

Paper presented at Media: Policies, cultures and futures in the Asia Pacific Region, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, November, 27-29, 2006.

Considering the national interest, conveying the public interest and opinion, flagging critique: screen-based Indonesian newscasting in the era of Reform.

Jennifer Dudley, Murdoch University, Perth.

In this paper, I consider the sweeping changes now evident in the content, format and presentation of screen-based news in Indonesia in the era of reform as opposed to the past. Because of the stringent restrictions on freedom of expression in media, especially in its investigative forms, during the New Order, I decided that a study of Indonesian news media since 1999, might serve as a useful measure of change in terms of permissible content, expression and critique as well as an indicator of social and political change generally. My research into the volatile world of Indonesian documentary filmmaking since 1982 suggested that regularly viewing those Indonesian news broadcasts available in Australia might also shed further light on the impact recent developments in Indonesian filmmaking and internet-based services have contributed to the national public domain of screen-based news and current affairs programming.

Indonesian owned screen-based newscasting comprises mainstream public and commercial television channels and a range of on-line news services comprising newswires, on-line newspapers and weeklies, Internet television and regional Media Centres, information rich newcomers in Indonesia's media environment. Since mid 2004, the subjects of my scrutiny have been the news services of *TVRI*, the national broadcaster; *Liputan 6*, the Internet television channel of the commercial broadcaster, *SCTV*; the newswire services, *Antara* and *Media Indonesia Online (MIOL)*; and, more recently, the on-line Media Centers in Yogyakarta and Sidoarjo, all of which I watch/read from Australia.

In contextualising the criteria selected for examination, my paper considers the broad scope of the media environment in Indonesia. It is cognisant of the multi-faceted interactions between technological innovation and implementation, media diversification and the enormous changes in the nature of media compliance generated through the dynamics of protest, *Reformasi* and legal change. The latter includes the legislation guaranteeing Freedom of Speech and Media Freedom (1999); substantial rewriting of the Criminal Codes and dismantling of *Keormasan*, previously used to arrest dissenting intellectuals and journalists; the substantial amendment of systems of censorship, approvals and permissions, and the removal of broadcast approvals from police jurisdiction. In the observations which follow, I consider the presentation of the national interest and sensitive issues, the coverage and representation of the public interest and citizens' opinion, and the broaching of criticism in a context defined by the consequent development of different modes of delivery, formats and approaches in screen-based Indonesian newscasting since 1998. I also question the security of these changes, seeking the public expression of issues encouraging the conclusion that change is not only permanent, but widely discussed and well-enfranchised in Indonesia's national public domain.

For the arguments proposed in this paper, it is unnecessary to describe the past situation in detail, except to emphasize key points illustrating the contrast between the current climate of screen-based newscasting and that which obtained during the New Order from 1989 until the demise of President Suharto in May 1998. Because this paper presents a brief overview only, those wishing to

know more are directed to papers, articles and books by George Quinn (1989), Krishna Sen (2000) and David Hill (2000, 2003), for instance. Their studies contain detailed information regarding the structural basis of screen-based newscasting in New Order Indonesia and the government's initial monopoly of informational content. Until 1995, this monopoly was effectively held by the national public service broadcaster, *TVRI*, despite the diversification of television media in Indonesia from 1988 onwards. Until 1995, the new commercial television channels were still required to carry *TVRI*'s major news services.

This situation is no longer the case. Instead, so many of the changes now evident in Indonesia's media environment have been contingent upon political, legislative and administrative changes – the reality of *Reformasi* - not least in the liberating reconceptualization and implementation of the relationships between the people as the Indonesian nation and their government by their democratically elected representatives.

Under Presidents Sukarno and Suharto, government was defined as synonymous with Nation. To criticise the decisions of government implied disrespect at the least, even treason. The media was not free, but was constrained by a system of laws operating to protect the government from public admission of its failures, muffle criticism and mask the treatment meted out to those perpetrating 'treasonable' acts. Content-wise, propaganda enhanced the national development effort. Information was filtered through a system of permissions and censorship protected the populace from dangerous ideas.

The presentation of screen-based news which, as *Liputan 6* declares, can truly claim to be "*aktual, tajam dan terpercaya / real, hard-nosed and credible*", despite geographic realities, technological difficulties and the legacies of corruption, is quite new in Indonesia. Mainstream newscasters are now able to representatively, informatively and authoritatively present material once forbidden under the New Order, such as political dissent, the dynamics of political change and democratic process, legislative deliberation and legal process, administrative failure as well as success, interest and sectoral group meetings on important issues, disasters, both natural and man-made and their management and controversy of all kinds.

While this paper examines the consequences of such changes in the nature of the content presented in screen-based newscasts, it also considers the way news content is presented, as well as the situation of journalists in a climate of media freedom. These topics provide a greater insight into the dynamics entailed in the reform process manifesting in Indonesia's media environment, as in social change generally. Has transparency been applied to the operations of the media?

Some notes on the methodology used in this research are also appropriate. I have not returned to Indonesia since February 2002, and despite watching Indonesian television in a structured way for research purposes during the early years of *Reformasi* (1998-2001), have not done so since in the country itself. Hence I cannot compare the contents of the various daily news services broadcast by *TVRI*, as did George Quinn in 1989. Instead, I have used the relayed services, composites or duplicated transcripts of *Berita Nasional*, *Berita Utama* and *Berita Pagi*, transmitted via satellite and broadcast by SBS at noon in Perth, six days a week. Where possible, I have followed these broadcasts daily, but have not precisely dated some of the examples documented in this paper, citing instead months and years where particular issues were highlighted in newscasts. Because of the topics selected for analysis, broadly establishing their newsworthiness in terms of their duration as feature items was considered sufficient for this study. However, the archival system of *Liputan 6* enables precise dating, as do other internet-based sources, thereby making a scholar's

task easier! I have read the publicly published Vision and Mission Statements and operational policy guidelines of the Indonesian newscasters considered here, but have neither investigated these further in situ, nor interviewed key personnel or journalists currently working for these organizations. Methodologically, this paper is largely observational and structural in analysis. Some of it is prompted by speculation on the basis of further development along objectively perceived trends of some years' standing. It is best regarded as an introductory contribution to a fascinating, multi-faceted and evolving field.

Every narration is someone's model of how to behave:
of the kinds of things to say to ourselves and to each other,
of what comes first, what comes last, what doesn't matter,
and what shouldn't be said or thought at all, at least, not in
public.
(Nash, 1994:212)

Reredana, former film reviewer for the Indonesian daily newspaper *Kompas*, cites Nash in relation to the misadventures of Indonesian literature and film structure and dialogue at the hands of the censors during New Order Indonesia. In my view, the quotation also references the ways in which Indonesia's newscasting media has been able to change since. How was this so?

Since the mid-1990's, technological change comprising parabola transmission, the Internet, telephony, satellite phones, mobile phones, laptops, LAN and highly portable multi-chip digital video cameras hastened the demise of repression. It was possible to film in ways not easily possible before, enabling an informal freshness and greater range in images supporting news items and changing the way in which shots could be taken. The portrayal of important public figures, long criticised as appearing remote, wooden and filmed in profile as though they were actors from the wayang has also changed, as illustrated in the shot below, selected from Moch. Operasi Rachman's footage of Gus Dur's Presidential election campaign, 1999.

[1. Gus Dur's campaign rally, in Yogyakarta. Newsfootage subsequently re-used in the documentary film, *Perbatasan / Boundaries* \(2002\).](#)

A recent example seen on *TVRI*, Monday, 29/1/2007, was a "car-stop" interview with the Sultan of Yogyakarta in his capacity as Governor, shot from the front at close-range. He is presented, not as a king imbued with mystical or awesome power, but as a public servant in the hot seat, grappling with the latest outbreak of Avian Influenza in the region.

Another major factor has been the power and speed of the Internet in the transmission of ideas, particularly in the media. From the mid 1990's onwards, the Internet in Indonesia has hosted more and more news and opinion outlets, ranging from the Indonesian newswire service *Antara* and the globals, eg. *CNN*, *NBC*, *Reuters*, *AAP*, *Agence France Presse*, to on-line editions of newspapers and weeklies. By 1997 the Internet was alive with news-groups of all sorts, the e-archives and informed chat-rooms such as *Perspektif*, which became an influential television chat show. These sites hosted political debates, provided forums eliciting opinion on various matters, flushing out controversies and sparking the ongoing momentum of attitudinal and social change which fuelled the dynamic and process of reform. During *Reformasi*, the populace as citizens of the Indonesian nation reclaimed orality in the public domain of the screen.

Today, *Kompas*, *The Jakarta Post*, *Bali Post* and *Surabaya Post*, *Gatra* and *Tempo*, among others, have substantial on-line duplication of news articles and editorial comment, although features and many popular columns are usually

reserved for subscribers or cold-type press only. The better laid-out of these online papers and magazines invite interactivity. One of the new dailies, *Media Indonesia Online (MIOL)*, subsequently adopted an on-line format resembling a sophisticated wire service.

[2a. & b. Index of news reports under the heading *Kesehatan / Health*, 12/3/2006 opening across, demonstrates the easy interactivity of *MIOL's* page layout.](#) This same page layout is now used by the on-line version of *Kompas* (22/1/2007).

This easy to read format can be constantly updated from GPRS/mobile & RSS feeds, a device also used by Media Centres in crisis areas. In the aftermath of the December 2004 earthquakes and tsunami in Aceh, many people besides journalists having access to these feeds contributed information and data to *MIOL*, a process enabled by sophisticated mobile videophones. This practice has continued since, and has been incorporated into television newscasts (*TVRI* and *Liputan 6*). During *Reformasi*, other ways of organising the production and broadcast of media evolved beyond the official channels. Now they are here to stay, despite occasional attempts to restrict the electronic press. Alternative and logistically useful information networks like SMS rings, also sprang up during *Reformasi*, re-appearing during the Jakarta floods of January 2002 and after the earthquake in Yogyakarta in May 2006.

Ironically, it seems that the spate of natural and man-made disasters arriving with the new millennium further accelerated changes in the nature and operation of Indonesia's media landscape. During the New Order, natural and man-made disasters like flood, landslides, famine and the consequences of deforestation and pollution and their handling, the tentative criticisms and cautious protests so generated and their wider ramifications for nation and people, were rarely the subject of television newscasts. Reports concerning these events, if they were made at all, were carefully scrutinised and censored before going to air, often days after the event when their initial impact had been diminished. Yet similar events happening in the world beyond Indonesia, downloaded from global newscasters like NBC, STAR and CNN who shared space on Indonesia's *Palapa* satellites, were frequently reported. Where these events involved violence, they were often narrated in a negative light.

Now the inevitable on-ground access accorded global media to the sites of catastrophic events within Indonesia, has meant that Indonesian news services must cover them seriously and objectively themselves, finding the angles that matter to the public as well as the government, or be forced to buy back the footage and transmission concerned from the foreign media who have accompanied subsequent international relief efforts.

Media Centres have a revolutionary legacy, invoked afresh during *Reformasi*, as part of its philosophical and organisational dynamic. A tool of political campaigns, Media Centres have been developed by those supporting participatory democracy - by students, intellectuals, media activists and *warga setempat / the citizenry on the spot* who valued enquiry, sought truth, demanded Freedom of Speech, Media Freedom and Human Rights, and who strategised to achieve these ends.

[3. Representative page from the *Jogja Media Center*, supported by the *Air Putih Foundation* and carried on *Indosat 2*.](#)

Media Centres emerged again in the wake of disasters, after the tsunami in Aceh for instance, after the earthquake in Yogyakarta and in Sidoarjo, monitoring the Lapindo-Brantas gas well blowout and subsequent mudflow. Pooling resources, equipment, skills and people power, and aided by new

communications technology, they have been an invaluable part of relief and reconstruction efforts in these devastated areas.

Commencing with the conveyance of the national interest, this paper will now consider the performance of the selected newscasters in the era of reform in terms of the criteria listed in the title by referencing the treatment of particular topics across a range of specific formats.

The concept of the national interest has changed greatly in Indonesia since the New Order, whose demise happened in large part because a majority of Indonesians no longer felt that the interests of President Suharto's government were synonymous with those of their nation. Legislation guaranteeing Freedom of Speech and Media Freedom was one of the early victories of the reform era. Screen-based news media then became sites of allocated multi-party political campaigning and public education focusing on democratic process and how to vote (Personal observation, 1998-1999, Rhodes, D. 2000). This direction has been most evident on *TVRI*, whose determined efforts to rid itself of propagandist approaches in the coverage of politics, law and administration have been notable. In 2002 – 2003, the Internet and its capacity to carry huge quantities of data were used to facilitate regional and national elections (Hill, D., 2003). The electoral process itself was beamed in from regional stations in many parts of the archipelago by satellite and sometimes directly in situ using webstreaming. Elections were – and still are – a regular feature story on *TVRI* newscasts as they are on other channels.

In the early years of the reform era, particular emphasis was placed on public service advertising for television in news and current affairs timeslots, and has continued since, as can be seen in the campaigns encouraging tsunami awareness and health issues, such as measures to be taken in the event of outbreaks of Bird Flu and the perennial problems posed by Dengue Fever and Malaria. Since the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh, advertisements explaining the generation of a tsunami and how to survive its onslaught (some derived from Japan and elsewhere) have been re-broadcast on *TVRI*, appearing again after the Pangandaran disaster in August 2006, together with volcano alerts for Mount Merapi (DYI), Lampung and Sulawesi Utara (May – August 2006).

Within the newscasts themselves, *TVRI* has allocated prominent space to the coverage of *Flu Burung / Avian Influenza*, also known by its scientific name, H5N1, describing the location of outbreaks, hospitalisations, subsequent action, compensation of stock holders, medical preparedness, national and international conferences concerning the problem, education re preventative measures and so on (2005-2006). Recent coverage (January 2007) has looked at what is actually happening in the public domain, because of and despite this prolonged campaign. Regarding the most recent outbreak in Yogyakarta, the cost of the loss of so much poultry, Indonesia's cheapest meat source, has also been stated. Meanwhile *Liputan 6* has urged its viewers to remember that the number of hospitalizations and deaths from Dengue Fever far outweigh those from H5N1.

Finally, emphasis continues to be placed on the dissemination of public information as part of mainstream and community television making, as in the *Konfiden* program of films accompanying the MARG Conference at which this paper was presented.

A public service broadcaster is obliged to consider the national interest, but does it also convey the public interest and opinions? Whether or not it does the latter is a crucial test in a democracy valuing freedom of speech. Public sector broadcasters in the USA and Australia often privilege public interest and opinions above those of the state when it is seen as the primary representative of the

nation. Deliberating such issues has been crucial for news journalists in Indonesia, especially for those working for the national broadcaster, *TVRI*.

A sustained example of a coalescence of national and public interest broadcasting concerns *TVRI*'s extensive coverage of the use of unsafe preservatives in basic foods such as bean curd and dried salt fish (November 2005 – January 2006). Appropriate experts were interviewed; scientific testing of the products concerned was shown; producers, vendors and consumers interviewed and symptoms of poisoning and medical treatment described. Consumer Protection and its enforcement in the problematic non-regulated labour sector was finally an issue taken seriously by legislators. The online news service, *Liputan 6* has also been diligent in its coverage of such matters.

In many newscasts, be these mainstream television or Internet, direct interviews on a growing variety of issues and topics, with a wide spectrum of ordinary people, *warga setempat*, their experience and opinions, now take centre stage, together with that of various professionals and interest groups such as farmers, fishermen, producers and sellers, NGO personnel, spokespersons for community welfare organizations like *Karung Taruna* and religious leaders, as well as workers of all kinds, including those in the informal sector as well as aid workers and volunteers. National leaders, Ministers and parliamentary members, party officials, bureaucrats, businessmen, police and soldiers are all still represented, but as part of the mix, rather than dominating the screen as was mandatory during the New Order.

Opinions are now expressed fearlessly by those interviewed, directly to interviewers and their cameras. Policies and administrative performance are debated openly. Administrative failures are no longer hidden. Aging infrastructure in need of overhaul and/or replacement is now newsworthy. A spate of aircraft disasters, train crashes and the recent sinking of a passenger ferry have led to enquiries into the safety of transportation and the rights of passengers. But everyday issues relating to the price of petrol, cooking oil, rice and basic foodstuffs and the standard of catering during the *Haj* have not been forgotten.

But taboo areas remain. While campaigns against gender bias and those to prevent violence against women, including family or domestic violence, occasionally receive news coverage on the major television channels, to my knowledge, no newscasters have actually followed any cases through the courts on the rare occasions where these have been prosecuted. Rarely have victims been prepared to be interviewed on the news except in relation to violence incurred in the workplace, most often as migrant workers. Fewer victims have been prepared to describe their experiences in chat shows. Interviews are with activists and the representatives of lobby and support organizations and with the relevant Ministers.

Besides content, the graphic and emotive power of the images selected for television broadcast of natural and man-made disasters have underscored the gravity and scope of these events. Excluding technical difficulties, visuals are now most usually tied relevantly to word, whether this be that of the reporting journalists, relevant officials and experts or *warga setempat*. Screen images often consciously cite cultural heritage, be this traditional cultural practice, or through visuals resonant of Indonesia's modern and contemporary artists, as evident in some of the footage depicting the aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh. While I wonder whether news coverage of this nature has also doubled as a strategy for the compilation of documentary material, these choices are consistent with the cultural and educative aspect of *TVRI*'s mission statement, and seem to be appreciated by viewers. Obvious attempts are now made to film and present news footage in an eye-catching but truthful way. Some of *Liputan 6*'s reports have been quite outstanding in this respect, but, as with *TVRI*, the quality is inconsistent for various reasons, many of them technical ones (scarcity of multi-

chip digital cameras, wear and tear, heat-damaged video stock, physical access to difficult terrain, webstreaming problems but excluding low-grade sources like mobile video phones).

[4. The Lapindo-Brantas mudflow disaster, *Liputan 6*, September 2006.](#)

Has Indonesia's screen-based news media taken full advantage of the climate of reform by maximising opportunities to flag and investigate issues in a responsibly critical manner? What of the authoritative presentation of previously forbidden material? Are critical issues not only flushed and documented, but intelligently presented, substantiated and then satisfactorily followed up? Is there evidence of a "discipline of verification" and a sense that "journalism's first obligation is to the truth"? (Kovach, B., 2004).

Because of technological change and Freedom of the Press, sourcing newsworthy items is no longer such a problem. The limitations of mainstream television newscasters are now time-based and monetary, rather than constrained by censorship. They must present a digest of news of the day as it occurs nationally, internationally and as distilled from the regions. *TVRI's* news service is still divided into morning news, breaking news at noon and the national news, but the content within each service is now more broadly-based and democratic in its selection. Since 1998, Indonesian newscasters have had to find ways of dealing with the avalanche of regional and national news initially appearing hard to sort and prioritise for those used to the limited supply of approved information available during the New Order.

Mainstream newscasters are now able to present material once forbidden, such as political dissent, public protest, interest and sectoral group meetings on important matters, disasters and their management. They flag critique by presenting the opinions of a range of stakeholders. Online newscasters like *Liputan 6* and the extensive web pages of the Media Centres have more time available to focus on selected newsworthy issues, treating them in greater depth. They provide viewers with the choice to peruse content more fully. Internet news service providers are distinguished by their rapid uptake of modern communications technologies, drawing on equipment which can function in situations of erratic power supply. Even poor quality vision from low-grade sources edited digitally seems not as important on the small screen of a computer monitor. What matters is getting the story and telling it informatively and with credibility.

Liputan 6 is often more convincing in this respect than the *TVRI* newscasts I watch in Perth. The Real Player format of *Liputan 6* presents viewers with the entire screened news item accompanied by an abbreviated written transcript. Besides running a news format conventionally divided into morning, noon and evening programs, its site carries breaking news, dedicated news services and archives. *Liputan 6* also offers feature "articles" and short documentaries. What matters is the topicality of the content, which is frequently investigative in treatment and often shot innovatively.

As with the Media Centres, the scope of coverage is extensive, usually more so than with mainstream television. The specific focus of investigation and depth of reporting is intense, and, with important stories, sustained over a long period of time. The flow of events and the debate surrounding them is followed. Different articles often present conflicting views. In this way, the newscasters' approach resembles that of the better newspapers and weeklies, whose interest goes beyond sensationalism and the news bite. This has been particularly evident with *Liputan 6's* reporting of the Lapindo-Brantas disaster and the scope and depth undertaken subsequently by Sidoardjo's Media Center.

Sidoarjo Media Center has continued to focus on the mudflow and its attendant problems, and now emphasises the constantly escalating damage bill and costs and progress of relocating the areas population, all aspects of their welfare, rights, as well as reporting the scientific and environmental aspects of the disaster. *Sidoarjo Media Center* also carries hyperlinks to scientific papers and blogs, such as those found on *Dongeng Geologi. Geologi Energi dan Kebencanaan*, a scientifically reputable, highly informative and engagingly cheeky website hosted by Kuala Lumpur based Indonesian geologist and consultant Rovicky. Rovicky uses aerial photographs, maps and diagrams illustrating the Lapindo-Brantas disaster, explaining geology, gas well blowouts and mud volcanos in everyday language. His has become a much referenced source and strategically linked site (*The Jakarta Post, Kompas, Metro TV, the BBC and the UN, as of September 2006*) and also carries articles about the Yogyakarta earthquake and volcanic explosion.

[5 & 6. *Dongeng Geologi* home page, and diagrams & photos subsequently reproduced in *Perspektif* and *Gatra* respectively.](#)

As hoped, mainstream media has picked up, and relayed or recognisably used as source material, some of the reports emanating from the Internet-based sources, finding the information and scope already clearly signposted as opposed to sourcing each item separately. For instance, the Indonesian President is actively interested in promoting environmental measures and renewable energy within the reconstruction plans for devastated areas, an interest not lost on those generating content for the Media Centres and a plus for interest and lobby groups like *WALHI*, all of which provide sources for television newscasters. The web-based newscasters have also contributed to the news-wire services, *Antara* and *MiOL*. While particularly accessible to Indonesian language speakers, some sites have been translated into English, others contain a mix of language.

[7. Page from the English language version of UNDP website, hyperlinked to the *Jogja Media Center*, September, 2006.](#)

From my limited, long-distance perspective, and placing emphasis on the evident experimentation in approaches, format and content delivery as well as transmission, it seems that Indonesia's screen-based news media have made a real attempt to address these questions since 1998. They are now able to cover those occasions where the national interest and large sections of the public interest conflict, as in presenting the debate, current at the time of the MARG conference (November 2006) as to whether or not President George Bush should visit Indonesia and where.

I first used Nash's comments to consider the question of authority in Indonesian documentary film, but found they usefully applied to this consideration of all forms of screen-based news, following the rapid legislation and implementation ensuring Freedom of the Press. The authenticity of documentary and screen-based news depends on the substance of the informational material presented, and the credibility of the address made by those presenting it to the audience. Although many Indonesian journalists argue that the right to access Freedom of Information remains problematic for news gatherers, I suggest it is useful to give credit where it is due. While acknowledging that resource poverty still exists, I will now consider how authenticity, informational substance and credibility of presentation have changed in the era of technological change and political and administrative reform. Beyond the virtues of proximity and technological access to the national and global arena, I suggest that currently, credibility, informational substance and authenticity are dependent on two key factors, the first being the nature of the structural and workplace environments within the media

organizations concerned, including their Vision and Mission Statements, Broadcast Charters and Operating Policy Statements, their wider corporate linkages and networks, and the second, the calibre of their journalists.

Regional autonomy has encouraged Indonesia's regions to speak with their own voice in the national context of television newscasting. Their media stations are now technologically enabled as transmission can be switched in directly from regional stations if not from source sites themselves.

Many examples abound. Regional *TVRI* stations file their own reports nationally. For instance, over the twelve months between October 2005 and October 2006, *TVRI* Palangkaraya in Kalimantan has covered cross-border issues with Malaysia such as legal and illegal migration and logging, plus haze from forest fires. Activist NGO's and the environmental watchdog and campaigner *WALHI* have supported the reportage of such subjects and can now feed their investigative reporting directly into the mainstream media. Proximity counts. Surabaya-based *Liputan 6* grabbed the initial running in reporting the Lapindo-Brantas gas-well blowout and accompanying unstoppable mud flow devastating Sidoarjo and surrounding areas.

The Special District of Yogyakarta (DYI) has its own, relatively autonomous *TVRI* station and *Studio Audio Visual*, a long-standing alternative media initiative, which has trained many community and screen-based Indonesian media workers. By September 2006, there were four Media Centres issuing the most up-to-date accounts of continuing difficulties and successes in the reconstruction of Yogyakarta since the earthquake. Bantul District, the most severely devastated area, hosts perhaps the most comprehensive of the Media Centres. Besides servicing the local need for important and helpful information, such centres act as a focus for the eyes of the world beyond Indonesia.

The structure and mission statements of television broadcasters have been re-assessed, as seen in the following examples from *TVRI*'s online site. Although *TVRI*'s Vision and Mission statements have not altered much since the New Order, the actual implementation and emphasis of their broadcast charter has. They are now transparent and accountable to the Indonesian public. The last two years have seen an intense publicly-conducted debate on *TVRI*'s status – whether to remain as a public service broadcaster (a model similar to the *BBC* and our *ABC*), or a public broadcaster, maintained by subscriptions and donations, as per America's *PBS* or Australia's *SBS*, which although mostly government funded, also gains revenue from advertising and sponsorships.

[8 a & b. *TVRI* Mission Statement & Change of Status statement.](#)

On 16/9/2006, *TVRI* became a public broadcaster and is still finding its feet with this choice. *TVRI*'s experimentation with these models, and its employment of producers familiar with documentary film production as well as ethnically diverse journalists and presenters (“jelly beans”) – consistent with the multiculturalism of regional autonomy in archipelagic Indonesia - has been evident in the news services relayed to Australia via *SBS*. This consultative strategy is consistent with *TVRI*'s objectives, which are to enlighten their viewers by presenting news which is “weighty, comprehensive, topical and interactive”.

The Mission Statements of Media Centres have been newly formed, and are posted on their respective websites as required for public scrutiny.

[9. URL for Webpage showing Jogja Media Center's Mission Statement](http://jogjamediacenter.or.id/?dir=pages&file+main&hal=profile,2/2/2007)

An evaluation of the authenticity, substance of information presented and credibility of address delivered by screen-based newscasters, is actually an

evaluation of the performance of the journalists concerned. A backwards glance at the past is important here, for it explains the obstacles with which Indonesia's newscasting journalists have had to contend in presenting news and current affairs programs commensurate with transmission in the global domain – an area in which their performance can be readily scrutinised by the profession's international monitors. For reasons already outlined on Page 2 of this paper, it is useful to begin with historical review before considering the situation of Indonesia's screen-based news journalists more accurately.

During the New Order, *RRI* and *TVRI* were a branch of the Indonesian public service within the Ministry of Information, despite having separate newsgathering arms. The journalists of *TVRI* were public servants first, and journalists second, a situation which some found conflictual, given the restrictions applied to content. Their job was to convey the national interest defined as the interest of the New Order regime. They narrated the news of the day, as selected and approved by the Ministry of Information and the administrators of *TVRI*. If they wished to present alternative views, they were compelled to apply for permission to do so. This was a lengthy process rendering the controversial stories old news by the time of broadcast, if this was approved.

Since 1999, they have embraced the opportunities provided by *Reformasi*, including the structural changes discussed in this paper. They have vociferously defended various attempted inroads on their newly granted freedoms, and have received broad public support for their efforts, as for example criticising those sections of the proposed amendments to the Anti-pornography - *pornoaksi* / public lewdity legislation RUU APP, debated in the MPR in March 2006 likely to threaten free speech. A content analysis of *TVRI*'s relayed news program on Monday, 13/3/2006, showed sections of this debate. The controversy was followed further in their morning discussion program. This focus continued for the next week, taking viewers to the street stalls selling newspapers and magazines, and showing the public demonstrations which the legislation provoked. Speakers representing both sides of the argument received airtime. Reporting on such inroads, and lobbying against difficulties within the profession are all part of improving credibility (Harsono, A & Kovach, B., 2004). Screen-based journalists have attended training programs in Indonesia and elsewhere, upgrading their skills to make the most of their vastly altered working climate.

[10. *The Jakarta Post*, July 2004, Yogya declares war on bogus journalists.](#)

CONCLUSION

For the present, the combination of technological change and press freedom has guaranteed Indonesians ownership of the coverage and presentation of their own historical events, their disasters, their issues and their successes. Indonesian journalists report on issues like terrorism and disasters, which compound economic difficulties and might threaten their freedom, “analysing them with an energy, intelligence and skill that can easily compete in the current international communications climate” (Kovach, 2004). They are building the infrastructure of independent organizations needed to spread and protect shared values over a sprawling and diverse archipelago in the absence of repression and censorship, but understanding those on the ground about whom they report often remains difficult because pressurised. Indonesia's screen-based newscasters now offer both a national and, for those located on the Internet, a global service in the era of Reform. Their real accomplishment and wider acknowledgement in the era of global reach is that their reports have become part of news coverage on television channels beyond Indonesia, including Australia where vision sourced from *Liputan 6*, *Metro TV* and *TVRI* has appeared on commercial television channels as well as the ABC.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harsono, Andreas, 2000, "Journalists' Use of the Internet Bubbled up from Underground" in *Neiman Reports* 54.4 (Winter 2000): 74. Expanded Academic ASAP. Thomson & Gale. Murdoch University Library. 2 February 2007.

Other articles by Andreas Harsono appear with this electronic link.

Hill, David T., 2003, "Communication for a new democracy:Indonesia's first online elections", *The Pacific Review*, 16(4), 525-548. Routledge, Taylor & Francis, London.

Kovach, Bill, 2004, "Elements of a Free Press in Indonesia" in *Neiman Reports* 58.1, Spring 2004: 86(2). Expanded Academic ASAP. Thomson & Gale. Murdoch University Library. 26 Nov. 2006.

Quinn, George, 1989, "Monopoly and Diversity in Indonesia's Television News", Canberra, ANU, RSPS. Conference paper presented at *Indonesia's new order: past, present, future*, December, 1989. Draft only.

Sen, Krishna and Hill, David T., 2000, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.