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'AN EMBARRASSMENT OF SPIRITS'
Spirits, hauntology, and democracy in Indonesia*

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ABSTRACT. Kyai Muzakkin is the spiritual leader of a Koranic school (*pesantren*) in East Java that he claims is the only *pesantren* in the world that is attended entirely by spirits (*jin*). Kyai Muzakkin is also the founder of an anti-corruption NGO. In 2009, he gained national notoriety and infamy when he combined his vocational interest in spirits and anti-corruption and sent a thousand spirits to Jakarta to protect the supporters of the Indonesian president at an anti-corruption rally. The introduction of spirits into the increasingly 'occult' Indonesian politics of 2009 was as apt as it was embarrassing. Describing how the public revelation of the intimate link between political worlds and spirit worlds made good political sense while also constituting an intense embarrassment to both modernist ideas of secular politics and the sensibilities of many orthodox Muslims, this article argues that the embarrassing irruption of spirits into Indonesian politics reflected not only a haunting within Indonesian politics and Indonesian Islam but also a haunting of the spirit of global democracy. Embarrassment, the paper posits, provides a useful methodological entry point into the ethnographic study of politics and its effects.

The politics and shame of spirits

'I sent the spirits (*jin*) to the demonstration, so that there would be no commotion and no bloodshed'. Kyai Muzakkin adjusted the rattan cap (*kopiah*) that he always wore when he was in his Koranic boarding school (*pesantren*).[1] Then he gestured for me to help myself to one of the plastic cups of Aqua drinking water, which were arranged in a wobbly cluster on the raised bamboo floor of the small bamboo hut that functioned as the reception area of his *pesantren*. We appeared to be alone on the raised floor, but the entire length of the back wall was partly obscured by a dozen or so clay jars (*gentong*), wrapped in white cloth. The jars, so Kyai Muzakkin told me, contained some of the main spirits of the *pesantren*. Our dialogue, set against the idyllic background of lush rice fields not far inland from the town of Paciran on the north coast of East Java, was in effect being observed by a thousand spirits. For Kyai Muzakkin the presence of

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1 Kyai is the honorific titel given to the spiritual leader of a *pesantren* school.

these invisible beings (*makhluk gaib*) was as undeniable as our own. Indeed, the political outcome of the demonstration for him proved their existence and efficacy: 'You know, there was no violence at the demonstration because of the spirits'.

This, the first of my two visits to the *pesantren* Dzikrus Syifa' Asma Brojomusti, took place in early 2011. Two years after the 2009 anti-corruption demonstration that had made him a national figure, Kyai Muzakkin was still convinced that his spirits had played a key role in politics by preventing the outbreak of violent riots that had, at the time, otherwise seemed inevitable. It was the first, and so far only, time that Kyai Muzakkin's spirits had become directly involved in politics. The decision to order the spirits to the anti-corruption demonstration had been over-determined by the way the demonstration had become the fulcrum in a national political crisis during 2009.

This article outlines the history of how it came to make sense for Kyai Muzakkin to send his spirits to Jakarta. The main purpose of the article, however, is to trace the outrage that Kyai Muzakkin's spirits provoked when news about them hit the media. Indeed, although the alleged presence of spirits at the anti-corruption demonstration made sense to Kyai Muzakkin, it was shameful to others. The conversation that opened this article had in fact been provoked by the sense of shame that the possibility of Kyai Muzakkin's abundance of spirits in the midst of politics provoked. When I first visited Kyai Muzakkin in 2011, I brought with me a printed version of the online newspaper article that had first alerted me to his *pesantren*, an article from Indonesia's largest newspaper "Kompas", published on the morning of 9 December 2009. It told of Kyai Muzakkin's decision to send his spirits to guard and attend the anti-corruption demonstration in Jakarta. Kyai Muzakkin had not seen the article before and therefore asked me for a copy. However, the printout of the article that I brought with me also included 167 blogs commenting on the article in the days following its publication.

The great majority of these online comments had been extremely provoked by the story, and voiced their outrage and sarcasm in highly explicit terms. It was therefore with some trepidation that I handed the printout to Kyai Muzakkin, fearing that he would hold the anger of the comments against me. Kyai Muzakkin immediately began to read the blogs, sitting motionless on the bamboo floor of the *pesantren* guestroom for almost an hour, moving only to flip the pages of the printout or to reposition his *kopiah* in growing frustration. By the time he had finished he was visibly frazzled. His frustration over the comments was understandable: they were irate and condescending, far out of line with what anyone would have dared to say to his face. The acidity and outrage of the comments forcefully brought it home to him that many people disagreed vehemently with him about the reality and proper place of spirits. A blogger calling him- or herself 'Ryan' had inserted 38 questions marks before commenting: 'Is there really still something like this in an era of globalization? This is an embarrassment to the nation'

(*bikin malu bangsa*).[2] Another blogger, called 'Nind', mixed embarrassment with irate anxiety: 'The world is upside-down [...] how can anyone speak of spirits in this day and age? Spirits that demonstrate to boot! How are we supposed to progress like this?' A third blogger, called 'Nani', posted only one word: 'Moron' (*konyol*).

The comments, I suggest, are as interesting as the spirits that triggered them. Some ridiculed the Kyai for being backward and superstitious, while others expressed outrage at what they saw as heresy against Islam. The comments were all, however, marked by 'malu', an Indonesian term that is the object of a long scholarly tradition. Notoriously difficult to translate, *malu* covers the meanings of shame, bashfulness, 'stage fright' and embarrassment. Embarrassment is a self-conscious feeling that indexes the failure of respectability (Miller 1996). Embarrassment, in other words arises from the failure to maintain one's status in the eyes of the other. As Erving Goffman puts it, embarrassment 'has to do with the figure the individual cuts before others felt to be there at the time' (Goffman 2005:98). The alleged presence of spirits in the middle of politics seemed to contradict a certain kind of respectability, to undermine the possibility of a certain kind of social relationship or community. This article seeks to diagnose what kind of respectability the potential presence of spirits offends and to identify what kind of political community is undermined by the irruption of spirits into politics. Kyai Muzakkin's one thousand spirits, the paper, proposes, were an embarrassment in the double sense of being both overabundant and mortifying (Webster's 1994:465). I seek to attend to this meaning of 'embarrassment' as both abundance and mortification. I suggest that, by following ethnographically how the public invocation of an abundance of spirits evokes a reflexive and self-conscious kind of shame (*malu*), we are pointed toward two very specific and influential subject positions from which spirits are embarrassing: namely the subject of the (modern) Indonesian nation and the subject of the (rational) Islamic community. The paper seeks to link the long tradition of studying *malu* in Indonesia to an analysis of the country's contemporary politics. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of research into the affective dimensions of politics and democracy.[3]

Revisiting embarrassment

The self-conscious emotions associated with *malu* have been part of Indonesian studies for decades. This interest was sparked by Clifford Geertz, when he famously suggested that *lek*, the Balinese equivalent of *malu*, was more akin to 'stage fright'. Rather than being a feeling of shame about oneself, the Balinese sense of *lek* was concerned about not fulfilling one's part in the 'theatre' that was Balinese society: *lek* was associated with

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2 I have translated the comments from the original Indonesian, supplying the original terms when relevant.

3 Ahmad (2004), Clough and Halley (2007), Marcus (2002), Navaro-Yashin (2012), Stoler (2010)

the fear that one might compromise one's assigned social role and that 'the personality of the individual will break through to dissolve his standardized public identity' (Geertz 1973:402). This emphasis on *lek* as a form of 'stage fright' was part of the 'dramaturgical turn' in Geertz's work that was to have an important impact on anthropology more generally (Ortner 1984). The great insight of Geertz was that embarrassment in Bali was less an individual sentiment than part of a 'dramatized statement of a distinct form of political theory, a particular conception of what status, power, authority, and government are and should be: namely a replication of the world of the gods that is at the same time a template for that of men' (Geertz 1980:174). In the Balinese 'theater state', embarrassment was, in other words, an emotion that tied the self to the world of politics, as well as to the world of spirits. Geertz's work here was to clear the path for a series of important studies that emphasized how the mastery of the self constituted a kind of emotion work that sought to attain spiritual potency while being troubled by spiritual anxiety.[4] Sociality, these studies highlighted, was therefore in many Indonesian communities closely entangled with spirit concerns, just as sociality was closely connected to notions of political power. In other words, Geertz's focus on emotions such as 'embarrassment' as central to Indonesian society struck a cord: embarrassment was where the self met the world of politics and the world of spirits.

Geertz's approach to embarrassment, though highly influential, was not above criticism. Ward Keeler faulted Geertz for implying that some authentic self was constrained by social convention. Describing *isin*, the Javanese equivalent of the Balinese notion of *lek*, Keeler argued that these terms did not cover the fear that the authentic personality of the individual would 'would break through to dissolve his standardized public identity', as Geertz had claimed (Geertz 1973:402). Rather, *isin*, *lek*, *malu* and other local notions of shame and embarrassment in Indonesian societies covered 'an awareness of vulnerability in interaction' (Keeler 1983:158). Embarrassment was not the fear of the dissolution of a social mask and the revelation of an authentic self; rather, Keeler asserted, 'the awkwardness that follows from inappropriate behavior [...] threatens the dissolution of several people's identities and the collapse of all social order' (1983:162). Keeler's critique is interesting because it seemed to bring the Indonesianist discussion about *malu* and related terms into conversation with a broader approach to embarrassment within sociology and social psychology.

The towering figure in this broader approach was Erving Goffman, whose perspective on embarrassment as one of the basic emotional mechanisms of human interaction has influenced, as Rowland Miller puts it in his overview, 'almost every analysis of the state [of embarrassment] conducted since' (1996:111). Goffman emphasized that authentic selfhood is an illusion. Suggesting that the mask we wear in everyday social interaction does not hide an authentic self and that this mask is 'our truer self, the self we would like be' (Goffman 1959:19), Goffman foreshadowed not only Keeler's

[4] Anderson (1990), Keeler (1983), Wikan (1987)

critique of Geertz but also post-structuralist performance theorists like Judith Butler (Butler 1990). Goffman's approach, like Keeler's, also highlighted another nuance of embarrassment of relevance to my concerns here, namely that embarrassment may be provoked not only by one's own behaviour but also by that of others. Miller terms this kind of shamefulness provoked by others 'empathetic embarrassment' and calls it 'the most subtle form of embarrassment' (1996:69). In this vicarious form of embarrassment, where it is the actions of others that cause emotional discomfort, the social and political dimensions of shame are forcefully brought to the fore. The same inherent social, rather than individual, aspect is crucial to *malu*. Shame in Indonesia, as Keeler pointed out above, is always a social event that threatens multiple identities and the 'collapse of all social order'. Just as *malu* is social rather than individual, Keeler also points out that it is a threat more than a safeguard of order. This opens up a focus on the global politics of embarrassment. Far from being an emotion that upholds social etiquette and order at a local level, embarrassment – especially when it is felt on behalf of others – is, I suggest, a diagnostic device for the ethnographic identification of the frictions within normative orders that traverse multiple scales: local, national and global.[5]

Embarrassment and the ghosts of politics

This article's analytical approach to embarrassment is ecumenical. It builds on the Geertzian insight that a certain 'fractality' characterises sociality and politics in Indonesia, that the same kinds of possibilities and concerns recur in the worlds of humans, emotions, spirits, and politics. It thus agrees with Geertz that the emotions generated by the fear of the failure of local social etiquette recur at the level of politics as well, and that spiritual disturbance plays a key role in ideas of 'disorder' in both social relations and politics. However, it extends the Geertzian perspective by adding to it Goffman's insight that embarrassment is a diagnostic device that allows an insight also into mediated sociality because embarrassment is concerned with status anxieties 'in the real or imagined presence of others' (Goffman 2005:98). Embarrassment constitutes in that sense as important a diagnostic device for understanding sociality in mediated, imagined and globalised communities as it is for an understanding of face-to-face communities – a possibility that Goffman's approach envisaged but never fully explored. What is more, embarrassment is not an emotion that functions to merely uphold orders – whether political or cosmological – as Goffman-inspired analyses tend to suggest (see Manning 1992:38). Rather, embarrassment marks a tension or rift within such orders.

Recently, a number of studies have indeed gone in exactly this direction by suggesting that self-conscious emotion work is closely related to ideas of the nation, in

5 See Anna Tsing (2005) for a discussion of the notions of 'friction' and 'scales'.

Indonesia and elsewhere.[6] Emotions, these studies suggest, are part of national affective economies and they gain their value by being circulated within imagined collectives (Ahmad 2004, Clough and Halley 2007). This, too, is the case with embarrassment. In his study of migrants on Batam, Johan Lindquist suggests that *malu* collapses the morality of intimate sociality with the morality of a global impersonal economy. *Malu* is, in that sense, an emotion that people are encouraged to experience as Indonesian citizens. As such, shame or embarrassment is generated by taking up a certain national subject position vis-à-vis other citizens or in relation to an outside non-Indonesian world. *Malu*, Lindquist argues convincingly, 'appears as an emotion (and opens up a space of analysis) that describes the failures to live up to the ideals of the nation' (Lindquist 2009:14). *Malu* in that sense is not a culture-bound emotion but a reflective national emotion generated by the collapse of the imagined ideals of the nation. The embarrassment generated when Kyai Muzakkin claimed to send his one thousand spirits to the 2009 demonstration thus very much underscores Lindquist's point that *malu* in contemporary Indonesia has long since left the local communities to which a Geertzian analysis often assigned it, to become an emotion that is provoked in nationalised and globalised subjects. Tom Boellstorff, in his analysis of the shame associated with queer sexuality, has similarly highlighted how the sexual anatomy of *malu* in contemporary Indonesia is constituted on the border between the global and the national, the intimate and the political (Boellstorff 2007). Gay shame or *malu*, Boellstorff argues, can be made into a politically effective tool to conjure up certain ideals about the nation (and public anxieties about their failure vis-à-vis a threatening outside world) because embarrassment is always sexually charged and closely associated with the genitals (*ke-malu-an*) (Boellstorff 2007:174, Collins and Bahar 2000). The sexuality of 'male-to-female transvestites' (*warias*), according to Boellstorff, '"haunt[s]" normative Indonesian masculinity' and by extension the normality of the nation (2007:184).

With the notion of haunting we are brought back to spirits. Politics is curiously haunted in Indonesia: by gay sexuality (Boellstorff 2005), by the notion of the 'masses' (*massa*) (Siegel 1998), by the memory of the 1965/66 killings (Florida 2008, Heryanto 2006), by forgeries (Bubandt 2009, Strassler 2000), and by corruption (Bubandt 2014, Butt 2012). Many of these studies draw on Jacques Derrida's suggestion that haunting 'belongs to the structure of every hegemony' (Derrida 1994:46), that politics is always haunted by those phenomena that it seeks to repress but which return as ghosts. Derrida coined the term 'hauntology' with reference exactly to the way politics as a kind of performance rules out certain phenomena, and yet allows for their continued haunting presence by its own operations (Derrida 1994:63). Derrida began by looking at those speech acts, those conjurments (*Beschwörungen*) and conjurations (*Verschwörungen*), through which certain phenomena (Marxism, for instance) are declared to be dead,

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6 See Boellstorff (2005, 2007), Brenner (1998), Collins and Bahar (2000) and Lindquist (2009) for Indonesia, as well as Herzfeld (2005) and Navaro-Yashin (2012) for elsewhere.

only then to be conjured up again (as 'pseudo-Marxism' or 'crypto-Marxism') (1994:62). A conjuration, a magical trick and a conspiracy all at the same time, is always a performative act, 'an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets' (1994:63). This kind of haunting, Derrida went on to suggest, was not diminished but rather strengthened by modern media, because the media is 'neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralizes' (1994:63). The media is itself a spectre that helps the conjuring act of making ghosts.

I find Derrida useful for the purposes of this paper because his analysis ties ghosts, spirits, politics and media together through an emphasis on their co-production in public performance. It is in this kind of mediated, political performance – conjuring up acts that deny their own magicality – that embarrassment also has a place and may be used as a methodological diagnostic device. Embarrassment points to a certain kind of haunting, a dissonance in the relation to the real or imagined presence of others that threatens this relation and the political order that undergirds it (cf. Goffman 2005:98–99). I do not employ Derrida's notion of hauntology as an abstract and deconstructivist metaphor. There is nothing academic, theoretical, rhetorical or metaphorical about the haunting that characterises politics in Indonesia. Spirits have a reality in Indonesian society that makes this haunting acutely anxiety-provoking and directly visceral. What one might call 'political hauntology' in Indonesia is saturated by spiritual entities – *jins*, vampires, Draculas, ninjas, witches – that are acutely real at the same time as they are intensely embarrassing because they question 'the limit that would permit one to identify the political' (Derrida 1994:63).

Democracy, corruption, and auto-immunity

On December 9, 2009 Indonesia celebrated International Anti-Corruption Day. It was the seventh year this day had been commemorated. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the country's president, who had been elected in 2003 on a sweeping political anti-corruption program, had immediately co-opted Anti-Corruption Day – which had been instituted by the UN – when he took power, celebrating it as a ritual of his rule and of his commitment to democracy and anti-corruption. But 2009 had been a more than usually tumultuous year in Indonesian politics (Patunru and von Luebke 2010), and during the year the government of Yudhoyono had become increasingly embattled. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, known popularly as SBY, was confronted with accusations of corruption within his government in association with the 6.7 trillion rupiah (Rp) bailout of Bank Century,[7] the opposition charging that large sums from the bailout had been siphoned off to pay for his re-election campaign.

[7] With the Indonesian rupiah hovering just below 10,000 to the US dollar in 2009, the bailout was equivalent to 583 million dollars.

SBY had also come under strong criticism for failing to support the KPK (Corruption Eradication Commission). In March 2009 the police arrested the chairperson of the KPK, Antasari Azhar, accusing him of masterminding a conspiracy to murder a Jakarta businessman. The relationship between the two men had supposedly begun as a *quid pro quo* arrangement whereby Antasari sought help from the businessman to obtain membership of a prestigious golf club in return for putting pressure on a state-owned company to appoint the businessman as CEO (Butt 2012:75). But Antasari had also, the police alleged, initiated an affair with the businessman's wife and had ordered him to be killed out of jealousy. The charges against Antasari spoke directly to popular suspicions about the immoral (*pamrih*) nature of all Indonesian politics (Anderson 1990), a logic in which corruption could lead seamlessly to adultery and murder, and which made the charges eminently believable. At the same time, the accusations were roundly suspected of being trumped up, a poorly disguised attempt by the police to compromise the credibility of the KPK after it had begun investigating high-profile police officers in early 2009. The police charges against the KPK chairperson therefore also spoke to an alternative truth about politics in Indonesia, namely its inherent falsity.[8] The charges against Antasari, in short, had the character of most political truths in Indonesia: they were simultaneously highly believable and most likely false (Bubandt n.d.). Eventually, and almost as if to underscore this, in 2010, Antasari was sentenced to eighteen years in prison for the murder on the basis of weak and contradictory evidence (Butt 2012:79).

Not content with the arrest of Antasari, in September 2009 the police proceeded to arrest two deputies of KPK, Chandra Hamzah and Bibit Rianto, and to charge them with corruption (von Luebke 2010). SBY initially supported the arrest, declaring that the KPK has become 'a superbody, responsible only to God. Its power must not go unchecked' (Jakarta Globe 2009). But when the KPK released a wiretap to the press that suggested a conspiracy between the police and the Attorney General's Office to weaken the KPK, SBY's disavowal of the KPK suddenly appeared suspect. The opposition and observers began to speculate that SBY had merely disowned the KPK because of fears within his own party, the Partai Demokrat (PD), that it too was coming under investigation for its alleged involvement in the Bank Century affair. Corruption, some began to charge ever more vociferously, had become rampant in a hypocritical government whose anti-corruption rhetoric concealed an endemic culture of corruption (Aditjondro 2011). As SBY procrastinated, the two suspended deputies of the KPK became popular heroes (von Luebke 2010). A massive support movement, which included a Facebook page that logged more than a million appeals for their release, was mobilised (Fitry 2009). Bowing to public pressure, SBY was eventually forced to step in against the police, and the two deputies were cleared of all charges in November 2009.

The fallout from these events was that by the end of 2009 the politics of anti-corruption seemed to have become infected by corruption on all fronts. The government

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8 Pemberton (1994), Siegel (1998), Strassler (2000)

around SBY and his party, which had made the fight against corruption its political corner-stone, was increasingly suspected of itself being corrupt. The same paradox haunted the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Even as popular opinion remained suspicious of police allegations of corruption against the KPK, the charges nevertheless gelled with a popular mistrust of state institutions, in which the possibility that the government's corruption watchdog was itself infected by corruption made ironic sense. A ghost seemed to haunt Indonesian democracy. This sense of haunting was neither restricted to nor most acutely felt by the rural population of eastern Java. It was a sense of haunting that was very much driven by elite politicians. Thus, in response to mounting political pressure, in late 2009 SBY began to express increasing concern that the mass demonstrations marking the Day of Anti-Corruption on December 9 would be used by hidden actors – literally 'dark passengers', 'stow-aways' or 'free-riders' – to topple him (Gatra 2009).

The dark passengers of democracy

The word 'free-riders' (*penumpang gelap*) was carefully chosen. It had been invented as a political term by SBY himself while serving as the Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs during the presidency of Gus Dur between 1999 and 2001 (Bubandt 2014:35). In 2009 the figure of 'free-riders' was used repeatedly by SBY and his spokesperson, Andi Mallarangeng, to highlight the President's suspicion that his own coalition partners, some of the most severe critics of his government, were using corruption allegations in an attempt to oust him (VIVAnews 2009). SBY's invocation of unseen 'free-riders' or 'stow-aways' gestured directly to the spectral character of Indonesian politics. Thus, the political efficacy of the term 'free-rider' to conjure up a sense of being besieged by invisible 'passengers' hinged not only on its appeal to people's everyday experience of traffic congestion and problems of infrastructure and transport. The term had direct connotations of spirits. While 'tumpang', the root of the word for 'passenger' (*penumpang*), ordinarily means 'to ride along with, to accompany, or to join' (Echols and Shadily 1989:592), the word 'tumpang' or 'menumpang' is also commonly used to refer to spirit possession, when spirits 'hitch a ride on' human beings. The hidden or 'dark' nature (*gelap*) of the political 'stow-away' only served to strengthen its etymological link to the spirit world. Andi Mallarangeng, the presidential spokesperson and Minister for Youth and Sports, seemed particularly worried about 'free-riders' in democratic politics: 'Dark passengers are people who have never before talked about anti-corruption but who suddenly move to the front to shout about it, clearly because they have their own political reasons', he said two days before the scheduled demonstration (Gatra 2009). The warning reflected the widespread sense in Indonesia that it was the most corrupt who spoke out most vehemently against corruption, the most anti-democratic who

appeared most passionate about democracy. Democratic politics as a whole, it seemed, was a space infested by ghostly figures who dissimulated: they pretended to be against corruption and for democracy, but were really aiming at overthrowing a democratically elected government by immoral and corrupt means. If the authorities and the government could not be trusted to be truly democratic, then neither, so it seemed, could the opposition.

As December 9, International Anti-Corruption Day, approached, the danger of these hidden forces – political and cosmological at the same time – seemed to become ever more acute. Some observers suggested that the demonstrations might turn out to rival in size and political impact the student protests that had brought down Suharto in 1998 (Tedjaksumana 2009). An anonymous chain text message sent to mobile phones throughout the Jakarta area created further anxiety. Claiming to quote an unnamed Chinese-language newspaper as its source, the text message read:

> Do not go outside on Wednesday 9 December unless you absolutely have to! Massive demonstrations are predicted throughout Indonesia on the Day of Anti-Corruption organized by the UN. There is a great risk that these will be accompanied by massive political actions that will most likely lead to anarchist riots, robbery, arson, rape, murder, etc.[9]

The text message not only conjured up old fears about mobs and the unpredictable, fears that are central to political power in Indonesia (Siegel 1998). Allegedly a quote from a Chinese-language newspaper, the text message also made a direct link between the possibility of violence and the Chinese and would to most Indonesian ears allude disconcertingly to the attacks on Chinese people that had accompanied riots in Jakarta in 1998 after the fall of Suharto (Heryanto 2006, Siegel 2001). In Indonesian politics, the Chinese have been assigned a trickster-like position for decades and have frequently been the object of political marginalisation, a marginalisation that was often driven by allegations of hidden links to communism during the three decades of New Order rule between 1966 and 1998.[10] With the revival of the fear of Chinese influence and the reference to hidden political opponents – both of which seemed to threaten the stability and democratic intentions of the SBY government – the scene in December 2009 was therefore set for a confrontation with dark and unknown forces that were hiding, ironically, amongst demonstrators celebrating the global fight against corruption. The apparent omnipresence of hidden anarchists and 'dark passengers' in a political situation where the global scourge of corruption, nepotism and collusion reached into the heart of the

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9 VIVAnews (2009). The Indonesian word used for 'to accompany' in this message was 'dibonceng', which means 'to hitch a ride on a two-wheeled vehicle'.

10 'New Order' (Orde Baru) was the name given to the regime of Suharto, President and authoritarian leader of Indonesia between 1967 and 1998. The name was fashioned in direct opposition to the 'old' and allegedly failed order of Indonesia's first president Sukarno, who was ousted following a complex coup in late 1965. For more on New Order politics, see Barker (2001), Heryanto (1999, 2006) and Siegel (2001).

very democratic institutions that were set up to combat it – this was exactly the kind of 'epistemic murk', to use an expression of Michael Taussig (1987), in which political violence in Indonesia has always thrived.[11] Jakartans braced themselves.

ANTI-CORRUPTION SPIRITS

On the morning of 9 December, the anxiously awaited day of the anti-corruption demonstrations, Kompas, the largest Indonesian newspaper, carried the story about Kyai Muzakkin's spirits. The story's headline read: 'A thousand spirits will be deployed to the demonstration to commemorate the International Day of Anti-Corruption held in Jakarta today' (Sucipto 2009). The article continued:

> KM Muzakkin, leader of Dzikrus Syifa Brojomust, an Islamic boarding school in East Java claims that spirits have found their own way to support the fight against corruption. 'This morning we have sent a thousand spirits (*jin*) to the area of the demonstrations in Jakarta. The spirits are led by Ghulam Akhmad, a spirit from Egypt who has previously possessed one of my mentally ill students', Muzakkin explained. 'These efforts are our way to provide support to the demonstrators and to the government in its struggle to eradicate corruption in Indonesia through another dimension'.

Kyai Muzakkin's Koranic school is unique in that it claims to be the only spirit *pesantren* in the world. But it is by no means politically or ideologically isolated. Dzikrus Syifa Brojomusti forms part of the network of more than 6,000 boarding schools associated with the traditionalist Muslim organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Formed in 1926 in reaction to the modernist Muslim organisation Muhammadiyah, NU is now one of the world's largest independent Muslim organizations, with a membership of perhaps thirty million people, predominantly from Java. Kyai Muzakkin is one of these members. He sat for years on the political strategic board of the NU in East Java, and he is, as he himself puts it, 'on the same path as the NU' ('NU dan saya satu jalan'). Indeed, Kyai Muzakkin's decision to mobilise his spirit army in support of democracy came days after Gus Dur, the former President of Indonesia and influential leader of NU, declared his support for the embattled SBY. In this context, SBY's warning that the demonstration might be usurped by political opponents – anonymous and corrupt people who sought to take possession, ghost-like, of an anti-corruption demonstration – struck a chord for Kyai Muzakkin. This was a time when all good forces, both political and spiritual, had to be assembled against an invisible political evil:

> 'The spirits we have sent are all well-educated and are sociologists, political scientists, legal experts, police officers, religious leaders. Or they have been trained as medical staff. If

[11] Bubandt (2009), Geertz (1995:7), Spyer (2006)

> protesters are possessed, attacked by black magic, are bewitched, or sorcerized or if magic is used to unsettle the demonstration, the spirits of the *pesantren* Dzikrus Syifa are ready to face these threats' (Sucipto 2009).

For Kyai Muzakkin the spirit world is a mirror of the complexities of the human world. The spirits that have accumulated over the years in his *pesantren* are as diverse as the patients they once possessed: a mixture of rich and poor, decent and wayward, illiterate and well-educated. Ghulam Akhmad, the spirit in charge of the other spirits at the *pesantren*, was, according to Kyai Muzakkin, exorcised from a young student from Surabaya in 2000. The student had become possessed while he was studying in Egypt at the prestigious Al-Azhar University, one of the world's premier Muslim scholarly institutions, where NU leader Gus Dur himself had studied in the 1960s (Barton 2002:84). When Kyai Muzakkin exorcised the spirit from the student upon his return to East Java, it turned out that Ghulam Akhmad had also been educated at the same institution, a background that for Kyai Muzakkin made the spirit a natural leader of the others at the boarding school. 'Ghulam is the chairman (*ketua*) of the spirits', as Kyai Muzakkin put it to me. Apart from a chairman, the spirit collective at the *pesantren* – a motley collection of Muslim, Hindu and 'wild' spirits that had accumulated over the last decade to number currently more than one thousand – also has a secretary (*sekretaris*) and a treasurer (*bendahara*) and forms, in this sense, a proto-political organisation that mimics the Indonesian bureaucracy. It was this differentiation of labour and background that Kyai Muzakkin felt also gave the spirits their ability to handle any eventuality at the demonstration, even the possibility that political infiltrators at the demonstration might themselves make use of magical means to achieve their subversive political goals.

The article continued by quoting Kyai Muzakkin: 'We do not want this day of commemoration or the struggle against corruption to be polluted by free-riders or dark passengers who seek to provoke and confuse the situation' (Sucipto 2009). As far as Kyai Muzakkin was concerned, the 'dark passengers' of which SBY had warned were of a 'cosmo-political' kind. And against this threat, which was simultaneously spiritual and political, democracy needed his spirits. I believe this link between the world of politics and the world of spirits is neither coincidental nor a novelty. Political order in Indonesia has for decades been threatened by political spectres of various kinds: ghosts that destabilise the order they were politically conjured up to bolster. There is thus a direct genealogy from the elusive 'free-rider' and 'the corrupt' (*para korruptor*) that haunt politics in the early twenty-first century to a string of other figures of 'latent political danger' that goes back to the New Order, if not further. During the 1980s, the threat of communism was often described as a 'latent danger' against which one had to be on one's guard (Heryanto 1999). The figure of the subversive communist was associated with the ominous figure of the criminal (*preman*). During a spell of shootings in the early 1980s, hundreds of suspected criminals were murdered and their corpses displayed during a state-orchestrated campaign that became known as 'Petrus', an acronym for 'mysteri-

ous shootings' (Bourchier 1990, Cribb 2000). The communist and the criminal were both ghost-like figures, impossible to identify, nowhere to be found and yet potentially everywhere (Siegel 1998). In the late 1990s with the fall of the New Order and a series of protracted violent conflicts throughout Indonesia, a new figure arose, namely the provocateur (*provokator*), an elusive figure associated with the deposed dictatorship of Suharto who provoked violence and then disappeared. The *provokator* came in a variety of forms, all spirit-like, such as the *dalang* puppet-master, the black-clad *ninjas* or the *dukun santet*, the sorcerers that haunted eastern Java until some two hundred accused sorcerers were mob-lynched in a campaign of terror during 1998.[12] It was this ghostly genealogy that was reconstituted in December 2009 through talk about 'the free-rider', 'the pretend democrats' and the *korruptor*. Corruption as a form of spiritual activity – invisible and indeterminable – was in that sense the latest instalment of a ghost-reading of politics that has been a dimension of the 'nervous system' of Indonesian state power for decades (Bubandt 2006, Taussig 1992). I suggest that this spirit-like character of corruption returned in the ridicule aimed at Kyai Muzakkin. The suggestion that it might take spirits to root out corruption was for many people laughable because of the spirit-like character of corruption, not in spite of it.

Laughing at spirits

Within thirty hours of its online appearance, the story in Kompas had provoked 167 responses from on-line bloggers. Many of the readers who commented on the story saw the spirits that Kyai Muzakkin had sent to protect the demonstrators as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution to corruption. Ridicule ranged through the comments, for how could spirits that belong to a superstitious past possibly bring about a desired future? The blogger 'Ahmed' suggested that sending a thousand lightly-clad promotion girls, known as SPG, would be a better way to prevent rioting. 'Yuro' announced that he planned to rent five hundred of the spirits to keep his rice field free from rats. 'OMG' wanted to see a group photo of the demonstrators and spirits. A commentator called 'Rangga' (Sharp Point) laughed: 'A thousand spirits. That is nonsense. Are there really still people caught in the past who think like this? Ha-ha-ha-ha'. Another blogger calling him- or herself 'Ramlan' wrote: 'Why, in a progressive time like this, do people still talk about spirits? Only God knows' (*wallahu'alam bissawab*).

The spirits, it seemed to many, were simply out of step with the times. Spirits belonged in the past and were an embarrassment to Indonesian modernity. They were also an embarrassment to the nation. The commentator 'hanz' blogged: 'What is next? That the spirits will contest the presidential election perhaps? What will the rest of the world say?' Another blogger calling himself 'iwan ridwan' agreed: 'Ooh, my nation is becom-

[12] Beatty (2012), Herriman (2007), Siegel (2006)

ing a laughing-stock (*ironi sekali bangsaku*). Dear God! (*Ya Allah!*)'. Meanwhile, 'full moon' (*purnomo*) wryly commented: 'Oh no, it turns out that the spirits are modern and know how to demonstrate and everything. Fantastic Pak Kyai. Repent your sins (*tobat-lah*)'. It is worth noting here that the term 'bangsa' is used in two ways, to mean either a category or 'order' of being, or 'nation' (Echols and Shadily 1989:49). Spirits constitute a class of beings that are an embarrassment to the nation (*bangsa*). As a category of beings they do not belong to the nation, to modernity, to the current time (*jaman*).

These commentators all laugh, aggressively but also slightly nervously, from a position of secular disbelief, from a challenged sense of being modern. Spirits are laughably incompatible with this sense of self, an embarrassment to Indonesian modernity in the gaze of the world. The nation, as Benedict Anderson has insightfully shown, is always haunted by 'the specter of comparison', every nation having to see itself through the eyes of other nations (Anderson 1998). The comments by Ramlan, hanz, and iwan ridwan are suffused with the global embarrassment that such national comparison may provoke, a kind of 'global stage fright' engendered by 'an awareness of vulnerability' (Keeler 1983:158) in a global encounter. One blogger who mockingly uses the alias 'jinny oh jinny' phrases this global stage fright succinctly: 'That's just great. A nation of spirits that is educated and professional. No wonder Indonesia is lagging behind'. Spirits, as this last comment makes clear, are part of what, following Michael Herzfeld (2005), one might call an Indonesian 'cultural intimacy': the recognition of something essential but intensely embarrassing about oneself as a nation.

The rueful sense that the public presence of spirits – felt to be somehow 'just typical' for Indonesia – compromises the desired role of Indonesian modernity on the global stage exists in more than one version. In fact, the spirits are as embarrassing to a secular modern as they are to an Islamic modern. A commentator called 'nimbrung' noted: 'I cannot imagine: If the leader of the boarding school is so misled in his faith, what about his students?' A blogger called 'The Prince of Bima' (Pangeran Bima) raged: 'Such pronouncements are not befitting for a Kyai. They are an embarrassment to the rational community of Islam (*Memalukan uma Islam yang rasional*). How can a Kyai do something like this?' A blogger called 'The Armoured Vehicle from Surabaya' (Panser Soroboyo) fumed:

> When this Kyai admits to befriending spirits, he is a Big Liar (*Pembohong Besar*). In the Koran, Allah the Merciful forbids us from befriending spirits. Even pious spirits do not interact with humans. It is important that each and every one of us guards our religious purity (*kesuciannya*).

Spirits, it would seem, are laughable, embarrassing and impossible because they do not 'belong' to the domain of the reality of the times – neither to the reality of the modern world nor to the God-given reality (*hakekat*) as understood by the 'rational' community of Islam (*ummat*). Kyai Muzakkin's spirits belong in that sense to the Indonesia of a by-

gone era, a superstitious era, a time when mystical Islam (*abangan*) was still hegemonic (Geertz 1960). The spirits are the embarrassing ghosts, one might say, of an *abangan* tradition in Indonesia that ought no longer to exist (Bubandt 2014:52–62, Hefner 2011).

As Derrida notes in a passage that compares the ghost of Hamlet's father to Marx's spectre of communism, spirits always point to a 'temporal disjoining' (1994:20). The spirit or ghost is a thing of the past, an 'anachrony' (1994:26), a dislocation of time in which the present is not able to be contemporaneous with itself (1994:29). The spirit ought not to be 'here, now'. Spirits are in that sense a temporal form of embarrassment, for as Mary Douglas has noted, embarrassment is a 'sense of disparity between what ought to be and what is there' (1996:75). The spirits are an embarrassing presence in relation to a modernity that ought to be. The uncanny aspect of this presence is, furthermore that it is uncertain: Even though spirits are 'here, now' in a way that they ought not to be, they are never 'there' in any unequivocal sense. The essence of haunting, in Derrida's sense, is the presence of a something that is 'here now' without truly being there. And that, I suggest, is exactly the embarrassment of spirits to the 'Indonesian modern': an embarrassment that is unsettled by the fact that spirits continue to be real to many of the Indonesians who deny them. To make matters worse, this absent presence of spirits mimics closely the nature of democratic politics, whose inner workings are driven, impossibly, by corruption.

For the enlightened, secular modernist and the modernist Muslim alike, spirits are an embarrassment. Motivated by religious or secular conviction, they dispel the spirits to an unreal state of make-believe, to the fictions of the past. And yet spirits still speak to something essential about Indonesian power – the sense that things which are hidden, invisible and spiritual (*batin*) are at least as real as those things that can be seen (*lahir*). Spirits, in that sense, are a 'fiction with reference to the world' (Siegel 1997:173), a world in which political power and its subversion at times take on an invisible, spirit-like form. It is therefore also striking how many of the blogs forcefully reassert the spirit-like reality of political power and corruption at the same time as they ridicule the assumed reality of spirits. 'Syamsul', for instance, writes: 'Wahh, why not conscript the spirits to sort out the Bank Century scandal [in which the government was accused of corruption]?' A commentator called 'Bahlul' is also amused but appears to allow for the possible political efficacy of spirits: 'Way to go, bro!! ('Ada ada aja bro!!') But if you have thousands of spirits like that, do not send them to demonstrate, bro. Instead, order them to catch the corrupt directly, and to throw them into the sea [...] he-he-he'. A few bloggers dispense with irony almost altogether. 'Dhaffdhaff' writes:

> Thank you, Pak Muzakkin, for sending your spirits to the demonstration. Please tell your spirits to possess the corrupt so that they will admit to their corruption [...] I also suggest that the spirits are asked to protect our authorities so that they do not become corrupt. This way we will have proof: if corruption disappears, then the spirits have more spiritual power (*kesaktian*) than the corrupt, OK?

This half-joking suggestion that the disappearance of corruption could be 'proof' of the reality of spirits points to a certain similarity. Spirits and corruption are alike because they seem to have a comparable spiritual power that would allow spirits to combat corruption. This similarity is made explicit in the comment by a blogger called 'tedy', who writes: 'Are these spirits not what SBY called "political free-riders"?' With this statement we are returned to the spectral character of politics in 2009, and suddenly the fictional or ridiculous character of spirits is no longer so certain.

I suggest that the outrage against Kyai Muzakkin – for not being a proper modern or a proper Muslim when he introduced spirits into the realm of democratic politics – hinges exactly on the very semblance between good spirits and democracy on the one hand and bad spirits and corruption on the other, a semblance that had also motivated Kyai Muzakkin in the first place. This semblance, however, has to be denied because it embarrasses Muslim orthodoxy and public notions of secular democracy in Indonesia, even as it forms the basis of the moral economy that drives political dreams about democracy and the constant battle against corruption.

This double ontology of spirits – their embarrassing incompatibility and implicit compatibility with modern democracy – is not unique to Indonesia, I suggest. Rather, it follows closely Bruno Latour's suggestion that modernity is characterised by a double process of 'purification' and 'translation', whereby domains like 'culture' and 'nature' (or 'politics' and 'spirits') are ideologically separated at the same time as they are constantly mixed up in practice (Latour 1993). This mixing has to be denied, and with it many actors are denied agency. The modern republic, as Latour (2005) has noted, belies its etymology because many things (*res*) cannot be made public (*publica*) in it. Objects, animals, spirits and other non-humans are routinely denied access to a political sphere that is restricted to free individuals. So too in Indonesia. Formally a secular republic since 1950 after winning independence from the Dutch, Indonesia is characterised by a public political sphere that insists ideologically on separating the world of politics from the world of spirits, religion and beliefs. But, as this paper has shown, spirits are publicly ridiculed only to be continuously invoked and employed politically – especially in times of crisis. In that sense, the demonstrating spirits become an embarrassing illustration of the way the modern world of transparency and secularism is intimately entangled with the world of the occult in ways that must always be denied (Bubandt and Beek 2011). This denied complicity between spirit worlds, modern secularism and politics is not a phenomenon that is peculiar to Indonesian democracy. Rather, its haunts democracy globally.

Conclusion: corruption and the spirit(s) of democracy

Democracy is 'in'. It is the big idea of the current moment (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Democracy is a new form of 'political second nature', and it is being globalised as a matter of course. Democracy is about 'the good society', about faith in its promotion and its globalisation. It has become an ultimate moral good. Given this heavy moral baggage, it is perhaps not surprising that spirits and ghosts haunt modern democracy at every turn. While the modern secular politics that provides the institutional infrastructure of democracy is often defined as the politics of a 'world without spirit' (Foucault 1988), democracy is anything but spirit-less. Since Alexis de Toqueville's (2003) admiring portrait of the success of American democracy (published in 1835 and 1840), political theorists have emphasized that democracy is more than people and things. Strong institutions alone are not enough to secure a strong democracy: a certain 'spirit' is needed (Diamond 2008). Although, to my knowledge, it has not been written yet, there appears to be a clear history that links the spirit of democracy to the Holy Spirit of monotheism and the spirits of animism. This article has suggested that perhaps it is because the spirit of democracy is linked to other spirits, such as those of Kyai Muzakkin, that the latter constituted such an embarrassment.

Democracy is haunted by other spectres than the spirits cultivated by people like Kyai Muzakkin. And globally, one thing in particular haunts democracy, namely corruption. The International Anti-Corruption Day, around which the events of this article have circled, was designed to celebrate global democracy and highlight the dangers that corruption posed to it. The Anti-Corruption Day was designated by the UN in 2003 'in order to raise awareness of corruption and of the role of the United Nations Convention against Corruption in combating and preventing it' (UN 2004:3). The Convention itself wastes no time in establishing an inverse moral relationship between corruption on the one hand and the good life in general, and democracy in particular, on the other. The Foreword by Kofi Annan begins:

> Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish (UN 2004:iii).

Corruption is entangled in many metaphors in this quote. One is medical: if democracy is health, then corruption is its plague. But the field is much wider. Corruption is a 'total evil fact', a kind of Maussian nightmare that negates all that is social, public and good (law, rights, markets, lives, democracy), while it is associated with all that is bad (crime, terrorism, insecurity). Corruption, one might say, is the anti-spirit of the current moment, a ghost in the democracy machine. And it is perhaps here, then, that the most important similarity between spirits and corruption emerges: both are embarrassing to

modern democracy. The worlds of spirits and corruption embarrass because they are entangled in an order to which they do not 'properly' belong. As such, one's proper sense of oneself, of a national sense of self, of one's modernity, of one's morality is also in danger and may at any moment be taken into possession by these internal but always 'other' worlds.

There is, I suggest, a clear discursive and moral continuum between Kofi Annan's 'insidious plague', SBY's 'dark passengers' and Kyai Muzakkin's spirits – between global, national and Javanese mystical notions of the threats to democracy. Even though I have argued that Indonesian politics is a 'spiritually informed' kind of politics, I am therefore not suggesting that this is due to some specifically Indonesian kind of spiritual culture. Rather, global discourses about corruption seek to establish a normative order in which democracy forms a good spirit and corruption constitutes a bad spirit. Corruption is a global threat to democracy, not only in Indonesia but everywhere. The globalisation of this sense of moral threat also globalises the metaphysical paradox built into it: that democracy appears to be reproduced by the very forces it attempts to exorcise. This is intensely embarrassing because it violates the distinction between 'what ought to be and what is there' in politics (Douglas 1996:75). For this reason, embarrassment ought to constitute, in my view, a central category in the anthropological study of politics and global democracy.

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