

# Countering Ahok, Countering the Public: An Investigation of Counter-public Sphere in the Cyberspace

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## **Abstract**

*This paper analysis how Buni Yani used social media – in this case his Facebook account - to counter the Indonesian mainstream public sphere in order to challenge its domination that predominantly started series of Islamic rallies in Jakarta Aksi Bela Islam by the end of 2016. Using the theory of public sphere as described by Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990) and its transfer to the realm of Internet (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2009), this paper shows that Buni Yani used all the three stages of public spheres as explained in the theory: encounters, public events, and mass media communication to successfully force a political issue into the arena of debate in the communication system and in the end changed the political outcome in Jakarta: Ahok's detainment and consequently his inability to hold his Governor post any longer. The strategic communication by Buni Yani was not only successful to offer/force a new topic in the public daily communication but also to mobilize thousands of Islamic sympathizers in a series of demonstrations to support his view. All the materials used for this analyses are mainly obtained from online sources.*

## **Keywords:**

*Counter-public Sphere; Internet; Social Media; Ahok; Social Movement*

## **INTRODUCTION**

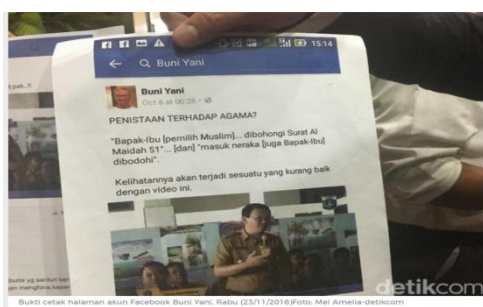
Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or better known through his nickname, Ahok, was is the Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta until June 15, 2017 (effectively suspended by May 9, 2017). During his official visit to Thousand Islands on September 27, 2016, he cited one of the holy verses of the Qur'an, the Surah Al-Maidah, verse 51. Everything went normal and without drama at that place. Even the audience were laughing when Ahok said those things (Castells, 2015). The video documentation of the visit including the controversial Ahok's speech was available on Youtube and could be accessed by the

public as well. The situation changed 180 degrees when Buni Yani, an academician who once worked as a journalist, added a "defamation" frame to Ahok's video which he partly uploaded on his Facebook account a week later. Since then, political turmoil began in the Jakarta and Indonesian political scene, where the residue of it is still felt until the time of this writing.

Responding to the concerns of Thousand Islands residents about the possibility of the termination of Ahok's program there, were he not reelected at the then upcoming governor election, Ahok, by quoting the Quran, said at that time, "So,

*don't believe them, perhaps in your deepest heart you are not allowed to choose me (in the next election), right? You're lied using Surah Al-Maidah (Verse) 51, all kinds of it. That's your right (not to choose me). So, if you feel that (I) cannot be chosen anymore, because 'I'm afraid of going to hell' because (you're) fooled, so yes, I'm okay with it."* (Downey, et.al. 2003).

When Buni Yani updated his Facebook status on October 6, 2016 that included 31 seconds of Ahok's video (from a total of 1 hour 45 minutes), he intentionally/unintentionally left out the word "using" (see Picture 1) in the transcription. The omission of that word had changed the meaning of Ahok's statement totally: from being "lied/fooled using Surah Al-Maidah" to being "lied/fooled [by] Surah Al-Maidah". The



**Picture 1.** Print out of Buni Yani's Facebook status that triggered a wave of demonstrations, which ultimately brought down Ahok from the position of Governor of Jakarta (Galtung, 1971).

first places the Quran as a tool of an action that carried out by a person, the latter

personifies the Quran and makes it the subject that performs an action (the act of lying).

In his later statement, after a public outburst caused by Buni Yani's post, Ahok clarified his statement, stating that he was referring to his political opponents who often politicize religion (Gerhards, et.al. 1990) to attack him (Gerhards, et.al. 2009). Ahok, a member of minority groups in 3 categories (a Christian, an ethnic Chinese, and a non-Java politician), was not a new kid on the block of Indonesian politics. According to him, since he started his political career in Bangka-Belitung province, from which he comes, his opponents often used religious issues and the Al-Maidah 51 to defeat him (Goffman, 1961). In Kepulauan Seribu, although he didn't mention the subject of his words, but from an objective standpoint, he clearly didn't mean to insult the Quran, Islam nor the Muslims.

Unfortunately, the Indonesian Islamic community, especially the rather conservative one, had other ideas. Provoked by Buni Yani's frame, groups of masses in the name of the whole Muslim communities had gone angry. What came were series of anti-Ahok massive demonstrations on the streets of Jakarta. They called themselves Aksi Bela Islam or

Aksi Bela Al-Qur'an (Action to Defend Islam/the Qur'an) (see Picture 2). There were at least four such rallies carried out in the streets of Jakarta: on November 4, 2016 or known as "411", on December 2, 2016 (or 212), on February 11, 2017 (or 112) and on March 31, 2017 (or 313), organized by GNPf-MUI (National Movement to Guard MUI's Fatwa), an umbrella organ that established shortly after the MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) published its stance about the incident, stating that Ahok had despised Islam. Within the GNPf-MUI itself were incorporated several Islamic organizations, such as HMI, FUI, and the hardline Islamist organization FPI, led by a controversial figure Rizieq Shihab, who became the 'motor' of the actions.



**Picture 2.** Aksi Bela Islam 3 or the 3rd Action to Defend Islam 212 on December 2, 2016 that covered Sudirman-Thamrin street and the HI-Square in Jakarta city center (Habermas, 1991).

Meanwhile, Buni Yani himself has admitted his mistake in removing the word "using" at the ILC (Indonesian Lawyers

Club) show on TV One on October 11, 2016. But it was too late to stop the mass movement of the Islamists.

The outcome of this scandal was at least threefold. First, in May 2017 Ahok was sentenced 2 years in prison and with that verdict, it effectively ended his career as the governor of Jakarta. Second, it has polarized Indonesian civil society even further into two camps: the anti-Ahok and the pro-Ahok group. Three, it fuels intolerance towards minority groups in Indonesia and dangers Indonesian multiculturalism conceptualized in the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

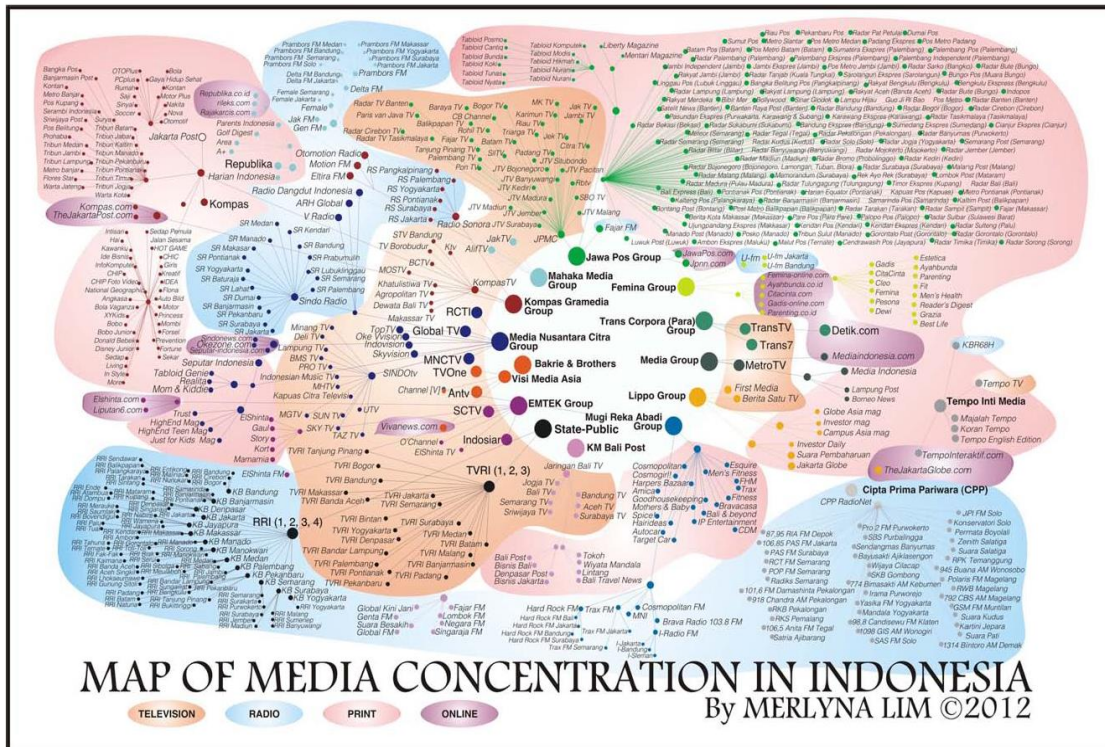
This paper aims to shed some lights into this case from the perspective of communication. It is a communicative analysis, emphasizing the use of new media in influencing the forming of public opinion that in turn inciting successful Islamic social movements to topple down Ahok from his governor post. The theory of public sphere and counter-public sphere will be used to highlight the Islamists' resistance position against the dominant Ahok as portrayed by the mainstream media. However, in order to understand from the communication perspective why Ahok was dominating mass media public sphere at that time, we need to understand

first the current landscape of Indonesian media.

### **State of the art of Indonesian media landscape**

If we look at the Indonesian media system, it is currently dominated by the media industry which resided mostly in the capital city of Jakarta. Merlyna Lim (2012) in *The League of Thirteen* found that all 10 national television stations are located in Jakarta. In addition to public broadcasters (TVRI/RRI) (Habermas, 1991), they are dominating the Indonesian media landscape (see Picture 3). This is not in accordance with the Indonesian Broadcasting Law, where television companies must operate in network system in order to broadcast nationally. Thus, this constellation makes Indonesian media are concentrated in Jakarta. Other media groups that also counted as the big players are Kompas Gramedia Group, Jawa Pos Group, Lippo Group, Femina Group, and Bali Post Group. However, they do not operate free-to-air national television broadcasting. But, the fact that these companies are also located in Jakarta, Surabaya (Jawa Pos) and Bali (Bali Post), makes Indonesian media system far from decentralized.

To make things worse, that 10 national private television stations (excluding TVRI) are owned by the so called five “media moguls” who four of them are or were politically active, either as the chief of a political party, or as a presidential candidate or simply working closely with the government as a Minister. Hary Tanoesudibjo, the owner of MNC Group that owns three national television stations: RCTI, MNCTV, and Global TV, is the founder and chief of Perindo Party. His party’s advertisements can be seen every day in those three television stations, not to mention in other media that he owns, such as radio, print, and online. His constant and persistent political campaigns show us his ambition to be the next Indonesian president. Similar to him, Surya Paloh, the owner of Media Group that controls Metro TV and newspaper Media Indonesia, is the founder and chief of Nasdem Party. He was an old fox in Indonesian politics by being a member of Golkar party for a long time before went on to establish his own political party. Nasdem is now part of the government coalition. In the coalition sits also Golkar party, which in the last presidential election in 2014 challenged Joko Widodo, now the president of Indonesia, by supporting his opponent Prabowo



Picture 3. Map of Media Concentration in Indonesia (Lim, 2012, p. 2).

Subianto, before making the U-turn later and joined the government coalition. In 2014, Golkar was led by Aburizal Bakrie, whose family owns two national televisions TV One and ANTV. Meanwhile, Trans TV and Trans 7, another two national broadcasting corporations, are the daughter companies of Trans Corpora (Para Group) that also owns Indonesian largest online news portal detik.com and chainstores Transmart and Carrefour. Para Group is owned by Chairul Tanjung, a former Coordinating Minister for Economics and former Chief of the National Committee for Economics under the SBY's administration (Kersting, 2014).

Looking at those backgrounds of Indonesian media ownership constellation, it is difficult to expect balanced reporting from those media. We can forget internal pluralism in each media, because of their partisan policy and their market-oriented nature, whereas external pluralism is still a big question mark due to lack of diversity of ownership and biased reporting. When business and politics collide in Indonesian media industry, sadly, we are now seeing the colonization of media networks by political networks.

Because the networks of mainstream media are controlled by the big media players, in Picture 3, in the center, it is somewhat difficult for those who live in

Indonesian peripheries that means outside Jakarta or Java and Bali, to be even considered important or relevant by the media, thus, to be considered significant to appear in the public sphere. Center-periphery relations can be seen also from the perspective of power relations. Those who are close to media networks and/or political networks find it easy for their interests and opinions to be represented by the mainstream media in the public sphere. On the contrary, marginalized groups that are pushed to the periphery of public sphere need special strategy for media to be aware of their existence and their voices. It is therefore a constant power struggle between center and periphery to seize public attention in the public sphere that in turn will affect the construction of public opinion, which is important ingredient for political decision-making.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Public Sphere, Counter-public Sphere and Public Opinion

But what does it mean with public sphere? Generally, public sphere refers to public affairs. It could also everything that is not private, rather, it can be accessed by the public or öffentlich. Indeed, public sphere or Öffentlichkeit in German language is derived from the word

öffentlich. That means all public affairs that are open and not covert and taken into consideration by the state and may become object of public discussion. We also often relate public sphere to the opinions of the majority of the citizen and therefore talk about public opinion. Although actually public opinion does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the majority. Public opinion is not the sum of opinions of the citizen, rather it represents the public through intermediary process, in which mass media play a big role in the construction of public opinion (cf. Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1990, p. 4).

Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990) view public sphere as an arena of contesting opinion and interest of the public. They highlight the functions of public sphere as an intermediary between political system and civil society. Seen from the system perspective, the functions, as well as dysfunctions, of the public sphere can be evaluated through the communicative process of input-throughput-output mechanism. Inspired by Habermas, Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990) developed a structured classification of the public sphere. Three main intermediary functions of the public sphere are:



- a) Selective/transparency function (input): taken up issue, interest, opinion from the public.
- b) Validation function (throughput): process information, give meaning, gate keeping, framing.
- c) Articulation function (output): synthesize public opinion, agenda setting.

However, in order for public sphere to function, it has to be institutionalized. And in modern society, mass media are still the most powerful institution to take this position and stimulate public debate.

Meanwhile, Noelle-Neumann (in Schutz & Rössler, 2013) views public sphere as a quasi-statistical organ with which we orient ourselves in the society. It possesses a latent function that works as social control. Noelle-Neumann's integration model (in oppose to the elite model) of public sphere gives the public an orientation of which opinion or political position is dominant at a given time and is 'save' to be expressed or articulated before the public. Those who disagree with the dominant public opinion could suffer from the threat of public isolation and are forced to be silent. Sometimes, the number of the "silent majority" outweighs the "small elites" who dominate public discussion.

But the "fear of isolation" has forced them to go underground.

In Habermas's descriptive-normative approach, public sphere is conceptualized as a discursive space of rational-critical debate that can be equally accessed by all citizens through which public opinion is formed (1991). He referred at first to the bourgeois public sphere though, thus neglecting the communicative dynamics at the grassroots level. He then revised his theory and recognized the existence of the proletarian/plebeian public sphere, that characterized by horizontal communication and by the use of alternative media. This kind of public sphere was born during the peak of new social movements (feminist movement, human rights movement, environmental movement) and later known as the counter-public sphere against the dominant, mass media controlled public sphere (Downey & Fenton, 2003). Today, due to the advance of new ICTs, people use mostly Internet as alternative media that give them the opportunity to form the so-called "virtual counter-public sphere". New ICTs open up the opportunity for the periphery to articulate opinion and interest and "touch" the political system via autonomous "invented" public sphere, in oppose to dependent "invited" mass

communication public sphere (see Kersting, 2014, p. 55).

### Habermas's Center-periphery Model

For Habermas, public sphere is an intermediary space of communication between civil society in the peripheries and political system in the center. Other scholars put the market as a separate system. So, social world contains political system, civil society or the "live world" and in addition to that, market system.

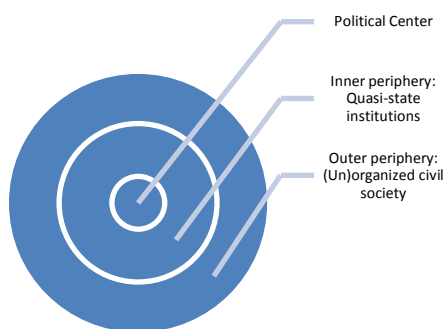
The political center consists of the whole governing system: the government and its administration, the parliament, and the judiciary system, as well as political parties. Meanwhile, he divided peripheries into two categories: the inner periphery and the outer periphery. The "quasi-state institutions" such as universities, foundations, public insurance system are located in the inner-side of periphery. Interest groups, civil society organizations,

private organizations, charitable organizations as well as unorganized private citizen/civil society actors are in the outer-periphery (Habermas, 1996, p. 354-355) (see Picture 4).

Public organization such as Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are somewhere between the inner and outer-periphery because there are NGOs that close to the public institutions and state actors as well as NGOs that are closer to the grassroots, for instance NGOs that concentrate more on their advocacy activities. But the description of center and periphery is actually not that simple. The analysis of Galtung (1971) on imperialism reveals that there are also Center in the Center, Periphery in the Center, Center in the Periphery, and Periphery in the Periphery.

### Levels of Public Sphere

When describing public sphere, Gerhards and Neidhardt (1990) speak from an open communication system, whose form is differentiated according to its number of participants in the communication process and the "degree of structural embeddedness" of each level. The level distinctions indicate that public sphere is distinguished by its method of information collection, processing, and



**Picture 3.** Picture 4. Center-periphery model following Habermas (1996) (author's illustration).



application. Furthermore, “levels” represent the existence of different steps of an “autonomous system of public sphere” as well (p. 19-20).

Relying on several other scholars, Gerhards and Neidhardt conceptualize three levels of public sphere:

1. Simple interaction system

This is the lowest level of public sphere in which its participants interact with each other spontaneously in public transports, parks, on the streets, or in the waiting room of a doctor’s office. It is characterized by its two-way, face-to-face communication process, unorganized communication structure, less impact on society and short term effect. Goffman’s (1961) “encounter” and Luhmann’s (1986, p. 75) “communication au trottoir” are two concepts similar to this kind of public sphere (Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1990, p. 20-22; cf. Gerhards & Schäfer, 2009, p. 2).

2. Public events

This type of public sphere is slightly organized in its structure and has more impact on society. ‘Specialist’ and ‘opinion leaders’ start to develop and normally they control and dominate the communication environment. Its participants share their identity and

perspective, and therefore rather homogenous than that of the first level. Issues that they discuss are more focused due to its organizational character. Examples of this kind of public sphere include mass demonstrations, political campaigns, and public meetings and lectures (Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1990, p. 22-23; cf. Gerhards & Schäfer, 2009, p. 2).

3. Mass media communication

The last one in this category is the classical mass media public sphere. It benefits from the “full-fledged technical and organizational infrastructure and [is] dominated by specialists like journalists, experts and collective actors ...” (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2009, p. 2). Ordinary citizens take passive role of receiver as the communication process is rather one-way. Furthermore, it has the advantage of reaching large audience and therefore the effect of communication is arguably stronger (seen from the positivist perspective). The media can take diverse issues into account at a short time and have more influence in the formation of public opinion. However, they cannot escape from the critics of biased reporting due

to “economic pressure and political preferences” (ibid., p. 3). Hence, the participatory model of this public sphere is somewhat limited and bias to those who are close to the center because the media prefer “powerful and institutionalized actors” (ibid.) to be appeared in their ‘arena’ and ignore less important institutions and less empowered civil society (see the discussion on center-periphery relation above) (Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1990, p. 23-26).

### **Transfer to Cyberspace**

Following the changing nature of media practice due to widely use of the internet, it can be justified if one questions how is the constellation of the public sphere nowadays, in regards to Gerhards and Neidhardt’s typology of the public sphere. Since not all parts of civil society have access to the traditional public sphere or are considered relevant by mass media, new media gives more opportunity for civil society to participate in the public sphere and therefore influence the formation of public opinion, which in turn can affect political decision making process for their favor. In pursuing the answer to this question, Gerhards & Schäfer (2009) compared old and new media in the US

and Germany and raised question whether the Internet is a better public sphere. In doing so, they equal ‘encounter’ public sphere with email and personal messaging applications, public event with discussion boards, blogs, and social media groups, and mass media public sphere with search engines respectively. However, they didn’t specifically categorize social media in their analysis and therefore it is still open to discuss what social media equivalent to? Does it constitute a special form of online public sphere? Or of counter-public sphere? Nevertheless, according to their research result, Gerhards & Schäfer (ibid.) didn’t support the popular claim that internet provides better public sphere than the old mass media public sphere. The communication in the internet is even more one-sided that that in the print media (ibid, p.6, 13). This is due to structural precondition, its openness characteristics and low level of professionalism that hinder the internet public sphere from performing its functions (see above). The challenge is now, however, finding way to exploit new media, as alternative media, to which we have free access, in order to make online activism effective for the benefit of the people who are positioned in the periphery.

In the effort to explain this process, this paper will take a closer look at the Ahok’s

case. In doing so, we should keep in mind the definition of public sphere as an arena of contesting opinions of elements of civil society and as a space where people have equal opportunity to participate in discussing public affairs that affect them.

#### Case analysis

First, the public opinion that was dominating mass communication public sphere was that Islamic fundamentalism, as a political category, was cornered into the periphery position. They were portrayed negatively and people rarely wanted to be openly associated with those 'type' of Islamic interpretation (tafsir). Ahok was the anti-thesis of it. And because he was close-related with the media and supported by political parties who own media (Nasdem party: Media Group; Kompas Gramedia Group, although doesn't have any direct relation with any political parties, but this group shares political values with Ahok, e.g. pluralism, multiculturalism, moderate interpretation of religion, secularism, etc.), he became "media darling" and dominated media coverage even before he took over governor's role from Joko Widodo. His eccentric, controversial, and non-compromise behavior have only added to media attraction, for which the media were more than happy to buy for the sake of

sensationalism. For Ahok's opponents it was difficult to defeat him at that time, both in the political and in the media arena.

Suddenly, opportunity came along with Ahok's controversial statement that started counter-action from the side of his opponents. It was for blessing in disguise for them. Ahok's unintentional error was exploited by Buni Yani via his Facebook status that proved later to have multiplied its controversy effect and pushed its way to the mass media public sphere. Here, Habermas (1996) reiterates the importance of controversial aspect for periphery-civil society in which he says,

Only through their controversial presentation in the media do such topics reach the larger public and subsequently gain a place on the "public agenda." Sometimes the support of sensational actions, mass protests, and incessant campaigning is required before an issue can make its way via the surprising election of marginal candidates or radical parties, expanded platforms of "established" parties, important court decisions, and so on, into the core of the political system and there receive formal consideration. (p. 381, emphasis added by author).

By removing part of Ahok's speech and adding his own frame, i.e. the "defamation" frame, via social media, Buni Yani has clearly spun Ahok's statement and presented the event in a controversial way. Even though manipulative in its nature, spin-doctoring is a common practice in a political campaign. According to Wikipedia, spin is a form of propaganda, achieved through providing a biased interpretation of an event or campaigning to persuade public opinion in favor or against some organization or public figure, spin often implies the use of disingenuous, deceptive, and highly manipulative tactics, a standard tactic used in spinning is to reframe, reposition, or otherwise modify the perception of an issue of event, to reduce any negative impact it might have on public opinion. Spin approaches used include selectively cherry-picking quotes from previous speeches made by their employer or an opposing politician to give the impression that they advocate a certain position; and purposely leaking misinformation about an opposing politician or candidate that casts them in a negative light (Lim, 2012).

From the point of view of a person who happened to be in the periphery position, spin-doctoring via mass media was unlikely because of his marginal position

and negative image in the mainstream media. Hence, choosing social media, to which he had free access, for spinning practice, was rational enough.

It is the nature of online communication (or in principal, of communication), that when something goes viral, the sender of the message can rarely control her or his original communication again. That is why, from this point onwards, Buni Yani couldn't predict the outcome of his statement anymore because it already became public consumption and was free to translate or be given meaning by whoever read that Facebook status without looking at the original Ahok's speech. But, unfortunately, frame was already constructed and thrown onto the internet which, in turn, reproduced and partially re-spun by various interest groups, particularly among Buni Yani's followers.

Sensational expression of opinion could be a weapon for grassroots movement to be detected by the radar of mainstream media driven by their market orientation. "Bad news is good news" is like a journalistic mantra, which minority groups can benefit from. Even the radical groups in a society, who normally neglected by political center, including mass media, can exploit such mechanism

of news production in conventional mass media, in order for them to be counted and gain wider publication. Downey and Fenton (2003) acknowledge that "... the internet permits radical groups from both Left and Right ... to construct inexpensive virtual counter-public spheres to accompany their other forms of organization and protest ... The internet offers them a way not only of communicating with supporters, but also the potential to reach out beyond the 'radical ghetto' both directly (disintegration) and indirectly, through influencing the mass media." (p. 198)

This is exactly what happened after Buni Yani posted his biased Facebook status. The followers and participants of Aksi Bela Islam were not only members of radical groups of, for instance, Islamic Defender Front (FPI), but also common, unaffiliated Muslim, who felt disturbed yet provoked by both Ahok's statement and Buni Yani's frame. This proves that Aksi Bela Islam has directly and indirectly reached out beyond the "radical ghetto" by adding more followers via mass media coverage on a daily basis. By doing so, minority groups have grown bigger and become significant enough for mass media public sphere to be considered and can even contribute to "destabilize" the

traditional public sphere and force mass media to reconstruct the structure of public sphere (cf. *ibid.*, p. 199). The success of GNPF-MUI and its followers in breaking into the public debate in the general public sphere and forcing out its interpretation of the case to become public opinion, was an answer to a wider criticism of alternative media for their "lack of success in reaching out beyond the radical ghetto" (Curran, 2000, p. 193 in *ibid.*, p. 196). This is also another prove that public sphere is rather dynamic rather than static (see Downey and Fenton, 2003, p. 186).

Referencing to Gerhards and Neidhardt's (1990) functions of public sphere, internet has been fulfilled the function of transparency. Ahok's statement was freely accessible to the public via Youtube video and could be considered as an input in a virtual public sphere mechanism. Buni Yani took up this opportunity as a political issue that he thought deserved public attention. Nevertheless, after Buni Yani's spin-doctoring action of the case, online public sphere failed to function as a validator of the issue. This validity dysfunction in the throughput process occurred because the public failed to counter-argue Buni Yani's claim about Ahok's allegedly defamation of the Quran. Though some facts about Buni

Yani's error quote were laid out, those counter-arguments lost in the battle of public opinion building. This was proved as series of massive Islamic demonstrations took place and therefore legitimized Buni Yani's defamation frame as a public opinion that favored the periphery. This was the output of a counter-public sphere operation. At the end, one could argue that virtual counter-public sphere has won the battle in the arena of contesting opinion and interest of the public.

### Impacts

The impacts of Buni Yani's and GNPf-MUI's 'controversial presentations' were/are massive. It had attracted public attention and led to series of mass mobilization: a combination of offline protest and online counter-publicity, in other words, a "hybrid space" (Castells, 2015). It systematically drew media attention which influenced public agenda and incited public debates, which, in turn, formed public opinion. The forming of public opinion was crucial for political agenda, which again, in turn, could determine the direction of public policy that affected Indonesian civil society at large.

The reaction of the Indonesian government was instantaneous, as it gains

momentum by evaluating the Civil Organization Law (UU Ormas). Recently, the revision of the Law was agreed, issued, and immediately executed by banning Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an Indonesian Islamic organization with global affiliation that aims for the return of the caliphate. Consequently, this reaction from the government has again drawn public debate on how they are handling the issue & executing the law. The public has been very critical, accusing the government of being authoritative and repressive, against democratic principles and even so far as labeling them being not much different than the New Order regime in regards to eliminating political opponents. At the grassroots level, this phenomenon has polarized the Indonesian civil society even further into two camps: the anti- and pro-Ahok groups, or if we relate the case to the national politics: the anti- and pro-Jokowi, or if we go beyond that: the conservatives and the moderates. Subsequently, this reality adds up to a wider concern that we need to address: do the new and plural counter-public spheres contribute to better intersubjectivity, mutual-understanding and social integration or to greater fragmentation (see Downey & Fenton, 2003, p. 200)?

## CONCLUSION

From this experience, we learn that the internet, particularly social media is vital for amplifying the power of marginalized people or the periphery to influence the mechanism of traditional, mass mediated public sphere. For periphery to reach the center of communication power, in this case reflected by the 'coup' upon traditional mass communication public sphere, the use of networks for message/information/frame circulation and distribution is decisive. In the case of Ahok, civil society networks that were against Ahok were actually already there, for instance religious networks (represented by FPI and later by GNPF-MUI, but also by smaller but well-organized Islamic cells in campuses and neighborhoods), political networks (represented by Gerindra Party, PKS and other political parties in the old Red and White Coalition) and ethnic-based networks (mostly from Betawi ethnic represented among other by Forum Komunikasi Betawi, Forum Betawi Rempug (FBR), and Jawara Betawi) (Luhmann, 1986). Unfortunately, their powers were separated. Through issue building and its 'controversial presentation', suddenly they found solidarity. The internet, utilized by political actors, activists and their followers via

social media, was then able to unite their power and even amplified it by making it a collective movement. Their collective power was successfully activated.

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