

The Politics of Civil Society in the Post-Suharto Indonesia: NGOs and CSOs Relations¹⁰

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Abstract

Hopes for democratization in Indonesia runs high, especially among political observers both at home and abroad. However, the elitist character of Indonesian politics have produced surprises and volatile changes that in the long run may jeopardize democracy itself. When decentralization was introduced, the power falls into the hands of the local bosses whose greed control on local resources have brought local political system into stalemate. When most parts of the society took laws into their own hands, the concept of civil society is inflated and mischievousness enters the local politics.

The Hope for Democracy in the 1990s

No one has predicted that the pro-democracy movements, brutally suppressed by the military-backed New Order government, will eventually triumph in challenging Suharto's authoritarianism that had been established since the late 1960s. In 1998, endless demonstrations carried out by students in major cities such as Jakarta, Medan, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Ujung Pandang amazed domestic as well as foreign observers when they managed to force Suharto to step down. Students initiated a broad network through their off-campus activities collaborating with various NGOs. Radical organizations formed by students or ex-student activists such as Pijar, Geni, Lapera, LBH Nusantara, Rumpun, SMID (Indonesian Students' Solidarity for Democracy), PRD (People's Democratic Party), PIPHAM (Center for Human Rights Information and Education), Lekhat, and Aldera, established informal coalitions to pursue joint human rights campaigns (Hadiwinata 1999). They collaborated with various pro-democracy NGOs such as YLBHI (the Indonesian Foundation of Legal Aid), Forum, INFID (International NGO Forum for Indonesian Development), and many others to put pressure on Suharto's government. The students' occupation of the parliamentary building in Senayan, Jakarta, was considered as the final blow which resulted in Suharto's resignation in May 1998.

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The pro-democracy movements thrived from the mid-1990s in the course of the growing dissatisfaction with Suharto's despotic leadership. Since then, students and NGO activists have become increasingly involved in practical and direct resistance in which street demonstration was their main choice. Crude anti-Suharto slogans such as 'Hang Suharto!' (*Gantung Suharto*), 'Drag Suharto to an extra-ordinary parliamentary session!' (*Seret Suharto ke Sidang Istimewa*), 'Suharto is the culprit of all troubles!' (*Suharto Dalang Segala Bencana*), and the like were frequently shouted and written in their posters. Although there were differences among the students and the activists with regard to the extent to which confrontation with the government should be pursued or whether Islam should be used as the basis for their resistance, they had nevertheless agreed to share common purposes which included: (1) a demand for the maximum protection of human rights; (2) an appeal to ensure the rule of law and the reduction of the state's power; (3) a call for free and fair elections; and (4) an appeal for the reduction of military role in politics (Uhlin 1997: 145).

Following the fall of President Suharto, Indonesia endured a serious transition to democracy. President Habibie - Suharto's successor -had laid an important foundation in the democratic reform through the introduction of new laws allowing new political parties to be formed, a free election, a freedom of expression and association (van Klinken 1999: 60; Young 1999: 73). He also guaranteed the freedom of the press and the reduction of non-elected military representatives in the legislature.

On 10-13 November 1998, the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) held a special session (*sidang istimewa*) and made several historic decisions, including decrees limiting future presidents to two terms, revoking presidential emergency powers, limiting the military's dual-function (*Dwifungsi*), ending the compulsory *Pancasila* indoctrination programme, and promising a more equitable center-region fiscal balance (Liddle 1999: 116). It appeared that the military agreed to submit to civilian authority. For example, in early September 1999, the plan to legislate a new emergency law, which would give the armed forces the power to control the state, was rapidly withdrawn following the widespread protests from students and other human rights activists (*Suara Pembaruan*, 2 October 1999).

Under the new political regulation, groups and individuals were allowed to form their own political parties. By 1999, there were 48 parties ready to compete in the general elections. The largest new parties are Megawati's PDIP (the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), Abdurrahman Wahid's PKB (the National Awakening Party), and Amien Rais's PAN (the National Mandate Party). PDIP, which was formed by Megawati supporters in the PDT, is the successor of the PNI of the 1950s. Its main supporters are the nationalist and secular Muslims, Christians and other non-Muslim minorities. PKB, which was formed by members of the biggest Islamic organization, *Nandlatul Ulama*, represents the traditionalist, syncretic Muslims, especially in Java and parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan. PAN was formed by the second biggest Islamic organisation, *Muhammadiyah*, although it claims to be a nonreligious party loosely based on economic populism. Unlike their predecessors during the Suharto's government, these parties appear to be more accommodating to NGOs and popular organizations because they are formed to represent the interests of grassroots people.

On 7 June 1999, a fair general election to elect 462 members of the DPR (People's Representative Body) was held. Predictably, Golkar lost its majority of votes because people were allowed to vote according to their own choice and voters were sickened by Golkar's domination during Suharto's government. Megawati's PDIP secured 33.3 percent of votes (153 seats in the DPR); which was followed by Golkar with 25.9 percent (120 seats); PPP with 12.7 percent (58 seats); PKB with 11 percent (51 seats); and PAN with 7.5 percent (34 seats) (*Suara Pembaruan*, 15 July 1999). Because the president was not directly elected by the people and none of the existing political parties managed to win a convincing majority, none of the contenders for the presidency could secure his or her position. It was in this situation, Gus Dur was elected as the president after defeating Megawati by 60 votes (373 against 310). Gus Dur made his way to presidency only after securing support from Golkar, PAN and his own party, PKB.

However, in less than two years after his election as Indonesia's fourth president, Gus Dur's popularity and power began to founder. While the process of democratization remained sluggish, Gus Dur himself was caught in ongoing wrangles with a number of cabinet ministers, military leaders, the chief of national police and the head of parliament, which weakened the

whole political structure. His alleged involvement in scandals such as *Bruneigate*¹² and *Buloggate*¹³ and his failure to bring corrupt officials and investors to justice had raised doubts of his seriousness to fight corruption. Strong critics such as Amien Rais, head of the People's Consultative Assembly, for example, expressed his fear that Gus Dur might not be serious in handling ongoing corruption and public disorder. The continuing conflict in Aceh, Maluku, and Kalimantan, the collapse of *rupiah*, the rampant corruption involving state and party officials, public disorder, and the soaring prices of basic items have generated frustration among the people of all class. Some even blamed him for bringing disorder and uncertainty to Indonesian politics. In July 2001, the People's Consultative Assembly decided to dismiss Gus Dur and appointed Vice-President Megawati as his successor in a special session.

Although Megawati managed to reduce the political tension within the elite circle, her limited political experience and lack of strategy have made it difficult to consolidate the already divided political institutions. For example, the wrangle between Kwik Kian Gie (Minister of Finance) and Laksamana Sukardi (Minister of Public Enterprise) - both from Megawati's party, PDIP - over the government's plan to extend the repayment of the Indonesian private sector's debt seems to indicate Megawati's lack of influence within her own cabinet. Moreover, the appointment of a convicted general as the spokesman for the military and the involvement of members of the army's special squad (*kopassus*) - which was allegedly taking a special order from villain military leaders in Jakarta¹⁴ - in the killing of the leader of the Papua's dissident group, Theys Eluay, showed Megawati's inability to exert control on the military - although under the current constitution the President serves as the top commander (*panglima tertinggi*) of the military. The most difficult test for Megawati, however, is whether or not she is willing stand by the people in pursuing the corruption scandal involving Golkar's leader, Akbar Tandjung. Although Tandjung had spent thirty days in detention, his release has sparked pessimism whether Megawati is serious in fighting corruption involving party leaders.

¹² *Bruneigate* is a term used by the Indonesian media in referring to a 'grant' from the Sultan of Brunei given to President Wahid. Critics argued that the president should not have used the US\$ 1 million grant for his personal purposes.

¹³ *Buloggate* refers to an illegal use of around 40 billion rupiah (US\$ 400,000) money from BULOG (the Indonesian food logistic agency) by those who are suspected to be President Wahid's close associates.

¹⁴ See <http://www.tempointeraktif.com>, 7 April 2002.

Between Optimism and Skepticism

The depth of the economic crisis in Indonesia, which sparked public disorder throughout the country, gave no choice for the post-Suharto governments but to comply with the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment packages. Despite brief protests by nationalist students and NGO activists, both Habibie and Gus Dur issued new regulations allowing a possible take-over of both public and private corporations by foreign companies. However, when Megawati came to power in July 2001, there was a growing concern that her nationalist leaning might turn the country's policy direction to an anti-foreign investment course of action as her father did in the early 1960s. In early 2002, the plan to sell state-owned enterprises (cement, fertilizer, electricity and telecommunications) was called off.

Yet, pressure to recapitulate the insolvent banking system under the control of IBRA (the Indonesian Bank Reconstruction Agency) has forced Megawati's government to reopen negotiations with potential foreign buyers. The sale of BCA (Bank Central Asia) - formerly owned by the tycoon Liem Sioe Liong - to the Farallon Capital from the United States in March 2002 seems to indicate the government's commitment to liberalize the economy. Megawati's attempt to establish confidence by creating stability proved to be successful (at least until July 2002) in giving positive sentiments to the market. The value of *rupiah* has increased substantially from US\$1= Rp 11,000 in December 2001 to US\$1= Rp 8,600 in July 2002. Despite the lack of unity and co-ordination among cabinet ministers,

For the time being, domestic and foreign observers alike seem to agree that democratisation and economic liberalisation will seem to be the main agenda of the Indonesian recovery projects. Indeed, when Abdurrahman Wahid was elected as a new president in October 1999, there was hope for more tolerance, openness and recognition of differences in Indonesian politics given the fact that Gus Dur himself was widely known as an inspiring political leader who firmly maintains the philosophy of religious tolerance and pluralism. The public mood of celebration, however, quickly gave way to disappointment. Conflicts among political leaders, more often than not involving massive mass mobilization and street violence, have generated frustration in society already annoyed by the ongoing public disorder, corruption and money-politics.

Nowadays, most Indonesians become increasingly sceptical about the ability of democracy to constitute an efficient government. The more people perceive political uncertainty, the greater the resistance against democracy. Groups in society - particularly those from the middle-class background - believe that democracy may not be compatible with the pluralistic character of Indonesian society. Therefore, there is a reason to agree with Thompson (2000: 8-9) that too much revolution can endanger democratisation since ongoing struggles will reduce the possibility to reach a consensus among the competing political forces much needed to form a 'pact' that can ensure order and stability.

What seems to have generated disappointment among Indonesians is the fact that the democratic political institutions (political parties, the parliament, the rule of law, and so on) - which have been rejuvenated by the post-Suharto governments - are vulnerable to manipulation, dirty tricks, money-politics and even violence. Following an investigation on an illegal use of public funding involving Golkar's leader, Akbar Tandjung, Gus Dur announced that ten other political parties might have received illegal funding from BULOG (the state's logistics agency) during Habibie's presidency (*Kompas*, 7 April 2002). Political parties are also increasingly criticized of their notorious use of vigilante groups in disbanding opponents as well manifested in a number of incidents in Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Madiun. Although its members had been elected in a relatively fair election, the DPR (People's Representative Assembly) is increasingly attacked for being inefficient, incompetent and inconsiderate. The lavish lifestyle, lack of discipline and tendency to prioritize personal interests of the DPR's members seem to have generated public disappointment (*Kompas*, 24 March 2002).

Law enforcement is another serious problem for the democratizing Indonesia. While the government's attempt to fight corruption remains sluggish, the security apparatus is beginning to lose power and self-confidence due to the lack of discipline and incompetence. For example, the police cannot do much to disarm the existing paramilitary groups (*satgas*) belonged to either political parties or radical Islamic groups, despite the prohibition on the possession of weapons as stipulated in the Criminal Act. As a result, public disorder will seem to continue during the transition to democracy. In many places in Java, villagers flocked to plantations, shrimp ponds, vacant real estate, teak forests, golf courses, big farms (including Suharto's Tapos ranch) and harvest the produce or plough the soil to signal their new claims. A rough estimate suggested that

the total area of 'reclaimed land' had reached at least 30,000 hectares by the end of 1998 (Sangkoyo 1999: 172). A study by Lucas and Bachriadi (2001) indicates that from 1998 to 2001 in the district of Kedu (Central Java) alone, there is an estimated number of 270,676 trees looted from the local forest constituting a total loss of around 42.8 billion *rupiah* (US\$4.2 million).

There are at least two factors which seem to have contributed to the complication of the democratic transition in the post-Suharto Indonesia. First, the rise of local political bosses which increase political mobilisation and violence. Indeed, many bosses began to turn to 'the masses' when they are under political pressure as well illustrated in the mass protest and the display of ready-to-die forces to support Gus Dur. Second, the fact that the concept of civil society has been increasingly inflated seems to have made democracy more vulnerable to public disorder. Under the spirit of people's sovereignty, groups in society can do no wrong. In some extreme cases, civil society organisations take the law into their own hands through the exercise of *peradilan rakyat* (citizen's trial) in which the mobs determine the punishment and execute those who are considered to be violating the norms and values. In a number of cases, criminals were burnt alive by angry mobs who had lost their trust in the security apparatus.

The Rise of Local Political Bosses

According to the good governance discourse, the best possible way to strengthen civil society is through the reduction of the role of the state and the expansion of the market forces as suggested by structural adjustment programmes (Abrahamsen 2000: 53). These conditions suggest the flourishing of voluntary organizations such as professional associations, NGOs, peasants' organizations, workers' associations, credit unions, women's associations, and so on. However, civil society in Indonesia represents a diverse set of traditional, ethnic, regional, linguistic and religious interests. Thus, while the vacuum created by the decreasing role of the state may allow grassroots organizations to mobilize for democratization, it also raises the chance for the pursuit of narrow-minded and primordial interests as well manifested in current power struggles among different political forces.

What we seem to have witnessed in Indonesia during the transition to democracy is a weak civil society whose activities depend on certain figures or patrons. This is particularly true for political activities at the local level, in which local bosses manipulate religious or ethnic

sentiments in their attempt to mobilize grassroots people. Although local bosses in Indonesian context are comparatively 'petty' in terms of less private wealth and more dependency on public resources to those of the Philippines, they have basic similarities in terms of links with outside superiors or factions of the national political elite (Tornquist 2000: 389). They are also similar in terms of the use of para-military (*satgas*) and vigilante groups in their attempt to exert influence on local politics. In Indonesia, local bosses are well aware that religious and ethnic sentiments will make a strong appeal to the potential followers. In Sampit, Central Kalimantan, for example, a conflict between local bosses from different ethnic groups over a top position in the local forest administration (*Dinas Kehutanan*) has sparked the worst ethnic conflict ever happened in the area during March - April 2001, in which hundreds of Madurese were slaughtered by the ruthless Dayaks and tens of thousands of them had to flee the area. Although tension between the indigenous Dayak and the migrant Madurese had existed for sometime, attempts by local bosses from the two ethnic backgrounds to use ethnic sentiments to mobilize grassroots people had resulted in a complete chaos.

The role of local bosses in Indonesian politics is signified by the enduring traditional culture in society that contains a patron-client relationship. Although the building of a sense of nationhood called for the use of Western concepts of power, the actual power play among the political leaders remained very traditional. As Karl Jackson (1978: xi) has demonstrated, political integration in Indonesia 'depends on a system of traditional authority relations animating village social life and connecting each village with the world of regional and national politics existing beyond the village gate... [V]illagers are organized into networks of dyadic, personal, diffuse, affect-laden, and enduring superior-subordinate relationships'. Thus, although political parties, state bureaucracies, the military services and other political institutions were all modeled on Western forms, but their practices followed the traditional rules of power relationships that came close to an authoritarian rule.

For most Indonesians, security can be gained by agreeing that power should be hierarchically arranged so that each person can find his niche in a system of pyramided clusters of patrons and their individual clients. In Indonesian term, the tie between patron and client is known as *bapakisme* (father-ism), a relationship involving a *bapak* (father) and his *anak buah* (children/followers). The *bapak* has to assume extensive responsibilities for his *anak buah*; and

the *anak buah* in turn owe him the incalculable debt that should be paid by their loyalty (Pye 1985: 117). This is what has led Karl Jackson (1978) to speak of Indonesia as having a 'bureaucratic polity'. At the heart of this bureaucratic polity is the idea of reciprocity between patron and clients that appeared in the political relations between senior and junior officials or between state apparatus and the society. It was under these traditional rules of power Indonesia has established itself as an independent state for more than five decades.

This structure of power was reproduced by the colonial state. In order to impose *rust en orde* (tranquility and order), the Dutch government relied on two major forces: the Royal Netherlands Indies' Army and the colonial bureaucracy. These two forces, according to Anderson (1990: 97) were behind the state's vertical penetration into the society. He continued to argue that under the so-called Ethical Policy, inaugurated in 1901, there was a huge extension of state apparatus into native society and a proliferation of its function in education, religious affairs, agricultural development, mineral exploitation and political surveillance (Anderson 1990: 97). This system of centralized control was well established especially during 1850-1910 until it was demolished in a few weeks in 1942 by Japanese invaders.

In the post-colonial era, amid the fear of a possible state collapse and the separatist threats throughout the country, the new government became increasingly dependent on President Sukarno as a popular figure. Indeed, it was Sukarno's ability to mobilize extra-state popular organizations, especially the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and to inject national pride by adopting an anti-imperialist foreign policy that won him popular support in establishing his Guided Democracy. This system was the major political arrangement during the Old Order era (1950-1965). In the New Order period (1966-1998), General Suharto had contributed more to the triumph of the state vis-à-vis the society. The basis of this triumph, according to Anderson (1990: 109), was laid in the physical purge of the PKI and its allies, the suppression of popular movements, the control of the state apparatus and the removal of President Sukarno as an effective political force. This was possible given Suharto's personal background that enabled him to win a full military support, particularly among the army. In the post-Suharto era, despite the serious attempt by the government to make a substantial political reform, the society in general is still sustaining the '*priyayi* culture', that is, a kind of relationship that puts the *priyayi* (the aristocratic upper-class) as patrons for the *wong cilik* (little people), which is taken for

granted and remain institutionalized in the social relations, especially in rural areas (Young 1999: 84).

In the post-Suharto era, local bosses ex-military officers, ex-government officials, *kyai* (Islamic leaders), businessmen, youth leaders, and so on – establish their connections to pave their way to the center stage of political activities through this patron-client relationship. They raise money from fractions of the national political elite and use it to mobilize grassroots people. One can therefore easily agree with Tornquist (2000: 389) who stresses that current ongoing religious and ethnic violence in Indonesia has much to do with conflicts between local patrons or bosses, their collaborators and thugs who can all draw on the vulnerable sections of the population. This situation will seem to persist, especially when political competition involving parties and other political groups has become increasingly stiff.

The Inflation of the Concept of Civil Society

At least theoretically, the transition to democracy in the post-Suharto era should have created the chance for the resurrection of civil society. The diverse layers that make up civil society include students, artists, intellectuals, disillusioned professionals, workers, peasants, Islamic leaders and NGO activists (Case 2000: 58). Since the early 1990s, when there was a split within the elite circle (involving Suharto and his cronies on one side, and General Murdani and his followers on the other side), grassroots movements (radical workers and peasants) began to emerge. Their activities were supported by students, intellectuals and NGO activists who demanded better deals for the oppressed and the dispossessed. By mid-1990s, groups of artists, intellectuals, students and NGO activists formed a pro-democracy coalition whose major aim was to put pressure on the Suharto government.

However, ideology does not seem to play a substantial role in unifying different groups that form a civil society in Indonesia. Tornquist (2000: 396) argued that what can be identified as ‘ideology’ in Indonesian civil society is no more than a combination of blurred moral and spiritual values with attached communal loyalties and symbolic personalities such as Gus Dur, Megawati, Akbar Tanjung and Amien Rais. For example, the main forces behind reform movements (students, NGOs, critical intellectuals, and so on) were not unified by a clearly identified ideology, rather, they were united by the specific, short-term interests such as the

clamp down on KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism), the end of military domination (the *dwi-fungsi* or dual function), and the demand for a free and fair election. Thus, there was a serious lack of ideological formation in Indonesian civil society that seemed to have contributed to its failure to serve as a key brake of the state. The lack of ideological tenet has to do with the New Order's policy to curb leftist ideology. The purge on the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) - which was accused of attempting a coup against Sukarno's government - and the subsequent mass detention on hundreds of thousands of its members in the late 1960s had undercut traditional Left strategies and appeal (Hewison and Rodan 1996: 430). Moreover, the imposition of *Pancasila* as the sole ideology (*azas tunggal*) for the state and society in the early 1980s had impeded the emergence of alternative ideologies. During that period, it was impossible for any organizations to nurture ideology of their own choice.

Despite the lack of ideological appeal, the emergence of civil society in Indonesia can be traced back to the late nineteenth century when radical peasants, militant labors and nationalist intellectuals organized and revolted against the colonial state demanding better deals and political freedom. However, civil society as a discourse has never been pursued until the early 1990s when NGO activists began to contemplate about the formation of independent grassroots organizations that can exert influence on government. The activists' acquaintance to the concept of civil society as the contender of the state derived from their close contacts with various foreign funding agencies, namely, those international organization operating in Indonesia such as USAID, CIDA, GTZ, NOVIB, Oxfam International, The Ford Foundation, Save the Children, and so on (Fakih 1996: 170).

During that period there was a serious attempt by NGO activists to develop civil society as a discourse, Activists such as Mansour Fakih, Muhammad Billah and Juni Thamrin encouraged the translation of Western literatures on civil society into Indonesian. Their focus on pluralism and diversity of opinions had made them embrace what Schechter (1999: 5) terms a 'Tocqueville-inspired' understanding of civil society much needed in their attempt to promote democracy.

However, Indonesian NGOs' understanding of civil society became increasingly instrumental (Schechter 1999: 7) insofar as they believed that support for civil society should be

built on the achievements of NGOs and grassroots organizations to challenge the state's domination. Impressed by the success of NGOs and students' organizations in putting pressure on president Suharto, activists believed that the emergence of a vibrant civil society in Indonesia can be made possible through NGOs' activities in establishing links with various grassroots groups. This view was well expressed in several national NGO meetings in Cisarua (1993), Yogyakarta (1996) and Bogor (1998).

An instrumental interpretation of civil society has its own risk. The expansion the institutions of civil society - especially when their only agenda is to challenge the state's domination - will risk the inflation of the concept of civil society itself. Blair (1997: 40) noted that under certain circumstances, civil society could become antithetical to democracy and lose its civility. Civil society organizations - when they are lacking commitment to the idea of tolerance - can promote destructive ethnic and religious conflicts. Civil society can therefore be displaced in the name of civil society (Schechter 1999: 7).

Radical Islamic Groups vs. NGOs: the rise of 'Premanism'

The rise of radical Islamic groups in the post-Suharto era can perhaps illustrate the inflation of the concept of civil society that can seriously disturb the transition to democracy. One factor which seems to have contributed to the rise of Islam in Indonesia during the transition to democracy was the emergence of a Muslim middle-class. Mostly well-educated, this group established many new organizations to promote Islam as both a cultural and a political force. Culturally, Islam tries to develop values among Muslims through winning hearts and minds; and politically it attempts to establish a traditional Islamic state or at least implement Islamic teachings in and through the state (Jamhari 1999: 184; Rais 1999: 200). The new trend, however, draws much attention to the substantive aspect of Islam and the local Islamic leaders are interested in establishing the *syariah* (the Islamic law) as a constitution for focal governments. In several districts in West Java (Cianjur, Garut and Tasikmalaya), local leaders began to design a bill promoting the adoption of the *syariah* into the constitution of local governments.

The rise of radical Islamic groups after the fall of Suharto indicates a challenge from society to the secular state. Organizations such as FPI (the Islamic Defence Front), *Lasykar Jihad*

(ready-to-die troops),¹⁵ *Hizbullah, Majelis Mujahidin, Lasykar Jundullah, Hizbut Tahrir*, NII (Indonesian Islamic State), and many others were formed not only to defend the interests of the Muslim population but also to replace the secular 1945 Constitution (*Undang Undang Dasar* 1945) with the *syariah* (the Islamic law). Although they constitute only a minority (as the moderate Muslim leaders often claim), their capacity to use religious sentiment to make a strong appeal to the grassroots people has placed them at the center stage of current power struggle in Indonesia.

They may not pose a direct threat to democracy as none of these groups declare their objection against democratic principles, but their tendency to use violence to thrash opponents or anyone who try to stop their actions seems to have raised concern among other groups in society. For example, they attacked and wrecked the office of a Jakarta-based women's NGO, *Solidaritas Perempuan*, in September 2000 for carrying out gender equality campaign. Fanatical members of these groups felt that the NGO's campaign for equality between the sexes was against Islamic law.

In Yogyakarta, an attempt by a local NGO network in Yogyakarta to establish linkages with various grassroots organizations was challenged by these radical groups. The radicals thought that NGOs' programme in linking themselves with various grassroots organizations was similar to the banned Indonesian Communist Party's method in mobilizing grassroots people during the 1960s. They demanded the cancellation of the programme. Labeling NGO activists 'new communists', these radical groups threatened to wreck their offices if they refuse to bow to their demand. For many NGOs, their actions were seriously threatening NGOs' attempt to establish a strong civil society. Disturbed by this uncompromising situation, an NGO activist complained: 'Today, although we live in a democratic political setting, NGOs seem to have a new enemy, namely, those radical Islamic groups who unfairly call us new communists. Their action has thwarted our attempt to establish a strong civil society' (Taufiqurrahman, interview, 06/07/2001).

¹⁵ It was believed that some of these radical Islamic groups have a close link with some influential army generals and top-rank police officers who are disappointed with Abdurrahman Wahid's anti-military policy (O'Rourke 2002: 346). The radical groups were used by these generals to incite riots and bombings in Jakarta and many other parts of Java and some conflict areas in Maluku and Poso in order to put pressure on Wahid's presidency (O'Rourke 2002: 345-9).

These incidents illustrate what Tim Lindsey (2001: 290) has called as the *'preman state'* in the post-Suharto Indonesia. To him, widespread vigilantism and the proliferation of communal violence linking religion and ethnicity to gang warfare and the systematic attack on minority groups are a result of the power vacuum created by the departure of President Suharto. This led to a fragmentation of political control and the rise of intense rivalry for power between political groups Suharto once dominated. Although *preman* (literally means thug) has a long history in Indonesia. Derived from the Dutch for 'free man' (used to refer to irregular or demobilized soldiers), the term came to mean thugs or bandits (Lindsey 2001: 284). Today, tough competition for power and money have encouraged political leaders to turn to local bosses who subsequently use *preman* to mobilize support or to intimidate opponents.

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