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Between fear and power : Kompas, Indonesia's most influential daily newspaper, 1965-2010

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Part II

Ideals and Pragmatism in Practice

Chapter 4

***Rasa* as the Basis of *Kompas* Self-Censorship**

“We try our best not to hurt others’ feelings; that’s part of Javanese culture. What’s the advantage of hurting others, right? I could write whatever I want, but will other people feel fine with that? Would they be angry or not? Would other people feel offended? Would their hearts feel the call?”

*~Arunata, former Kompas journalist, personal communication,
March 3, 2015*

It was Friday night in the *Kompas* newsroom. Even though the clock on the wall showed that it was almost midnight, the newsroom was still crowded with journalists: a normal everyday scene. As midnight approached, the editors became even busier, striving to meet their deadlines. In one corner of the room, something unusual was happening. Five journalists were seated around a table near the political desk. Two of them were senior editors, while the rest were young journalist candidates, still in their probationary period. This was the last day of their training at the political desk and the three-month evaluations

were being carried out. This evaluation is important in determining whether these candidates get appointed as permanent employees or not.

On one side of the table was a young woman named Sheryl. She was a fresh graduate from a prominent university in Indonesia and had been working as a trainee at *Kompas* ever since. Asep, the Chief Editor of the political desk, was chastising her for a recent mistake involving two very important news sources. The first source was a former military general, who was also one of the former Vice Presidents in the Suharto era, Tri Sutrisno. The second was Harry Tjan, a senior political researcher from CSIS, an important think tank organization during Indonesia's New Order regime. Reporting on a seminar held by "The Movement of Strengthening Pancasila (*GPP*)", of which Try Sutrisno was the chair and Harry Tjan acted as the main speaker, Sheryl was said to have quoted the words of these news sources incorrectly. This was significant, not just because these important news sources were both influential political figures, but also because they had close ties with *Kompas'* media owner, Jakob Oetama.

The seminar had discussed the notion of returning to the old constitution. This was the 1945 Constitution (henceforth, UUD 1945), which was created by Indonesia's founding fathers. UUD 1945 proposed that the Indonesian People's Assembly (henceforth, MPR) should come back to its function as the highest state institution that represents the people. This means that the power to elect the president and to create the blueprint for Indonesian development (henceforth, the GBHN) would be returned back to MPR. Sheryl, in this case, had written an article as expected, entitled: "*Perubahan UUD 1945, kembalikan Fungsi MPR dan GBHN*" (The Amendment of the 1945 Constitution, Giving Back the Function of MPR and The GBHN), and it had appeared on the second page of the newspaper, dated Thursday, February 20, 2014. The headline of the article was as follows:

The Movement of Strengthening Pancasila argues that the amendment of the 1945 constitution conducted in 2002, which has erased The GBHN and decreased the power of MPR, needs to be reconsidered. (Kompas, February 20, 2014)

Early in the morning on February 20, Harry Tjan made a direct complaint to the newspaper as he felt that he had been cited incorrectly. He agreed with the point about MPR and the reconsideration of the 2002 amendment, but he argued that The GBHN part had not been properly quoted. He did not think that The GBHN -the state policy guidelines made by the People's Assembly (MPR) during the New Order period should be brought back. He argued that this was because The GBHN did not only direct the president's policy over five years, but had to also guide the developmental policy for decades. Therefore, in response to Tjan's complaint, everyone was looking at Sheryl. The secretary of Jakob Oetama (*Kompas'* President Director) had called the Chief Editor asking for her. Asep, Head of the political desk, then called Sheryl directly at home. It was a shocking morning for the young trainee, and she was extremely nervous about the evaluation meeting to be held the following day.

Sheryl believed that Tjan had made the point about bringing back The GBHN, and Asep, in fact, believed her. In discussing Sheryl's work that night, Asep made it clear that it was no-one's fault. Yet, he suggested that it would be good to issue an apology. He said:

This is not your fault. People easily get offended by us. If other newspapers slapped people in the face or knocked them down with the stories they published, people are fine with that. But if we're the one who does it, even just a tiny little thing, people get deeply offended. In Javanese, we say, "ngono yo ngono ning ojo ngono" (you may behave that way, but please behave like this instead). (Asep, evaluation meeting, February 21, 2014).

Asep argues here that, whether *Kompas* was right or wrong, apologizing would always be a wise move. In doing so, he emphasized the importance of “*rasa*” in conducting reportage in the field and in doing journalism in general to these young reporters. With regard to this concept of *rasa*, on another occasion, Asep defined it to me as follows:

[It is] an ability to show sympathy to all humans, regardless of whether they are a good or a bad person, because of one’s understanding that one is not an angel oneself, and who therefore, can also make a mistake. (Asep, personal interview, November 26, 2017).

That night, Asep advised the trainees that revealing someone’s mistake in news coverage is not always wise. He gave an example of how a previous journalist once wrote a story about a car accident without revealing the fact that the driver was drunk, because the driver had subsequently died. In his view, this was done out of respect towards someone who had already passed away. He questioned the benefit of writing negatively about a person, when that person had already suffered. He ended his advice with the remark: “*rasa* will provide you with guidance as to whether a story should still be explored further or not.” (Asep, evaluation meeting, February 21, 2014).

However, in the example above, one could ask Asep, that while *Kompas* wanted to respect the death of a person by not revealing that he was drunk, did it not also mean that the newspaper had failed to teach the reader a lesson about the dangers of drink driving? With regard to Sheryl, one could ask why the paper should apologize, if they were actually right?

This chapter will examine the particular form of self-censorship that *Kompas* engages in. I will argue this self-censorship is informed and legitimized by the interpretations of *rasa*. Subsequently, I will argue that this emphasis on *rasa* is influenced by the political economy interest of the newspaper. Indeed, the reluctance of *Kompas* to criticize power holders is related to its interest in

securing its economic interests and to obtain protection through its elite contacts. These interests make the newspaper wary of offending its influential and useful associates. In this regard, both cultural factors as well as political economy factors have intertwined in shaping *Kompas*' journalistic practice.

This chapter will be divided into six parts. The first part will discuss the concept of *rasa* as found in the literature on Javanese culture and examine how this concept is understood by *Kompas* journalists. Next, it will present the use of *rasa* in the case of self-censorship of the newspaper's coverage of power holders. The third part discusses the use of *rasa* in framing the headline title of a news article on corruption, illustrating how self-censorship operates at *Kompas*. The fourth part will discuss how *rasa* has been internalized as the habitus of the newspaper's journalists, and finally, I will discuss several cases of the use of *rasa* in the newspaper's conflicts with conservative Islamic groups. I will argue that even though *rasa* is a cultural value, its implementation has very much been influenced by some political economy factors. To begin, I will start my discussion by outlining briefly the theorization about *rasa* in Javanese culture according to the existing literature in the next section.

4.1 What is Rasa?

Literature on Javanese culture has highlighted *rasa* as one of the central concepts to understanding the Javanese way of life, especially in relation to Javanese beliefs or religion (Geertz, 1960; Mulder, 1978; Stange, 1984; Suseno, 1997). One of the most prominent scholars was Geertz, whose theorization on *rasa* has mostly been adopted by other scholars. Geertz perceives of *rasa* as being a common element existing in three main aspects of the religious life of the Javanese gentry: etiquette, art and mystical practice. These three aspects represent the Javanese's effort to discipline himself, moving away from the outer aspect of life and focusing on the inner. By 'etiquette' he refers to the polished interpersonal behavior that smooths daily interactions with other people. 'Art' is seen as a dual discipline of mind and body which manifests in inner significance being revealed in outward gesture. 'Mystical practice' refers

to the intensive regulation of thought and feeling to marshal an individual's spiritual resources for the attainment of ultimate enlightenment.

In defining *rasa*, Geertz argued that *rasa* has two primary meanings: "feeling" and "meaning". As "feeling" it refers to both the five physical sensations such as seeing, hearing, talking, smelling, and tasting, and also the emotional "feelings" of the heart such as sadness and happiness. Meanwhile, as "meaning", *rasa* applies to the perception and understanding of what is hidden between the lines of the words in a letter, poem, or even daily verbal interaction. Furthermore, it also applies to external physical movements which represent the internal, such as the movement in a dance, polite gesture, or a smile. Indeed, while it is hard to examine whether someone has internalized *rasa* and therefore is at inner peace with himself, people can deduce it from his external appearance, especially in regard to his etiquette. In the words of Geertz, "the more refined one's feeling, the more profound one's understanding, the more elevated one's moral character, the more beautiful one's external aspects." (1960: 239). A Javanese who possesses *rasa* and therefore an inner peace will demonstrate refined and polite behavior towards others, which will also make those surrounding him feel an inner peace within. The ultimate end is the creation of social harmony, ensuring every person lives in a state of tranquility.

This conceptualization of *rasa* as suggested by Geertz has been shared by other scholars such as Mulder (1978), Stange (1984) and Suseno (1997). Mulder (1978), for instance, relates the Javanese emphasis on *rasa* to the principles of harmony, oneness, and even coincidence, which are expressed in Javanese social life. Meanwhile, Stange (1984) suggests that a harmonious society is inseparable from good leadership, as a good leader not only understands and reflects the will of the people, but becomes the physical embodiment of the collective. In a similar vein, Suseno (1997) suggests that expressing respect for hierarchical order in society is extremely satisfying to the gentry, as it contributes to the maintenance of a system where everybody has his place and

everything is in order, and therefore, all aspects of society can progress smoothly. No-one needs to fear confrontation, surprise or disappointment. This feeling of being bound together in an ordered society gives him an inner feeling of peace, and ensures an absence of conflicting emotions and tensions, all of which fulfill his idea of a good life. It is in this regard that when there is a dispute or argument, a Javanese would prioritize and seek harmony. Suseno explains, "The decisive issue is not the question of truth, but whether this world-view is experienced as "fitting" and whether it presents itself through a meaningful *rasa*." (1997: 132)

In this sense, *rasa* is interpreted as an obligation to social order or harmony which takes priority over an obligation to speak or seek the truth. This is encapsulated in a Javanese proverb: "*bener durung mesti pener*" which means conveying the truth is not always right if it violates social harmony. The case of the drunk driver above illustrates this interpretation of *rasa*. For Asep, it was a journalistic truth, or *bener*, that he was drunk; however, revealing this would be considered *ora pener* (not fitting).

As I will discuss in the next section, such a concept of *rasa* is useful in interpreting the news production process in the *Kompas* newsroom. It helps to explain how on many occasions, a reluctance to criticize power holders does not stem from a conscious act of self-censorship. Rather, it comes from an almost embodied sense of social obligation, of knowing what proper behavior is, or as Suseno puts it, what is 'fitting', which often clashes with the difficult ideal of 'speaking truth to power holders'.

4.2 Rasa as a Basis for Resolving Complaints

How was Sheryl's case above solved? Later on the same day, at Jakob Oetama's request, Sheryl was asked to come to the house of Harry Tjan to apologize. She was accompanied by Heru, one of the editors at the political desk. On the way to Tjan's house, Heru gently warned Sheryl to just be quiet and politely listen to whatever Tjan had to say: " *Don't argue. Just answer, 'Yes.'* " To Sheryl's

surprise Harry Tjan was not angry at all. He seemed even happy to see them both and warmly welcomed them into his house. Then, as the discussion went on, Tjan explained the reason why he had made a complaint. He explained that he had never agreed with the idea of bringing back The GBHN in the Indonesian Constitution, and that he had even said so in some previous seminars. Sheryl told me, *“As ordered, I just listened politely to his complaint, smiling, nodding, and saying yes when necessary.”*

On the next day, Friday, February 21, 2014, a smaller news article appeared on the same page as the original article Sheryl had written, entitled: *“Pembukaan UUD 1945 Memuat Tujuan Negara Indonesia (The Opening of the 1945 Constitution Admitted Indonesian State’s Aim)*. The article, which was only one paragraph in length, did not adequately clarify the error made in the original article. In relation to The GBHN, this second article only said that “Harry Tjan argues that The GBHN is no longer relevant to the current situation, as a president will only maximally work for ten years.” (*Kompas*, February 21, 2014). This insufficient clarification was obvious considering the content of the article above compared to the original article:

The People’s Assembly has to function as the highest state institution which conducts the people’s mandate and also enacts The GBHN as stated in the 1945 Constitution, before the amendment. (Harry Tjan, Seminar of Restudying the Amendment of the 1945 Constitution, Granadi Jakarta, February 19, 2014)

These two messages have the potential to convey different meanings and to confuse the readers, since they contradict each other.

The source of the confusion lies within the inconsistent message showing the same news source speaking about The GBHN. The original article said that according to the source, Indonesia should return to The GBHN, while the revised article stated the opposite - that according to the source, Indonesia should not use The GBHN. The supposedly revised article did not show any

notification statement saying that it was meant to be a revision (*ralat*) of the previous day's article. In terms of quantity, the clarification was insufficient as the latter article was much shorter than the first one: while the first article was 8 paragraphs and 6 columns in length, the second was only one paragraph and one single column in length. This imbalance in the length of coverage may suggest that the latter article did not properly clarify the issue and explain the contrasting statement given by the sources. However, no complaint appeared the next day. Both parties seemed happy. Try Sutrisno, the Chair of The GPP, even made a phone call to the newsroom conveying his gratitude for the coverage.

Both Try Sutrisno and Harry Tjan believed that they were right and *Kompas* was wrong. In this kind of situation, the Indonesian Press Law as stated in the Regulation of the Press Council (*Peraturan Dewan Pers*) number 3/2006 regulates that the press has to give the news sources the right to answer (*hak jawab*) and the right to correct (*hak koreksi*) sufficiently (*secara proporsional*). The latter article published on February 21 never stated that it was meant to clarify the statement made in the previous article. At the same time, the news sources, despite their complaints, did not push the case further by claiming their legal rights. So, were the news sources right? Or had the newspaper made no error in its coverage, as the Chief Editor believed? If so, why were they willing to apologize? This is where *rasa* came into play. The newspaper did not want to disrespect Tjan by refusing his request; on the other hand, Tjan did not want to embarrass the paper by making an explicit confession that it had been wrong.

4.3 Rasa as a Guide to Framing Corruption Stories

Rasa also informs the way in which stories of corruption are covered. The particular way in which *Kompas* deals with corruption coverage reflects the cautious character of *Kompas* reporting. A particular case can illustrate this.

It was Wednesday, March 12, 2014. At *Kompas*, the weekly meeting was about to start at 10 am. People were gathered in the main meeting room, and *Kompas* Chief Editor, Arif Subangun, opened the meeting by discussing a recent complaint made about the news coverage of the Indonesian Vice President, Boediono. The complaint concerned an article dated March 7, 2014, entitled: *“Nama Boediono Disebut 67 Kali”* (Boediono’s Name was mentioned 67 times.)”

The article covered the judicial process of Budi Mulya, Deputy General of Indonesian Bank. The Indonesian Central bank was, through its relation with the Century Bank scandal, involved in a mega scandal involving corruption that cost the state more than \$ 547 million (7,45 trillion rupiah). The article said that during the prosecution, the judge had mentioned Boediono in his position as the Governor of the bank in 2008. He suggested that Boediono was involved in the bank’s policy to bail out Century Bank, a policy that was only intended to lend the flailing bank about \$ 49 million (632 million rupiah). In reality, however, Century Bank was lent a much bigger amount. The *Kompas* article – particularly its headline - left readers with the impression that there was a possibility that Boediono was involved in the scandal.

On the day after the article appeared, the spokesman of the Vice President’s office, Yopie Hidayat, came to *Kompas* to complain directly about this headline. According to Asep, the Chief Editor of the political desk who was responsible for the headline, there was a strong indication that the Vice President himself had called the President Director of *Kompas*, Jakob Oetama, that day. In the meeting, Arif said, *“one of the things which has been criticized by the Vice President’s office.... [is] about Kompas, that [the newspaper] seems to be losing its character.”* (Arif Subangun, weekly editorial meeting, March 12, 2014). In response, Asep answered:

A staff member from the Vice President’s office has complained about... for example, eemmm... the title of 67 having no meaning. This is a journalistic matter... in my view, even if the Vice President’s name appeared only one time in our paper, it will still appear in other

newspapers. I think it's a hugely significant fact that [Boediono's name] has been [mentioned] 67 times. This [scandal has led to] a big loss for the country (Asep, weekly editorial meeting, March 12, 2014)

Here, Asep defended his position that, journalistically, there was nothing wrong with the headline title. His opinion was that there was news value in the fact that the judge believed that Boediono might have played a role in the scandal, which any media would surely cover.

In this regard, Asep had a point. Various other media had also covered the story of Boediono being summoned as a witness at this trial. They, too, had stated that it was *alleged* that he played a role. While *Kompas'* title only implied that the name of Boediono was mentioned, several other media were more explicit. One day prior to *Kompas'* article, on March 6, 2014, *BBC.com* covered the story with the title: *"Century Indictment Revealed Boediono's Involvement."* While *Kompas'* headline only implied his involvement, the BBC's title explicitly stated that Boediono was involved according to the indictment of the judge. On the same day as the BBC article, *Tempo.co* wrote a story entitled: *"Century Scandal, JK: Boediono Must Be Responsible."* This headline suggested that Boediono should be made accountable according to Jusuf Kalla, the Indonesian Vice President of Century Bank at the time of the Century case in 2008, who had been the direct superior of Boediono. Still in the same month, *Koran Sindo*, on March 28, 2014, went even further by framing a story with a headline that suggested Boediono should resign from his position as Vice President: *"Being a Witness for Century Scandal, Boediono Was Pushed to Resign."*

In the meeting, Asep conveyed his suspicions over the complaint by asking Arif if the real reason behind it was because of the close relationship Boediono had with Jakob, the owner of *Kompas*. If this was the case, he would wholeheartedly acquiesce not to write any more critical stores about Boediono anymore. However, he insisted that the newspaper should be transparent. In his words: *"If it's because of Pak Jakob's relationship with Boediono (that I am*

not allowed to write about it), it's okay. But please make this explicit beforehand." (Asep, weekly editorial meeting, March 12, 2014).

Interestingly, Arif, the Chief Editor, agreed that there was nothing wrong with the content of the news article. The problem lay in the way *Kompas* had delivered the message, which needed to be softer. With a warm smile on his face, he said:

There was nothing wrong with what was written in that article. Let's talk about the way we convey the message. We are hard in principle but flexible in our way. So we do not differ in terms of principle. We should convey the reality. But the way to deliver it has to be more sophisticated... As for Pak Jakob, he never asked me to drop the news story. He did not intervene. But he did say: 'Boediono itu orang baik. Kasihan ya' (Boediono was a good man. It's sad to hear about this situation...). (Arif, weekly editorial meeting, March 12, 2014)

After the meeting, which was only attended by a dozen editors, I posed a question to Ryaas Cahaya, a senior journalist and one of the vice chief editors on the editorial board. I asked whether the title had been correct in his view. His response was that the headline had been wrong. It was not a typical headline of a *Kompas* article. He said:

From my point of view, it was not Kompas. I mean, if we talk about that title. For better or worse, Boediono is the Head of the State. We must respect him... This is where culture becomes important. We need to explain to the young journalists about the character of Kompas. We pinch, but it should not hurt. (Ryaas Cahaya, personal interview, March 12, 2014)

Interestingly, this view of Ryaas was also supported by other senior journalists, such as Budi Rahardjo, who was then also a vice chief editor of *Kompas*. He said Suseno's description of the importance of respecting those higher in the

hierarchical order echoes with what Ryaas Cahaya said when asked about Boediono: *“For better or worse, Boediono is the head of the state. We must respect to him.”* (Ryaas Cahaya, personal interview, March 12, 2014).

Months after the meeting, on the afternoon of October 5, I had a chance to talk to Asep about the incident. He still believed that it did have something to do with the close relationship between Jakob and Boediono, and pointed out that both were originally from Jogjakarta and therefore aware of the Javanese values of respecting each other and trying their best not to enter into any direct confrontation. He implied that whilst Jakob might not have explicitly complained to Arif about it, but they all knew that if the owner said something like *“He was a good man, it’s sad....,”* it means the journalists must pay strict attention to the implication. As explained in chapter 3, in the big family of *Kompas*, Jakob was regarded as the father of the journalists, who were seen as his children. Therefore, no journalist in the newsroom wanted to make Jakob, their father, feel sad. It was expected that *Kompas* journalists should have enough sensitivity and self-awareness not to put Jakob in this situation, without having to be told. This is especially true considering that everyone in the newsroom suspected that there had been phone calls between Jakob and Boediono in regard to the coverage.

As a journalists working for the newspaper for more than 15 years, Asep understood the importance of not offending Boediono’s feelings, and the importance of using *rasa*. However, he thought his mistake lay in the fact that his *rasa* was not yet sufficiently refined in comparison to the newspaper elites in the higher positions. In his words:

Perhaps it was because of the different level of our (understanding about) rasa. That was why we had different interpretations on what kind of headline was considered appropriate. There is, for instance, no problem for young journalists like me to mention (the phrase) 67 times, but for senior journalists it might be considered inappropriate.

Perhaps for them it was seen to be too confrontational.” (Asep, personal interview, October 5, 2014).

Such an explanation suggests that *rasa* was a shared journalistic value in the newsroom, of which both Asep and the editorial elites mutually understand. In this regard, both parties were aware that corruption stories should be conveyed in such a way that will not cause offence to those in power. Therefore, the disagreement between Asep, who had written the headline, and the senior editors, did not indicate the absence of *rasa*, but rather, confirms that the existence of *rasa* was an internalized social norm in the newsroom.

4.4 Rasa as a Strategy to Deal with Islamic Hardliners

Rasa was also used as a strategy to deal with attacks from Islamic hardline groups. Paying close examination to *Kompas*’ history, this study found that every time the newspaper received complaints or even attacks from Islamic groups due to its coverage of Islam, it always preferred to apologize and admit that it had been wrong. This admission was made even when the journalists believed that they were actually accurate from a journalistic point of view. In this regard, what matters for *Kompas* journalists is not being right or wrong, but rather how to avoid conflict in order to maintain social harmony. These following stories will illustrate this point.

It was June 16, 2016. For Muslims in Indonesia, it was one of the days for celebrating the fasting month, Ramadan. On this day, a rather unusual event was going on inside the *Kompas* newsroom. Tens of uninvited guests, mostly dressed in white costumes, were visiting the office of the media group. They were the elites and members of the Islamic Front Defenders (FPI), an Islamic hardline group who were well-known for their sporadic raids in Indonesia, mostly in the name of defending Sharia law. Two days before, a letter had been sent to *Kompas* from the FPI²³, mentioning that they wanted to make a visit to

²³ See appendix 1.

discuss some of the recent coverage. That night, one of the journalists said to me with a bitter smile: *"This is a special exception where a guest determines the date and time of their visit without waiting for approval."* Therefore, as planned, at around 1 pm on June 16, these special "guests" were seated in one of the newspaper's conference rooms, being welcomed by the Chief Editor, Randu Rahardjo. In attendance were also some elites of the media group from *Kompas.TV* and *Kompas.com*.

In a video that went viral on YouTube, however, people could see that the ensuing discussion was rather one-sided. It was the members of FPI who dominated, while the journalists mostly listened passively to them. One of the most noticeable figures in the discussion was Munarman, the spokesperson of the FPI. Speaking in a loud voice and occasionally pointing a finger at the seated journalists, he accused the media group of covering recent events in an unfair manner. In particular, it was the news relating to the latest raid of street vendors by the Public Order Apparatus (Satpol PP) that involved a middle-aged woman, Saeni, who sold food during the daytime in Serang Regency, on June 11, 2016.²⁴ Munarman believed that the raid had been done with the aim of preserving good virtue, namely enforcing the implementation of Sharia law. However, he believed that *Kompas* had reported the news in such a way that portrayed Saeni as the victim and the Satpol PP as the perpetrators, and the raid as unjust. Thus, in the view of the FPI, *Kompas* had misrepresented Muslims in a negative light and had not considered their perspective.. Indeed, Munarman evoked the same term that *Kompas* journalists use to describe their manner of reporting: *perasaan* (feeling). In his words: *"Why does Kompas so often offend us? This is hard to measure, indeed, as it relates to feelings... (But) it is negative, and it hurts,"* (Munarman, meeting at *Kompas*, June 16, 2016).

The complaint from the FPI members did not merely stop at asking for explanations, as more offensive statements were also launched by Munarman,

²⁴ During the month of Ramadan, it is forbidden for a Muslim to eat during the daytime.

as well as other FPI members. In an aggressive tone, Munarman warned the *Kompas* journalists sitting before him that such coverage could lead to another '1998'. With '1998', he was referring to the mass riots in the days approaching the forced resignation of President Suharto on May 21, 1998, which involved brutal ethnic violence towards Chinese minorities. Thousands of stores owned by Chinese Indonesian were destroyed, robbed and burnt, and hundreds of Chinese women were sexually abused. There is still an ongoing debate about the underlying reasons why the Chinese were targeted; however, rumors suggested that this was part of the strategy of the regime to deflect the public's anger away from the weakening President Suharto.

Now, Munarman was implying that a similar incident could also happen to *Kompas*, and even more ominously, would therefore target not just ethnic minorities, but a religious minority too. He specifically targeted the historical roots of the newspaper, which had a close relationship with the Catholic Church, and went even further by suggesting that *Kompas*' coverage could be seen as an insult from Catholic believers to Islamic ones:

Do you wish for Kompas to be perceived in that way? Kompas: the pastor's commander? (Kompas = Komando Pastor?) Do you want the old riots to start again? I don't think you want that.... If a media as big as Kompas leads people in this direction, don't blame the people if they get angry. We serve as an alarm... the FPI is an alarm. It's better than if we were just silent and then suddenly the 98 incident erupted again. And it can get even worse, as there is also religion involved... If Kompas is perceived to be under the command of the pastor, it would be a target. We don't demand a lot. We don't want you to defend Islam. But please, be balanced and proportional. (Munarman, FPI member, June 16, 2016)

Interestingly, despite believing that *Kompas* was not wrong in journalistic terms, their journalists responded to such an attack with submission. Responding with a smile and a soft voice, Randu Rahardjo answered the guests as follows: "If we

are seen as having crossed the boundaries (kebablasan), please kindly let us know...". (Randu Rahardjo, June 23, 2016). In line with Randu, the journalists from *Kompas TV* responded as follows: *"Now that we have been advised that we might have crossed a line in our reportage, we will really take this as a lesson...."* . The other senior journalists who acted as representatives of the *Kompas* media group wisely elaborated, saying: *"Thank you for your reminder."* Instead of arguing that they had, in fact, been correct journalistically, they decided to admit that they were wrong and asked for forgiveness from the Islamic hardliners.

To put *Kompas'* submissive attitude in context, it is important to emphasize that *Kompas* was not the only newspaper who reported on the attack by the FPI members on the vendor. There were at least 10 other online media news outfits that also reported on the raid by Satpol PP on Saeni: *Republika*, *SindoNews*, *DW*, *BBC*, *BeritaSatu*, *Detik*, *Tempo*, *The Jakarta Post*, *Media Indonesia* and *Viva*. Of all these, *Republika* –an Islamic platform newspaper, was one of the most critical of the raid, and explicitly wrote that Saeni was the victim of the Satpol PP. On June 13, 2016, they wrote: *"Johan (the spokesperson of the President) said that the President had given special support to Saeni, who was the victim of Satpol PP"* (*Republika*, June 13, 2016). This line was written in an article entitled: *"(President) Jokowi Gave Charity to a Mother Who Sold Food."* Furthermore, the use of the word "victim" implied that there was a perpetrator, namely Satpol PP, who had committed a crime. However, the FPI did not attack *Republika* or any of the other media. It was only *Kompas* which was the target of their fury.

The FPI's attack on *Kompas* was not, in fact, triggered by its coverage of the Saeni incident, but rather, by the coverage of other media outfits that belong to the *Kompas Group*: *Kompas.com* and *Kompas TV*. The first coverage of the incident was made by *Kompas.com* on June 11, 2016, in an article entitled: *"This Mom Was Left Crying As Her Food Vendor Was Raided In the Daytime During Ramadan"*. On the same day, *Kompas TV* too, reported the raid

immediately after it occurred. In this broadcast of 13 minutes, the audience could watch how the Satpol PP outfit had raided the area, while Saeni herself was seen crying and begging for the raiders to stop. The video moved a young man, Dwika Putra, so much, that he then shared the footage of *Kompas TV* on Twitter, announcing that he would start a donation for the poor woman. Only one day after the announcement, on June 12, 2016, he was surprised by the amount the fund had received: more than a quarter billion rupiahs (or almost \$ 20,000) from more than two thousand people.

It was only two days after this coverage appeared on *Kompas.Com* and *Kompas TV*, on June 13, 2016, that the news about Saeni finally appeared on the front page of *Kompas* daily newspaper. It was entitled: “*Food Raid, The Tears of Saeni Triggered Sympathy.*” This coverage appeared in the form of a feature telling the story of the raid and how it had triggered widespread sympathy from the Indonesian public, including from President Jokowi himself. On the same day, the paper also wrote an editorial entitled, “*Lessons from Saeni*”, which criticized the Indonesian government for letting the local government in Serang create regulations about Sharia law, which according to the editorial’s view, had gone against the Indonesian Constitution. However, the newspaper only wrote a total of three articles about Saeni, which is far fewer than *Kompas.Com*, which had written 75 articles.

However, despite this, the FPI had targeted *Kompas* daily newspaper. In the salutation of the complaint letter written by the FPI, it was addressed to the Chief Editor of *Kompas Daily Newspaper*, *Kompas TV* and *Kompas.Com*. It seems that the Islamic hardliners were fully aware that Jakob Oetama was still active as the general director of the daily newspaper, and that he also owned the entire group. The FPI was right. Despite most of the coverage coming from *Kompas.Com* and *Kompas TV*, the power to stop the coverage fully lay in the hands of Jakob Oetama.

Following the attack from the FPI, a heated debate started within the *Kompas* newsroom. This internal debate revolved around two main arguments: the first

suggested that *Kompas* had been wrong in not realizing how sensitive the issue was. *Kompas* might be right journalistically, but, the argument ran, the coverage itself was a violation of the journalistic values inherited from the *Kompas* founder. On many occasions, Jakob had taught his journalists the importance of being mindful of sensitive issues relating to religion. In his speech, given when he was granted the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from Gajah Mada University in 2003, he said: *"Towards the various groups whose views and perspectives on life are varied and could be sensitive, the media tends to tread more careful."* Therefore, the FPI's attack was seen as a consequence of the failure of the *Kompas* journalists to be aware of the sensitive nature of the issue.

The opposing argument was that *Kompas* had not been in the wrong, as they possessed all of the data and facts to support their story. Indeed, they were not the only ones who had covered the story in such a way that favored the food seller, and had even been invited to be present at the raid, showing how the story was prompted at the initiative of the state. Therefore, it was not the intention of *Kompas*, nor any other media, to put the tears and despair of the middle-aged woman under the spotlight. As a consequence of this viewpoint, it was suggested that *Kompas* should defend themselves. A few journalists even believed that they should bring the case to court. Needless to say, they also believed that self-censorship following the attack was unnecessary. The supporters of this argument were mostly young journalists working for *Kompas.com* and *Kompas TV*. They were a minority in the newsroom and possessed little power and authority.

Of these two opposing views, most media workers supported the position adopted by the founder, Jakob. They felt the journalists should accept that they had been wrong in writing the story, and the follow-up editorial policy and action of *Kompas* was in line with this mainstream opinion. They believed that they should keep their promise to the FPI to self-censor themselves by no longer covering the issue. Moreover, they also initiated special training for the

socialization of *Kompas* values predominately for the younger journalists at *Kompas TV* and *Kompas.com*, who were not seen as being sufficiently cognizant of the journalistic values of the newspaper. In the words of Asep: “they barely know the values of our media, so their warning bell doesn’t ring when a dangerous situation is approaching.” (Asep, Vice Chief Editor, personal interview, July 30, 2016).

Besides socialization, the majority of *Kompas* journalists also believed that going to court to defend their coverage was not an option. This conviction of the uselessness of going to court was based on historical experience: in the past *Kompas* had always lost such trials. In the words of Randu Rahardjo: “*Pak Jakob always says: don’t give up your business to other people*”, which illustrates Jakob’s skepticism about the extent to which the judicial process would work in their favor. This statement of Randu Rahardjo was no exaggeration, considering the repeated unpleasant experiences the newspaper had endured. Protests by Islamic groups have affected *Kompas* several times.

Other Attacks by Islamic Groups on Kompas

A second incident relating to Islamic sensitivity occurred in 2012, when *Kompas* published a book (through *Gramedia Publishing*) entitled “*The Five Most Influential Cities in the World*” (<https://www.eramuslim.com/berita/nasional/gramedia-mulai-membakar-buku-5-kota-paling-berpengaruh-di-dunia.htm#.WzFARiN97Zs>). This publication sparked protests from members of the Islamic Front Defender (FPI). The FPI claimed one of the pages of the book contained an insult to the Prophet Muhammad by describing him as a robber and murderer. On page 24 of the book, it was indeed written as follows “*Prophet Muhammad was a robber who orchestrated a murderous attack on the caravans in Makkah City.*” (cited at *Nahimunkar.com*, June 8, 2012). The FPI then reported the case to the police, although this was later revoked after a peaceful solution was found. One of the requirements contained in the agreement to drop the case forced *Gramedia* to withdraw all the books that had been circulated, and burn them. In addition to the withdrawal and burning

of the books, the director of *Gramedia* also publicly apologized for their “mistake” and promised not to repeat it again (Detik.com, June 13, 2012). In this regard, *Kompas Gramedia Group* fulfilled all of the demands of the protesters. The burning of the books was carried out on June 13, 2012 and was covered by many other Indonesian media, such as in the following picture by *Tempo*:



Source: Tempo.co, June 15, 2015

At the book burning conducted in front of the *Kompas* office, the Indonesian Muslim Assembly (MUI) leaders were also present, in addition to the leaders of the FPI, and the leaders of *Kompas* daily newspaper and *Gramedia* publishing. In one press conference, one of the chairmen of the MUI, KH Ma'ruf Amin, stated that he fully supported the burning of the books and saw it as a good solution to avoid a larger conflict (*BBC News.com*, June 14, 2012). He was, interestingly, also a prominent elite in Nahdlatul Ulama, one of the biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, and considered one of the more moderate ones.

A similar incident also happened in 1997. This time, it was directly related to *Kompas* daily newspaper, the first and core business of the *Kompas* media group (KKG). Perhaps surprisingly, this case had nothing to do with any domestic affair in Indonesia, but rather was triggered by *Kompas*' coverage on the political controversy taking place in Algeria. Although there were dozens of stories published about this conflict, outrage was leveled at mainly two editorial articles of the daily, entitled "*Violence Making Algeria Runyam, Victims Continue to Fall*" (dated August 28, 1997); and "*Algeria's Situation is Unscrewed, Hundreds of People Slaughtered*" (dated September 2, 1997). Both of these editorials sparked the anger of Muslims because they felt it framed the Islamic party in Algeria, the FIS, as a violent group. For certain Islamic groups who came together to form the Indonesian Committee for the Solidarity of the Islamic World (KISDI), this coverage was considered to cultivate a fear of Islam from the Indonesian public, and of any party carrying an Islamic symbol. The KISDI went further by suggesting that even though *Kompas*' coverage was about the Islamic party in Algeria, the coverage was equally damaging for the image of Islam in Indonesia.

The anger over the book led to a subpoena, submitted to the court by a group of lawyers calling themselves the *Team of Islamic Defenders* (TPI Team), together with KISDI. This team of lawyers claimed to act on behalf 119 Islamic figures in Indonesia, including on behalf of Amin Rais and Ahmad Syafi'ie Ma'arif, both of whom were prominent figures in the Islamic Muhammadiyah mass organization, which was perceived to have a more tolerant attitude towards Indonesia's religious diversity. However, the lawsuit was later withdrawn through a peace deal requiring *Kompas* to apologize publicly and pay substantial damages to the team of lawyers for the immaterial loss they had suffered. Furthermore, Arif Subangun, the author of the two editorials, was dismissed from his position as editor (Personal interview with Arif Subangun, *Kompas* journalist, June 9, 2017). This case clearly taught the media group how dangerous it was to touch on sensitive religious issues.

The most traumatic case of all, however, was the case of *Monitor Weekly*, a subsidiary media group under the *Kompas Gramedia Group*. As I explained in chapter 2, this case was triggered by the publication of a survey result on the most popular figures in Indonesia. While the survey put the then President Suharto in first rank, it placed the Prophet Muhammad only in 11th place. The fact that Muhammad was placed much lower than Suharto, and even below the Chief Editor of *Monitor*, Arswendo Atmowiloto, who was nominated in 10th place, triggered the anger of the Islamic community, resulting in a wave of demonstrations in many big cities in Indonesia. It also sent Arswendo to jail for five years, and lead to the permanent closure of the weekly.

All these cases have a number of characteristics in common. Firstly, they were all sparked by *Kompas'* coverage of something related to Islam –sometimes, as in the Algerian example, only remotely related. The coverage was then taken up by certain offended Islamic groups, who framed the issue as an attack on Muslims. These groups, who declare themselves as the mouthpiece of Indonesian Muslims, used it as a justification to launch an attack on *Kompas*. The articles they criticized were not necessarily published by *Kompas* daily newspaper itself, but were predominately published by other media outfits under the group. Yet the attack was always directed at *Kompas* daily newspaper, as well as at Jakob Oetama, the owner of the *Kompas Group*. In fact, in every dispute, journalists from the other media outfits under *Kompas* always came to offer support, as *Kompas* considered itself part of the “Big Family of Kompas Gramedia” (*Keluaga Besar Kompas Gramedia*), in which the daily newspaper was the oldest brother. Finally, no matter what the conflict with the Islamic groups might be, and regardless if they were journalistically sound or not, *Kompas* journalists always confessed that they had been wrong and conveyed regret, or apologized publicly. Sometimes, when there was an especially inflamed dispute, it was *Pak Jakob* himself who apologized, like in the case of *Monitor Weekly*, in which Jakob wrote: “Monitor was wrong in publishing its surveys. Therefore, we regret this and condemn it.... I suppose Monitor deserves to get its punishment.” (Kompas, October 23, 1990)

From the several cases above, it is also clear that besides apologizing, *Kompas* has always been committed to self-censorship whenever faced with a conflict with the power holders or with powerful groups in Indonesian society. The basis of this self-censorship is *rasa*, one of the values in Javanese culture which emphasizes the important of not hurting the feelings of others and avoiding conflict in order to maintain social harmony. The next chapter will illustrate how *rasa* has been an integral part of the habitus of *Kompas* journalists.

4.5 Rasa as the Habitus of Kompas Journalists

In each case above, there is evidence on how *rasa* has been embodied among the newspaper's journalists as an integral part of their habitus. Referring to Bourdieu (1977), as explained in chapter 3, habitus is defined as a set of values that is internalized by humans, created through a long period of socialization, which then forms the person's way of thinking and acting. The fact that the set of values is internalized over a long period of time means that the person who carries such habitus is not aware that his predisposition has been structured by his previous life history, and that is why sometimes habitus is also described as having a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu in Maton, 2008: 54). In the case of the complaint by Harry Tjan, Heru voluntarily instructed Sheryl to remain quiet and smile at whatever Tjan said to her. This was because Heru, as a mid-level editor, was aware of the importance of maintaining harmony, regardless of whether Sheryl was right or wrong. It was in that moment that Sheryl, as a new journalist, was taught what *Kompas* was about.

Meanwhile, in the case of the Century Bank scandal with Boediono, Arif Subangun was already aware that the headline title was not fitting with the *Kompas Way*, even if Jakob Oetama had not explicitly condemned it. The same thing goes for the conflicts involving protests by Islamic groups: the cases of Saeni, the book about Five Cities, the newspaper's editorial on Algeria, as well as the article by *Monitor*. In each case, *Kompas* journalists preferred to admit that they were wrong and ask for forgiveness, despite believing that they had

been right journalistically. This is because by doing so, they could rebuild and repair their relationship with the power holders.

The journalists in the newsroom know what kind of information should not be delivered to the public in order to maintain respect for others. According to Arunata, a former journalist at *Kompas*, every *Kompas* journalist understands the following principle:

We try our best not to hurt others' feelings, that's Javanese culture. What's the advantage of hurting others, right? I could write whatever I want, but will other people feel fine with that? Would they be angry or not? Would other people feel offended? Do their hearts feel the call? (Arunata, personal interview, March 3, 2015)

Asep advocates the same philosophy:

The culture of Kompas is rooted in the values of the Kompas founder, Jakob Oetama, and prescribes never to attack people and make them cry. Don't make people who are already suffering, suffer even more... [we are] different from other newspapers such as Tempo, which always want to attack. We situate the problem comprehensively, in an indirect way, using refined language. (Asep, personal interview, February 7, 2014)

Both interviews above show how *rasa* has been internalized as the main value among *Kompas* journalists.

Furthermore, internalizing *rasa* is a sign that a person has become a true Javanese. Sularto, the Vice General Editor of the paper, suggests that *Kompas* is never “vulgar in choosing its topic, words...[it exercises] self-control, and becomes *njawani* (Javanese)” (Sularto, personal interview, February 11, 2014). In this concept of “becoming Javanese/*njawani*”, it is suggested that the extent to which a person can be considered a Javanese can be determined by the

degree to which he integrates *rasa* in his writing. In the case of Asep, he believed that his “failure” in writing an appropriate headline title about the Boediono case was because his *rasa* was not yet refined enough. In fact, for a Javanese, *rasa* is manifest in their every social interaction, such as in the way they greet and smile people, the way they stand, and even the way they sit. This is because they have already internalized the value of *rasa* as part of their habitus, which emphasizes the importance of keeping social harmony. It is only by protecting social harmony and avoiding conflict that a Javanese can keep their own inner peace, which for him is a virtue. Indeed, for a Javanese, inner peace is a reflection of a good life.

4.6 The Political Economy of Rasa

Even though as explained above, *rasa* reflects the idea of a good life for a Javanese, its manifestation into practice is also shaped by some political economy factors. While *rasa* can be seen as a cultural value, it has to be emphasized that this cautious respect for social obligations also aligns with particular political economy features in which *Kompas* operates.

In this regard, there are four factors which have influenced the implementation of *rasa* in *Kompas* journalism. First of all, there is the historical trauma caused by the ban between January 21 and February 5, 1978, due to some coverage deemed critical by the Suharto regime. As explained in chapter 2, before finally being allowed to publish again on February 6, 1978, *Kompas* was required to sign a contract with the regime to never cover the following four things in their news coverage: (1) they would never write about the President’s family and their wealth; (2) they would never question the double function of the military (security function and political function); (3) they would never write about issues related to ethnicity, religion, intergroup conflict and racial issues; and (4) they would never write about any sensitive issues which could trigger social conflict related to religion, ethnicity, race and other minority groups (Sularto, 2011:24). This last requirement specifically prohibited covering sensitive issues relating to religion.

Three days after the reopening of the newspaper, the *Kompas* President Director, Jakob Oetama, was met the President at the Press Commemoration event. The President said to Jakob in Javanese: “*Ojo meneh-meneh*”, which means “Never Again” (Sularto, 2011: 22). This warning, which was said in Javanese instead of the Indonesian language, indicated that the President was very upset about the coverage. The same warning was repeated by Suharto in another meeting with Jakob in 1980, when Jakob asked the President whether they would be allowed to cover the student protest. The answer was even stronger: “*Tak gebuk*”. In the Javanese language, this means: “*I will hit you [hard]!*” The effect of the message was shocking, as Suharto complimented his words with the gesture of a clenched fist (Sularto, 2011: 22-23). In the biography of Jakob Oetama, it states that *Kompas* was warned many times by the military elite during the New Order period. Against this political background, in order to survive the New Order, *Kompas* had to conduct journalism in such a way that avoided offending the regime. According to Arunata, “For 30 years, we have to live with those values. We were raised and molded in this way”. (Arunata, personal interview, March 3, 2015).

As also mentioned in Chapter 2, the historical trauma also related to the case of *Monitor Weekly*. In this case, a wave of demonstrations took place in several big cities across Indonesia and involved the destruction of *Monitor’s* office. Furthermore, the weekly was banned forever, and the chief editor declared guilty of violating the blasphemy law. He was sent to prison for five years. It was this incident which shook Jakob the most, as *Monitor* was part of *Kompas Gramedia Group*. In the words of a journalist on the *Kompas* editorial board:

At that time he felt that Indonesia was growing with Kompas into a tolerant society. But the Monitor incident made him hesitate and ask: “Who are they actually? Apparently I do not know this society.” This historical trauma must then be carried by all future generations of journalists after him... (Jimmy Laluna, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

It is noteworthy that *Monitor Weekly* was not the first newspaper to compare the popularity of the Prophet to other figures, which served to make *Kompas* journalists aware that they were targeted due to their Catholic-ness. As explained in Chapter 2, the founders and first generation of *Kompas* were mostly Catholic, and some were Chinese in terms of ethnicity. Moreover, *Kompas* was historically founded and initiated by the Indonesian Catholic party in 1965, and had organizational ties with the Catholic party until 1971 (Dhakidae, 1991).

The fact that the newspaper belonged to the Catholic minority group forms the second factor why *rasa* is the basis of self-censorship at *Kompas*, utilized in order to avoid offending Islamic believers who are the majority group in Indonesia. The repeated experiences of being attacked by hardline Muslims have made *Kompas* fearful of Islamic groups. In the words of a *Kompas* journalist:

What has happened to Kompas, in my view, is a syndrome of "Islamophobia". However, this phobia of Kompas has to be put in quotation marks, as this phobia is not the result of our poor understanding of Islam, as we understand it very well. Kompas realizes that it carries original sin as the newspaper was born Catholic. This original sin is something latent, which haunts it...that they might be attacked at any time because of their Catholic-ness. Indeed, historical experiences have confirmed that what we consider as latent has manifested in real attacks. (Hikmah, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

As argued by many scholars, as Indonesia was entering the Reformation era after the fall of Suharto, the practice of intolerance from majority Islamic groups has been on the rise (Crouch, 2012; George, 2016; Lim, 2017; Wiratraman, 2014). It is for this reason that the use of *rasa* has persisted and to some extent intensified even more, despite the regime change.

This second factor compels the newspaper to secure protection from the power holders, which provides the third factor underlying the practice of *rasa*. In this regard, the power holders refer are members of the political regime as well as the powerful informal Islamic groups in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the two biggest Islamic organizations in the country. By staying close to the power holders, *Kompas* hopes to secure protection from the potential threat posed by these conservative groups. This protection could come indirectly, from the public perception that the newspaper has an alliance with the power holders, making these groups pause before launching an attack. This close relationship can be seen by the fact that all Indonesian elites, from politicians such as President Joko Widodo, Vice President Jusuf Kalla and party leaders such as Abu Rizal Bakri, to religious leaders such as the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Said Aqil Siraj and the former Chairman of Muhammadiyah, all officially congratulated the newspaper on its 50-year anniversary on June 28, 2015. These articles appeared in a special edition entitled: “50 Years of Kompas: Putting Indonesia On Stage”, published on the same day.

This protection by association could turn into concrete support when the newspaper is in actual danger. This can be seen from the case of the incident with *Monitor Weekly*. *Kompas* was supported by Abdurrahman Wahid, the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Wahid announced in the media that there was nothing wrong with the survey results conducted by the weekly. He suggested that perhaps most of the readers of *Monitor* were not Muslim, so it was understandable that the Prophet Muhammad was not ranked in first place. Despite this, *Monitor Weekly* was still targeted, but journalists believe that the outcome could have been still worse without Wahid’s support. Meanwhile, support also came from NU in the case of the *Five Cities* book publication, which was condemned by the Indonesian Front Defender (FPI). According to Mohammad Bakir, the Managing Editor of the daily, the newspaper got support from Nur Iskandar, a respected religious leader from Nahdlatul Ulama. Nur Iskandar was the religious teacher of Rizieq Shihab, who was the Chairman of the FPI. It is for this reason, he believes, that the newspaper did not have to pay

a large amount of money to settle outside of court, unlike in other such incidents with the group. In this case, the paper was “only” required to burn all of the books and never to publish them again.

This close relationship is surely not without a price, as to some extent, dependency on power holders restrains *Kompas*’ reporting. Besides the cases above, where *Kompas* preferred to apologize for their news articles in order to maintain harmony, the paper also voluntarily self-censors itself before any complaints can be made. In order to secure a close relationship with NU, for instance, the newspaper has tried to avoid covering certain events which might offend NU followers. The Indonesian People’s Tribunal in The Hague on November 2015 was one such event. This people’s tribunal was held at the initiative of the families or sympathizers of the victims of Indonesia’s mass killings in 1965, and brought together international civil society organizations from around the world. It aimed to gather testimonies and other evidence linking the Indonesian military government under Suharto to the killings of thousands of Indonesians, who were suspected members of the communist party. These killings were carried out by civilians but initiated and sponsored by the military. The reason the newspaper did not properly cover the event nor investigate the issue, was because it did not want offend Nahdlatul Ulama followers, whom were believed to be involved in the killings. In the words of Jimmy Laluna, a senior journalist and member of the editorial board: “...We don’t want to hurt the feelings of NU, who are our friends”. (Jimmy Laluna, personal interview, November 22, 2015)”.

Finally, there is an economic interest underlying the practice of *rasa*. Implicit in the practice of *rasa* is the need to survive under both regimes: the New Order era and the Reformation era. By surviving, *Kompas* was able to secure its economic interest - not just the economic interest of the media owner, but also of all the journalists working there. If *Kompas* had been banned permanently under the New Order, the workers would have lost their jobs. Similarly, in this Reformation era, if *Kompas* was attacked by the Islamic radical groups and the

newspaper was shut down, or went bankrupt, the journalists would also lose their jobs. Furthermore, the several cases above demonstrate how *Kompas* had to bear the consequences of “mistakes” made by its other business subsidiaries, such as in the case of *Monitor Weekly*, the *Five Cities* book, as well as the case of Saeni. This has made the newspaper, in its role of “big brother” or even “father” to these other media, tread even more carefully. This is because the mistakes made by the newspaper could cause collateral damage to other business groups living under the same management of *Kompas Gramedia Group* (KGG) and belonging to the same owner, Jakob Oetama.

As long as the newspaper still exists, the minority groups working for it can still make a living in Indonesia. This can be said to be the indirect business interest of *Kompas*. However, *Kompas* also provides a direct economic interest to the minority, as a place where the Indonesian minority groups can make a living. In one interview, retired *Kompas* journalist Ludwig Swara said:

I graduated in the time when it was hard to find a job. It was 1965, and the Old Order regime had left Indonesia in serious economic crisis. And I am Chinese so I can't work as civil servant. No Chinese would be appointed in the state apparatus. Kompas was the reasonable place to work for me. (Ludwig Swara, personal interview, December 24, 2014)

It is noteworthy, however, that while *rasa* is sensitive towards the needs of those who are powerful, it is not always sensitive to the needs of those who are weak. By not covering the tribunal held by the victims of the mass murders, for instance, meant that *Kompas* did not take the side of the hundred thousand murdered victims. Since the beginning of the Reformation era in 1998, the problems of religious intolerance have been on the rise.

One of the incidents often cited as evidence of this is the eviction of Ahmadiyah believers from various places such as Nusa Tenggara Barat and Bangka Belitung, because they were seen as violating the mainstream Islamic teachings as

agreed on by the Indonesian Islamic Leaders Council (MUI). The newspaper was aware that the eviction had violated the Indonesian Constitution, but they preferred not to expose it in order to avoid causing offence to the NU and Muhammadiyah elites, who were the main members of the MUI (Arif Subangun, *Kompas* Chief Editor, personal interview, February 13, 2014). In this regard, it is clear that *rasa* has mainly served those in power, because it is the power holders who can generate a threat to the newspaper. *Rasa* has therefore been used as a tool for survival for this minority newspaper, safeguarding it from the threat posed by the majority groups in Indonesia.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the role of Javanese values – particularly *rasa* – in shaping and legitimizing a form of self-censorship at *Kompas* daily newspaper. More specifically, *rasa* has been used as the basis (a) to accommodate complaints about articles from close friends, as demonstrated in the case involving Harry Tjan, (b) to deal with the complaints regarding corruption coverage, as in the case of the Century Bank scandal involving Vice President Boediono, (c) to settle attacks from Islamic groups, as demonstrated in the case of Saeni, the *Five Cities* survey results discussing the Prophet, and the tragedy in Algeria. In all these cases, the journalists agreed to confess their wrongdoing and apologize, despite believing that they were journalistically correct. As a consequence, they accepted the demand of the protesters by not covering the stories which triggered the protest, or at least, covering them in a more positive manner. In some disputes, they even agreed to pay compensation to the protesters as part of the settlement. Lastly, *rasa* has also been used as the basis for deciding whether to cover any issues considered sensitive for Islamic groups, such as in the case of the tribunal on the mass killings of 1965 and Ahmadiyah's eviction.

With these illustrations, I argue that *rasa* has been an integral part of the habitus of *Kompas* journalists, which they have internalized through a long process of socialization within the newsroom. This habitus has, in turn,

provided a certain kind of formula which directs the journalist's way of thinking and acting in the daily production of news. In the spirit of *rasa*, journalists try to avoid covering issues in such a way that would offend the power holders, or in other words, to pre-empt complaints arising from these power holders. And when the newspaper did cover such sensitive issues and complaints arose, *Kompas* would swiftly acknowledge this and apologize, regardless of whether they were right. These compromises are often legitimized with reference to the concept of *rasa*. What matters, according to this cultural value, is not to find which side was right, but rather, to minimize the possibility of conflict and a confrontation with those in power. *Rasa*, in this sense, prioritizes the maintenance of social harmony over the quest for "truth". Indeed, both *rasa* and the maintenance of social harmony are two important values in Javanese culture.

However, even though *rasa* is a cultural entity, its manifestation into practice is also influenced by political economy factors and the vulnerabilities of the newspaper. In this chapter I highlighted the relationship between *Kompas'* conscious style of reporting and its vulnerabilities. First of all, it is the historical trauma from the ban during the New Order period which required the newspaper to refrain from covering certain issues in order to be allowed to operate again. The second factor is the fact that the newspaper is owned by a Catholic group, which has made any critical coverage of Islam subject to be perceived as an attack from a minority towards the majority Islamic group in Indonesia. In the course of its history, the newspaper has experienced repeated attacks from Muslim groups due to its coverage on Islamic issues, and consequently, *Kompas* has sought protection from the power holders. This has led to the third factor which influences the use of *rasa*, which is the practice of self-censorship that it applies. Lastly, the use of *rasa* was influenced by an economic interest to secure the newspaper's survival, not only that of *Kompas* daily newspaper itself, but also all the other media falling under the umbrella of KKG. This is because any damage occurring in one unit will bear consequences for the whole business group.

The next chapter will focus on how *rasa* informs the coverage of corruption across different political regimes. I will elaborate on how *rasa* operates in the newspaper's coverage on corruption through the concept of a *polite watchdog*. By this concept, I will argue that while *Kompas* still covers the incidents of corruption by power holders, but does so in such a way that will not cause offence to the power holders, thereby avoiding any direct confrontation with them, or at the very least, reduces the risk of complaints arising.