CHAPTER 17

The Internet, Social Networks, and Reform in Indonesia

Merlyna Lim*

The Internet is quickly expanding beyond its origins in the United States to the rest of the world. At present, 533 million people in the world are estimated to be active Internet users (Cyber Atlas, 2002). This figure is growing exponentially, and by 2004 a predicted 945 million people will be using the Internet around the world. Due to this rapid growth, the Internet has made a huge impact upon societies everywhere.

Research on this impact is increasing. Among the leading issues being studied is the relationship between the Internet and democracy. For some time prophetic scholars have envisioned the Internet as a source of ideas for a possible transformation toward democratic politics (Barber, 1984; Becker and Slaton, 2000). Moreover, there are politicians and policy experts, notably in the United States, who seem to have faith that the Internet is an appealing force for democracy that will undermine authoritarian regimes around the world (Friedman, 2000; Wright, 2000). However, the population of Internet users is still very much concentrated in higher-income democratic countries. This raises the question of what impact the Internet has made upon political life, especially in terms of advancing democratization in authoritarian states. How might this impact change in the future?

Until recently, Indonesia was still among those countries under authoritarian control. For decades following independence, informational media in Indonesia developed under the strong control of the state. The Suharto regime made use of the media as a means to spread its propaganda over the archipelago to legitimize and maintain its identity as a progressive "developmental state." Communications and media technologies, particularly satellite and television, were deliberately used to build a national identity under the state, thus blockading society from accessing information other than that which the state provided (Kitley, 1994; Shoesmith, 1994).

The Internet, which came to Indonesia during the early phase of the political crisis in the 1990s, has risen both economically and politically to become an alternative medium that has found its way out from under the control of the state (Hill and Sen, 2000; Lim, 2002). However, the Internet was initially just available to a small segment of society The medium was still very new, immature, and elitist. How, then, could the Internet have had a pervasive impact on Indonesian society? Is it true that it helped Indonesia become a more democratic state? And if so, how was this accomplished?

These questions cannot be resolved just by looking at the Internet and its users. Rather, the answers emerge from a deeper exploration beyond the Internet. The relation between technology and society ranges far beyond the causal relationship between the technology and its immediate users. Rather, the interconnection between technology and society is historically and culturally rooted in a local context, which is the nexus where technology and society meet, and the basis on which technology's impact spreads widely through society.

Using the case of Indonesia, this chapter addresses both democratization of media and democratization in general, with the aim of demonstrating a firm connection between the two. It also describes how the Internet could have wider impacts than those revealed by statistical analysis. These impacts are greatly facilitated by the convivial attributes of the Internet itself, which in turn foster a multiplier effect starting from the small Internet café—the *warnet*—and spreading to people and places throughout Indonesian society.

The Internet: A Convivial Medium for Civil Society

Communication media can be used by different groups for various purposes, but some are more suited to certain purposes than to others. For democratization, these media should have features that are suited to civil society and grassroots citizen action by making it less easy for a small number of groups to control the flow and content of information, knowledge, and ideological or symbolic representations. These features include one-to-one communication, affordable cost, ease of use, broad availability, and technological resistance to surveillance and censorship.

The Internet is a medium that possesses most of these features. E-mail, for example, allows one-to-one communication at a relatively low cost and is easy to use. Through the availability of Internet café and other public-access points, the Internet is now broadly available not only in developed countries but also in developing countries like Indonesia. The anarchic characteristic of this technology, originally designed by the U.S. Department of Defense to facilitate survival of a nuclear war (Abbate, 1999; Cerf et al., 2000), is what hinders efforts to control or censor it. Indeed, the overwhelming volume of information flooding the Internet in open networks rather than in a hierarchically controlled form limits such attempts. The Internet can thus be considered a "convivial medium"—borrowing Ivan Illich's (1973) concept of "convivial technology."

The conviviality of the Internet as an informational and communication medium is more crucial for civil society in authoritarian states than in democratic states. However, when the space for dialogues and exchanging information is limited to Internet users, rather than encompassing larger segments of society, the conviviality of the Internet is less effective than its potential suggests. Information that circulates only among the members of a small "elite" loses its power to mobilize people to challenge the cordons of hegemonic power. No political revolution can happen without involving society on a wider scale. Even those efforts made within cyberspace are fruitless unless they can be extended into real social, political, and economic spaces.

Through a narration of the Indonesian experience, the remaining sections of this chapter explore how the Internet has risen as a medium that, while new, is nonetheless rooted in traditional culture and social networks—thus providing its users with the ability to reach wider strata of civil society and to be engaged in challenging the domination of the state in both private and public life.

May 1998: The Question of the Role of the Internet

When the "father of development" à la New Order, President Suharto, was forced to step down in May 1998, some writers drew a parallel between this event and the Zapatista's Net movement in Chiapas, Mexico—implying that the political revolution in Indonesia was (Inter)Net-driven (Basuki, 1998; Marcus, 1999). However, many Indonesian media and information technologists do not accept this opinion, arguing that it was impossible for the Internet to have such a role in the overthrow of Suharto's New Order government. This dissenting opinion is heavily based on the following argument:

1. According to a statistical analysis, the estimated number Internet users in Indonesia in 1998 was just less than 1 percent of the population, and this 1 percent was assumed to be an elite group that was unlikely to join in anti-hegemonic actions.
2. In any case, the Internet is only an extension/advancement of old/previous media, and as such—even though it has transformed the mode of communication and the transfer of information—it is considered a neutral technology that could only reflect the existing power structures of society.
3. By inference, the Internet is part of the media and culture of dominant social forces, retaining a rigid connection with existing power holders.

These reasons are sufficient to explain the long domination of the Indonesian state over the use of communication and media technologies. All of these technologies, from the telegraph to the radio, from satellites to television, have been developed to suit the quest of domination by elites (Kitley, 1994; Shoesmith, 1994). It is apparent that the vast majority of people have never been able to exercise power from their marginalized positions. However, by putting the Indonesian experience in the picture, this chapter argues that the Internet is not neutral with respect to power and, further, that power can act in unpredictable nonlinear ways in cyberspace as in other cultural sites. In short, those with limited power can create or continue their own agendas, and their own forms of identity, culture, and community, by using a medium such as the Internet—especially one so new to its users.

To be effective, however, the Internet would have to reach far beyond the computer. To explain how the Internet works in Indonesian cultural sites and how it can serve as a medium that supports those who are dominated as they attempt to challenge the hegemonic power of the dominant (state), the following section describes how in Indonesia the Internet was transformed into a new medium based on a traditional network culture.

Warnet: A New Medium Arising from a Traditional Network

Superficially, the Internet is a "non-Indonesian" technology. Imported from outside, it came to Indonesia in the early 1990s and began to be commercialized only in the mid-1990s. Available to just a small segment of society, the Internet was so limited in terms of social access that it seemingly could have no significant impact on society. For example, data from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) indicate that in Indonesia in 1999 there were only 21,052 Internet hosts with 900,000 users, while in the United States during the same year there were 53,175,956 hosts with 74.1 million users (ITU, 2001). By 2001, however, the number of hosts in Indonesia (46,000) had increased by 120 percent and the number of users (4 million) by 350 percent, compared to a 100 percent increase in hosts (106,193,339) and users (142.8 million) in the United States (ITU, 2002). These figures suggest an explosive, even chaotic, rate of growth in Indonesia.

Even these figures of rapid expansion tell much less than the full story. The impact of the Internet on Indonesian society cannot be measured simply by counting the number of direct Internet users. It is difficult to see the dynamics of change at the macro level that only tallies numbers of nationwide Internet users. If we step down from the macro-level to the micro-levels of the district, the community, the neighborhood, and the family, where real Indonesian social life is lived; only then can we see that the actual channels of access to the new technologies are much wider than previously appeared, including the real and potential uses by segments of society that are excluded from direct use. Dynamic social mobility in the unstable context of contemporary Indonesia allows usage of the new media to grow in "invisible" ways. But, paradoxically, the Internet may be simultaneously elitist and not elitist. That is, while it is directly accessible to only a very few, the social and cultural linkages that connect others to these select members of civil society create non-elitist—and even counter-elitist—tendencies as well.

To understand the Indonesian Internet is to understand the social dynamics of its smallest but most popular Net-access point: the Internet café, or *warnet* (see figure 17.1). From 1990 to 1994, the only access to the Internet was through universities or research institutions. But in 1995–1996, with the emergence of commercial Internet service providers (ISPs), Indonesians could suddenly have an independent dial-up Internet connection from their homes or offices. At least *some* Indonesians could. What with the economic crisis under way, and the combined costs of a subscription fee, connection fee, and telephone tariff, ISPs were prohibitively expensive for most people. Also, telephone penetration was still low. So, in this context, the *warnet* emerged in the mid-1990s as an alternative point of access for the public (Lim, 2002).

As with Internet cafés in other countries, use of the *warnet* does not necessitate computer ownership or ISP subscription. Access is instead rented by the hour or minute. However, what does differentiate the *warnet* from generic Internet cafés is that the *warnet* is attached to the historic cultural context of Indonesian life. The *warnet* is not only a point of Internet access but also the result of a transformation and localization of Internet technology; in short, the *warnet* is an Indonesian In-
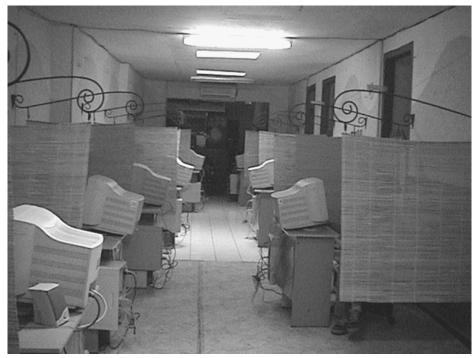
Figure 17.1.   A *warnet* (Internet café) in Bandung, Indonesia.
Source: Author's photo.

ternet. The Internet, as embodied in the *warnet*, is a medium that is "continuous with and embedded in other social spaces," within everyday "social structures and relations that they may transform but cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness" (Miller and Slater, 2000).

Warnet and the Traditional *Warung*

The term *warnet*, which is an abbreviation of "*warung* Internet," is rooted in the term *warung,* which refers to a very simple place where people from the lower-middle and lower classes buy snacks or meals and congregate with friends or family while eating. A *warung* can be physically located in the front part of a house, usually in an erstwhile guestroom. Alternatively, it can be built as a room extension in the frontyard or on the street. *Warung* usually consist of just one small room with one table. However, sometimes they have a bigger room, allowing for more than one table. In this type of *warung,* people would sit on the floor (*lesehan*) and eat on the short tables. Another type, the *lesehan,* is more family-oriented. A common feature of *warung* is the *krepyak*—a bamboo curtain used for covering the front side of the structure (see figure 17.2). The *krepyak* has two functions: By separating the people inside from the public outside, it protects them from the sun and gives them a sense of privacy.

Figure 17.2.   The traditional warung.
Source: Author's photo.

The physical appearance of traditional *warung* has been substantially adapted by the *warnet*. The physical location of the *warnet* is exactly that of the *warung*: the front part of a house. Wood and bamboo also dominate the materials used to culturally impart a *warung* feeling to many of the *warnet* in Indonesia, particularly in Bandung. The *krepyak* is commonly used either as a window cover (for sun protection) or as a partition separating computers from each other. The *lesehan* type of *warnet* is very popular among teenagers. In a *lesehan* room there can be three or four computers that a single group can reserves for a certain duration. This yields a sense of closeness and group privacy. Even in terms of its physical attributes, then, the *warnet* is attached to local cultural practices.

Yet, such "traditional" adoption can be superficial. The physical elements of the *warung* represent only one attempt, albeit an important one, to anchor the *warnet* in Indonesian culture. To enable its linkages to be truly realized, social networks based on cultural traditions must also flourish in and beyond the built environment of the *warnet*.

Traditional Social Networks

Beyond its physical attributes, the *warnet* is culturally entrenched in a traditional social network formation that has existed for hundreds of years. As a traditional food out-

let, the *warung* is an important social and culinary focus for most Indonesians (Rigg, 1996). The presence of a *warung* in the neighborhood is very important, especially to lower-middle and lower-class people. Whether in a city or a village, the *warung* is simultaneously a point of commerce, a meeting place, and an information network for the households in the neighborhood. Not just a place to eat, the *warung* is where people meet to chat and to gain and spread information—although the most popular form of information spreading is gossip. It is a place to talk about various things from the price of meals to business matters, from love life to politics. It is public, yet altogether private. *Warung* and *warung*-like places such as the *pasar,* or "traditional market," take on the role of civic space—that is, as one of "those spaces in which people of different origins and walks of life can co-mingle without overt control by government, commercial or other private interests, or de facto dominance by one group over another" (Douglass et al., 2002). This role is similar to that of the old-fashioned coffee shop in North America and Europe, where people are generally free to linger and can engage in conversation at a reasonable cost and with few commercial nuisances. The *warung* also parallels the public baths of Japan and Korea, where all people in a community gather not only to bathe but to engage in conversation (Douglass, 1993). *Warung* can also serve as micro-civic spaces. The conversations and dialogues created in *warung* are brought to other communities, such that markets, families, working-spaces, and paddy fields all become civic-space nodes for social engagement. Together with these nodes, the *warung* create a network of information flows that reach far beyond the nodal sites themselves.

However, with the influence of globalization, which has trapped people in hyper-real lifestyles, much of the urban middle-class no longer has an opportunity to go to *warung* or *warung*-like places. The habit of visiting such places has been replaced by frequent trips to fast-food restaurants and shopping malls, which do not provide spaces for dialogues or the privacy to talk freely for any length of time. Most of the conversations that do happen there are commodified and inhibited.

In this setting, the *warnet* has emerged as a reincarnation or contemporary form of the *warung*. Even though people can access the Internet from other places like home, office, public library, or university, the *warnet* accounts for approximately 60 percent of total Internet users. As an entry point to cyberspace, it provides spaces for dialogue and accessing information that are substantially free from intervention and manipulation by the state and corporate economy. People can make use of this technology without losing or compromising their personal or social identities and without being inhibited by matters of political correctness or commercialism.

As a physical space, the *warnet* is also a kind of civic space. Accessing the Internet from the *warnet*, unlike connecting from home, office, public library, or university, is a direct form of social engagement. While sitting at a computer in the *warnet*, a user interacts physically both with the *warnet*'s physical space and with other users. Those who want to enjoy accessing the Internet together with friends can choose a *warnet* with a private *lesehan* lounge, where they can relax by sitting on the floor and sharing interesting URLs or listening to songs downloaded via MP3 technology. And those who want privacy can sit in the *krepyak*'s partitioned space, where others cannot see the computer screen.

Thus there are social networks as well as physical spaces created by cyberspace. The most common online activity in the *warnet* is chatting. The privacy provided by chat rooms is particularly important to Indonesian youth, especially those trying to gain autonomy from their parents or the older generation than is possible in offline space, especially in matters of social relations between the sexes (Slama, 2002). Indeed, the Internet offers access to a subculture that is distinct from other spaces and places in society. Just like the *warung*, it is both public and private. *Warnet*, too, facilitate not only online social relationships but also offline ones—as when young people meet in person in a *warnet* as a follow-up to their online chat.

The physical and virtual nodes created within and by the *warnet* are aspects of social network formation, which does not stop in the *warnet* itself. Rather, the *warnet* extends its flows of information outward to other social networks within society. Using the existing cultural foundations of communication, including the traditional network of *warung*-like places, Internet users spread this information beyond the *warnet* and capture spaces where people may not even familiar with the word "Internet."

As an example of how information flows from cyberspace to the *warnet* and to traditional networks in Indonesia, let us now consider the political revolution that occurred there in May 1998.

From Global Flows to the *Warnet-Warung* and the Political Spaces of Revolution

The flow of information from global to local scales of interaction was facilitated by the existence of virtual and physical nodes of the *warnet* linked to traditional social networks. Both the *warnet* and its *warung*-like linkages to the rest of society were crucial to the rise of civil society in a very short period before the downfall of Suharto in May 1998.

As previously noted, up to the advent of the Internet, all information that came into and spread throughout the country was subject to political cleansing by the state's filtering apparatus, manifested in the creation of the Ministry of Information. All broadcast television and radio channels relayed only that information which did not endanger the harmony and unity of the nation-state. The press was under the strict control of the state, with tight practices of scrutiny, censorship, and banning. In this regard, during the last four to five years of the New Order era, Internet-based information was considered a luxury. The main reason is that the Internet could supply controversial information that was previously unavailable to most Indonesians—for example, details related to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) or to Suharto's wrongdoings, or that would undermine the president and *Pancasila*[1]. To be able to access such information was a privilege for Indonesian Internet users.

There were a few major sources of this kind of information. Among the most important were Apakabar,[2] George Aditjondro,[3] SiAR (1998a), Pijar (KdPnet, 1998), Munindo (2000), and CSVI (2002). Of the information classified as "unavailable and controversial," the most popular was the famous *Daftar Kekayaan Suharto,* or "list of Suharto's wealth." This information was originally written by Aditjondro, an Indone-

sian professor teaching the "Sociology of Corruption" at the University of New Castle in Australia. He called himself "the scent dog of Suharto's wealth."

The original information comprising the "list of Suharto's wealth" was not a list but, rather, a series of four long e-mails under the subject *Kekayaan Suharto* ("Suharto's Wealth"), versions 1 to 4, with *Yayasan-yayasan Suharto: cakupan, dampak, dan pertang-gungjawabannya* ("Suharto's foundations: their coverage, impact, and blameworthiness") as a subtitle. These e-mails revealed how Suharto used his "charity" foundations to cover his corrupt business network, who was involved, and the amount of money spent or gained. On 31 January 1998, Aditjondro sent the e-mails to John MacDouggal—the moderator of *Apakabar*—and to other colleagues and friends. MacDouggal spread these e-mails through the *Apakabar* mailing list on 1 February 1998 (Aditjondro, 1998c).

Among the other earliest recipients besides *Apakabar* were Munindo (Aditjondro, 1998a), Pijar (KdPnet, 1998), and SiaR (1998b). All published the information on their homepages and/or spread the information through mailing lists. By April 1998, many other websites had also published this information. Additional websites, even personal ones, added links to it. Some of the reproductions of Aditjondro's original message used the title he had specified; others used an edited title with a more incendiary vocabulary; still others used a title with a much more provocative, cynical, or hilarious line.[4] The format of this information was also modified—for example, from a long narrative into a shorter version. Some changed it into a summary; others paraphrased the narrative.

Overall, the Internet users transformed a long narrative format into a short list (Luknanto, 1998b). This list captured only the names of foundations and their links to business networks, but it provided a kind of information that was simpler and more readable for ordinary people. Meanwhile, the process of dissemination continued intensively, especially by e-mails corresponding to Indonesian mailing lists. Just a few months after Aditjondro posted his article—especially by March–April 1998—the information about Suharto's wealth had effectively spread throughout cyberspace.

In April 1998, some activists published their online tabloid first edition, called "Indonesia Baru." While publishing this politically related information, they also described five ways to disseminate information in their website. Two of these were as follows: (1) Print out this homepage's contents and fax them to your friends; and (2) photocopy the printout, then give it to non-Internet users (Indonesia Baru, 1998). The latter suggestion was a true breakthrough. Other websites thus published the same request.

From April to May 1998, many mysterious faxes—sent anonymously and carrying various messages, the most popular of which was the "list of Suharto's wealth"—came into private and public offices in major cities in Indonesia. The people in those offices—from directors to janitors—became aware of this information and were willing to spread this information to other people within their networks.

The printout version of this information was also disseminated. Many *warnet* in Bandung put the list on their announcement board, together with other Net-related issues such as the "top-10 hot IRC chat rooms." The *warnet* users then spread the list to other *warnet* users and sent the photocopied materials to nonusers.

The photocopied version of the "list of Suharto's wealth" was commonly found on the streets during March–May 1998. Newspaper sellers and street-vendors sold this

photocopied version at traffic lights, gas stations, and bus stops and stations. In Bandung, one page of a copy of the list sold for 1,000 rupiahs (approximately US$.10). From here, the information reached ordinary people in cars, motorcycles, buses, and other public transport.

In Jakarta, two social groups had speedy access to political information: (1) taxi drivers, who always knew where the students held or would hold street demos, and who updated their passengers with this information, partly just to avoid traffic jams, and (2) the *warung*-owners near universities, where students live and engage in their activities. These ordinary people developed sympathy for the students, listened to their gripes, and occasionally supplied them with food. The cabs and the *warung* thus became small local hubs in the information flow. From these and other hubs, politically charged information reached many people. The traditional style of networking information had been awakened. The end result was the creation of resistance identities that spread from a small segment of society to the mass scale of civil society and, after thirty-two years of Suharto's authoritarian rule, rose up to overthrow his regime.

As the information reached innumerable people from various walks of life, it was finally time to launch a real mass-based anti-hegemonic movement. The accumulation of collective resistances reached its peak in May 1998, when students and ordinary people joined to demand that President Suharto step down. Greatly affected by the impact of the military's violent practices, which resulted in the death of some students during the protests, an intense social movement reverberated through civil society, generating an authentic political revolution that culminated in Suharto's resignation as president on 21 May 1998.

Various actors took key roles in the successful dissemination of information during this process. The informants (e.g., Aditjondro) and the first layer of disseminators (e.g., the owners of Munindo, Pijar, and Indonesian Daily News Online) were mostly based abroad.[5] The second layer consisted of Internet users in Indonesia who, for the most part, had accessed the information from the *warnet*. Comprising the third layer were the mediators (e.g., newspaper sellers, street-vendors, taxi drivers, and *warung*-owners) who connected the "elite" with ordinary people). And the final layer was made up of average citizens at large. The interconnectedness of all actors from all of these layers created the necessary multiplier effects for information dissemination to result in mass mobilization and political reform.

Indeed, the Indonesia story shows how meaningless the previously mentioned figure of "1 percent" was as an indication of the scope and impact of the Internet's spread of information. As the crisis broke, Indonesian authorities had no geared-up plans for controlling or censoring the Internet and were quite naïve about its political potential—in stark contrast to the methods the regime had used to censor previous forms of communications and media. This situation put the Internet in a unique position to support antiregime social movements. Under such an immense crisis, it was easier for civil society—including cyber- as well as student-activists—to make use of the Internet to awaken and tap into traditional networks of information that had been suppressed under the authoritarian regime. Through such nonhierarchical networks, social groups could have multiple horizontal as well as vertical interconnections. Uneducated, elderly, technologically blind, poor, female, and other marginalized segments

of society no longer faced a cumulative set of barriers to participation in transforming
the spaces of information flows.

The Retreat of the Civil Society Movement
and the Rise of the Corporate Economy

Even though it was available to only a small segment of Indonesian society, it is clear,
from the events of May 1998, that the Internet has become a novel space for informa-
tion exchanges. It has enabled political discourse to be carried out without substantial
barriers and thus, together with the traditional network that brought information to
the public, has accelerated the transformation of Indonesian society into a more dem-
ocratic one.

   Although the new informational web of the Internet intensified the political rev-
olution in Indonesia, since the fall of Soharto it has not supported a continuation of
the civil society momentum toward reform. Up to the point when the revolution
reached its zenith in May 1998, people had focused on a common agenda, which was
confronting the government. However, after the May 1998 political revolution, the so-
ciety did not know what to do next. Like its predecessor, the new, semidemocratic gov-
ernment lacks a clear political agenda or strategy, placing society in a chaotic political-
social-economic situation.

   The new post-Suharto democratizing yet unstable regimes have embraced more
openly than ever before the world economy of the transnational corporations (TNCs).
The International Monetary Fund, acting as an agent of TNC globalization and using
loans to cover the Asia finance crisis of 1997 as its leverage, has compelled Indonesia
to open its economy to trade and investment and to privatize its government-owned
companies and institutions. This circumstance has provided the TNCs with unprece-
dented opportunities to capture the spaces of information flows and to create another
front in of accumulation in cyberspace. At the same time, economic reform is worsen-
ing the political-social-economic situation by diverting public resources from social
funds to subsidize competition for vagabond capital (Douglass, 2002b). The student
movement continuously confronts the new government but without a clear vision,
adding to the chaos. Currently, individual interest has taken over the political agenda
of civil society, while communal interests are pitting elements of civil society against
each other around issues of race and religion—thereby undermining the "civil" attri-
butes of civil society (Lim, 2002).

   Thus while civil society movements are dissipating, and the state is in a state of
chronic instability, a shift is occurring in hegemonic tendencies away from authoritar-
ian regimes toward global capital. As evidence of this shift, *warnet*, which used to be-
long to the younger generation and students, are being seized by big national corpora-
tions and TNCs. A new corporate economy has entered the arena and is steadily
capturing this valuable treasure of civil society. One of the most ambitious companies
is M-Web Holding Limited, a South African media-giant that has also invested in
Thailand, China, Namibia, and Zimbabwe (M-Web, 2001). Starting its business by

acquiring Cabinet, an Indonesian ISP, in May 2000, M-Web saw the *warnet* as a prospective target for monopolizing the Internet business in Indonesia. Thus, in January 2001, it acquired PT Warnet Gemilang (M-Web, 2002), a company that has linked nine big *warnet* in Jakarta. Subsequently, in collaboration with many universities in major Indonesian cities (e.g., the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, the Institute of Technology Sepuluh November in Surabaya, and the University of Gajah Mada in Yogyakarta), M-Web set up a biggest *warnet*-network in Indonesia (M-Web, 2002). In less than one year M-Web has already established more than 1,500 stations in its *warnet*-network in Indonesia.

The M-web type of *warnet* is nothing like the small, old-generation version with its simple, traditional look. One Internet center—the "Student Internet Centre"—has more than 30 screens; others have more than 200. An appropriate name for it would be "Net-mall," because it resembles a shopping mall much more than a simple *warung*.

M-Web has also killed the individual *warnet* businesses located near its Internet centers, which cannot compete with this giant company (NatnitNet, 2001). By announcing its goal of "making the Internet widely available for everybody, especially students," M-Web has successfully drawn universities into its commercial ground, and with its motto "Everything is provided here," it ties the students to a commodified identity. M-Web and other actors of the corporate economy are increasingly commercializing and controlling the Internet through giant *warnet*, ISPs, and other Internet-related business.

As a result of this shift of ownership from the "people" to the corporate economy, the Internet is on the way to becoming a sanitized medium. While the change in the places where people access the Internet might not by itself lead to such an effect, it is the damage done to the link between Internet use and civil society that is crucial.

Conclusion

The Indonesian political revolution of May 1998 may be considered an Internet-"coincident" revolution, but in fact the Internet was not the only or even the principal source of information for social mobilization leading to the downfall of Suharto. However, it is clear that the Internet emerged in Indonesia at precisely the time when other forms of media were being tightly controlled and traditional networks of information circulation could still be tapped. The most important factor was not cyberspace itself but, rather, the linkages between cyberspace: cyber nodes such as the *warnet* and the physical spaces of cities, towns, and villages.

Manuel Castells (1996: 469) argues that, in the current information age, dominant functions and processes are increasingly being organized around networks. Networks constitute the social morphology of our society, and the diffusion of networking logic has substantially modified the operation and outcomes involved in the processes of production, experience, power, and culture. While the networking form of social organization such as the *warung* has existed in other times and spaces, the *warnet* paradigm has provided the basis for its near-simultaneous expansion throughout the entire social structure. The power of network flows has become more impor-

tant than the specific interests they represent, so it is vital now to be present in a network and not to be excluded from it. At a certain moment in history, the nodes of cyberspace—*warnet* and *warung*-like settings—joined to create a powerful network that, in the case of Indonesia at the end of the twentieth century, was more dynamic than the collapsing networks of the state-corporate economy. Castells refers to this outcome as "the pre-eminence of social morphology over social action" (1996: 469), a pre-eminence that is the main characteristic of network society.

Today, the Indonesian state is still trying to recover from the crisis. Civil society is no longer so critical of government in terms of democratic reform, though the latter continues to be an issue. More generally, the concern is shifting to the corporate economy. This new juggernaut can potentially depoliticize cyber-exchanges by transforming civil society into little more than a sum of individual consumers having no identity other than the biggest name brands and latest corporate commodities. Thus, as noted earlier, the Internet may potentially become a sanitized, homogenous medium whose main function is to sell consumerism to people and people to advertisers. Hence the threat to the Internet's role as an ideal public sphere, one that facilitates a rational-critical discourse where everyone is an equal participant and supreme communication skill is the power of argument (Habermas, 1991). This deformation of the public sphere is happening through the growth of culture industries and the penetration of large private interests into the ownership and control of cyberspace. Large companies are devoted to maximizing profit and turning the Internet into an agent of manipulation toward the same end. As summarized by Jürgen Habermas (1991: 185), through the shift from state to corporate hegemony "it [becomes] the gate through which privileged private interest invaded the public sphere."

Cyberspace and the *warnet,* as well as all the traditional social networks attached to them in Indonesia, are now back to their long sleep, hidden under the flood of consumerism and waiting for students or civil society or society at large to wake them up. Like the developmental state of the Suharto government, this global corporate force seeks hegemony over social power and identity while masking state-corporate relations that continue to threaten the rise of an authentic, politically active society. Sustaining an active civil-society presence in the public sphere thus faces formidable challenges related to both state and corporate economic penetration of the virtual and actual physical spheres of power. Technology in general, and use of the Internet in particular, must therefore be seen as comprising a dynamically changing milieu in which political struggles will continue into the future. Whether the new shadow will be the commodified world of economic exchange spreading over local communities and culture is a question for further research to answer as globalization continues to weaken government as a source of regulation over the economy and submerges nation-states in the turbulence of successive international crises.

Notes

1. *Pancasila* is literally translated as "five principles." These principles are fundamental for the society.

2. The e-mail address for Apakabar is Indonesia-l@indopub.com.

3. Aditjondro fled Indonesia a short time after his lecture in Yogyakarta in 1994.

This lecture, about the oligarchy of the political regime, was claimed to be insulting the President Suharto. The police interrogated him after the lecture. Knowing that he would not be able to escape from the Indonesian government's hegemonic trap, which could possibly end his career, he decided to fly to Australia before the state took any further actions. When Aditjondro arrived in Australia, the state attempted to bring him to court. But this action was fruitless since Aditjondro had already been outside the geographical boundary of the Indonesian government's authority (Munindo, 1998).

4. One title was *Daftar Isi Kekayaan Eyang Kakung,* or "The List of Grandfather's Wealth" (Luknanto, 1998a). *Eyang kakung* is a family-oriented Javanese term that literally means "grandfather" (or "great-grandfather"). It is generally used to confer respect and thus reflects good manners. In this regard, the positive connotation of this word was intended to humiliate Suharto, a grandfather "not worthy of respect." At the same time, the term implied that Suharto was no longer the "father" of the nation-state but, rather, was outdated and old and should have stepped down long ago.

5. The cyber-activists who operated Munindo, Indonesian Daily News Online, and Pijar were based in Germany.

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