

## *Soapbox Forum*

# **The Schapelle Corby Show: Drugs, Media and Society**

**Edited by Laura Noszlopy**

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## **Introduction**

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As far as some were concerned, it was a cut-and-dried case. On 8 October 2004, Schapelle Corby, a trainee beautician from Brisbane, arrived at Ngurah Rai airport in Bali, where she and some friends were planning a holiday in Kuta, Australia's beach resort of choice. As she went through customs, however, she was detained by customs officials because 4.1kg of marijuana was found stuffed in her boogie-board bag.

Eight months later, on 27 May 2005, she was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment and a fine of AUD13,875—a sentence which was lighter than the death penalty she might have faced under Indonesian drug laws, but heavier than that sent down to many other defendants, both foreign and Indonesian nationals, facing similar charges. It was also a punishment that drove many Australians to outraged distraction.

People are sentenced on drugs charges in Indonesia at least as frequently as they are in other countries around the world. This case might have gone relatively unnoticed had it not been for a series of peculiar reasons, all of which were compounded by the avid media coverage that followed her case throughout. While the Australian public was whipped into a frenzy (polls reported in *The Economist* suggested that 90 per cent of Australians believed Corby to be innocent), the Corby case received little attention in the local Balinese, let alone national Indonesian media. For the most part, what the Indonesian media noted was what they considered to be the bizarre response of Australians to a cut-and-dried case, and the thoroughly inappropriate apparel of the journalists, entourage of Schapelle supporters and various Australian tourists, expatriates and hangers-on who waited outside the courtroom whenever the trial was on. Meanwhile, in Australia, the case remained headline news and became a major debate in the highest echelons of national politics and foreign affairs. And the furore did not subside with the sentencing; tensions—and the excitement of the opposing media camp—exploded when the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra, and later government offices in Jakarta, received a series of threatening packages suspected of containing a dangerous biological agent, initially assumed to be anthrax. But how exactly did this case become such a big mess and eventually even come to threaten Indonesian-Australian relations?

On 13 October 2005, Corby was re-sentenced, this time facing a reduced term of fifteen years in jail. The press in Bali barely mentioned it; the press in the rest of Indonesia was quiet too. Perhaps, for once, even the press in Australia was relatively subdued. The fate of one of Australia's favourite 'daughters' and Indonesia's 'marijuana queen' had been subsumed by a mass of reporting on other news explosions that have challenged the very core of Bali's identity: now known as Bali Bomb #1 and Bali Bomb #2. Balinese tourism was going from bad to worse. On 14 October, Kerobokan jail, where Corby is being held, was stormed by angry Balinese protesters. They weren't protesting for Corby's release—that much is clear. They were finally protesting the fact that Amrozi and his colleagues from the Bali Bomb #1 had yet to be executed by the authorities and had been transferred, following the second round of bombings, to what many surmised was a 'safer location' (safer for the prisoners, that is).

The fact that what was once *the* story of the moment has been subsumed by other stories is entirely typical of contemporary media. Nonetheless, this particular case of news creation mania throws up some interesting issues regarding relations between Australians and Indonesians, and regarding perceptions of foreignness, fairness and professionalism more generally.

Here on this soapbox, three scholars researching various aspects of Indonesian society and culture present their angle on the mediation of the Corby case. We have perspectives from both inside and outside Indonesia and from inside and outside the media industry (from an Indonesian in Australia [but also in Asian Media Studies], an Australian in New Zealand, and an Indonesian in Indonesia, but with access to the courtroom and to the Australian and Indonesian media). All comment on how this case became front page news for a whole gamut of contrary, and sometimes rather bizarre, reasons—largely based on a cross-cultural collision, some fundamental misunderstandings, long-standing stereotypes and prejudices, conflicting interpretations of the meaning of truth and legal process, and deeply felt emotional responses to foreignness. Intriguingly, these commentators share some core images, especially the notion of the reality TV show and the media circus. All three conclude that the 'Corby case', at least as both the Australian and Indonesian publics have come to understand it, has relatively little to do with points of law, and everything to do with the mediation of difference and the representation of its 'star'.

Krishna Sen, Professor of Asian Media at Curtin University, Perth assesses the ways in which the media's treatment of the case emulated the formula of a reality TV show, with the media (and its imagined public) acting as judge and jury, despite the fact that there were (several) actual legal teams on the case. An expert on both Indonesian and Australian media, she points out that while they treated this particular case in distinctly disparate ways there are underlying structural similarities between the two. Krishna Sen is also Director of Media Asia Research Group and Dean of Humanities Research and the Graduate Studies Centre at Curtin University of Technology. She is a member of the International Advisory Board of the Asia Research Centre at Murdoch University and Vice President of the Australian Asian Studies Association.

I Nyoman Darma Putra, Lecturer in Indonesian Literature at Udayana University, Denpasar, attended almost all of Corby's court hearings. He was witness to the 'circus' of mutual cross-cultural misunderstanding and mayhem that took place, and therefore can offer us a report from the field, as it were. He also points out the profound bemusement of Indonesian onlookers. Who is this Corby? If she is not a public figure, a celebrity, or the offspring of someone-very-important-indeed, why is she so significant to Australians? Darma Putra's interest in Australian-Indonesian relations started in the 1980s, when he participated in the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program. He went on to study at

the University of Sydney and University of Queensland.

Graeme MacRae, Lecturer in Anthropology at Massey University, Auckland, analyses the emotionality of the Australian reaction, both to Schapelle and to the idea that it could happen in 'Australia's Bali'. He can recall Bali in the days when you could buy Buddha sticks and magic mushrooms on the street in Kuta. These days, he is an anthropologist who has researched in Bali for over a decade and was there during the Corby trial in May-June 2005. He is an Australian but has lived and worked in New Zealand for a long time, and likes to think he views both Australian and Balinese popular cultures with a mixture of insider knowledge and some detachment.

I myself am an anthropologist, writer and editor living between Bali and Britain. I was sufficiently intrigued by both the Indonesian and Australian reactions to this case that it seemed apt to ask these experts to offer their opinions on what it was about Schapelle that drew more headline space than all the other momentous events that were taking place around the globe at the same time.

### Postscript

As I was finalising these contributions, some of the authors noted with sadness the news of Van Nguyen's execution at Changi Prison in Singapore on 2 December 2005. The death of this 25-year-old Melbourne man on a drugs charge reinforced the seriousness with which the authorities in most of the countries in Southeast Asia treat drug offences. While the writings here sometimes reflect some of the more farcical aspects of this issue, this very public tragedy reminds us again that the problems we refer to are literally matters of life and death for the producers and traffickers, as well as the consumers, of drugs.

## The Trials of Schapelle Corby

*Krishna Sen*

Asian Media, Curtin University

The reality TV drama—*The Schapelle Corby Story*—has come to an end, thank heaven. In this, the highest rating Australian television drama of 2005, a young woman is tried by the Courts in Bali and found guilty of smuggling marijuana into Indonesia. Well before that judgment was made, the Australian media had already declared her innocent and a victim not just of a corrupt Indonesian judicial system, but also of 'criminal' (though unnamed and untried) airport baggage-handlers in Brisbane and Sydney. The Australian commercial television networks, in particular, also tried and found guilty the Indonesian judiciary and any Australian specialist who might dare say something not entirely negative about anything Indonesian. After the verdict was handed down on 27 May, the drama became increasingly muted and, apart from a few moments of interest in the 'legal team sacking' and 're-hiring' and the 'sentence reduction by high court' episodes, the popularity rating of the series has generally headed south.

"Our" Schapelle' was very much a creature of the television, with just a little bit of help from talk-back radio. But importantly, it was only after the breathless television show had been moved out of prime time that the broadsheet print media and 'our' ABC seemed able to give some seriously thoughtful coverage to the issues. In the end, the TV channels had themselves been tried by 'serious' media and had been found wanting. But then, television—I am told—is 'medium': 'because it is neither rare, nor well-done'! (Shashi

Tharoor, opening the 2004 Asian Media Summit in Kuala Lumpur.)

Thinking back over the story as it unfolded between 8 October 2004, when Corby was arrested, and 27 May 2005, when the verdict was delivered, several distinct dramatic episodes stand out for me.

The first interesting scene comes from the episode screened on 28 April, where Corby delivers her emotional plea to the judges. I first heard about it on 'your ABC' (and mine). The in-court reporter stated that the plea had been heard in English without the provision of Indonesian translation. Most mainstream media reporting assumed that the judges would not have been able to comprehend the language of the plea, and reported that one of the judges was, in fact, not listening at all, but reading a book. I and, by the sound of their reaction, the listeners of talk-back radio were appalled. A woman's life was at stake and the judge was reading a book! More was revealed on the SBS 9 p.m. news. As per the pattern of the day, the reporter talked about the reading judge and then... the camera panned on to the volume he was holding, showing part of the title: *pidana seumur hidup* (life sentencing). Clearly, the judge had not been reading a Mills and Boons novel.

If we had known that the judge was consulting something relevant to the case, we might have felt less outraged. I don't think for a minute that this was deliberately selective reporting. It is just that our reporters and photographers, and our newsrooms were not aware of what the judge was reading—not because they could not get close enough, but because they could not read Indonesian. And by reporting that which they could report, in a factually correct manner, but in a tone of voice which carried outrage, they added to the image of a heartless judiciary—precisely at the moment when Schapelle's trembling voice was saying: 'My life is in your hands, but I hope I am in your hearts'.

Could this peculiar form of inadequate reporting be prevented if more Australian reporters and photographers spoke or read Indonesian? Possibly. However, had the Australian mainstream media been less linguistically challenged, they would probably have told us also that the Indonesian media had dubbed Corby the *Ratu Ganja* (Queen of Ganja) long before the judges had delivered their verdict—a story hardly likely to convince Australian readers about the fairness of the Indonesian system.

The most striking difference between the two national media throughout the drama was that the Australian media was constantly quoted in Indonesia, but there was very little reference to the Indonesian media in the Australian one. While *Jakarta Post*, Indonesia's best-known English language newspaper, was selectively cited in the Australian media, there was nothing like the extensive, on the whole correct, and at times almost fascinated, Indonesian coverage of how the Australian media was telling the story of Corby.

Most educated Indonesian journalists and editors, certainly those working in the metropolitan media, have a working knowledge of English. And yes, we should be teaching more languages, particularly more Asian languages, to Australians. But there is more at stake than just the relative knowledge of each other's language—the question of how we deal with political and cultural distance *per se*.

## Difference and change

Throughout the period of the New Order (1965-98), and indeed perhaps since the establishment of 'Guided Democracy' (in 1957), the Australian media have been in the habit of characterising their Indonesian counterparts as cowed and controlled by authoritarian governments. The image of a completely repressed media was probably never entirely true, and is completely at odds with the almost anarchic freedoms that the Indonesian media have enjoyed since the fall of Suharto in May 1998. In the new

millennium, the Indonesian national media are highly diversified, both in terms of ownership and editorial positioning, and the regional media are often deeply marked by local cultural concerns. The idea, promoted by both successive Indonesian governments, and to some extent by Western media discourse, that state-control of media is somehow prescribed by something called 'Indonesian' (or Asian) culture is demonstrably wrong. If a cultural consensus legitimising a command-and-compliance model of media ever existed, then in post-New Order Indonesia that consensus is well and truly dead.

It is almost impossible to generalise on how this huge—linguistically, socially, politically and culturally diverse—media covered the story of one of many foreign drug smugglers in Indonesian jails. Much of the regional media paid only scant attention to the case. In Bali, the newspapers were concerned mainly by the impact that the case might have on its tourist trade, and were fascinated by the behaviour of the Australian journalists and tourists (see Darma Putra's contribution). On the morning of the verdict, the island's oldest and largest daily paper, *Bali Post*, ran with the headline: 'Observing Preparations for Corby Case: Visitors Forbidden to Wear Shorts' (*Melongok Persiapan Sidang Corby: Pengunjung Dilarang Pakai Celana Pendek, Bali Post Online, 27 May 2005*). The article included instruction from the Chief Judge who had noted inappropriate attire amongst foreign journalists and crew.

The Indonesian national media has no illusions about the national judicial system. In the first six months of 2005, as the Corby case progressed in the Bali courts in accordance with Indonesian law, the Indonesian national media (centred in Jakarta) were grappling with two murder cases, which were showing up serious deficiencies in post-New Order Indonesia's law enforcement system. On 7 September 2004, high profile Human Rights lawyer Munir had been murdered on a Garuda international flight. In the second case, on 1 January 2005, in the Hilton Hotel in Jakarta, Adiguna Sutowo, younger brother of prominent businessman Ponco Sutowo and son of the once all powerful oil-chief Ibnu Sutowo, shot dead a waiter, in full public view. In both cases the highest rank of business and political elements were involved, preventing or disrupting the operations of police and prosecution. If the Australian media were seriously interested in examining the Indonesian judiciary they would have done well to pay attention to the politics of money and power, fear and corruption that the Indonesian media were unearthing around these two cases.

For the Indonesian media, their only real interest in the Corby case was driven by their mystified fascination with the Australian media's coverage of it. On the whole, the Australian media got a fair trial at the hands of their Indonesian counterpart; they were found wanting on many counts. The Australian media had 'widely and wildly suggested' (*Jakarta Post Online, 30 June 2005*) during the early weeks of the trial that Corby faced the death sentence, but, as Indonesian papers pointed out, not one person in Indonesia, either foreign or local, had ever been sentenced to death for trafficking marijuana (though heroin and cocaine smugglers had).

*On one count of misleading the Australian public: guilty*

Public polls, published in a number of Australian papers, showed that even as the evidence was being presented to the court in Bali, 90 per cent of the Australian public had already declared Corby innocent. As a thoughtful editorial piece in the *Jakarta Post* pointed out:

A person is found guilty or innocent on the basis of evidence brought before the court and not by public opinion... But the diatribes by the Australian public and media against the Indonesian legal system while the trial was still in progress

have certainly been very unhelpful. The Indonesian courts have their flaws... but it was dead wrong of the Australian public and media to prejudge the court... (30 June 2005).

*On one count of promoting a kangaroo court: guilty.*

The same *Jakarta Post* article speculated on the impact of Australian media's heavy-handed presence on the outcome of Corby's case. There is little doubt that since the fall of Suharto's 33-year dictatorship, the Indonesian judiciary has been struggling to reform itself—in particular to gain autonomy from the executive government, but also to ensure that it is seen to be autonomous of all pressures from vested interests, whether Indonesian or foreign. In December 2001, another young woman, a Mexican, had been found guilty of attempting to smuggle over fifteen kilos of marijuana—more than three times the amount in Corby's bag. The Mexican got only seven years. Clearly, the judges had been harsh on Corby—a harshness, the *Jakarta Post* suggested, provoked in some measure by the intense pressure from a foreign media to deliver a 'not guilty' verdict. It is arguable that in the Indonesian political context three mid-level government bureaucrats (the judges in a provincial court are, after all, just that) would have felt the absolute need to prove themselves above any accusation of influence from a foreign, well-heeled and powerful media. Had the Australian media then provoked terrible consequences for Corby?

*On one count of perverting the course of justice: guilty?*

### **The Australian 'public' in the Indonesian media**

The mainstream Indonesian print media assumed that the Australian media reflected Australian public opinion. *Tempo*, the most respected Indonesian national weekly, devoted its May cover story to *Jemaah Corbiah*—literally 'Corby's community', but with all the connotations of a religious fraternity or a fundamentalist movement (see also Vickers 2005 and MacRae's contribution). Although the magazine might be forgiven for assuming that a popular *Corbyite* uprising was imminent, (a conclusion perhaps unavoidable when following the media coverage of Corby from a distance), one needs to always question any conflation of the public and the media.

I started this article suggesting that the Corby story needs to be seen as a popular Australian TV drama. So let me close with an episode that was never screened. You pretty much had to be a Corby-junkie—looking for out-takes and following the script-development online—to know about this episode.

On 3 June 2005, a rally was held in Brisbane to protest against Corby's 20-year sentence. There were 21 reporters, camera operators and photographers at the rally, easily outnumbering the handful of pro-Corby protesters. 'I'm very disappointed', said the organiser Guy Pillgrim, 'because so many people are so passionate about this'. Given the lack of interest in the rally, one had to question if, indeed, the Australian 'people' were quite as passionate about Corby's trials as the media claimed. Is it possible that the so-called pro-Corby (and almost axiomatically, anti-Indonesian) frenzy, which embarrassed the government and every intelligent commentator on Indonesia-Australia relations, was just a popular television beat-up?

There is little doubt that there was intense audience interest in the 'trials of Corby'. Otherwise, two private television channels would not have given hours of live coverage from the courtroom on the day of the verdict. But perhaps this audience interest was the same kind of affect generated for the characters in *Big Brother* or *Australian Idol* or,

indeed, for the even more clearly fictional characters of the midday soaps. Of course we cry when a soap heroine is wrongfully imprisoned, and we might even write letters of protest to Channel 10 when our favourite gets thrown out of the Big Brother house unfairly. But Australians don't go out to protest the fate of televisual characters.

What really happened to the real Schapelle Corby is a tragedy. But the discourse around the television character of the same name has its own dangerous consequences. Foreign, in this instance Indonesian, media habitually construct their images of Australians out of representations in the Australian media. Goenawan Mohamad, former editor of *Tempo* and arguably the most intellectual of Indonesian journalists, once suggested that all of Indonesian television has become 'soap-opera-ised' (*Tempo*, 40/II, 11-17 June 2002). It would be useful perhaps for Indonesians to recognise that the Australian media were not that different from their own.

## Who is Corby? And Other Bewildering Questions

*I Nyoman Darma Putra*

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For the Australian public and her legal team, Corby and her case contain a substantial element of 'reasonable doubt'. But for the Indonesian, and especially the Balinese, public, it is the person rather than the case that raised a whole series of bewildering questions.

Among the first questions to be asked were: Who exactly is Schapelle Corby? Why have she and her case received such special attention from the Australian media and public? Why had businessman Ron Bakir jumped in to stir public emotions in support of her supposed innocence? According to local ways of thinking, one could reasonably ask whether Corby is a movie star in her home country. Is she from a rich family? Is she the daughter of a bureaucrat, politician or political leader?

The way Indonesian media dubbed her the *Ratu Marijuana* or 'Queen of Marijuana' (inspired by the fact that she was a beauty student) provoked the question of whether Corby was a celebrity (that is, before she became one through this case). All these questions and more were asked rhetorically, not in order to clear up the matter of 'reasonable doubt', but to try and make sense of why a drug suspect in police custody could become so important that it made the headlines, and resulted in the sending of terror packages and petitions to Indonesian diplomats in Australia and to the Foreign Affairs office in Jakarta.

Corby's case came to public attention in Indonesia, at least among newspaper readers and law observers, not because custom officers found a considerable amount of marijuana in her boogie-board bag, not because she is a former beauty student, but rather because of the way Australian journalists covered the case here in the Denpasar District Court in Bali. At each appearance, there was always a media scrum to shoot Corby's arrival from Kerobokan jail, some six kilometres away, at the court. This took place from the parking lot to holding cell, along a distance of about twenty metres. It took place again each time Corby was escorted out of the holding cell to the court room, another fifteen to twenty metres away. Australian journalists covering her story tried to elicit her comments by asking her questions, ranging from 'How are you?' to more serious enquiries such as 'Did you admit to the possession of marijuana in your bag?' or 'Did someone plant it?'

Only on the very first occasion did Corby respond to provocative questions from

journalists; most notably she started a furore after saying that 'the translation was wrong', with regard to the prosecutor's allegation that she had admitted possession at the airport. The indictment was leaked to the media a few days before the opening of her first trial, and it became a running theme throughout. It was claimed by the arresting customs officer that Corby had said 'No! I have some', as she tried to push away the hands of the officer, as he was opening a pocket of her bag. It is from this alleged statement, and other limited conversation in English during the ensuing search and investigation inside the airport customs-room, that many came to the conclusion that Corby had admitted that the marijuana was hers. But Corby always denied this, and her lawyers have questioned the English language abilities of the officer in question. The repercussions of 'answering' questions not asked by the judge himself meant that, on subsequent arrivals at the court for every trial, Corby stayed tight-lipped. Although journalists kept asking provocative and perhaps bewildering questions, she chose not to say anything outside the courtroom. But, for local people who happened to be in the courtyard and saw how the media mobbed Corby, or for those who watched the scenes on local and national TV, it was hard to understand why it was happening. People asked 'Who is she?' first, rather than 'What she has done?'

There has never been such a media scrum by foreign journalists in the history of Denpasar District Court. Many cases involving foreigners on drug charges with considerable evidence have taken place in the same court, but they didn't receive such attention. Local and national journalists who covered these cases calmly waited to listen to what was happening in the courtroom. For Corby's case, and later also for those of the 'Bali Nine' and the underwear model Michelle Leslie, the scrum not only occurred on their arrival at the courtroom, but also after the hearings when the defendants returned to the holding cell, and from there to the cars that transported them back to Kerobokan jail. On the judgment day, some cameraman even waited for Corby at the front gate of the jail and followed her car all the way to court, hoping to snap exclusive pictures.

Such scenes continued inside the courtroom as journalists jostled to get coverage of the hearing. As the room is relatively small and judges have placed restrictions on the use of large tripod cameras, TV cameramen competed to get the best position to film the accused, and the judges, lawyers and prosecutors. The windows in the room are limited and narrow. Cameramen unscrewed windows from their frames in order to get a wider space; they then abandoned the unclosed windows when their day's work was finished. In many cases, tripods were left in place overnight to secure a shooting position. On the one hand, this made local people think the Australian cameramen were more professional, enabling themselves to get better shots than their competitors. But it also shocked them, especially when they saw cameramen unscrewing the windows from their frames. Surprisingly, court officers did not try to stop them. During the coverage of the Bali bombings trial in 2003, things were better organised, with police controls and pre-assigned positions for tripods inside the spacious courtroom of Nari Graha.

The Chief Judge on Corby's case, Linton Sirait, however, held an informal meeting with foreign and national journalists in order to make sure that the judgment day would run in a smooth and orderly manner, avoiding what had been described as a 'media circus', particularly as the proceedings were to be broadcast live by Australian commercial networks (Channels Nine, Seven and Ten). Mr Sirait did not want to create the feeling that the court had put restrictions on journalists, as he held the opinion that courts are open and transparent. But to avoid crowding, only two TV and two stills cameramen were allowed in the courtroom and they were instructed to share the footage, as a 'pool camera'. With the absence of local and national journalists in the meeting (who were also keen to get good footage, but were not included in the group that needed 'disciplining'), and

overshadowed by a strong sense of competition among the Australian media (many of whom vied aggressively to get their own shots on the day), the pool camera plan did not work smoothly.

The smell of competition pervaded both the court and the jail. On the first day of Corby's trial, two senior Australian TV journalists—one from a commercial network, the other from a state-funded channel—were involved in an argument outside Denpasar District court. One tried to interview Corby's mother, while the other took her away to prevent the interview taking place. It was later understood that the journalist who took her away paid the family for an exclusive story and had banned Roseleigh talking to journalists. The same senior journalist came again to cover judgment day, and again got into an argument with other Australian media people. This time, he was harshly criticised by both local and Australian photographers for having hindered the photographing of Corby's mother as she left the gates of the jail. He quickly escorted her to a brand new Kijang Innova car parked directly in front of the gates. An Australian photographer explicitly criticised him and told him to go home with his 'chequebook journalism'. Chequebook journalism has indeed become common in Australia, particularly among commercial networks, but is still a relatively foreign concept in Indonesia, where 'envelope journalism' works in a quite different way, with the source paying off the journalist, rather than vice-versa. Therefore, such an argument between Australian journalists was hard for the Indonesians to make sense of.

This argument was not the only strange thing about the scene outside Kerobokan jail in the week prior to the judgment day. Local observers were bemused by the flow of Australian tourists coming to try and visit Corby. Most of them did not know Corby personally. They said they came to pay their sympathy to someone they considered innocent. Their presence attracted local and national media who covered the event from the angle that Kerobokan jail was competing with the Bali Museum as the main tourist attraction in town, a common view among journalists, local residents and taxi drivers who work in the area.

Of course, not all the Australian tourists who came to the jail were allowed to enter—not only because of the crowded situation and the limited time that detainees have to accept visitors, but also because Corby was selective in who she admitted, perhaps fearing that comments they made on their exit would again be detrimental to the positive image her defence team were trying to maintain. But the visitors who didn't get in seemed happy enough to come and drop off meals, drinks or letters for her.

They may not have been aware, however, that the local and national media had directed their attention to the visitors' personal appearance. For example, the front page of *Radar Bali* (the regional section of the *Jawa Pos* newspaper) showed a photograph of an Australian tourist wearing a miniskirt and t-shirt, revealing the tattoo on her back. In fact, almost all the Australians present, both journalists and visitors, wore casual clothes. Taxi drivers, prison guards and the general public who happened to be near the jail were startled at the appearance of the Corby sympathisers. Bali has long been known as a tolerant society, especially in the context of tourism, but the very casual appearance of the foreigners who turned up at the jail and courtroom did cause a stir. Why didn't they wear appropriate clothes to these official places? Did they think they were sightseeing or visiting the beach? It's not hotter in Bali than it is in an Australia summer, so why would they wear so little clothing?

In Indonesia, initially at least, Corby's case was reported like an ordinary drug case. It had not attracted public attention in Bali until the media realised how it was being reported abroad. And then the news broke about a letter and two petitions sent to the Indonesian

Consulate General in Perth, followed by suspicious packages, initially suspected of containing anthrax, which were posted to the Indonesian embassy office in Canberra and also to the Office of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta. Several suspicious letters were also sent to the Chief of Denpasar District Court. The Chief was forced to abandon his office for at least two days until it was declared anthrax-free by forensic police.

These events attracted national media attention. The mailings were viewed as a form of terror. The leading Indonesian news magazine, *Tempo*, published a cover story titled *Aksi Terror di Australia: Jemaah Corbyiah*, a banner associating the events with the alleged terror group, Jemaah Islamiah (6-12 June 2005). A week later, national newspaper *Kompas* published a cartoon by leading Indonesian cartoonist G. M. Sudarta. This featured a kangaroo as a postman carrying an envelope with a picture of a skeleton, while the people in the cartoon were depicted singing a song adapted from the Beatles lyrics—‘Wait! Oh yes, wait a minute mister postman, wait...!’ (15 June 2005). No similar coverage had occurred in the Indonesian media before the issue of suspicious packages came to the surface. The new coverage emphasised how the Indonesian media were less interested in the legal and criminal issues of the Corby case, but were, instead, interested in the threat to the harmonious relationship between Indonesia and Australia which was now threatening to (re-)hit rock-bottom. For Indonesians, especially Balinese, the relationship between the close neighbours is much more important than the Corby case; they do not want to see good relations destroyed by a drugs case, and fear that the Australian government might listen to Corby’s supporters demanding a boycott of tourism to Bali.

The Corby case may well stay in the memory of the Balinese people for some years—not because of her innocence or guilt, but rather because of the coverage of the Australian media, which has become part of the popular history of the district court. The judges on her case will also have stories to tell. They may not fully understand why the Australian media and their public so emotionally lent their support to Corby. In Indonesia, especially in drug cases, people tend to follow official opinion, from police officers and judges, rather than media investigations and provocation, despite the fact that they may contain elements of reasonable doubt against the ‘legal truth’ presented by court.

## **Fear and Loathing in Our Own Holiday Paradise: The Strange Tale of Schapelle Corby (*et al.*)**

*Graeme MacRae*

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A producer looking for an idea for a new reality TV program would be hard-pressed to do better than the Schapelle show. Likewise, an opportunist businessman looking for a new brand to market; a lawyer, a high-profile case to defend; a middle-somewhere population, a cause to support. While you and I are unlikely to ever know how the dope boogied its way into Schapelle’s baggage (did anyone see a dingo?), we all (even across the sea in New Zealand, where we try to keep our drug scene off the front pages) know and are unlikely to forget the story, or at least the media hysteria surrounding it. And in case we were about to, the new series, involving the equally photogenic, but suddenly camera-shy Michelle Leslie has (at the time of writing) brought it all back again.

It all seemed less than interesting to me until I arrived in Bali just before Schapelle’s

trial and found that three million Balinese and 220 million other Indonesians were even less interested, perhaps because they knew even less about it than I did. According to their media it was nothing new or special—just a routine ‘foreigner-caught-with-drugs’ report on page three or four—and for most people it hadn’t even registered among their daily concerns. This discrepancy, this yawning gulf, between the media perceptions and public attitudes in the two countries seems to be a social fact of some significance about neighbours that have struggled for half a century to make sense of each other.

There is no question as to the role of the media in generating public attitudes in Australia, and Krishna Sen and Nyoman Darma Putra (in this Forum) have analysed Indonesian media perceptions. But I think the respective media played to, and were read, in very different social, cultural and political contexts—with real differences in the way people in the two countries see drugs and the drug trade, but also in the way the citizens of the two nations see each other. What I would like to do here is to comment on the Australian public and media perceptions and especially the social/cultural/political contexts in which these divergent (mis)perceptions may begin to make sense.

Ngurah Rai Airport in Bali is generally a user-friendly sort of place, especially if you are an Australian tourist. Officials smile and welcome you to Bali and immigration and customs formalities are minimal. But on 8 October 2004, Schapelle Corby had a somewhat different experience. Customs officials decided, for reasons unknown, to check her baggage and found a pillow-sized slab of marijuana weighing 4.1 kg in her boogie-board bag.<sup>1</sup> Because of this evidence, which no-one has contested to date, and the lack of evidence to support her claim that she knew nothing about it and that it must have been put there by crooked baggage-handlers in Australia, the court presiding over her case had little choice but to convict her, and on 27 May 2005 she was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> This was just another routine drug conviction from a local point of view, and arguably a lenient sentence at that; but according to some 90 per cent of the Australian public a travesty of justice against someone who could have been any ‘one of our daughters’.<sup>3</sup>

In Australia, the case became an overnight *cause célèbre* involving her somewhat colourful family, a wealthy and flamboyant mobile phone entrepreneur, a tangled transnational web of lawyers, would-be lawyers and bush lawyers, a media frenzy out of all proportion to the event and eventually even a reluctant government.<sup>4</sup> This extraordinary phenomenon of public culture, reminiscent of the Lindy Chamberlain case, and the more recent Peter Falconio one, will no doubt be analysed in depth by others more competent to do so, but what I would like to contribute here are some preliminary reflections on the place of Bali in Australian culture and on some of the background factors informing Indonesian perceptions of and reactions to the case.

### ‘One of our daughters’

The reaction in Australia to Schapelle’s arrest, trial and conviction was immediate, strong and remarkably consistent. She was seen from the start as probably an innocent holidaymaker in the wrong place at the wrong time whose only crime was ‘not locking her baggage’, and at worst as guilty of a minor offence for which the Indonesian penalties were manifestly excessive and whose treatment by the Indonesian authorities was inhumane or, at best, inappropriate. Support groups, celebrity supporters, fundraising efforts, articles in women’s magazines and websites mushroomed all over the country.<sup>5</sup> The general tenor of opinions expressed ranged from simply ‘Schapelle is innocent’ to reservations about the competence and fairness of the Indonesian judicial system—‘The

judges don't even speak English, mate—they're straight out of the trees...' (Malcolm Elliot, Radio 2GB, 15 May 2005).

But the whole show quickly turned into a substantial commercial enterprise, with everyone wanting a slice of the pie. Her family signed an 'exclusive' agreement with Channel Nine, but continued to talk to everyone. Ron Bakir, a businessman of high profile and ambiguous reputation, emerged as a financial backer to help with legal fees in Bali, but it soon became apparent that he saw her as a business opportunity. Other companies tried to register rights to the use of her name.

As it started to turn messy, other stories began to emerge: 'Meet the Corby's. A dad with a drug record, a brother in jail, and a former bankrupt who wants 50% of the action' (*Weekend Australian*, 21-22 May 2005). The story expanded into a series of sub-stories about the increasingly bizarre sideshows, but the core story—of the girl who could have been 'any of our daughters' in the hands of violent, corrupt and incompetent Asian men—never went away. By early June, more reflective observers within the Australian media were starting to feel a certain embarrassment over the orgy of jingoism and thinly disguised racism they had unleashed which reflected 'an immaturity ... that will rebound on us as a nation' (Paul Kelly, *The Australian*, 1 June 2005).

Indonesian media coverage, on the other hand, was relatively restrained and paid little attention to the not-very-newsworthy event of 'yet another foreigner in court on drugs charges'. As the case developed, though, and the Australian media became involved, the more newsworthy story was the growing foreign media circus itself, and ultimately reports of public and political reactions in Australia. Among the effects of this was that it led many ordinary Indonesians to the conclusion that Corby must be a person of considerable wealth or social status.

### **Bali: playground of Middle Australia**

The widely shared ideology and official policy of tourism in Bali is 'cultural tourism', centred on an image of a natural, artistic and religious paradise. The reality is largely driven by the mass influx of holiday-makers out for a good time in the coastal resorts of Kuta/Legian/Seminyak, Sanur and Nusa Dua, where tourism means various combinations of visiting the beach, shopping and nightlife. Nothing that looks much like 'traditional Balinese culture' is visible or easily accessible to tourists in these parts. This is effectively restricted to Ubud, where the beach-tourists go for a day trip and a minority of mostly European and Japanese tourists stay for longer periods to immerse themselves in performances of traditional music/dance/drama, painting, sculpture and the beautiful ricefield landscape. Among the beach-tourists, Australians are the largest and most visible group.<sup>6</sup> Kuta tourism is Australian-tourism: restaurants and bars in Kuta advertise prominently their Australia-friendliness in the form of special deals on favourite Australian beers and live video screenings of Australian football matches.<sup>7</sup>

Among the outpouring of emotion in the aftermath of the first bombing in October 2002, which killed 88 Australians as well as 38 Indonesians, were sentiments of solidarity, friendship and even fictive kinship between Balinese and Australians. The experience of years of regular interaction on the beaches and in the hotels and nightclubs of south Bali have clearly enabled many Australians and Balinese to transcend differences of language, culture and the differences between their respective governments, at some fundamental level of shared humanity (even if based on a short-term complementarity of interest). These Balinese and Australians think of themselves as having a lot in common.

The other side of this familiarity and kinship is a certain feeling of proprietorship on

the part of Australians about Bali—that it is theirs, almost a part of Australia. Michel Picard (1996: 199) argued some years ago that Balinese culture was no longer separable from the process of tourism. It has also been suggested, more specifically, that the Kuta/Legian strip of south coastal Bali is culturally, as well as economically, better understood as an offshore extension of Australian beachside culture and economy. Schapelle Corby, according to the information available, comes from the heartland of this beach-based Australia; her sister lives in Bali, married to a surf-shop proprietor; and she has travelled to Bali many times. A quick perusal of the opinions of her supporters on various websites suggests that a significant proportion of them share similar perceptions of Bali.

The reality is considerably more complex, involving multiple influences, especially from elsewhere in Indonesia. The point however is that in the eyes of many Australians who know Bali through the beach scene, it feels like home, and all the other realities which are Bali, including the fact that it is part of a still rather centralised and authoritarian state, are invisible or, at best, obscure to them. So having their bags searched or being subjected to the power of a foreign government does not form part of their image, experience or expectation of Bali. 'We go out for a good time, not to have the cops shutting off the music ... It definitely puts people off ... It's not as relaxed as it used to be' (*Forbes*, 27 August 2005).

### ***Narkoba*: drugs in Indonesia**

Indonesia has a drug problem and it's getting bigger and uglier, but in Indonesian popular thinking this is a 'foreign' problem imported into Indonesia (*Tempo*, 22 May 2005). There is an element of truth in this belief. Opium has never (to my knowledge) been grown in Indonesia, but was imported by the Dutch during the colonial period and was retailed at great profit until the 1930s through government shops, with local aristocracies and Chinese as their best customers. Good quality marijuana has long been cultivated in Sumatra, and in the 1970s it was readily available in Kuta, along with 'Buddha sticks' imported from Thailand and a local variety of 'magic' mushrooms, but these gradually disappeared from the tourist scene as a more middle-class style of tourism developed, fuelled by legal alcohol.

The recent growth and globalisation of the trade in illicit drugs has, however, taken advantage of Indonesia's relatively permeable borders and corruptible bureaucracies, and it has become a significant staging post in transnational drug movements. A certain segment of this trade is siphoned off into the local market and as a consequence Indonesia has seen a growth in drug use and addiction in much the same way as many other countries. By the mid-1990s all manner of drugs were once again readily available in Kuta, at the same time as serious hard-drug scenes and widespread addiction were developing in Jakarta and other major cities throughout Indonesia (*Tempo*, 22 May 2005). Such is the reality, but local discourse about the problem, at all levels of society, tends to portray this as the importation of a foreign problem into what is a traditionally drug-free society. Throughout Indonesia there are large and prominent billboards advertising in lurid and alarming form the health and legal consequences of messing with *narkoba*. Indonesian law is correspondingly tough on drug offences, with the death penalty or life imprisonment common and well-publicised sentences for convicted traffickers.<sup>8</sup> It also classifies drugs differently from Australian law, with marijuana in the same category as heroin.

### ***Ajeg Bali: the fear of outside influences***

In Bali, drugs are one small part of a larger set of problems which have afflicted Balinese society since the downfall of Suharto in 1998 and especially since the bombings of October 2002. These problems are outlined and addressed in a movement known as *Ajeg Bali*, which means something like 'Bali standing upright and true'. According to the discourse of *Ajeg Bali*, Balinese culture is suffering from both internal weakness and external threats. The latter are more prominent and include the growing power of outside capital investment in Bali, immigration of (especially Muslim) migrants from other parts of Indonesia (especially East Java), and the corrosive influences of 'foreign' (read 'Western' culture).

One of the spokespersons of the *Ajeg Bali* movement is the local police chief, Made Mangku Pastika, who led the strikingly successful search for the perpetrators of the Bali Bombs in 2002, and became something of a local hero in the process. His present cause is a campaign against the triad of social evils: gambling, prostitution and drugs. Many Balinese see drugs as a serious danger to their children and there is little sympathy for anybody, local or foreign, who is involved in their importation or distribution.

### **Conclusions**

The Indonesian and Australian publics both tend to subscribe to highly simplified, and radically divergent, views of the Corby case, based on entirely different sets of knowledge and priorities. For Indonesians, growing public concerns about a mushrooming drug problem and a perception that it is of foreign origin, local reportage of extreme Australian media and government reactions to the case, combined with a complete absence of focus on Schapelle as a person, have resulted in widespread indifference to her personal fate coupled with a degree of offence both at foreign involvement in the drug problem itself and perceived Australian attempts to 'interfere' in Indonesian judicial process.

Australian media coverage, on the other hand, has moved between the Orientalist spectacle of a young (more or less) innocent white woman at the mercy of a mass of uniformed foreign males and highly personalised accounts of her and her family's ordeal. In neither case have 'the facts of the case' been central to coverage and, when they have, rather different 'facts' have been emphasised.

Both coverages of the case have done little more than draw upon, feed and strengthen simplified stereotypical views. As a result, the case has—unlike the Bali bombing which brought Australians and Balinese together in mutual understanding—tended to (re)open a gap of comprehension between them. Whatever this may tell us about the two media cultures, it seems, if nothing else, to suggest a case for better informed public opinion and more responsible journalism.

### **Epilogue: the new series (with Michelle as Schapelle) or, are Australians just slow learners?**

As the Schapelle saga unfolded, the dangers of doing drugs in Bali became inescapably apparent to everyone in Australia, or so one might have expected. Since she was arrested however, Australians (thirteen at last count) keep getting arrested for drug offences in Bali and other parts of Southeast Asia. While some were caught with blocks of heroin strapped to their bodies, the evidence against others is less unequivocal. The latest (in early September 2005), and of most interest to both Australian and Indonesian media, is

Michelle Leslie who, like Schapelle, is young, female and professionally photogenic. She was caught (along with four others who were initially invisible, for reasons to become clear later) with a couple of pills, which turned out to be Ecstasy, in her bag (and more in her blood) in what appears to have been a routine police check of patrons entering an all-night dance party at the Garuda Wisnu Kencana theme-park.<sup>9</sup>

There was a confused flurry of reports, in the media of both countries—of addiction, denial and blame-shifting—before her lawyers and media minders took control. Their immediate concern was, understandably, to avoid another Schapelle-style media circus. Michelle, presumably more media-savvy than Schapelle, immediately minimised her exposure to photographers by covering her head and face with a sarong while her family and wealthy boyfriend tried to keep a low profile. A few days later, however, she appeared completely covered by a Middle-Eastern style *burqah*. While this was effective in avoiding the taking of images of her face and clothing, it also had the immediate, and not surprising, effect of providing a whole new meal for the media to feed on. Then to add spice to the feast, her team announced that she was in fact a Muslim.

This was widely read, even in Australia, as a strategy to simultaneously circumvent photography and to appeal to the sympathies of the Indonesian judiciary. The contradictions, however, were not lost on either local or Australian observers: between Islamic couture in the Middle-East and Indonesia; between her profession of Islam and her profession as a modeller of underwear; and the fact that neither most Balinese nor the judge in the Corby case are Muslims. What the strategy certainly did provide though was a gift to both sets of media in the form of a new angle and a corresponding escalation of public interest.

Soon Michelle's team were busy dealing with a 'Muslim backlash' in Australia with one hand, and the news that she had tested positive for Ecstasy with the other. Singapore modelling agencies were letting it be known that their local models were definitely not drug users, while Indonesian authorities insisted that they were not targeting Australians, pointing out the many non-Australians are also caught.

As Australian media began speculating as to whether their compatriots were a bit slow to learn some obvious lessons from it all, the Indonesian authorities were wondering the same thing about the Australian media themselves and banned the Nine Network, which drove the Corby circus. But it seems that the show is not over yet and there are always new opportunities for the innovative—the Standards Association of Australia announced in August that their annual design awards would include a new prize for 'tamper-proof suitcases'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Postscript (20 November 2005)**

Michelle's media management strategy, and whatever went on in the background, seemed to work. After a series of allegations in the Indonesian media that her anonymous partners on the night of her arrest were the sons of high-ranking Indonesian politicians, and amid speculations about behind-the-scenes payments, her trial was concluded with unusual speed. Although found guilty and sentenced to three months prison, she had already served this time and was expected to return to Australia within days where her minders said she would tell her 'real story'. The only issue remaining seems to be who is entitled to the profits from her story. Meanwhile Schapelle sits in her cell in Bali, her fifteen minutes of fame all but over and perhaps wishing she had better connections in Australia and Indonesia.

## Notes

1. A boogie-board (for non-Australian readers) is a small surfboard about a metre in length and half a metre wide and weighing a few kilograms. Serious users carry them, like regular surfboards, in specially made bags.
2. Indonesian law does not discriminate between categories of drugs in the same way as most Western legal codes.
3. The quote is by an anonymous e-mail correspondent to an ABC radio program hosted by Sally Loane (cited Vickers 2005), but similar sentiments have been expressed by many others. I might add that she could have been my daughter too and, while I am in no position to speculate as to her guilt or innocence, I am not unsympathetic to the nightmarish situation in which she finds herself. My purpose here though is not her predicament but the larger issue, of which she is clearly a victim, of systematic misunderstanding between her country and that in which she is imprisoned.
4. On the day of the verdict there were, reportedly, more Australian reporters in Bali than immediately after the bombings in October 2002 which killed some 200 people (Vickers 2005).
5. For a sample simply type 'Schapelle Corby' into Google.
6. Australians made up the largest group of all tourists to Bali until 1998 and since then have been second only to Japanese. Despite a drop after the bombs in 2002, Australian visitors were back to pre-bomb levels of 267,520 in 2004 (McIlveen 2005). Japanese tend however to stay for relatively shorter periods and travel systematically, especially to the Ubud area, while a high proportion of Australians tend to stay on the coast for days or weeks on end.
7. See Vickers 1989: 184-194.
8. According to the head of Indonesia's National Drug Agency, there are over 3 million drug users in Indonesia, and some 15,000 people die from drug abuse each year. The majority of users are young people and schoolchildren are increasingly involved. Between 2001 and 2003, there were 26 narcotics cases involving foreigners (*Tempo*, 22 May 2005) and there have been many more since.
9. The Garuda Wisnu Kencana theme-park is a development based on a huge statue of the Hindu deity Wisnu and his vehicle, the bird Garuda. At the time of its planning in the mid-1990s it was highly controversial but was justified as an international symbol of Bali-Hindu religious culture. Its predominant usage is ironically as a venue for the very drug-assisted pop-concerts and dance parties which many Balinese see as an affront to Hindu sensibilities. For its chequered history, see Suasta and Connor 1999.
10. 'Muslim backlash to Leslie', *News.com.au*/30 August 2005. E. A. Yong 'She was different from other girls', *The Electric New Paper*, 7 September 2005. C. Wockner, 'Stupid Aussies wander into drug war', *The Courier-Mail*, 27 August 2005. R. Fidgeon, 'Indonesia bans Nine Network reporters', *The Courier-Mail*, 31 August 2005. R. Macey, 'Award will honour the safest cases'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 Sep 2005.

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