physical spaces as well as mental spaces. Wherever people went, and whatever they thought, they could not escape the eyes of the state. Although many public parks, civic centres, plazas and city squares were created by Suharto's government, they were all created for the purpose of encouraging activities that symbolically supported the regime. The uses of these spaces were restricted to state-approved functions. By staging events in these spaces to extol the New Order government as the primary source of Indonesian identity and progress, potential civic spaces were used to manipulate and control the people.

Suharto's success in creating these identities was manifested in the general lack of awareness among people that they were being controlled or manipulated.

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1 He wrote that in modern society our spaces are organised 'like so many cages, so many theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible' (Foucault, 1979, 200).
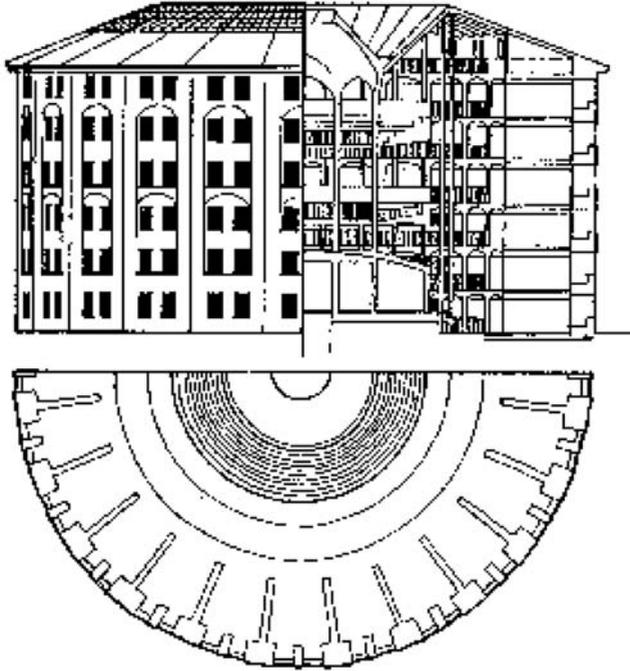
Fig. 1 Diagram of panopticon
Source: Bentham, 1843, plate 2

For more than three decades, people believed that the plazas, squares and parks were venues for national ceremonies (e.g., the flag ceremony on Monday mornings) or for regimented national physical exercises—*senam kesegaran jasmani*—on Friday mornings and mass jogging on Sunday mornings. Those engaged in the exercise programmes would wear athletic uniforms—not unlike prisoners in an exercise yard—as symbolic evidence of their loyalty to the nation and the ruling regime, and their participation was a way of thanking the state for delivering economic progress and for its generosity. The government used these activities to create the illusion that it really took care of its people by providing such spaces.

THE 'AUTHORISED PARTY'

For more than 30 years, the government was able to legitimise itself through such identity promotion in public spaces. No spaces were 'civic' in the sense of being available to civil society at arm's length from the state. All activities in all kinds of spaces—private as well as public—had to be known about and permitted by the state. Social occasions, religious meetings, sporting events and cultural and artistic events, let alone political debates, all required stamped letters stating that the activity was permitted by the 'authorised party' (*pihak yang berwajib*). The government did not specifically identify this party or person. Like the invisible guard at the panopticon, the 'authorised party' could

Fig. 2 '1 x 24 jam tamu wajib lapor'
Source: author's photo

be anywhere at any time, thus making people engage in self-censorship and self-discipline with the knowledge that the 'ghost of Suharto' just might be observing their actions.

A particularly ominous use of the term appeared on small signs in every neighbourhood, street and alley, which bore the phrase 'All guests who stay more than 24 hours should be reported' (to the authorised party) (*Tamu 1 x 24 jam wajib lapor*) (Fig. 2). This plain sign was much more powerful that it appears to be. Much simpler and cheaper than the surveillance cameras used by many Western governments, it successfully controlled people without any overt appearance of control. Although people might not always have actually reported their guests—especially since it was not clear to whom they should be reported—they accepted the idea that their government had the right to ask them to do so, and that it was the right thing to do. They were also encouraged to feel suspicious of 'strangers' in their neighbourhood.

Far above these small neighbourhood signs soared an even more powerful aspect of the New Order panopticon. This was the Palapa[2] communications satellite (Fig. 3), images of which were used from elementary school upwards

2 Palapa, a name signifying national unity, was chosen by Suharto in July 1975. It symbolises the fulfilment of a vow for unity first expressed by Gajah Mada, a revered national hero of the fourteenth century who served as Prime Minister of the Majapahit kingdom. He had vowed not to partake of Palapa, a national delicacy, until the goal of national unity was achieved.
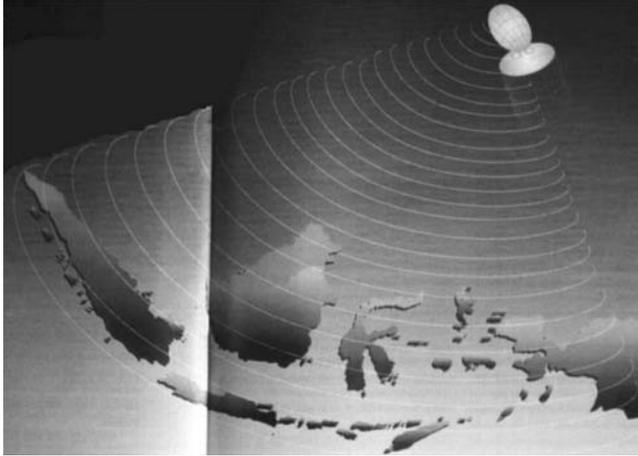
Fig. 3 The Palapa satellite 'unifies' Indonesia
Source: Indonesian Telecom archive, as cited in Telkom, 1996, 204–05

(mainly in the 1977 and 1984 curriculums) to symbolise the unification of Indonesia under the all-seeing eye. When Suharto pushed the button to launch this satellite in July 1976, he declared a day of national unity and made an explicit parallel between the satellite and himself as the unifier of the 13,677 Indonesian islands.

Followed by the *Televisi Masuk Desa* programme (government-controlled national television), Palapa was much more than just a prestigious piece of technology. It was a provocative symbol of national identity and cultural integration, which

> allowed the government to more emphatically reach and mark the perimeters of national culture space, to link the boundaries of the far-flung archipelago to the centre and to each other, enabling Indonesians throughout the nation to more effectively 'imagine their community'. (Kitley, 1994, 104)

By filling the minds of people with the image of unification, the state had actually been 'panopticonising' society by identifying the image of a satellite with surveillance capabilities with nationhood and national identity.

Another key element of the panopticon apparatus of the New Order, which is still applied today, is the *rukun tetangga* (RT) system. This system was taken directly from the Japanese method of getting people to spy on their neighbours, which was introduced to Indonesia during the Japanese occupation in the Second World War. The state appoints a *ketua RT* (leader) for every neighbourhood block, a *ketua RW* (*rukun warga*) to oversee several RTs, a *lurah* (chair of village) for several RWs, and so on up to the top level. Within this system, no one can say where the state stops because it is composed of layered organisations that are not officially of the state, but nonetheless report to the state—right down to the neighbourhood block level.

Like the guards watching the prisoners in the panopticon, Suharto's New

Order regime could effectively control society's spaces through its 'authorised parties', its '*Tamu 1 x 24 jam wajib lapor*' signs, its use of Palapa as a symbol, and the RT system. In doing so, it provided no real civic spaces at all. This led to a suffocation of civil society, which was furthered by direct action against potential sources of mobilised dissent.

CONTAINING ISLAM AND THE UNIVERSITIES

In authoritarian states, there are generally just two major social movements for political reform that can be sustained. One is religion, especially a dominant national religion which a state does not dare try to destroy; the other is based in universities, where disaffected intellectuals gather and radicals find sanctuary (Douglass et al., 2002). As had his predecessor, President Sukarno, President Suharto viewed Islam as a principal source of identity projects that could effectively challenge his rule, and much of the political effort of the New Order was aimed at containing Islam and capturing its identity for state purposes. Following the practices of Sukarno, Suharto maintained the Ministry of Religious Affairs to control Islam by creating an allegedly 'modern, tolerant and apolitical' Indonesian Islam. This was achieved by publishing Islamic *da'wah* (educational and legal literature) acceptable to the state, governing the development of Islamic discourse, and establishing quasi-Islamic legal institutions, which were based on the state Pancasila ideology of unity with diversity (not Islamic sharia law). The Ministry of Religious Affairs also published an official translation and commentary on the Qur'an and watched over the non-official ones. Another form of marginalisation involved forcing Muslim parties to unite under one party, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), which for decades supported the rule of Suharto.

Universities, especially the main national public universities such as the University of Indonesia (UI) and the Institute of Technology Bandung (ITB), had been major sources of political movements in Indonesia since the Dutch colonial days. To pre-emptively quash such activities, Suharto began strategically to diminish the ability of students to gather for political purposes by filling university leadership positions with his personnel, and redesigning spaces through campus renovation projects. By placing the faculties at UI far apart from one another, so that it was almost impossible to walk from one faculty to other, the potential for crowds of students and faculty staff to gather together was effectively dissipated. In ITB, the old student centres where student activists had gathered to talk were torn down and never rebuilt. Meanwhile, by enforcing periodic police and military sweeps of protestors on campus, the state claimed the right to control campus spaces at will. The disappearance of civic spaces in universities directly diminished the political engagement of universities in national politics.

In sum, through its control of potential civic spaces, the state orchestrated the production and manipulation of images, symbols and ideas. Nominal civic spaces were captured and transformed into a state theatre of choreographed identity formation. Through its propaganda, the state tried to build and sustain what Castells calls a 'legitimising identity', which was needed in order for

Suharto to remain in power over a vast archipelago of great diversity and potential opposition to the regime's hegemonic designs.

The dawn of the internet era: breaking down the walls of the panopticon

For more than three decades, the Suharto regime enjoyed near-absolute control over society's physical, media and information/communications spaces. The internet was highly instrumental in ending this era (Marcus, 1998; Hill and Sen, 2000). The internet represents a revolutionary change in space–time relations. The technologies of cyberspace transcend Euclidean notions of space by using space–time relations in a way that severely reduces the effects of borders, and defies simple linearity in communications pathways (Derrida, 1974). In seeming to annihilate space with time, cyber-technology allows communications through the internet to appear instantaneously upon demand at multiple points in an ever-shifting network of connectivity. In contrast to the printed word or even television and radio, the internet radically expands the reach of communications, and, in so doing, allows for the appearance of vast, previously unimaginable cyber-terrains where ordinary people can exchange ideas and construct shared identities.

The internet's revolutionary technology also contains the potential for users to bypass, finesse and otherwise resist attempts by the state to control its uses. The potential for massive increases in information, points of connectivity and the spatial scope of communications adds to the difficulty facing any government or regulatory body that wants to monitor and control its content. Such limitations on state surveillance and censorship mean that spaces can be created to give substantial autonomy to people, not only in terms of sharing information but forming collective associations, creating identities of resistance and creating identity projects that seek fundamental political change. In other words, the technology allows for the creation of what can be termed cyber-civic spaces that facilitate the rise of civil society in places such as Indonesia.

Yet, despite this potential, cyberspace is less 'virtual' or open to the world than it appears to be. First, its use requires physical technology. This technology is not ubiquitous, and on a global scale it is, in fact, still rare. It also requires other types of physical infrastructure, ranging from satellites, telephones and cable networks to internet cafes that shelter the hardware and provide space for users. In addition, these system elements must be managed by real people at real geographical sites. On a global scale, the networks of wired cities that are centres of local control, management and access to the internet are the spatial templates for cyberspace and, by extension, cyber-civic space. In this new geography, each node is still dependent upon the local production of space.

More specifically, the actualisation of cyberspace as a new form of civic space is contingent upon the changing ways in which the localisation of global cyber-networks occurs. In Indonesia, *warnet*—small commercial establishments equipped with several computers hooked up to the internet—provide a clear example of how civil society has been able to develop cyber-civic spaces within

the context of an authoritarian political regime. Since its birth in the mid-1990s, the *warnet* system has provided the major entry point for Indonesians, especially the younger generation, to cyberspace. Without the *warnet*, the internet would have remained beyond the economic and physical reach of most of those who now use it. Currently, approximately 60 per cent of internet users in Indonesia access it from the *warnet*.

Accessing the internet from the *warnet*, unlike connecting from home, an office or a public library, is a direct form of social engagement. The students and youngsters who sit in front of the *warnet* computers are not just surfing the web: they are also interacting with one another within the physical space of the *warnet*. While some choose to sit in a partitioned space for privacy, many others want to enjoy accessing the internet together with friends, and create group lounges within the *warnet* with several computers. For these users, physical space matters as much as cyberspace. Cyberspace reaches into the physical space of the *warnet*, with the users co-existing in both.

Since its birth, the *warnet* has been characterised as a free space. It was born independently of the state or major corporations. It was created by young people who bypassed the state-owned telecom company in order to connect to the internet. The identities of those who actually founded the *warnet* remain vague. It started to become very popular in 1996, when its young staff (Onno Purbo and friends), graduates and students of ITB—working within the Computer Network Research Group (CNRG, which was actually not formally within the structure of ITB)—built a company, Pointer, whose main task was to build as many *warnet* as possible in Bandung and Jakarta. They also popularised the concept of *warnet* by giving free seminars all over the country (Lim, 2001).

Like all good civic spaces, the *warnet* provides protection from both state intrusion and consumer identities while offering a way of meeting others and exchanging ideas and information, potentially linking thousands of social communities and organisations with one another. Many communities are created virtually but then become physical communities or even legal institutions. This interplay between the virtual and real physical space sometimes extends beyond the realm of chatting and emailing for friendship. Cyber-civic spaces can transform electronic messages into political action, as was the case in the late 1990s in Indonesia.

THE INTERNET AND THE RISE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDONESIA

As the most pervasive provider of internet access in Indonesia, the *warnet* gained greater prominence in the late 1990s during the economic and political crisis that undermined the ability of both the state and the corporate economy to maintain their power over internet access. The late 1997 crisis that swept through Pacific Asia hit Indonesia politically and economically, causing the collapse of both the New Order regime and the nation's export economy. Many state-linked corporate internet service providers (ISPs) simply collapsed in 1997 due to the combined political and economic crisis, resulting in the failure of the state and its corporate cronies to monopolise the Indonesian internet. At the same time, the

state encountered an identity crisis as people lost their trust in the New Order. During this crisis, the *warnet* grew in Indonesia, especially in Java, and provided network points for the political activation of civil society via cyberspace.

The major contribution of the internet to Indonesian society during the crisis was that it provided spaces where people could mingle without the overt control of the state and, by extension, the vast business world linked to it. During the 1996–98 period, just before and during the peak of the crisis, cyberspace became the principal means by which people could discuss and criticise the New Order. Through the internet, people could gain and share information that had previously been controlled by the state and its infamous Ministry of Information, especially forbidden information about scandals (such as the massive wealth of Suharto's family, and his role in the 'G30S affair', an attempt to take over the government in 1965) and left-wing materials. For the first time, the Indonesian people finally had their own civic spaces, and the *warnet* became a favourite way of exploring them.

Unfettered access to information and the freedom to talk about many things— from politics to sex—gave a feeling of excitement to the *warnet* all over Indonesia. Information about Suharto's family quickly became very popular. When people wanted to find a scapegoat, the Suharto family were the perfect choice. 'Apakabar', a mailing list created and moderated by a US citizen, John McDougal, became one of major sources of such information.[3] Another source of similar information was George Aditjondro, an Indonesian professor teaching at the University of Newcastle in Australia, who posted the results of his research into the corruption of Suharto's family and political cronies on many Indonesian mailing lists.

Because of the long-term absence of non-governmental sources of information in Indonesia, the ability of the internet to connect the global and local was crucial. The internet not only connected Indonesians at home with Indonesians abroad, but it also linked Indonesian society to broader global sources of information and to social movements (e.g. in China and Korea) that could inspire Indonesians to organise their own movements. The connectivity among Indonesian students and universities inside and outside Indonesia was vital to the rise of civil society. Several major internet mailing lists and websites that provided free spaces for political dialogue were created by Indonesian students and young people abroad (e.g. Pijar and the Voice of Democracy in Germany and ParokiNet in the USA). All of these triggered the emergence of collective identities of resistance to challenge effectively the legitimacy of the New Order regime.

WHEN VIRTUAL REALMS MEET THE REAL WORLD: CREATING INSURGENT SPACES

The internet was crucial, but it was not the sole source of support for political reform (*reformasi*) in Indonesia. Megawati Sukarnoputri, the opposition leader, and her party, PDI Perjuangan (The Democratic People of Indonesia in

3 Personal communication by email, 2001.

Struggle), campaigned in cyberspace by launching a website,[4] but she also had to go onto the streets to hold campaigns all over Indonesia to gain support. The Democratic People's Party (PRD), a small pro-labour and largely student-based party that had been the target of government crackdowns, still had to hold roadshows at universities to obtain votes from students in addition to its intensive online campaigns through Apakabar and other mailing lists.

Activists still had to make internet-based information available to a greater number of people by transforming it into printed forms. The journey of one piece of information is described in Figure 4. In order to reach the masses, information from the internet was transformed into printed flyers and information sheets, which were then given away or sold by newspaper sellers in the streets. For example, CNN was one of the major sources of information that had previously been unavailable in Indonesia. If one student surfed the internet from a *warnet* and read a piece of information on CNN online, he or she would feel obliged to share it with more people. He/she would print out the information and fax one copy to a friend, take another copy to his/her family, and give further copies to a newspaper seller. The friend and family members might also disseminate the information in a similar way, multiplying it exponentially throughout major cities in Indonesia. At the same time, the newspaper seller might make more copies and sell them on the street. In Bandung, a one-page summary of Suharto's wealth was sold for just 1,000 rupiah, the hourly wage of an unskilled worker at that time. The newspaper seller might also sell it to his colleagues, who would also sell it, rapidly disseminating the information to a vast audience.
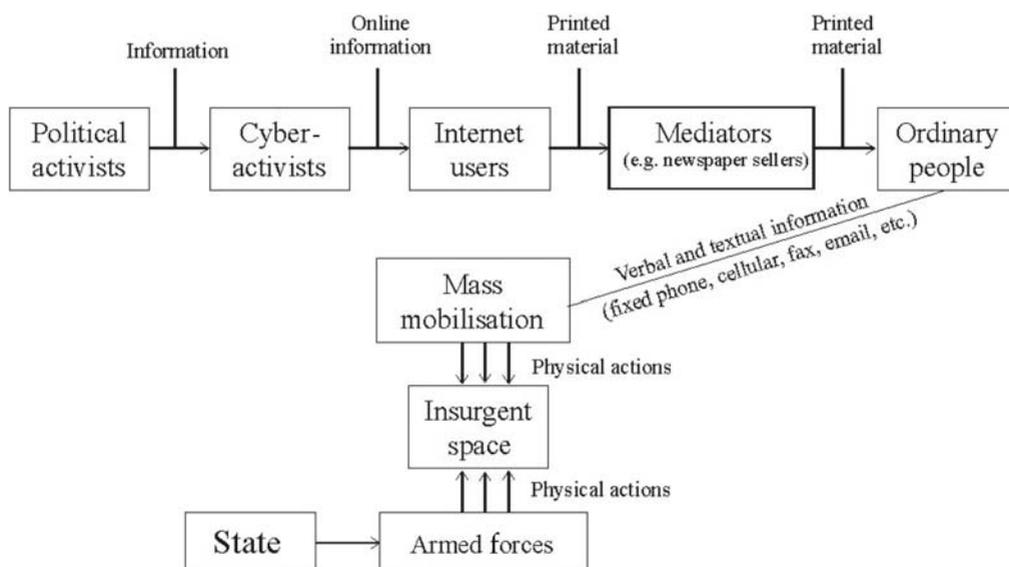

Fig. 4 The scheme of information flow (from physical space to cyberspace to insurgent space)

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4 http://www.megaforpresident.org/ (checked July 2002).

Empowered by new information and a sense of collective opposition, people turned from resistance to finding the right way to confront the state and bring down Suharto and his New Order. Using different communication technologies that were not overtly controlled by the government—telephones, faxes, cellular phones and email—students and others persuaded people to move onto the streets and occupy parks, plazas and governmental buildings. The peak moment came in May 1998, when thousands of demonstrators representing manifold civil society groups occupied the parliament building in Jakarta, demanding the abdication of Suharto. Other spaces that had never had a civic function before were turned into insurgent spaces: examples include the Hotel Indonesia roundabout (Bundaran HI) and the National Monument (Tugu Monas).

This story shows how the internet has been vital to political reform in Indonesia. Its flow of information helped to galvanise the energies of civil society, enabling it to confront the state and create insurgent spaces (Douglass et al., 2002). Cyberspace requires physical civic space in order to mobilise people. From cyberspace to the *warnet* and the streets of Indonesian cities, the overthrow of Suharto succeeded not in virtual space, but through actual political activities in appropriated civic spaces.

Cyber-civic space and communes of resistance

Just as it can support civil society in the accomplishment of a historical political revolution, the internet can assist another aspect of contemporary network society—communal resistance—which opposes not just the state, but also other segments of civil society that do not share the same beliefs. The Jihad Troopers is one example. Its story shows how a project identity can be constructed not on the basis of a multicultural civil society, but as a continuation of communal resistance to a secular society and state (Castells, 1997, 11).

Religious identities are among the strongest and most important sources of identity construction in the network society (Castells, 1997, 12). For Muslims in Indonesia, connectivity to the global network also means connectivity to global Islam. Islamic societies in Iran, Egypt and elsewhere become closer and more real through the information and graphic representations available in cyber-space, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East has made a very significant impression on Islamic society in Indonesia. Global Islamic fundamentalism began to flourish as Indonesia entered a period of political and economical uncertainty, presenting a ripe situation for Islamic fundamentalism. Inter-regional conflict and separatist movements in several places in Indonesia provided further opportunities for fundamentalism, reinforcing the disintegration of political structures in Indonesia. As noted above, Islam had been marginalised for decades. The fall of Suharto provided an unprecedented opportunity for Islamic communities to rise up and step into the political field.

JIHAD TROOPERS

The 'jihad' movement is one of the strongest and most radical forms of Islamic fundamentalism. A group led by Ja'far Umar Thalib—a veteran of the

Soviet–Afghanistan war, who met Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 1987—is currently the most prominent faction of this movement. Called Laskar Jihad (LJ) (Jihad Troopers), in a relatively short period of time it has become one of the strongest Islamic communities in Indonesia. The original organisation, FKAWJ,[5] was founded in 1999 and introduced LJ to the world in April 2000, when its members (along with other Muslim groups) held a rally in Jakarta calling for a jihad in the Moluccan (Spice) Islands, where large Christian communities lived. Around 5,000 young people, some armed with swords and daggers and dressed in white robes and turbans, congregated at a sports stadium to mark the Islamic New Year (BBC News, 2000). The leader told the crowds that 10,000 youths were ready to fight a jihad against Christians in the Moluccas. In the following months, 2,000–3,000 LJ members travelled to the Moluccas to fight alongside local Muslims, who were locked in a cycle of communal violence of burning and killing with the region's Christian population.

The cyber-holy warrior

While ultra-conservative in its ideology, LJ is ultra-modern in its use of technologies. The group launched Laskar Jihad Online[6] (LJO) in June 2000, and this has subsequently been the major vehicle in maintaining and developing the group's presence. Well designed and regularly updated (with support from some information technology experts), LJO shows that the website of a fundamentalist group can be professionally maintained. This is not just a religious fundamentalist group: this is Laskar Jihad, computer-savvy young men using web skills for recruitment and funding.

The old version of LJO[7] was bilingual (in Indonesian and English), while the new version, which was launched on 13 May 2002, is only in Indonesian. In both versions, a daily updated news page is combined with citations from the Qur'an. The website provides information about LJ, its leader and the debate behind the movement. It offers all kinds of information—including news from the battlefield in the Moluccas—in textual, visual and audio forms. Mutilated bodies said to be Muslims massacred by Christians, burnt or damaged mosques, and graffiti on walls containing messages that insult Islam are shown to support the textual debate, which is full of heated rhetoric concerning resistance to Christianity, Judaism and US globalisation (one pictorial is entitled 'Die America'). The web pages seek not only to justify the movement; they also try to convince Muslims about the importance of jihad, and provoke the emotions of

5 Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Jamaah Wal Jamaah. For background information on FKAJW and its leader, see Aditjondro, 2000; 2002; BBC News, 2002; Harsono, 2002; Laskar Jihad Online, 2000a; 2000b; and Noorhaidi, 2001.

6 http://www.laskarjihad.or.id. The website is registered at the Indonesia Network Information Centre under FKAJW, with Arif Rahman as webmaster, Andi Sugandi from CV Pajar Utama Sejahtera as a billing contact, and Abdusallam Sukarta from Indonesia Website Services as a technical contact.

7 http://www.laskarjihad.or.id/old.htm

readers through images and sounds. Real audio files are included. Most contain the speeches of LJ and other radical leaders.

Beyond the website, the group has more than 1,400 members[8] on its internet mailing list, which keeps the troopers—who are scattered in 53 local agencies all over Indonesia—updated with its latest news.[9] Thus LJ has been marrying communal resistance based on religiosity with the postmodern weapon of information technology. This is exemplified by the LJ webmaster—medical student by day, cyberspace holy warrior by night—who writes in a mission statement that its intention is 'to show the software site of jihad, a holy war' (Ebiz Asia, 2001).

As a social movement, LJ does not stop in cyberspace. More advanced than the student movements, which traditionally spread their information by photocopying or faxing, the printed information from LJ is of a professional standard. It produces a printed newspaper, *Tabloid Laskar Jihad*, which is sold for 2,500 rupiah through more than 60 agencies all over Indonesia. The news from LJO is also spread to many Islamic communities, especially to some madrassas (Islamic boarding schools) that are funded by Jafar Umar (the leader of LJ). The printed versions of LJO news are placed on the schools' announcement boards. Reading and talking about this kind of news raises certain feelings in the youngsters' hearts. Most of them see the leader of LJ as a hero, making them want to join him in the holy war. These madrassas are major sources of LJ's warriors.

LJ also receives support from more traditional media. Some newspapers have obvious sympathy for LJ, while others try to be neutral. Much of the content of newspapers is actually drawn from the LJO, even though most journalists do not mention the source. Thus the information about LJ that is passed to newspaper readers is based on LJ's perspective.

By holding rallies all over the country, LJ has persuaded thousands of students and young people to become troopers (as well as raising billions of rupiah). There are thousands of young men who collect donations at traffic lights. LJ members are professionally trained fighters; they have real weapons and fight real battles; and they have gained power and even tacit legitimisation from state and society. This legitimisation was readily shown in its first national congress, held in May 2002. It was opened by Indonesia's vice-president, Hamzah Haz, and boasted many public figures as speakers.[10] LJ is a success story in terms of creating resistance identities, making use of cyber-civic space, and forming communes of resistance within the broader civil society of

8 As of October 2001, there were 1,419 members of this mailing list.

9 This mailing list—laskarjihad@yahoogroups.com—(founded on 17 May 2000 and halted on 4 October 2001) was not meant to provide a space for dialogue. It was a one-directional newsletter that provided news from the battlefield.

10 This congress was closed by the chairman of the national assembly, Amien Rais, and speakers included Adi Sasono from the ICMI (Association of Indonesian Intellectual Muslims), Tommy Tamtono (the editorial director of the *Republika* newspaper) and Said Agil Al Munawar (the Minister of Religion).

Indonesia. While the members of LJ are still in the minority, they have gained much support. Many people want to believe in LJ and feel sympathy towards it. Whether it continues to exist or not is crucial to the future of Indonesia. While it is only a small group, it is a commune of resistance that relies mainly on violence, and thus is an Achilles heel in the process of democratisation in Indonesia. As suggested by Castells, these kinds of communal resistance emerge as negations of civil societies and can lead to the end of nation-states (1997, 66–67).

Conclusion: from panopticon to communes?

The network society, with its potentially open informational space, can invigorate local tendencies towards more inclusive and democratic societies throughout the world, including Indonesia. The manner in which the internet can act as a civic space—a cyber-civic space—in which civil society can rise up to engage the state or other powerful entities is one of the most important questions of our times. At certain moments in history, civil society finds a way to challenge the bounds imposed by the state by appropriating spaces, claiming autonomy and pursuing its agenda through insurgent action. The long struggle of creating resistance identities in Indonesia, which in the past had failed and failed again, has now been facilitated by the creation of autonomous cyberspaces that have assisted the rise of civil society. The fragments of a civil society movement could finally turn resistance into a society-wide project. The watershed was reached in May 1998, when social protests successfully removed Suharto. At that moment, people in the emergent civil society who had been longing for democracy could believe that democracy in Indonesia was at last beginning.

However, the reformed state, which on the surface looks more democratic, is now floundering through an extended period of legitimisation crisis, and has been unable to find a way to rise above the communal projects manifested in divisive party politics. It has become too weak and powerless, while resistance identities that can find no accommodation with other factions of society keep multiplying. Helped by the internet, local resistance is hooked up to global networks of resistance, making local collective identities of resistance stronger and stronger. When the state is not able to be a vehicle for social, political and economic justice and security, the populace tends to rally around leaders who offer provocative symbols and easy political solutions, such as a regression into the mythological history of jihad. Cyber-civic spaces become spaces for resistance identities to be divided into communes. In such a context, the internet is not a tool of democracy, but instead threatens civil society, which is the basis of democratic life. In the case of LJ, an informational network is generating a collective identity of Islamic fundamentalism in a commune of resistance that flows from the frustration, anger and hatred that people feel for the state.

The Indonesian experience clearly shows that the internet can be a cyber-civic space where people can mingle without state intervention. Under Suharto, the state's system of control and surveillance constricted such activity in all other potential civic spaces, so political activation through the internet became vital to

political reform. Yet, in the post-Suharto era, it is not clear whether civil society will flower in the liberated cyberspaces of the internet, or will instead succumb to communal resistance and the disintegration of civil society itself. If the latter situation comes to pass, Indonesia is likely to experience a severely weakened state and a fragmented society, risking perpetual instability. In such a situation, some segments of society might even reinvent the Suharto era as halcyon days of national coherence and prosperity, forgetting the daily suppression of civil society. If, on the other hand, a vibrant civil society with a stable government under the rule of law emerges to overcome communal resistances, Indonesia will be able to chart its own destiny in a global age. In the final analysis, the paramount question concerns how to retain the integrity of Indonesian society in a way that allows for the continuity of the nation-state. Civil society must be an active force in the formation of political communities that can work collectively to resolve rather than foment social divides.

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