Book Review

Media and Transformation in Germany and Indonesia. Asymmetrical Comparisons and Perspectives

Grüne, Anne; Hafez, Kai; Priyadharma, Subekti & Schmidt, Sabrina (eds.) (2019): Media and Transformation in Germany and Indonesia. Asymmetrical Comparisons and Perspectives. Berlin: Frank & Timme. 346 Seiten. ISBN 978-3-7329-0579-9.

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Twenty years ago, a book published by Curran and Park paved the way for a "De-Westernization" discourse in media and communication research. It has often been misunderstood as a simple call to include more non-Western countries in international studies. But in fact, the criticism of a Euro-American bias went deeper. It included the uncritical application of Western-centric theory and methodology to non-Western societies. This book stands in the tradition of the "De-Westernization" discourse, aiming to juxtapose "asymmetrical" perspectives on media and communication from two geographically and culturally distant countries—in this particular case Germany and Indonesia.
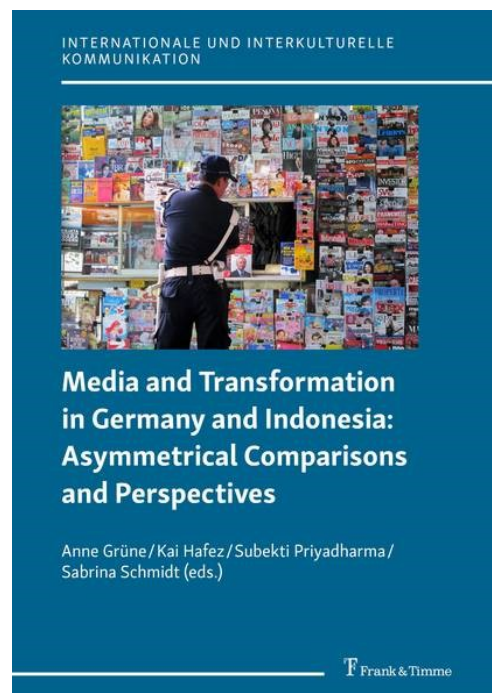
Before looking at the content in greater detail, it is important to note that the book documents the proceedings of an academic conference based on the collaborative project "Media Systems and Communication Cultures—Germany and Indonesia in Comparative Perspective". The project was jointly conducted by the University of Erfurt, Germany, and Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia, and funded by the *German Academic Exchange Service* (DAAD). The book assembles a series of manuscripts, several of which are instructive and potentially useful for further research. However, the connection between the individual contributions is rather loose. Some chapters even hardly relate to the overall topic of the book. Therefore, one should not expect an overarching, coherent methodology nor an in-depth comparative analysis in this book. Instead, each section closes with a brief documentation of a roundtable discussion that followed each panel of the conference, often highlighting similarities and differences between the analytical perspectives on German and Indonesian media landscapes.

The first section centers around the theme of *Media and Political Transformation*. Mira Rochyadi-Reetz and Martin Löffelholz start with a systematic comparison of the media systems in both countries. Their main theoretical references are the "Four Theories of the Press" study by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) as well as "Comparing Media Systems" by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The choice is surprising because at least the former is outdated and the latter is characterized by a clear Euro-American focus. An alternative would have been the approach by Blum (2014) who created a useful categorization of media systems that explicitly involves non-Western societies. Nevertheless, the chapter provides some interesting descriptive insights on major differences between both media systems, for instance regarding pluralism, professional autonomy, and media concentration. A more in-depth analysis of the Indonesian media system since 1945 is provided in the following chapter by Ade Armando. It outlines how various attempts to establish a liberal media system were effectively thwarted by authoritarian governments until 1998, when dictator Suharto resigned and a new democratic era ("reformation") began. However, the Indonesian media system remains deeply marked by the oscillation between media control and media freedom. The last contribution to this section is an analysis by Oliver Hahn and David Liewehr of the German federal election campaign in 2017. The chapter entails a concise summary of key aspects such as the successful communication strategy of the right-wing populist party AfD and the imploding campaign of the once promising social-democratic candidate Martin Schulz. However, due to its narrow focus, the contribution this chapter makes to the overall theme of the book remains relatively limited.

The second section focuses on *Media Representation and Racism*. It is opened by Sabrina Schmidt who discusses the connection between racism theory and the Habermasian public sphere. While the analysis is quite instructive from a theoretical point of view, it is also lengthy and not closely connected to the comparative perspective on German and Indonesian media systems. In her analysis, Schmidt makes a disputable claim stating that the Habermasian theory of the public sphere is uni-

versal and therefore can be meaningfully applied on democratic societies beyond the western world. Even for the case of Japan, another Asian country that has a much longer democratic tradition than Indonesia, scholars have voiced very serious doubts on the Habermasian concept being applicable on the Japanese media system. The theoretical analysis is followed by two empirical contributions that are among the most insightful pieces in this book. First, Ratna Noviani analyzes cinematic representation of "Chineseness" in Indonesia. The analysis is highly interesting because it is the first contribution to the volume that provides a qualitative understanding of how one of the many conflict lines in this multiethnic and multireligious country is portrayed by Indonesian filmmakers, ranging from othering to admiration. In a similar vein, Margreth Lünenborg offers an intriguing analysis of migrants' visual representations in German media. For instance, the author is able to demonstrate how different visual means are used to portray migrants as either anonymous or as visible human beings, respectively as an overwhelming mass of people vs. human beings that the viewer can empathize with.

In section three, *Internet and Counter Public Sphere*, Subekti Priyadharma compares the German/Indonesian online public spheres. His analysis shows some substantial differences, for instance concerning social media usage (despite lower internet access, Indonesia by far exceeds Germany with regard to social media usage). However, it also demonstrates striking similarities between both countries regarding the spread of disinformation and the rise of right-wing populism in online public spheres. In the next chapter, Jeffrey Wimmer discusses the participatory and thus democratic potential of the internet, in particular social networks, from a generic perspective. Unfortunately, his insights are not directly linked to the cases of German and Indonesian public spheres.

The fourth and last section centers around the interrelation between *Popular Culture and Democracy*. The first chapter by Randa Aboubakr is an analysis of popular culture as a venue for representation and participation of minorities—with a focus on Egypt, which is surprising given the fact that the book title promises comparative perspectives on Germany and Indonesia. Anne Grüne's analysis provides insights on how popular culture can be used as a venue for democratic transformation, but also be misused for anti-democratic tendencies. Lastly, Yasraf A. Piliang provides a sharp analysis of current problems and shortcomings of the political debate in Indonesia, describing an increasing shift from ideals such as coexistence and cooperation towards extreme personalization and self-glorification of political actors—a concerning tendency indeed being somewhat reminiscent of prominent populist actors in the Western world.

To conclude, several contributions to this book offer compelling analyses concerning different aspects of the media systems in Germany and Indonesia. However, only in some cases a meaningful level of comparison between both is achieved. Some chapters do not even have a convincing connection to the overall theme. Of course, conference proceedings are not comparable to a classical edited volume,

but it would still have been helpful if some key insights of this book would have been integrated in a concluding chapter. Regardless of this, for readers interested in international media systems and/or transformative contexts, the work offers some valuable insights as well as starting points for future research.