Freedom and Blasphemy: On Indonesian Press Bans and Danish Cartoons

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Two prominent Indonesian social scientists, Ariel Heryanto and Stanley Yoseph Adi (2002: 51), have observed that "all dominant narratives of the rise of the nation in Indonesia are inseparable from the history of the press." This is not an uncommon view (see, e.g., Adam 1995; Sen and Hill 2000; Tickell 1987). Indeed, by many accounts the special role played by the press in narratives of the nation is hardly confined to Indonesia. A more general claim is implied by Heryanto and Adi's (2002: 49–50) remark that "typical of many colonial and post-colonial societies, the press . . . in Indonesia carries a moral authority and political weight not seen in many industrialized First World countries." They imply that the importance of the press in these societies goes beyond being a conduit for information, a catalyst for action, or even, as famously argued by Benedict Anderson (1991), a ritualistic inculcation of new social imaginaries; nor are these historical narratives and attendant hagiographies only about national identity. The reference to moral authority should remind us that they are also—as Anderson noted—about the supplanting of sacred languages with the vernaculars of print capitalism, an element of the (apparent) triumph of secularism. Indeed,

this may be one reason the press carries special authority within many narratives of the rise of the nation well beyond the Euro-American world. I argue that, by linking purportedly secular language to concepts of freedom and of voice, some familiar ideologies of the press can manifest a certain moral narrative of modernity, a story of human agency emancipated from its captivation with fetishes and other unrealities (see Keane 2007: 47–51). Of course, there are many competing views of the press, and actual practices are surely even more diverse. But it is not uncommon that the press is seen to play a special role in history. In such cases, this perception may, in part, reflect the way in which it seems to embody freedom and, at times, to give concrete form to the idea that a people can be a historical agent, by means of giving the people a voice. With this in mind, we may see how conflicts over the actions of the press can reveal some of the difficulties posed by the moral narrative of modernity and the common sense of contemporary liberalism.

The claims to authority for the press that Heryanto and Adi's remark exemplifies rest on semiotic ideologies that give rise to paradoxes due both to their particular portrayal of signification—one far less complex than the range of actual practices—and to their genealogical ties to that moral narrative of modernity. Moreover, two common (if not universal) grounds for that authority, that the press is supposed to embody freedom and to give voice to the people, may turn out to be at odds with each other. To help make these problems visible, in this article I juxtapose the notorious incident of the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005 with a quite different sort, the closing of the Indonesian magazine *Tempo* in 1994 and the new kinds of conflict that subsequently emerged after the lifting of press censorship in 1998. The *Tempo* case seems to be a straightforward instance of an authoritarian state suppressing outspoken journalists. But when placed in the context of religious objections to publications as exemplified by the Danish case, the *Tempo* ban may also display certain moral dimensions implicit in the authority often claimed for the press. As I show, these dimensions have become even more apparent since the lifting of Indonesia's formal apparatus of press controls in recent years, as former defenders of press freedom themselves give voice to explicitly moral anxieties about the consequences of that freedom.

The Indonesian and Danish cases obviously differ greatly in historical context, political implications, the power differentials between the press and its opponents, and, for that matter, semiotic modalities (texts and images, respectively, each with distinct kinds of truth claims and communicative norms). The celebrated role played by the Indonesian press in many narratives of the nation's history may not be duplicated in places like Denmark. The full-fledged commercialization

of media is far more recent in Indonesia than in Denmark and gives rise to quite distinct worries. More specifically, the banning of *Tempo* is usually seen as a critical moment in a growing popular resistance to authoritarian rule. The terms of this struggle could easily be understood within the more or less secular terms of political instrumentality, a contest between agents of "state" and of "society," a struggle over information in which both sides claimed to act in the national interest. By contrast, the Danish cartoons manifested a form of European ethnonationalism, increasingly defined against an Islamic other, crystallized around a purported opposition between secular freedoms and religious sensibilities. But in both incidents certain ubiquitous ideas about the press come into play. Both cases center on the kinds of actions that can be attributed to the public circulation of verbal and visual signs, actions on which the authority of the press partly depends. In the Indonesian case, as I show, this point comes into sharper focus once state censorship is lifted and a host of new moral conflicts arise to shake the familiar assumptions about the press. At this point, certain parallels as well as contrasts between the Indonesian situation and the conflict between satirical Danes and pious Muslims become apparent. The juxtaposition of these cases casts into relief how semiotic ideologies can mediate moral claims in public.[1]

Across a wide range of social contexts and historical circumstances, the press has often been taken to be a special kind of historical agent. Journalists, editors, publishers, and the readers whose habits they help shape are often self-conscious, if not self-dramatizing, about their impact. Claudio Lomnitz (2008: 55) quotes the American journalist James Creelman, writing in 1901: "The modern editor is seldom contented unless he feels that he is making history as well as writing it." Lomnitz (2008: 56) then remarks that "this expression captures the well-known ambiguity of the term *history*, which refers at once to events of the past and to their telling. Nowhere is this duality more patent than in journalism." In the Indonesian case, Tirto Adhi Soerjo, who started the first indigenous newspaper in the Dutch East Indies in 1903, came to be celebrated as a principal founder of the nationalist movement (Pramoedya 1985; see also Pramoedya 1980). Tirto referred to himself as the "defender of the common people" (*pembela rakyat*), anticipating what came to be the dominant image of the press in Indonesia a half century later, the "press of struggle" (*pers perjuangan*). Today this historical role is fossilized in the names of newspapers like the *Voice of Freedom* (*Suara Merdeka*) and the *People's Thought* (*Pikiran Rakyat*) and in the slogan, appropriated by the leading

1. For a distinct but complementary account of the centrality to secularism of what I am calling a semiotic ideology, see Asad 2006.

newspaper, *Kompas*, from the nineteenth-century American satirist Mr. Dooley, "To console the poor, to remind the established" (Manzella 2000: 306).[2]

In fact, strong views of the social efficacy of the press are commonly shared by both the press's proponents and its opponents, across a wide range of social and political contexts. Efforts by states to control the press depend on assumptions about its social powers, its potential historical agency, that are often very close to those held by members of the press themselves. As Dominic Boyer (2003: 512) has written of the former East Germany, censorship could be seen as an intellectual vocation, "a kind of operation upon public language and upon public knowledge, . . . a productive intellectual practice" similar to the view that editors and critics took of their own work. The censor and the censored are united in their conviction that texts are in themselves potentially powerful and can serve as vehicles for their own social and historical agency and as catalysts for the agency of their publics.[3] However the press does or does not act, it is, at least, commonly taken by its producers, consumers, and opponents alike to be a historical agent with special powers of objectification.[4] What I want to emphasize here is that, among many other things, this objectification takes place within a *moral domain*.

2. For the history of the Indonesian press, see Adam 1995; Dhakidae 1991; Hill 1994; Romano 2003; Sen and Hill 2000; and Tickell 1987. Some good examples of the heroic vision of the press in different periods of Indonesian history are Atmakusumah 1992; Lubis, Tasrif, and Said 1992; Pramoedya 1985; and Yuliati 2000.

3. In drawing on situations as distant as those in Indonesia and Denmark, I am assuming that ideas about the press can never be portrayed simply as matters of local knowledge. Like bureaucracies, nongovernmental organizations, laboratories, armies, religious missions, universities, advertising agencies, banks, and postal services, the press draws on globally circulating institutions, procedures, and norms. Journalists often measure themselves against standards whose origins and exemplars they readily locate elsewhere (Ståhlberg 2006). In these respects journalists are the quintessential cosmopolitans (Hannerz 2004); we might think of Karl Marx serving in the employ of Horace Greeley as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. At the same time, the languages and the very terms of relevance, what makes the news newsworthy, are embedded in particular localities. In Indonesia the national language that dominates print media and television has at times seemed to imbricate the local and the cosmopolitan (Keane 2003). And certainly journalistic writing responds to local expectations about narrative structure and linguistic form and takes place in a workplace shaped by local traditions of labor and authority.

4. This was a self-conscious goal of the press within twentieth-century socialist states (Boyer 2003, 2005; Wolfe 2005), but the objectification of social bodies through interpellative address (the incorporative "we" familiar from *USA Today*, for instance) was also important in more liberal political orders (see esp. Warner 1990); for an illuminating contrast, see Hasty 2005. A different but, I think, congruent view is suggested by James Siegel's (1998: 61) remark about *Tempo*'s crime reporting, that "one question leads to another in such a way that a particular crime is made into a type and a national problem." For more on the idea of objectification within moral narratives of modernity, see Keane 2007.

By "moral domain" I refer to the sphere of judgments and evaluations of persons and actions. I take this to be not inherently distinct from what is often called "the political"; rather, it is an element of those presuppositions on which the latter is grounded. By examining the actions imputed to the press, and the struggles to control or liberate the press as an agent, we can gain some insight into how morally loaded concepts such as "freedom" and "truth" enter into the world of politics and social practices. These are concepts that link morality and agency to certain ideas about language and other modes of signification. They are, that is, forms of *semiotic ideology* that mediate among communication, politics, and religion.

Here I approach concepts like "freedom" as social facts. Critics of liberal thought, such as Zygmunt Bauman (1988), among many others, often argue that concepts such as "freedom" are inseparable from relations of domination and inequality. Yet such critical approaches should not wholly displace empirical questions about the social lives led by ideas such as freedom and truth. If we follow the history of these ideas in particular concrete circumstances, we may find new purchase on the possibilities and the paradoxes those social lives involve. As I have argued elsewhere for the idea of "modernity" (Keane 2007), regardless of the problematic character of such concepts as analytic tools or normative guides, we should at least take seriously the consequences of their global circulation and their interpellative power. Whatever we may conclude that freedom "actually is"—if such a question even makes sense—we must pay attention to its ubiquity as an idea people argue with and about and as a framework with reference to which people construct certain kinds of practices and institutions and argue about their legitimacy.

In what follows I offer some provisional thoughts about the underpinnings of these ideas in secularism and touch on some of the moral anxieties they can entail. I discuss two challenges to press freedom at opposite ends of the globe, one involving state realpolitik, the other ethnopolitics and religious transgression. By juxtaposing these very different events in quite distinct contexts, I argue that they shed light on certain common problems in semiotic ideology as it bears on the idea of freedom. In the Indonesian case, however, these problems became of significant public concern only after the end of state censorship and amid the growing commercialization of the media.[5] Drawing on this argument, I then return to the question with which I began, the moral authority of the press.

5. Observers of Indonesia may point out that suppression of media has hardly disappeared, but it takes different forms and no longer has the pervasive, state-centric grip it had under Soeharto's Ministry of Information.

The Banning of *Tempo*

In June 1994 the Indonesian newsweekly *Tempo*, along with two other magazines, was shut down by President Soeharto's Ministry of Information after reporting on disputes within the regime over the purchase of ships, of dubious seaworthiness, previously owned by the former East German navy. *Tempo*, an unabashed clone of *Time* magazine, had been started twenty-three years earlier, not long after General Soeharto had seized power from Indonesia's first president, Sukarno.[6] Under the charismatic leadership of its founding editor, the poet and essayist Goenawan Mohamad, *Tempo* had by the 1990s become one of the most influential elite newsmagazines in Southeast Asia. In its early years *Tempo* had been identified with the more optimistic views about the possibilities represented by the transition from Sukarno's efforts to blend nationalism and socialism to Soeharto's promises of economic growth and technocratic modernity under his developmentalist New Order regime; over time the editors grew increasingly disenchanted. Goenawan was a master tactician, steering a careful course between criticism and caution that allowed the magazine to stay in print, while also retaining the respect of its readers through its ever more daring challenges, hinted and sometimes open, to official versions of reality. Those readers were primarily members of Indonesia's tiny urban elite and middle classes. This readership was reflected in the steep cover price and the predominance of advertisements featuring luxury goods, often making ostentatious use of English. The articles were written in an innovative, lively, urbane, and allusive style of Indonesian not readily accessible to the majority even of the nation's literate population. Like virtually all leading periodicals of the time, the magazine was implicitly secularist in tone (cf. Goenawan n.d.). The magazine's circulation peaked at 190,000 at a time when the national population was approaching 200 million. (In the same period, *Kompas*, the staid newspaper of record, had a paid circulation of more than half a million and probably reached 3 million readers; figures for the leading tabloids were probably much greater [Hill 1994: 13, 41].)

In view of this relatively limited, if powerful, constituency, the reaction to the banning of *Tempo* was striking. Sustained by promises of economic benefits, Indonesia's middle class had been largely quiescent and acquiescent for the previous two and a half decades. By the time of the magazine's ban, after decades of enforced calm and stability, Soeharto's power seemed unshakable. But in the year following the ban, there were 170 demonstrations across a country in which dem-

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6. Steele 2005 gives an insightful history of the magazine; see also Kitley 2001.

onstrations had long been rare and risky. According to Heryanto and Adi (2002: 55): "In the entire New Order's history, no single controversy had forged such broad-based civil protests, cutting across religious, ideological, ethnic, linguistic, gender and geographical differences. Unlike previous social upheavals, this had no central organization, leadership or agenda." The demonstrations brought into the streets not just students and workers but also middle-class professionals, in alliances and numbers unprecedented since the end of the Sukarno regime in the 1960s. The *Tempo* demonstrations were some of the first serious open challenges to the regime's legitimacy, and some later observers considered them to have played a significant role in the loss of authority that helped precipitate President Soeharto's eventual fall from power in 1998. To put the events in perspective, it is worth bearing in mind all the other things that did *not* bring massive, prolonged demonstrations to the streets. Throughout the thirty-two-year history of Soeharto's New Order regime, the banning of magazines, newspapers, and books was hardly unusual (for instance, it has been estimated that the regime banned two thousand books). Nor was state violence confined to the suppression of texts. After all, the Soeharto regime had come to power in 1965–66 amid one of the bloodiest slaughters to be perpetrated in the post–Second World War period, had carried out something close to genocide in East Timor, and had ruthlessly suppressed labor unions, seized land to benefit cronies in the name of development, and become increasingly corrupt. Yet given the public reaction, it seems that there was something distinctively provocative about the *Tempo* ban. I return to this question below, but first I turn to the second case.

The Danish Cartoons Affair

It is a nice irony that Harmoko, the minister of information who signed the order banning *Tempo*, had once been a political cartoonist for the newspaper *Merdeka* (*Freedom*) in the 1960s. Presumably he understood something both of the power of cartoons and even, perhaps, of the social power of the idea of freedom.[7] Although this idea of freedom seemed unambiguous to press defenders in the context of social resistance to state oppression, a struggle over the expression or suppression of truthful reporting, the heroic vision of the press may not always be so clear-cut. One point of difference lies in the very semiotic ideologies underlying the modes of action to which the press sometimes lays claim. Semiotic ideol-

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7. Examples of Indonesian political cartoons from roughly the same period can be seen in Anderson 1990.

ogy and its relationship to the idea of freedom are the elements on which I want to focus in the Danish cartoons affair. As the Danish case shows, not only does semiotic ideology mediate moral judgments, but it can also obscure the nature of social action from its protagonists and make it hard for the actors themselves to understand the consequences.

In September 2005 the right-wing Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (*Jutlands Post*) published a number of political cartoons, most of which used the image of Muhammad to lampoon Islam in one form or another. These were solicited after it had been reported that a children's book author had been unable to find an illustrator willing to portray the Prophet, so afraid were Danish artists of a backlash because of the Islamic injunction against such portraits. According to the newspaper's editors, their purpose was to test the courage of Danes in standing up for their traditions of freedom of expression (in effect making press freedom a distinctive feature of Danish ethnonationalism). After several Danish Muslim leaders failed to gain the ear of the prime minister to register their protest, the case was publicized in parts of the Middle East. The result was a wave of anger, sometimes violent, that lasted several months (followed by a second wave in 2008) and extended across the Muslim world, including Indonesia. In early October both the editor and the cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten* insisted that they had done nothing wrong and stressed that freedom of speech lay at the heart of Danish democracy. A spokesperson for the paper said that there was no intention to provoke Muslims; "instead we wanted to show how deeply entrenched self-censorship has already become" among Danes (Heflik 2006).The Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said that he would not intervene, since the state guaranteed freedom of expression. Across Europe and America there were reinvigorated talk about a clash of civilizations, heated defenses of the freedom of expression, and, countering them, calls for sensitivity to religious feelings.

I bring up this by now quite familiar incident not to rehearse these arguments yet again but to draw attention to one feature of the European commentary that may help illuminate the problems of agency and the press with which I am concerned here. The Danish publishers and politicians seemed to have no coherent explanation for the anger they encountered. From the start they claimed that there was nothing to apologize for. Indeed, the prime minister refused at first even to meet with Muslim representatives. Faced not just with violence but also with a boycott of Danish exports in the Middle East, eventually the publisher of *Jyllands-Posten* apologized for any hurt feelings Muslims had suffered, writing that the cartoons "were not intended to be offensive, nor were they at variance

with Danish law, but they have indisputably offended many Muslims, for which we apologize" (*Jyllands-Posten*, January 30, 2006).[8]

There are some notable features to this statement and the actions that led up to it that we may better understand if we reflect on the semiotic ideology they presuppose. The publisher's apology was striking for what it did not say. It was directed not at the action but at the response to that action. None of the Danish remarks reported in the English-language press gave any serious consideration to the cartoonists' aggression or to the readers' hostility toward Denmark's Muslim population to which the cartoonists were appealing—readers, one may surmise, in whose voice they claimed to speak. The apology instead focused on the over-sensitive feelings of Muslims. One might say, of course, that this is a common strategy of apologizing without taking responsibility, but its success depends on its apparent reasonableness. Two aspects of this case are worth noting. First, by focusing on the feelings of those who respond, and treating them as distinct from the initial action of publishing the cartoons, the apology in effect treats the original act as complete in itself. (Ironically, a similar model of action is embedded in the laws under which blasphemy has been prosecuted in Indonesia, a point to which I return shortly.) The *Jyllands-Posten* editors maintained that their initial action was self-contained and that any response to that action was supplementary or extraneous to it. Indeed, their alleged purpose was not to attack Muslims but to criticize Danish self-censorship. In this portrayal of the publication, the act properly understood takes place wholly among Danes. It is as if the Muslims were mere bystanders. Thus the editors can apologize for the response, treating it as an unintended consequence.[9] In the classic liberal mode, they focus on the intentions of discrete actors, not on the social relations out of which those actions arise and into which they enter (see Asad 2008; Mahmood forthcoming). Now, given the background, we can surmise that this claim was disingenuous, but the question then is, why should the defense have seemed persuasive to so many Europeans and others?

This brings me to the second interesting aspect of the case. One dimension of

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8. The statement was published in Danish, Arabic, and English versions (Associated Press and *Washington Post* 2006).

9. It may be that cartoons, like other publications, do operate with reference to a communicative norm in which a response is expected—but then the accusation would be that the Muslim response is of the wrong sort. Interestingly, such a more dialogic norm seems to lie behind one effort to respond in kind, when the Iranian newspaper *Hamshahri* published cartoons about the Holocaust (Slackman 2006).

the Danish response was a denial that the newspaper had engaged in an aggressive action at all. The implication seems to be that anyone who was angered by the cartoons had failed to understand the nature of representations. To say, for instance, that cartoons are only pictures, not deeds, and that (unlike, say, the photographs from Abu Ghraib) they do not portray true events is to articulate a particular semiotic ideology, affirming certain fundamental assumptions about the place of signs in the world, the nature of truth, and their relations to action. The moral evaluation of Muslims' nonmodernity centers here on the notion that they simply do not understand reality, as registered in their failure to grasp the true nature of signs. Indeed, the question of semiotic ideology must arise when we consider that photographs of actual physical brutality against Muslims had not provoked similar responses.[10]

Now the cartoonists and their editors surely knew that a cartoon is not merely a picture, much less an inoffensive one; otherwise they would long ago have been out of a job. As the cartoonist Art Spiegelman (2006: 45) wrote, this kind of work necessarily has "a predisposition toward insult." To be effective, insult cannot operate in the vacuum of abstract freedom. The cartoonist must have good intuitions about which taboos can be transgressed and which cannot, which boundaries may be pushed to the most provocative effect—and where their ultimate (which is not to say static) limits lie. He or she must know the audience and its moral sensibilities.[11]

The effectiveness of the Danish cartoons as acts of aggression was surely inseparable from their appeal to certain kinds of readers and their growing hostility to Muslim immigrants (see Henkel 2006). But acts of hostility toward Muslims, and angry responses to those acts, are hardly unknown in Europe. What is worth considering is the peculiarly semiotic focus of this event. This semiotic focus drew on a deep genealogy in European history. It tended to obscure the nature of the Danish actions and made it hard for defenders of the Danes to understand

10. It goes without saying that the protests are part of ongoing struggles over the place of Muslim immigrants in European society. As Mahmood Mamdani (n.d.) and others have pointed out, they are also responses to the exclusion of dissidents from public discourse in some Muslim countries. My point is to ask what it is about *cartoons* that they should have served as such a powerful instigation, rather than, say, economic policies, electoral politics, or police actions. Among other things, if *Jyllands-Posten* can be seen as a "voice of the people," it is because it interpellated that people in ways that quite flamboyantly excluded Danish Muslims.

11. So close is the potential tie between cartoonist and audience, in Anderson's (1990: 163) view, that Indonesian cartoons during the 1950s and early 1960s "were a way of creating collective consciences by people without access to bureaucratic or other institutionalized forms of political muscle."

Muslim responses in any terms other than familiar stereotypes about intolerance, irrationality, nonmodernity, and an innate propensity for violence.

Press Freedom as Part of a Secular Semiotic Ideology

We need to disarticulate the various strands that cases like the Danish cartoons bring together. Of course, the anger had many sources other than images in Denmark, which at any rate few of their critics seem actually to have seen. And certainly there was political opportunism on all sides. But it is not my purpose here to take on the host of debates about immigration, citizenship, or Islam, nor am I equipped to discuss all the complexities of European, much less Danish, politics. It is also not my goal in this article to portray a Muslim alternative to this secular ideology, which in any event cannot be treated in monolithic terms (for Middle Eastern Islam alone, see Caton 1990; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005, forthcoming; Messick 1993; Shryock 1997; Starrett 1995; see also Eisenlohr 2006). Nor should we imagine that the sense of offense some Muslims expressed is fundamentally alien to "the West" (as Spanish laws against lèse-majesté and American reactions to flag burning or the *Piss Christ* artwork make clear). What I am interested in is what the European response to Muslim anger reveals about some of the aporia of one (albeit not the only one) of their own dominant semiotic ideologies. I want to ask what it was about the Danish denials that made them so persuasive to other observers across a fairly wide political spectrum. This means asking what the resulting debates about freedom and blasphemy might reveal about certain moral claims of the press and about the underlying assumptions that those claims presuppose. I want to suggest that these claims involve semiotic ideologies whose genealogies reach back much earlier, and extend far wider, than the current politics of immigration, identity, and current geopolitical strife do.

By focusing on freedom of the press rather than on social relations, the defenders of the newspaper could count on a family of commonsense views of what pictures and words are and how they function in the world. They tapped into a widespread and habitual way of thinking that treats representational acts as referential and communicative in function. In this view, pictures and words are mere vehicles (and, in the case of words, arbitrary social conventions) filled with information, itself a distinct entity that stands apart from persons and their actions. The task of the viewer or reader is to open up or decode those vehicles to obtain that information.

This view is not the only one found in the Euro-American West, but it has a privileged relationship to the moral narrative of modernity, in particular to those

strands associated with liberal thought and the concepts of freedom associated with them.[12] It is implicit in John Stuart Mill's (1989) classic defense of press freedom, according to which the reader should evaluate the message, asking how well it fares in competition with the alternatives, which determines whether we should accept it as true. As many have observed, this is also a model that depends on the presumed naturalness of marketplace dynamics. Expressions of truth should be set into free circulation to be sorted out by the invisible hand of their readership, as the aggregate outcome of so many individual judgments. According to the American First Amendment scholar Lee C. Bollinger (1991), the prevailing view of contemporary press freedom in the United States holds that the public should receive all the information it needs to exercise its powers in a democracy, and this is a quantitative model. The press should be a conduit permitting the largest possible flow of information, regardless of what passes through that conduit. To be sure, the European arguments are somewhat different from the American ones (as European Holocaust denial laws show), but they share a deep background. The classic defense of freedom of expression draws, in part, on a semiotic ideology that takes words and pictures to be vehicles for the transmission of opinion or information among otherwise autonomous and unengaged parties and the information they bear to be itself so much inert content more or less independent of the activity of representation.[13]

This assumption about words and pictures, or semiotic ideology, tends to place them in a domain apart from that of action and actors.[14] Moreover, there is at least an affinity between this semiotic ideology and the view of action I have described,

12. For an alternative emphasis on physical performance and rhetoric in the West, see, for instance, Fliegelman 1993. The general claim I make here is developed in detail in Keane 2007; for more on the political implications of modernist language ideology, see Bauman and Briggs 2003. On the transition to an information-based view of language, see Guillory 2004.

13. For the purposes of this article, I am forced to oversimplify somewhat. For instance, as Bollinger and others have pointed out, in the United States state control over television was historically less controversial than that over print media, and arguments that the impact of televised images is more than informational—for example, in the case of child viewers—have had more currency. (Worries about the effects of television were preceded by those over comic books; see Hajdu 2008.) Television regulation, however, involves not just issues of semiotic distinctions among text, sound, and image but also different property regimes (airwaves entailing legal rights quite different from those of printing presses and copyrighted words). But defenders of the Danish cartoons did not usually dwell on the distinctiveness of the visual medium.

14. There are, of course, several well-known arguments against this separation of language from action. The efforts required, however, by thinkers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin to make the case against this separation suggest the inertial power of the commonsense view that I sketch out here.

in which the action and the actor's intentions remain relatively independent of the social relations into which they enter. (The classic exceptions to the referential and predicational model of speech that typify legitimate restrictions on free speech, "fighting words" and crying "Fire!" in a theater, retain this character of discrete actions on the part of autonomous subjects. To an extent, this also characterizes more familiar portrayals of the so-called performative character of language.) That is, how one understands words or images can both express and reinforce one's understanding of social action, its moral import, and therefore its political consequences.

If it is disingenuous to overlook or misconstrue how expression can constitute an aggressive form of interaction, it can seem reasonable in part because of a prevalent model of communication that, in its most familiar forms, has roots in iconoclasm. To be sure, the theological, institutional, and political history of this concept is complex. But even a simplified version can, I think, tell us something about the assumptions and habits that make the Danish position seem common-sensible to so many.

Western liberalism draws on some iconoclastic themes ultimately shared by the three major Abrahamic scriptural religions. One underpinning of this iconoclasm is the worry that people would be distracted by sounds or images at the expense of those spiritual things that transcend experience. They might even come to worship those sounds or images. The liberal tradition shows the more specific effects of the Protestant Reformation as a purification movement (see Keane 2007). In its religious form, the iconoclastic impulse led to the stripping of imagery from the churches. Pictures should only convey visual information; they should not inspire devotion and become objects of worship. Indeed, for some reformers, they should not even stir feelings.

A similar purifying impulse ran through the Protestant Reformers' treatment of language. The Latin liturgy and Bible seemed to them to verge both on pagan magic and on idolatry of the Word. Protestant churches brought a new focus to the pulpit. Sermons, now central to the service, emphasized the communication of ideas over supplication, blessing, confession, or nonverbal ritual actions such as making the sign of the cross. Opposed to the treatment of Latin as a sacred language, the Protestants translated the Bible into vernaculars. In effect, this desacralization of the words and images encouraged hearers and readers to treat them as vehicles for communicating information and not as aspects of interactions among, and constitutive of, moral subjects. It also tended to treat the truth conveyed by words and images as lying in a realm distinct from the words and images themselves and from the relations among those who wield them. A

long history produced an underlying understanding of verbal and visual signs as conduits, empty in themselves, for the conveyance of ideas between otherwise autonomous people.

The classic arguments for freedom of the press commonly rest on this by now habitual view of words and pictures as vehicles for information that are fundamentally independent of social relations and interactions, other than serving as ready-at-hand tools. This background is one reason it has been so difficult for Danes, and indeed for Americans, to deal with verbal or visual expressions of hatred: to the extent that they are mere words, it is hard to see clearly how they are also forms of action in any serious way, beyond, say, making misleading truth claims or hurting another's feelings. Even accepting that they are actions, they are actions understood as taking place between otherwise independent agents. Since those agents are independent, the response of the wounded is ultimately in their own hands (one might ask, for instance, why they cannot be less emotional). These habits of thinking and action are very deep. Cartoonists, whose daily bread depends on having keen instincts for the potency of words and drawings, may themselves have trouble explaining the effects of their work. For it runs against the grain of some habitual and ordinary ways of thinking and speaking in the world that liberalism created.

This is not to say that important alternative views of words, things, and persons do not exist in Western Christianity. These views appear, for example, in the role of visual imagery in the *imitatio Christi*; the transubstantiation of matter in the Eucharist; potent language in the form of exorcisms, curses, and oaths; the uses of scriptural texts in divination; the practice of votive offerings; and so forth. But these examples lie in the religious domains that are rather too easily dismissed as relics of a vanishingly "traditional" worldview. There was also a long tradition in rhetoric that stressed the interpersonal effects of speech (Guillory 2004; Szabari 2006) and the powers of blasphemy (Cabantous 2002; Lawton 1993; Levy 1993). One could argue, however, that in the emergent public spheres of the liberal world, rhetorical, poetic, or performative action tended, increasingly, to remain confined within marked domains as models based on communication, information, and the autonomy of social agents grew in dominance and generality.

The difficulties and sense of paradox to which much of the more recent literature on fighting words and hate speech gives rise are symptomatic of the deeper history I have sketched. It is in the context of this history that utterances such as "With freedom comes responsibility," which some commentators offered after the Danish cartoons affair, can seem evasive or otherwise problematic. The responsibility is inseparable from the autonomy of actors who must be responsible for

what are, in the end, their own actions. For this reason, among others, the appeal to responsibility has always seemed too meek while also inducing the sense of treading on a slippery slope. After all, the same appeal to responsibility is too often used to discredit political critics of government officials and their policies from Jakarta to the American White House. The appeal to responsibility seems, on several counts, to miss the point. It does so, I suspect, because of the difficulty of understanding the nature of the conflicting views of action involved.

To say that the aggrieved feelings of Muslims are independent of the act of publishing caricatures of the Prophet is to say that they misconstrue the real nature of action; to say that cartoons are only pictures is to say that Muslims misconstrue the real nature of symbolic forms. Both assertions draw on the common sense of a particular semiotic ideology to cast doubt not just on the other's respect for freedom but, more deeply yet, on the other's grip on reality. Viewed in the light of the moral narrative of modernity, the semiotic failure of the offended Muslims is a symptom not only of difference but, more specifically, of an anachronistic ontology. They are, in this respect, like prosperity gospel preachers, faith healers, and other apparently magical thinkers. Their false grasp of the nature of signs is a manifest symptom of this: that, failing to grasp reality, they lie on the other side of a boundary between rational and irrational, modern and premodern.

Now, if the matter were to rest there, we would have nothing more than a familiar story about the clash of civilizations: they have their reality and their values; we have ours. But my point is somewhat different, for it rests on the observation that the defenders of the Danes are not merely asserting a different view of reality, or even of signs, from those of their critics. Rather, they are themselves as much in the grip of a selective semiotic ideology as their antagonists are, an ideology that leads them to misconstrue the nature of *their own* actions. The "otherness" lies not just between liberal secularists or Christians and conservative Muslims, or between Danes by genealogy and Danes by residence, but also between any given actors' self-understandings and practices.

The Moral Authority of Indonesia's "Press of Struggle"

What, then, do the banning of *Tempo* and the Danish cartoons affair have in common? The manifest differences between the cases are, of course, significant. We see in one case a state's relatively transparent, if heavy-handed, effort to protect its interests, more or less rationally construed, and in the other, a somewhat murkier ethnoreligious provocation. The overt power differences between journalists and their opponents in the first case are quite the reverse of those in the

second. The actions undertaken in the first case can be understood in terms of information, conveyed by words, and those undertaken in the other, as a matter of position taking by means of visual imagery. The moral authority of *Tempo* rests in part on the implicit truth claims of its reporting, that of *Jyllands-Posten* on its explicit appeal to an ideal of freedom independent of any such claims — at least at the most literal level of reference and predication. And they rest on very different institutional cultures (although the Indonesian press draws heavily on Western models) and juridical histories (although the Indonesian legal system is rooted in that of the Dutch and bears stronger kinship to the Danish than it might at first seem; see Lev 1985).

But if we consider these cases from the perspective of semiotic ideology, there are some important parallels as well. The cartoons are visual representations (aided by textual labeling) within the conventional frame of caricature and assault. As images, they leave a certain degree of interpretive responsibility in the hands of the viewer. Moreover, they are identified with particular artists, rather than with the collective authority of an editorial board. As with news photos, the distinction is demarcated by how they are visually set within but apart from the textual surround on the page (see Gürsel 2007). Yet they also depend on and are historically privileged by the very space of freedom on which the text rests as well. Moreover, however much they are identified with a particular artist, that artist's opinion is also commonly understood to express what everyone is thinking. To the very extent that they are visual rather than verbal, perhaps, and surely by dint of their framing as direct opinion, cartoons can also serve as a version of the voice of the people. Indeed, one might surmise that the measure of the cartoon's accordance with that voice lies in its very license for rudeness. The image, which shows what might not be spoken, can be the id of the people.

More than this, if we consider the Indonesian and Danish cases from the perspective of semiotic ideology, there are some important points of convergence. In both cases, there is what seems, from the perspective of material interests and rational calculation, a disproportion between cause and social effect. The people who overlooked the Soeharto regime's physical violence and took to the streets to protest the loss of a magazine are, in this respect, like the Muslims who burned buildings to protest drawings. The apparent disproportion, viewed from the perspective of a certain semiotic ideology, consists in placing too great a value on representations, too little on reality. And in both cases, power is manifested, or takes its most concrete and publicly evident form, in the ability to suppress representations. Conversely, in both cases the ability to create and sustain representations (publish *Tempo* or cartoons of the Prophet) is taken, by some, to be an

important manifestation of a distinctly modern form of historical agency. Political freedom, in the sense of self-determination, seems in such cases to be articulated with special force in an idiom of freedom of expression. That is, the freedom of expression—more specifically, of textual and visual forms identified as the *voice* of a people—seems to be the most immediately perceptible objectification of more abstract concepts, both of political self-determination and of historical agency.

Freedom appears, in this context, as the absence of an identifiable source of repression. Or, put another way, the vision of the press as a historical agent, as the voice of the people, may to an important extent *depend* on the repressive exterior against which it defines itself. In the *Tempo* case, this exterior is the state apparatus; in the Danish, it is intolerant Islam. One might argue that it is precisely the experience of repression, or its specter, that has made the idea that the press might be the voice of the people so persuasive.[15] If *Tempo*'s promise of freedom was most manifest at the moment it was banned, so we might say that *Jyllands-Posten* actually constituted Danish freedom in the moment of calling forth an opposed source of nonfreedom. What the Danish case brings to the foreground is the potential tension between the moral claims of the liberal model of freedom, on the one hand, and those associated with the voicing of the people, on the other. In the Indonesian case, as I now suggest, this tension came to prominence only after the lifting of state controls on the media.

The idea I would like to pursue for the rest of this article is that the special historical role attributed to the press in Indonesia (and, perhaps, in many postcolonial societies) derives in part from how it seems to give manifest form to a certain idea of freedom, of which the Danish case is both paradigm and display of aporia. Of course, there are some well-known difficulties with this idea of freedom, and this is not the only idea of freedom in play.[16] But the widespread influence of the

15. Certainly the press has not been alone in claiming to be the voice of the people. As Indonesia's first president, Sukarno famously declared himself "the extension of the tongue of the people." But the press's claim spans a much longer period. I am also forced to gloss over historical transformations that any notion of "the people" undergoes. Siegel (1998), for instance, suggests that the New Order regime effected a shift in social imaginaries from the positive identifications associated with *rakyat* (the people) to more obscure and threatening criminals and crowds.

16. Two perspectives on freedom are embodied in the distinction between the Indonesian words *merdeka* and *bebas*. Both can be translated as "free," and both are associated with the claims of the press. But whereas *merdeka* is historically rooted in ideas of political emancipation, *bebas* has more ambiguous connotations that include "license." Although, as noted above, newspapers have long spoken in the name of *merdeka*, people conventionally use *bebas* to refer to freedom of the press (*kebebasan pers*). No doubt, the more moral anxieties about the press are on the rise, the more negative implications of *bebas* come to the foreground.

idea is undeniable. In Indonesia the view of freedom as an absence of repression and the resulting production of a collective voice were most plausible under the brutally simplifying conditions of authoritarian state control, both during Dutch colonial hegemony (up to the Second World War) and during Soeharto's New Order regime (1966–98).[17] Since the fall of Soeharto and the subsequent dismantling of state controls on media, this simple understanding of freedom and of the press has become troubled. One symptom of this trouble is a wave of highly public moral anxieties about commodification, blasphemy, and pornography.

For some significant sectors of the Indonesian public at certain historical moments, the experience and understanding of power seem to have focused on the power to suppress expression. To the extent that the capacity to suppress expression is how power is made visible—how it becomes available for experience—then it also shapes prevailing ideas about freedom. Freedom can, in certain circumstances, seem to consist of the removal of an external constraint on a preexisting force for conveying truth. To the analyst of hegemony and structural power, these views will surely seem naive. But on the ground, as it were, these ideas have also been highly effective. Concepts and intuitions of political and social freedom over the course of twentieth-century Indonesian history have been closely associated with freedom of the press. Indeed, one might argue that it is precisely the experience of repression that has made the idea of the press as at least potentially the voice of the people so persuasive. And how freedom of the press is understood and enacted, what kind of historical agency is imputed to the press, and what consequences might be hoped for or feared reflect underlying semiotic ideologies.

The semiotic ideologies that have had the greatest influence on dominant ideas about the press developed within the framework of more or less secularist nation-states. Therefore, once the suppression of the press is no longer reducible to matters of state interest, as it can seem under authoritarian regimes of censorship, we should not be surprised to see newly energetic conflict in moral domains such as the commodity form and offenses such as blasphemy and pornography. When states attempt to control the press, they may well agree with their journalistic

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17. This idea of freedom against repression has a complex relationship to other ideas such as freedom of self-realization, a contrast that is only partly captured by the familiar distinction between "negative" and "positive" liberty (Berlin 1958). Although the former concept is sometimes seen as central to the liberal political tradition, the latter plays a crucial role in the history of liberal subjectivities (see, e.g., Povinelli 2006; Taylor 1989). The idea of freedom of self-realization plays a growing role in contemporary Indonesia but has over the period I consider here, I think, been relatively muted and subject to some skepticism. To the extent that the press is taken to be the voice of the people, in fact, the two have long been intertwined (see nn. 16 and 25).

opponents about how representations work to communicate information to the public. The situation is quite different in the case of moral conflicts that stray beyond those secularist assumptions. In short, state suppression of the press often worked *within* the assumptions of the modernist semiotic ideology I described above. In some respects, it reinforced the view that the press plays a special historical role, bound up in its information-conveying functions. By contrast, the challenges to the press that are emerging in more morally fraught domains, as in the Danish case, are taking place across different ideologies of representation and truth.

A tension underlies the heroic image of the engaged journalist exemplified by Tirto, the pioneer of the Indonesian press mentioned above. On the one hand, the "defender of the common people" is manifestly partisan, often in response to direct appeals by readers. This is very clear in Tirto's own writing, which is sometimes ferociously, and hilariously, polemical and can be extremely nasty in its personal attacks on Dutch officials and comprador aristocrats. On the other hand, the defense of the press as the bearer of truth in the face of its suppression commonly (though not universally) appeals to a logic of disinterestedness and objectivity. Discussion of professional standards by which Indonesian journalists measure their alignment with journalists elsewhere in the world often turns on this idea of objectivity. Quite distinct truth regimes and communicative norms can be brought to bear in defending press freedom.[18]

The sense of historical agency embodied in the idea of "the press of struggle" depended on certain ideas about action, representation, and freedom — and the resulting public revelation of truth — that in turn were part of the secular world in which the journalistic profession was formed. First, the sense of agency presupposed an understanding of language that resulted from the long history of purification discussed above. Texts and images were suited to convey information, and readers were not to seek in them magical power, divine authorship, or even moral icons. Second, the purified vision of language and other signs tended to work in conjunction with the attribution of autonomous agency to their users.

18. Needless to say, most journalistic work in Indonesia (as elsewhere) has not been particularly heroic or educative; even without the effects of state control, much of the press is devoted to sports, gossip, occult incidents, commodity prices, weather, job postings, official announcements, and, especially, crime. Nor, given pervasive poverty and illiteracy, has the press been likely to stand foremost in most Indonesians' concerns during most of its history. But throughout the twentieth century in Indonesia, the basic sense of mission, among both journalists and their publics, remained strong. Indeed, even the editors of the pulp tabloid *Pos Kota* express a paternalistic regard for their working-class readers (Siegel 1998: 30–31): their self-published history is titled *Thirty Years of Serving Readers* (*Pos Kota* 2000).

In this vision, suppression of the press locates the sources of the constraints on freedom in an external agent, one that itself acts with the freedom denied to those who have been suppressed. To the extent that the idea of freedom is defined with reference to external suppression, it tends to reinforce the notion of an otherwise autonomous agent and to occlude the socially and semiotically embedded character of activity. It may tend to obscure a view of the agent's own moral sensibility and of all that goes into constituting the subjectivity that compels and constrains actions.[19] Third, the focus on repression tended to obscure any potential contradiction between the claims to objective truth telling, on the one hand, and partisan speech on behalf of the people, on the other.

These ambiguities were hard to see under the New Order. There was an oppressive state, a clear opponent whose own autonomy and unanimity of action was easy to imagine, against whose repressive forces the agency of the struggling journalist could only be understood as freedom more or less unbound. But if one imagines the state as the superagent against which one would be free, what happens when that figure of repression is gone?

The fall of Soeharto in 1998 led to a surprisingly fast dismantling of the formal apparatus of state control of the press. The Ministry of Information was eliminated, licensing rules were loosened, and the number of periodicals skyrocketed. The press has increasingly been viewed in the model of business, and some powerful figures from Soeharto's New Order regime have invested heavily in media enterprises (Heryanto and Adi 2002; Sen and Hill 2000; cf. Dhakidae 1991). Many journalists who came of age when the profession was financially marginal find themselves baffled and resentful when confronted not with the clear opponent of state censorship but with the more elusive forces of perceived market demands (a situation comparable to that in the former East Germany, for instance; see Boyer 2005). In this respect, ironically, they share ground with the other major source of opposition to the unconstrained press. For if the market seems to demand salaciousness, slander, and even blasphemy, important parts of Indonesian society are pushing back. Most visibly, the press is facing growing attacks on moral grounds from newly vigorous Islamic organizations.[20] These range from raids on news-

19. There is no law against blasphemy per se in Indonesia; rather, blasphemy cases have been prosecuted on the grounds of disturbing civil order. Insult against the Prophet is not a crime until someone responds to it as an insult. For example, when the weekly *Monitor* published a popularity poll in which the Prophet placed eleventh, the state did not act until after the uproar about his presence on such a list had made it a question of public order (see *Monitor* 1990; Ramage 1995).

20. The press is also under attack from powerful businessmen and politicians, using lawsuits and physical violence, but one could argue that these attacks are a privatized extension of earlier statist

stands and bookstores to legal action against the new Indonesian *Playboy* magazine and a clerical edict against watching gossip on television.

Even some major advocates of press freedom are worried. One of them, Seno Gumira Ajidarma, was fired as a magazine editor after publishing eyewitness accounts of a massacre in East Timor during the New Order regime (Human Rights Watch 1992). The vigorous defense of press freedom in the essays he wrote after the firing would be familiar to any Western reader (see Ajidarma 1994, 1997). Yet only a year after Soeharto's fall he wrote: "It seems as though freedom has given birth to anarchy. . . . The hundreds of newspapers sold on the streets are full of slander and abuse. . . . The journalism which not so long ago was so cowed suddenly emerges with a rhetoric that knows no bounds, and the mass media that grow like fungus in the rainy season provide no hope for the development of culture, in fact they destroy it" (Ajidarma 1999: 170–71). Without a repressive other, it seems that the possibilities for action become unrestrained, unmastered, dangerous. Ajidarma's words suggest that certain actions have no master agent. This is far from what one expects of the heroic subject of the press of struggle. Of course, one might say that Ajidarma writes in an Indonesian social context far from that of Euro-American liberalism (and its relative comfort with commodities and desires). Yet perhaps that is why he can express more clearly the consequences that follow from the point that I made above, that even the political cartoonist does not work in a pure space of abstract freedom. In Ajidarma's case, a relatively simple idea of freedom—as the absence of an oppressive other—faces a challenge from the author's own sensibilities. We might surmise that intuitions about actions that should be undertaken are inseparable from sensibilities about those that should *not* be undertaken, about what is unreasonable, unthinkable, or even merely uninteresting.

Conundrums of Freedom

The situation of the postauthoritarian press exposes certain conundrums. If freedom consists of removing an external force of suppression, what happens when that force is removed? Ajidarma's worry about the anarchic, funguslike growth of the media suggests one possibility: pure activity with no motive or guidance beyond market forces and the irrational desires they manifest. The model of freedom and repression alone provides no account of the kind of moral sensibility

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forms of repression. On the tension between views of the press as a watchdog (and a vehicle for an emergent "right to information") and as potentially anarchic, see Mazzarella 2006.

that presumably drove his own writing or that of Tirto, or of the alternative kinds of constraint that might guide them, such as those of perceived market demand; intuitions about appropriateness, relevance, and truth; or the requirements of justice. Is the sense of self-restraint that guides action, the innate sense of what can or should be possible and impossible, speakable or unspeakable, to be taken as a constraint on freedom, or not?[21] Could we imagine action without such intuitions? The loss of the censor seems to have precipitated a kind of moral panic.[22]

Consider in this light an interesting detail of the Danish affair. The editors of *Jyllands-Posten* had once refused to publish a caricature of Jesus. In light of subsequent events, one could, of course, simply say that they were hypocrites pandering to a Christian readership. But must we take these actions to be so entirely rational and self-aware? If the refusal to lampoon Jesus was due to a tacit sense of what a reasonable action should be, would that count as self-censorship? From what transcendental ground would such a calculation be made? Is there a position from which all possible actions can be surveyed? If not, and the editors make decisions that are shaped by intuitions, motivations, and sensibilities formed in some kind of social world, how could their actions not follow *some* kinds of contours that, *from the outside*, might look like constraints on freedom? The encounter between contrastive semiotic ideologies can help make visible these otherwise imperceptible contours.

If the moral claims ascribed to the press in national narratives such as Indonesia's draw on liberal ideas about freedom, they also draw on a somewhat distinct notion, the voicing of the people. Here the Indonesian press faces another dilemma. Since the fall of Soeharto in 1998, the repressive forces that do appear, such as the religious calls for censorship, also seem to arise not from an apparently external force like the state but—in a sense—from those very "people" in whose voice the press claims to speak. Indonesian Islamic groups have been claiming with increasing vigor to speak on behalf of society, to be themselves the voice of the people, and on that basis to challenge the press where it seems licentious, profiteering, or blasphemous. Such assertions confound the long-standing assumption that the press stood on the side of society, and for its truth, over and

21. In some contexts, the problem of motives and constraint resembles the traditional model of crying "Fire!" in a crowded place. See, for example, Spyer 2006 for insightful discussion of the dilemmas of self-censorship arising among some journalists when reporting on Indonesia's ethnic violence.

22. Viewed within the immediate Indonesian context, this is part of a larger set of anxieties and acts of violence arising after the loss of a powerful centralizing state, its long-standing system of patronage, and its capacity to organize social identities (see Sidel 2006).

against the oppressive force of the state, which also knew the same truth (if only to suppress it). At the same time, the constraints imposed by commercial demands confound another long-standing assumption: that the press would be, if released from external controls, a relatively self-directed force for the purveying of truth. That the press is a commercial enterprise involves both forms of control and sources of motivation that do not square easily with the dominant views of the press as a historical agent in Indonesia. It can provoke the fraught impression that market forces introduce inexplicable and virtually unlocatable forces of constraint at the same time that they encourage immoral, or at least amoral, forms of expression.

If the force of suppression is not something that lies outside but is either one of the preconditions for the vehicle of expression itself (the market in commodified news) or a community (pious Muslims), then how is the special role of the press to be understood?[23] In what terms can the press claim to speak as the voice of the people and with what moral authority? Not, at least, as an agent that stands wholly outside social relations and their histories, the transcendental position, perhaps, imagined by certain ways of claiming objectivity and the more autonomous models of freedom.

Both these quandaries — those posed, respectively, by semiotic ideologies underwriting press freedom and by competing claims to voice the people — have thrown into question the ideas of freedom that have developed along with the image of the press as a historical agent. As the Danish cartoons affair makes clear, arguments about freedom of the press articulate concepts of agency and truth that rest on distinct semiotic ideologies. When we juxtapose the Danish affair with the moral anxieties around the post-Soeharto press, we can also surmise of the former that the fight was not just about an abstract concept of freedom but about *Jyllands-Posten*'s claims to speak with moral authority as the voice of Danish society.

Why did the closing of *Tempo* matter so much, not just to the urban middle classes but to others as well? In one sense, of course, it was merely the straw that broke the camel's back. But why this straw, and this camel? In part, I think, because it seemed to summon up the problem of freedom in concrete form through a highly visible act of suppression. Through the semiotic ideology it exemplified, the magazine embodied a version of the subject of modern liberalism. Speaking as an apparently autonomous agent, its voice seemed to materialize the possibil-

23. To be sure, in some neoliberal views, the market is all that legitimately counts as a community.

ity of a similarly autonomous and self-aware people not just *in* whose voice but *with* whose voice it might be speaking. In doing so, the reader might imagine that the people were addressing themselves. The clever turns of phrase, the knowing asides, the urbane allusions, the hip slang, the sprinklings of English vocabulary were hardly the transparent language of rational debate as postulated of the Habermasian public sphere. Nor were they socially inclusive, drawing as they did on a speech style far removed from that familiar to many readers, much less to most Indonesians. But they did summon onto the page the highly self-conscious activity of a society in the process of creating itself in fast-moving real time.

The ever-present threat of state suppression reinforced this implicit autonomy, since the only constraint the magazine seemed to face was a similarly constituted autonomous subject. The banning of *Tempo* magazine objectified the condition of unfreedom under Soeharto that in its everyday modalities could, for many middle-class Indonesians, remain elusive. *Tempo* had come to embody, for some, what would be possible if one were free.[24] By contrast, the violence in East Timor not only was socially distant to most Indonesians but also could be understood as a simple matter of realpolitik, of state interests and national integrity. But the closing of the magazine seemed to be an attack on the freedom and, finally, on the constitutive promises of modernity itself.[25]

For the Danes, the reaction of Muslims to mere signs seemed to prove their nonmodernity and inability to inhabit a shared reality with Europeans, an apparently *external* threat to freedom. In post-Soeharto Indonesia, the moral anxieties that have followed on the lifting of censorship reveal the conundrums produced, in part, by the semiotic ideology that underlies the moral authority of the press and the secularism that authority presupposes—challenges to the idea of modern freedom posed, as it were, from *within*. Viewed in the context of the Danish cartoons affair, the purified and secular model of representational action is clearly never adequate to the range of practices in Indonesian, Danish, or any other society. This much, I think, is well known; its ties to the moral claims of the press are perhaps less so. The actual range of practices in any representational economy

24. The advertisements that displayed the rarified commodities of the middle- and upper-class global modernity *Tempo* exemplified were no doubt also crucial to this sense of freedom; see Mazzarella 2003 for a comparable situation in India.

25. At this point, the freedom exemplified by *Tempo* converges with a second sense of the word, that of self-realization over against social constraint, which I mentioned above. One way this idea has been expressed in Indonesia is through literary polemics, one of which compares poetry editors to the police (Situmorang 2004).

hardly sustains the notion that words and images are objects wholly external to those who produce them and those among whom they would circulate, a notion that underwrites the classic arguments for press freedom.

The authority of a press that speaks for the people may be undermined by the idea of freedom that rests on a vision of language purified of morally constitutive effects or independent of social ties. Nor can this semiotic ideology fully sustain the claims made for the powers of the press or the constraints — whether internal or external — that the press has faced. The Danish case, by pitting largely tacit semiotic ideologies against one another, brings them into visibility. What the Indonesian situation helps show (once the deceptive clarity of the authoritarian state is removed) is not only the coexistence of contrastive semiotic ideologies but also their lack of alignment with actual practices. The comparison also makes it easier to notice a similar lack of alignment in Denmark. Whether in Denmark or in Indonesia, the arguments about the powers of the press that are most familiar in the Western tradition are entering unfamiliar ground. The semiotic ideology that sustains a certain vision of collective voice resists the vision that underwrites the autonomy supposed of a free agent. Or so it would seem, if that freedom is taken to derive from a position from which one may survey all that lies before and outside oneself, a position from which one may master words and images and thus constitute the autonomy and self-mastery promised by the moral narrative of modernity.

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