7 From real to virtual (and back again)
Civil society, public sphere, and the Internet in Indonesia

Merlyna Lim

The ability of the Internet to facilitate communication and distribution of information has caused many to identify it as the “new technology of democracy” – as the principal means to enable the expansion of a newly emerging public sphere of political discourse and decision-making actively involving civil society. Yet despite the utopian perspectives on the impact of the Internet upon global society, the Internet, as a technology originating in the U.S. but now existing all over the world, is always localized. Its democratic potential is thus indeterminate and must be worked out in the context of local constellations of power. As elsewhere, the Internet that has been developing in Indonesia has its own character and configuration as it is transformed in important ways by localized power structures.

Technological transformations are imbedded in these power relations, and localities – nations, cities, communities, including cyber-communities – are sites of the nexus struggles over the choice, use, and transformation of technologies such as the Internet. No one source of power is predetermined to “win” in these contests. Rather, dynamic tensions continue in a process of historical change, which, as an open-ended trajectory, allows human agency, when collectively empowered, to make a difference. Indonesia during and after the overthrow of the Suharto regime shows how such moments of the interplay of technology and society allows for the possibility of its people to make history.

In the relations among the state, corporate economy, and civil society, a focal point of contests of power is over the creation and assertion of identity. These contests over identity are driving forces that are interpreting and transforming technological processes of the Internet in Indonesia. More than merely creating a self-image that stands in relation to larger social, economic, and political forces, emerging identities is part of a struggle for power. In its extreme, such identities work against hegemonic systems of belief, loyalty, and action. This has been the case with the so-called “developmental state,” which has used various controls and manipulation of media to cast a rigid identity congruent with political regimes that, in not a few cases, have remained in power for decades.
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With the collapse of these regimes one by one, the new source of hegemony comes from globalization and takes the form of commodification of social relations that, through the accompanying neo-liberal policies dismantling state regulation over the economy, attempts to shift socio-political identities to those of citizen as consumer. At the same time, the rise of civil society as a potent political force interacts with state and capitalist identity formation, sometimes legitimizing them, other times resisting, and occasionally leading to mass mobilization to create alternative social projects centering on alternative identities. The Internet is intricately involved in these relationships, both as a means of communicating and forming identities, and as a technology that is transformed through shifting power relations that evolve, in part, around identity formation.

CIVIL SOCIETY, PUBLIC SPHERE, AND IDENTITY

Three concepts underlie the exploration of the Internet as a technology received and technology transformed in the context of the localized processes of social change. The first, civil society, refers to the organized face of society outside of direct state or capitalist control. This concept draws from de Tocqueville’s (1969) idea of voluntary association and Gramsci’s (1971) separation of civil society from both the state and market in the public realm as being integral to processes of democratization and political participation by the masses.

The second term, public sphere, is given attention as a means to clarify a central point; namely that “public” does not simply indicate what the government oversees. Rather, it should be understood as a realm in which civil society and corporate interests form political communities and become engaged in relations of power along with the state. As such, the public sphere is conceptualized as a shifting forum situated between the private sphere and the sphere of public authorities (Habermas, 1989). This interplay between civil society and corporate interest directs action in the public sphere in both time and space.

In the triangle of relationships among civil society, the state, and the market, there are at least three widely observed configurations of power: (1) The authoritarian “developmental state” marked by the dominance of the state, though possibly in alliance with corporate interests as it suppresses civil society; (2) the now ascendant neo-liberal corporate economy model with its diminished state and transformation of society into individualized brand name consumers, and (3) the ideal of the active society marked by a public sphere mediated through civil society and its many organizational faces and forms. Which of these models will prevail is a question not only of whose voice will be empowered but is also equally one of a struggle over identity, which is itself both a source and expression of power.
Both state and market make use of the public sphere to create and assert their identities. The state, in its quest for legitimization, seeks to use media of all types to create images and symbols to make citizens identify with it as a positive force caring for society. Corporations seek to transform people into consumers who are loyal to and identify with certain brand names and, at a more general level, are aligned with the wonderful benefits of a supposed “free” market, despite the monopolistic tendencies of contemporary capitalism. At the same time, civil society struggles to create its own identities without the domination of those imposed by the state and market.

As noted above, the Internet is eminently suited to creating and disseminating visual symbols and stylized information that various actors call upon to create shared identities and accompanying social power when these coalesce. As such, the Internet is intricately part of the rise of civil society and the reformation of the public sphere in Indonesia. As a fundamental facet of human social existence (Castells, 1997), creating shared identity is one source of motivation in the use of the Internet technology. This tendency imbeds the Internet in a potentially larger societal process of political transformation revolving around identity struggles. While identity is multi-layered, and often contradictory, it provides “symbolic identification” which links a person to collective alliances that coalesce as resistance to globalization and the rise of network societies. Castells (1997) articulates three types of identity:

1. Legitimizing identity introduced by dominant institutions to extend and rationalize their domination.
2. Resistance identity generated by those who are devaluated or stigmatized by the logic of domination.
3. Project identity, or collective actions of people to build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seeks the transformation of the overall social-political structure.

Identities that start as resistance can induce projects and, in the course of history, may become dominant, but history is not linear and the values or identities must be viewed in the context of historical moments when they emerge or prevail. In the case of Indonesia, the world space of flows – the Internet society – descended on to the country at a juncture of traumatic socio-political transformation. The following sections look at how the Internet in Indonesia has developed in relation to the state–corporate–civil society struggles over identity in the public domain.

THE PRE-INTERNET ERA IN INDONESIA

With its history of Dutch colonization and independence, nation-building in Indonesia became a conscious political, cultural, and economic project
of the state. Consequently, the control of communication and information flows also became important as a strategic tool for national integration. Media and telecommunications were seen as the most powerful tools to forge national unity. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia saw telecommunications and media as tools for “development,” which was promoted as a central means of legitimizing the regime in power, notably the New Order regime of President Suharto, which lasted for thirty-two years from 1966 to 1998.

Television of the Republic of Indonesia (TVRI), established in 1962, functioned mainly in a development role that was designed to engender popular identity with the Suharto regime. It transmitted the same developmental and sanitized cultural programs in every city across the country. The ambition to “build unity” through media was manifested most clearly in the “television enters the village” program. Televisions were placed in village halls throughout the nation and served by a network of terrestrial broadcast transmitters (and after 1976 by a domestic satellite) – all of which were under the control of the state (Shoemsmith, 1994).

The urge to use telecommunications to foster identity with the proclaimed developmentalist pursuits of the state became so great that Indonesia, a so-called Third World country with a per capita income of US$125 (in 1976), became the third country in the world to launch its own communications satellite, the Palapa satellite, which cost US$160 billion. The reasons for launching the satellite revolved around the government’s purpose to more “emphatically reach and mark the perimeters of national cultural space, to link the boundaries of the far-flung archipelago to the centre and to each other, thus enabling Indonesians throughout the nation to be able to more effectively ‘imagine their community’” (Kitley, 1994).

Thus, in contrast to de Sola Pool’s declaration that “satellites are technologies of freedom” (1983), the advent of satellite technology in Indonesia removed freedom from society by strengthening the centralized control of the state over it. For more than three decades, radio and television broadcasts in Indonesia were directly employed as tools of state propaganda. Print-based information sources, such as newspapers and magazines, though mostly privately owned, were also under state control. Censorship and the outright banning and closing of news media were common during the New Order era. The government, through its Ministry of Information and pervasive policing capacities, could easily ban or shut down publications that displeased it. The ban of Tempo magazine in 1982 due to its incisive coverage of the general election and again in 1994 for a second time because of its controversial report on one of Habibie’s pet projects, are obvious examples of how the state protected its legitimacy by quashing press freedom. Indonesia under Suharto could fit appropriately within the classic definition of the state defined by Max Weber (1919) as the set of institutions having the “monopoly of violence.” As this example
The Internet in Indonesia shows, violence was not always physical, but was nonetheless directed towards controlling thinking and, more deliberatively, to constructing the identity of a progressive developmental state to sustain the Suharto regime.

Through its control of media, the state controlled the building of a national identity by filling up the public sphere with production and manipulation of images, symbols, and ideas. Through its propaganda (national agenda), it tried to build and sustain what Castells calls a "legitimizing identity" needed to remain in power in an archipelago of great diversity and always in potential opposition to the state’s hegemonic tendencies.

Giant billboards on the streets, big pictures in the newspapers and television kept telling the success stories of the New Order regime under Suharto. The people of Indonesia were thoroughly influenced by such media saturation. Those who were not had no option but to yield to the identity of “development” created by the state. The public sphere was fully embedded in the state propaganda machinery.

THE INTERNET ERA IN INDONESIA

The coming of the Internet soon became highly instrumental in ending this episode, and has proven to be far more powerful in scope than the printed page, the electronic voice or televised picture. It is revolutionary in how it potentially allows citizens – and corporations – to bypass, finesse, and resist attempts by the state to control its access and use. As such, it creates new cyber-terrains of contests over identity in a potentially renewed public sphere for civil society in Indonesia.

This section begins with a brief history of the Internet in Indonesia that explains chronologically how the Internet was developed in Indonesia, followed by a story of Indonesian Internet – the warnet (the Internet café).

The Internet was introduced to Indonesia for the first time in the early 1980s, via the first Internet connection made by the University of Indonesia, which also brought Indonesia into UUNET in 1984, thus making it among the first nations in Asia to enter the Internet world. However, because of a lack of infrastructure, there was no permanent Internet link until 1994 (Lim, 2001).

In the early 1990s, Indonesia formally welcomed the idea of the Internet and the information superhighway. Pushed by the issue of being globally networked, “Habibie’s kids” (a reference to that generation of technocrats who benefitted from the largesse of oil revenues and political vision of a high tech Indonesia of Habibie (Shiraishi, 1996)), endorsed the state’s building of the first Internet network in Indonesia, IPTEK-Net (Science and Technology Network). BPPT (Agency For Assessment and Application of Technology), via its project IPTEK-Net, made the first permanent Internet link from Indonesia in 1994, showing the supremacy of government in
purposely pioneering this technology, as it had also done with satellite technology in 1976.

With the arrival of private commercial ISPs (Internet service providers), the Internet had attained a public presence by 1995. At the end of 1995, there were an estimated 15,000 Internet users in Indonesia being serviced by five commercial ISPs, in addition to IPTEKnet. Over the following six months the figures mushroomed (Hill and Sen, 1997). At the end of 1997, there were nearly forty ISPs in Indonesia. However, the boom of ISPs in Indonesia never led to the Internet being widely used. It was still used only by certain social classes, namely people who were able to pay both telephone pulse and Internet subscription fees, and who had access to telephone lines and personal computers.

The international issue of the digital divide pushed the Indonesian government to build a national Internet program through a loan from the World Bank. However, the low telephone penetration, low Gross Domestic Product, lack of stable infrastructure, slow growth of Internet subscribers, and the economic crisis in 1997 led to the collapse both of the commercial Internet and the government’s project.

Thus, an alternative form of commercial Internet that survived the crisis was the warnet, or the Internet café, which could potentially reach even the lower classes as it offered low-cost Internet access. While it is arguable who was the founder of warnet, it is undoubtedly clear that the ones who popularized the technology were the young people from the Computer Network Research Group (CNRG) at the Institute of Technology Bandung (ITB), namely Onno Purbo with some ITB fresh graduates and students (Lim, 2001). In 1997, through their company, Pointer, these young people established numerous warnet throughout Bandung and Jakarta. They also gave free seminars on warnet business that resulted in the extensive growth of numbers of warnet in Indonesia, particularly in Java and Bali.

**THE WARNET: EVERYDAY FORMS OF THE INDONESIAN INTERNET**

The term “warung” is usually used to describe a simple place where people may buy some food and gather with friends or family while eating the food. The warnet or “warung-Internet” usually consists of one (or more) room(s) with several computers hooked to the Internet and rented on an hourly basis.

Unlike connecting from home, office, or public library, for Indonesian youngsters, accessing the Internet from warnet is a direct form of social rendezvous. Using the warnet does not only mean accessing the Internet but also interacting with other warnet users. Many warnet users enjoy accessing the Internet in a group; they often choose a warnet with private lounge where they can relax by sitting on the floor and sharing some interesting URLs or listening to MP3 songs. The users who are concerned
INTERNET AND THE EMERGENCE OF RESISTANCE IDENTITIES

While the Internet in Indonesia, particularly the warinet, developed free from the interference of state and corporate agendas, it should not be romanticized as a virtuous sanctuary of social good and harmony. Socially irresponsible acts, such as the encouragement of violence of one group against another, can and are promoted on the Internet. At the same time, resistance alone does not easily counter hegemonic tendencies of global capital or the state–corporate nexus. In other words, the flowering of the Internet within society is itself fraught with pitfalls and misdirection, antagonisms, and even violence.

In 1997, the national postal service PT Pos Indonesia, through its ISP, WasantaraNet, jumped into the warinet business by establishing warinet in post offices. This is an ambitious national strategy to supply Internet access in all of Indonesia’s provinces via local nodes and warinet. This effort from WasantaraNet was an attempt to maintain national stability by controlling the flow of information at the point of access (Lim, 2001). This was seen by some Indonesian youths as an invasion of the state and implied that the Internet no longer belonged to the “people” as they imaged it. One of these young people, the CyberBug – a hacker from one prominent group of Indonesian hackers named Kecoak (cockroach) – responded by creating a kind of Robin Hood resistance identity by “hacking” the Wasantara warinet billing system so the warinet users could
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avoid paying the amount of money due per minute of Internet use. But why did these hackers just try to hack the billing system of Wasantara and not other warnet? And why did they publish the method for hacking on the web (CyberBug, 2000)? The answer is because they wanted to gain a reputation as leaders of resistance to the power of the state, a movement of a new generation of hackers:

Almost all of the new-generation hackers are anti-establishment, anti-oppression. A tyrannical government like that of Indonesia is suitable to be perceived as an enemy by these hackers. In the end, no matter how harsh are the state’s authorized party measures against these intelligent people, it will be impossible to stop the hackers. As quoted from the Hacker Manifesto: you may stop me but you will not stop all of us. (Torremendez, 1997; translation by author)

Another important example of individual resistance concerns the case of KlikBCA, the e-banking website of Indonesia’s biggest bank, Bank Central Asia (BCA). In this case, Steven Haryanto used his own money to buy domain names similar to “klikbca” – www.klikbca.com. He bought www.klikbca.com, klikbca.com, klikbca.com, klikbca.com, and klikbca.com, and then put the identical copies of the original website in these websites. His typo-error logic was proven right. From these websites, he got about 150 BCA customers to give their names and their personal identification numbers (PIN). However, he had not acted with criminal intent, as he never used the user names and PINs, and gave all of the data back to the BCA. He also registered his original name with a complete address as the owner of those websites. As he stated in his open letter to the public, his intention was only to “make the Internet banking users more aware about the security system” (Haryanto, 2001).

Haryanto had created a resistance identity, which could be seen as being destructive and as a misinterpretation of the freedom of the Internet through his notorious action. Yet, it also caused some to pause to think about such episodes in terms of how corporate actors occupy the Internet without considering the rights of consumers to the security of their accounts (S’to, 2001a, 2001b).

WARNET: THE VICTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY – THE ASSOCIATION IS VIRTUAL, THE FIGHT IS REAL

While the above examples show how resistance identities can sporadically emerge, disappear and re-emerge within the context of the warnet, the final example below shows how resistance can be transformed into a social project through an organized political reform movement, marking the victory of civil society against the domination of the state.
The Internet in Indonesia

What started as a mailing list (asosiasi.warnet@yahoogroups.com) became a virtual organization to discuss warnet-related issues. However, it developed later into a space for discussions on a wide choice of topics, ranging from technical computer-related problems to topics such as the monopoly power of the state-owned company and telecommunications regulations and policies. The list had its own motto: "The association is virtual, the fight is real." In May, 2000 the active members of this mailing list met and legally established their association, AWARI (AWARI, 2001 [Asosiasi Warnet Indonesia – Association of Internet Kiosks in Indonesia]). Although all agenda items were still arranged through the virtual space, resistance against the state monopoly (Telkom) accelerated through the discussions and conversations in the list. This led ultimately to the creation of a real world project of building an alternative to the state-run system. The project was manifested in a boycott against an increase in the telephone tariff, followed by a street demonstration, a boycott against the Ministry of Communications regarding licensing the Internet industry, and other resistance actions. Meanwhile, at the local neighborhood and city levels, unaffiliated warnet associations also began to emerge in response to two needs: to prevent price competition, and sharing of bandwidth (Lim, 2001). While perhaps modest or narrow in focus, this association reveals how the creation of an open-ended bulletin board was transformed into a successful project to resist state control and maintain alternative avenues of access to the Internet as a principal means for social interaction and identity formation.

THE INTERNET AND REFORMASI² (POLITICAL REFORMATION)

Although Marcus (1999) asserts that the political revolution in Indonesia was Internet driven, the Internet was not the sole driver for the reformation. Internet users in Indonesia numbered just 1 percent of the population (less than 2,000,000 in 1998), making it impossible for the Internet to create any major movement in Indonesia alone. Yet, in 1998 there was no other source of information other than the Internet that was free from the control of the state. It is important to note that for Indonesians there were two types of information that were forbidden: alternative politics or ideologies not in line with those of the state, and sex-related or pornographic materials. With the coming of the Internet, however, there was suddenly no barrier to accessing such information. The survey done by SCoT Research Group showed that about 90 percent of male warnet users access pornographic sites. Political information is not yet a competitor to pornography. However, at particular moments, accessing political information can become a major activity of warnet users in Indonesia. During the reformation struggle against Suharto’s government, warnet was the major
source of “forbidden” information, although there were other sources such as shortwave foreign news broadcasts, campus rumor networks, and faxed and photocopied underground bulletins.

With the ability to bypass the intervention of the state in connecting with the rest of the world, the Internet in the late 1990s provided the space for dialogs and information exchanges for people, especially for Indonesians who were suppressed under Suharto’s regime. The global–local connection has undermined not only the ability but also the legitimacy of the state in controlling information. When citizens are made aware through the Internet of all sorts of alternative sources of information that are not dangerous to their sense of well-being, the idea of allowing the state to control these sources and the Internet is questioned and even rejected – either overtly by public acts of resistance or covertly through underground information networks using the Internet. Through global–local contacts and the building of discussion lists over the Internet during the reformation period, the Internet became the site of a renewed public sphere that allowed society to have dialogs without interference from the state.

A famous mailing list, Apakabar, is a perfect example to show the new social autonomy from the state. Started by an American, John McDougall, Apakabar forwarded Indonesian-related news and articles to its subscribers from all over the world. Most of the information/news it brought was not available in Indonesia. As it developed, it became one of the main sources for uncensored news and discussion on Indonesia. From 1996 to 1998, this list became a major irritant for the army and the Ministry of Information, and it helped to establish the Internet’s reputation as a radically free medium (Hill and Sen, 1997).

Global–local relations among Indonesians who were in and out of the country generated massive amounts of previously banned information through the Internet. George Aditjondro, an Indonesian professor who lives in Australia, was among the main sources of such information. He had been spreading thousands of email messages about the corrupt businesses of Suharto and his cronies. The list of the wealth of Suharto’s family was typed on emails and spread to many places as free information. Indonesian students and youth abroad in Germany (through Pijar, an email-based newsletter and Suara Demokrasi [Voice of Democracy], a web-based newsletter) the US (through Parokinett, a mailing list) and other countries also made use of global–local contacts by their websites and mailing lists to infuse Indonesian society with information and provide Indonesians with the space for political discussions.

The Internet also has the power to create opportunities for people to speak and to create their identities freely. In addition to mailing lists created by young educated people, political parties also took advantage of the open information system of the Internet. The party in opposition to Golkar (Suharto’s party), the Democratic People of Indonesia in Struggle (PDI Perjuangan) under Megawati Sukarno, put together a homepage
about Megawati and her party to raise public sympathy for this repressed party (Wirantaprawira, 1998). The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which had been banned for more than thirty years, appeared again on the Internet, and no government official could effectively ban it (Komunis, 1999).

One instance of the capacity of the Internet to challenge the New Order is the presence on the Net of the Democratic People’s Party (PRD) (PRD, 1999), a small pro-labor, largely student-based party. Despite a government crackdown on the PRD, the trial and continuing detention of the party leadership and the harassment of the rank and file, the PRD continued posting on the World Wide Web and on Apakabar, maintaining its profile and openly challenging the government, and contributing to the downfall of the Suharto regime.

Because of suppression by the state, young people in Indonesia could not be exposed to alternative philosophies, beliefs, religions, or other ways of thinking. Pancasila was the only way of thinking. Communism was seen particularly as a “latent danger” that could ruin society. Many books related to communism and socialism never entered the country, and books of leftist Indonesian authors, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer, were banned. Speaking about communism, or reading or owning a book about it could lead to years in jail. Through the Internet, however, Indonesian youth could show their resistance to the state. One group, The People’s Resistance in Indonesia (CSVI, 2002), consisted of some young Indonesians in the Netherlands who defied the state by providing information about Marxism, leftist parties, and the Liberation Movement, East Timor, the Indonesian Communist Party, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Tapol, and other left-wing perspectives and information. These examples show how the Internet enabled people to circumvent the control of the Minister of Information or the authorized apparatus of the state upholding Suharto’s rule.

THE “REFORMASI”: FROM REAL TO VIRTUAL AND BACK AGAIN

As noted above, the Internet has been crucial, but it is not the sole source of support for reformation. Megawati and PDI Perjuangan still had to go to the streets to get support. PRD still had to hold road shows at universities to obtain votes from students. Students and youth still had to make Internet-based information available for a wider range of society by transforming it to readable printed media (see Figure 7.1). This began to occur in early 1998, just before the fall of Suharto, when unprecedented amounts of information from the Internet became available on the street. As mentioned above, the most dominant information was the list of Suharto’s wealth originally written by George Aditjondro. Students at the university
campus, warnet, and schools spread the printed version of this information. Newspaper sellers were selling photocopied versions of this information on the street. In Bandung, for example, one sheet of the list of Suharto’s wealth was being sold for just one US dollar. This information filled a void for people who for so long had been trying to find “who is to blame for the crisis.” Upon learning that Suharto gained so much money from his corrupt business, public opinion started to build against him.

As information reached more people, the resistance identity against Suharto also spread, particularly among students and young people. As a broad collective resistance identity was forming, the stage was set for it to be transformed into a project identity. The “people” became collectively self-empowered and the right moment to confront the state was born. Using different kinds of communications technologies, including the telephone, fax, cellular phone, and particularly email, students mobilized people to move to the streets and to occupy strategic places to challenge the cordon of the authoritarian state. Finally, in May, 1998, thousands of demonstrators representing diverse civil society groupings gathered at and occupied the parliamentary building in Jakarta, ultimately forcing Suharto – the President of Indonesia for thirty-two years – to resign from office.

The Internet played a crucial role in this process by providing otherwise inaccessible information and thus challenging centralized information from the government.
CONCLUSION

In the Preface of his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989) argues that the liberal public sphere is peculiar and historically unprecedented, as well as a non-transferable historical reality. Thus, we may ask whether cyberspace (the Internet) constitutes an authentic political or public sphere of this type. Yet, in the case of Indonesia, the Internet has clearly contributed a new space enabling the rise of civil society.

Will these public spaces become a beneficial public sphere that can contribute to the body politic in Indonesia? Will these cyber-communities help create the civil institutions that constitute a more democratic political reality in Indonesia? Will resistance identities emerging from these spaces become identity projects that lead Indonesia towards democratization? The cases of the *wamen* Association and *Reformasi* provide some answers to these questions. The virtual community has created a civil community that has been able to shift its action from resistance identity to project identity, thereby contributing to a more democratic society in Indonesia through fundamental political reform. But this is also only one particular case. No one can guarantee that all public spaces – or even all cyberspaces – will function as effectively as in the case of these examples. Resistance identities that emerge sporadically will not automatically transform themselves into project identities. The idealized public sphere will not just appear by the miracle of the Internet.

Habermas (1989) did not envision the Internet when he constructed his well-known model of the public sphere, and he might not believe that civil society could arise from electronic networks. As detailed in this chapter, however, it is clear that the Internet has contributed to the re-emergence of civil society in Indonesia. Moreover, the Internet is impacting all components of the public sphere – media, conversation, public opinion, action (Katz, 1997). Yet, contrary to utopian perspectives, which suggest that the Internet approximates an egalitarian world where equal distribution of information and conversation lead to a new and better democracy, in fact the Net can also create contrary outcomes. The fact that in Indonesia the Internet is available to only a small percentage of the population, such as the highly educated, shows that the Internet is at this point unequal, providing an overabundance of information for one group while it remains inaccessible for the majority. Moreover, it is entirely possible that the Internet can be used for factions of civil society to plot violence against others.

Recognizing the many possibilities of the Internet, this chapter is presented as an invitation to see that the Internet is powerful but is not neutral to power. By locating it within the triangle of state, corporate business, and civil society, it goes beyond the usual treatments of the Internet as only a technology by showing how the Internet and society shape and
reshape each other. By inserting the question of democracy into the
discourse, technology is given purpose beyond a socio-techno phenomenon,
allowing an examination of the Internet as a means for political reform.

Pursuing the issue of social purpose reveals the drivers behind the shift
towards more democratic practices throughout the world. The rise of an
urban middle class demanding more freedoms from the state is an important
element in this process. Others include the contradictory process of
globalization, which both promises more freedom while enclosing the
world into spheres of corporate monopolies over information, ideas, and
knowledge. In both instances, the push for democracy is fundamentally a
manifestation of the use of human agency to create meaningful identities
beyond the grasp of state and corporate power. The Internet, in providing
a new site for this struggle, has become a potentially vital public sphere.
Will it continue to contribute to the actual material and social support for
the better future of this country? This is the question now at hand in
Indonesia.

NOTES

1 Habibie enjoyed President Suharto’s patronage for more than twenty years, and
was Minister of Research and Technology from 1978 to 1997; he was then
appointed vice-president and became interim President when Suharto was
ousted in 1998.
2 Reformasi which could be directly translated as “reformation” is a term to
describe the period after the fall of Suharto in May, 1998.
3 George Aditjondro is a lecturer at the University of New Castle. He fled the
country after his lecture about the oligarchy practices of Suharto and his cronies
was claimed as politically dangerous.
4 Pancasila is the name of the foundation of Indonesia as a nation; directly trans-
lated as “five principle.”
5 Suharto used the term “bahaya laten” (latent danger) for communism to
emphasize that the communism that he had conquered (in 1967) had always
existed and people had to be aware of it and see it as an enemy, a big danger.
6 Tapol is an abbreviation of tabanan politik, which is translated directly as political
prisoner. During Suharto’s era it had been taboo to talk about this issue,
since most of the political prisoners were related to the Indonesia Communist
Party (PKI).

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