Corona in Indonesian and German Cartoons: Contested Medical Pluralism, Distrust in the State and Radicalization in Times of Crisis

Cartoons published in Germany and Indonesia provide insights into people's mindsets, attitudes, fears and hopes during the Corona pandemic. Our analysis of the work of leading cartoonists (one in Germany and two in Indonesia), focusing on healthcare and the wider socio-political issues raised by the pandemic, reveals wide differences in the meta-narrative of the corona crisis between the two countries. In Germany, the crisis is seen as a threat to the wider social and political order, which the German cartoonist Piero Masztalerz personifies in depictions of esoteric right-wing conspiracy theorists and the clown-like alternative practitioners (Heilpraktiker). In Indonesia, the pandemic tends to be seen as one more crisis amongst others. The Indonesian cartoonists Benny Rachmadi and Muhammad Mirsad highlight the economic effects of the pandemic crisis, that deepen already existing poverty, as well as mocking the government's inadequate response. Cartoonists from both countries stress people's increasing disenchantment and marginalization as a result of the Corona crises; this challenge constitutes a litmus test for the future of plural societies in Indonesia and Germany.

1. Crises in cartoons

Since it was first detected, the new coronavirus has dominated public discourse, political action and individual life-worlds. The global spread of the Covid-19 pandemic causes immense distress and confusion, while the evolving crisis calls into question known and accustomed rules that have hitherto guided societies (Seijts / Milani 2020). The following timeline shows the evolution of the pandemic in Germany and Indonesia and charts the introduction of measurements to prevent the spread of infections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First cases</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Germany</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indonesia</strong></td>
<td>2 March: First cases in Jakarta. Panic buying in supermarkets and drugstores across Jakarta</td>
<td>27 January: First cases in Munich. Little public reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First measurements &amp; reactions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mid-March</strong>: Local governments decide to close schools</td>
<td>26 February: Many cases in Heinsberg (North Rhine-Westphalia) lead to first closure of public spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 March: the Indonesian President declares a COVID-19 public health emergency</td>
<td>&quot;End of February&quot;: panic buying of toilet paper and other household items</td>
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<td></td>
<td>23. April: Ministry of Transport restricts mass exodus from Jakarta for Idul Fitri celebrations (‘Mudik’)</td>
<td>13 March: 14 of the 16 German federal states decide to close schools and nurseries for the next few weeks.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Mid-July</strong>: schools in the &quot;green zone&quot; are allowed to reopen</td>
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### Travel restrictions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early February</td>
<td>Restrictions on tourists from China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March</td>
<td>Ban on entry by tourists from some parts of Iran, Italy and South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 April</td>
<td>Total ban on entry and transit by all foreign visitors</td>
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*Mid-March:* Restaurants ordered to close. Food delivery and collection services are allowed to remain open.

*End of August:* Schools reopen after the summer vacations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 March</td>
<td>Entry restrictions on non-essential travel from third countries imposed throughout the EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 July</td>
<td>Restrictions on entry to Germany lifted for travellers from some third countries with low rates of infection</td>
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</table>

### Lockdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partial lock downs implemented by some Provincial Governments, e.g. border closure of West Papua from 26 March to 9 April</td>
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</table>

*Mid-March:* Bavaria declares a state of emergency for 14 days and introduces measures to limit public movement.

### Social distancing rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 March</td>
<td>Indonesian President authorizes local governments to implement large-scale social restrictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mid March:* Government imposes 1.5-metre (4.9 feet) social distancing rule, to be adhered to at all times in public spaces. Ban on public gatherings of more than two people, except for families and those living together.

### Face masks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 July</td>
<td>Government announces that it is compulsory to wear masks in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June–August</td>
<td>Six local governments implement fines for citizens who do not wear masks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 April</td>
<td>Wearing of face masks made compulsory when on public transport and while shopping in all 16 states</td>
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Table 1: Timeline (by the authors)

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1.1 Cartoons as epistemological windows

The current pandemic crisis is being observed and discussed from various angles. Qualitative researchers in particular are searching for new epistemological windows to explore ongoing social and socio-political processes in times of restricted mobility and social distancing. The medium of newspaper cartoons is one way to identify new issues arising in everyday life in context of evolving political and social norms and regulations. As an object of qualitative research, cartoons can be seen as a form of eye witness account of the social world inhabited by the cartoonist; they provide evidence of the cartoonist's perspective on her or his world. Cartoons not only entertain; they also condense political issues. Anderson (1990) highlights that cartoons have the potential to reveal people's mindsets, political attitudes, fears,
and hopes more than any other media. Duus (2001: 995) outlines the specific character of cartoons:

(...) cartoons reveal a side of political culture not found in official memoranda, public speeches and newspaper editorials, theoretical tracts, and ideological pamphlets. They provide access to 'everyday' reactions to politics that even public opinion polls cannot capture. Cartoons thus constitute a vast archive that reveals not only fundamental shifts in political consciousness but also the ebb and flow of political sentiments among the thousands and millions who read them – sentiments left unvoiced by the silence of other texts and other archives.

Cartoons offer a condensed picture and function as epistemological windows into the cartoonist's perspective on concerns, negotiations, and evolving social and political norms. Underlying to the apparently simple images of cartoons are references to meta-narratives, which are grounded in public knowledge and discourses. Cartoonists engage with these narratives through portrayals of easily recognizable stereotypes, references, symbols and codes, as well as references nationally and culturally specific identities and memories (Carlson 2008; Greenberg 2002). These references to shared public knowledge may be identified as "reproducing a common sense view of the world" (Greenberg 2002: 194), which is, however, necessarily bound to the perspective of the cartoonist and, in a wider sense, to the audience for which the cartoonist publishes her or his work (Dodds 2010). Additionally, it is important to stress that any kind of cartoon obviously needs to be understood within its specific context and related historical, social and socio-political background.

In this contribution, we present a cross-case analysis, in an "overtly comparative mode" (Yin 2009: 176), of cartoons from Germany and Indonesia that respond to the same global issue from two different points of view. The data source comprised editorial cartoons produced by well-known and widely published cartoonists from Germany and Indonesia between March and August 2020.

The cartoons from Germany are drawn by Piero Masztalerz. He is the recipient of many awards in Germany, including, among others, the German Cartoon Prize in 2011 and 2019, and first prize for political caricature in 2012 and 2014. His work is widely published in news periodicals (Spiegel-Online, Stern) as well as in satirical magazines (Titanic, Eulenspiegel). His cartoons are characterized by a dry and often black humour that purposefully and pointedly targets current political issues in Germany. We analysed 30 cartoons that were published between March and August 2020 on the homepage of the cartoonist
The Indonesian counterparts to Piero Masztalerz are two of the country's most well-known cartoonists: Benny Rachmadi and Muhammad "Mice" Mirsad. They gained their popularity through *Benny & Mice*, a jointly produced cartoon strip that was first featured in the *Kompas* newspaper in 2003. In 2010, the duo decided to end their partnership. *Benny & Mice* was then replaced in *Kompas* by *Mice Cartoon*, drawn by Mice, while Benny Rachmadi's work appears under the byline *Kartun Benny* in the *Kontan* newspaper. Both cartoons are known for their satirical take on Jakarta society, presenting an ongoing commentary on current social and political issues that readers find easy to relate to.

We analysed 25 cartoons published between March and April 2020 on the social media fan page of Benny and Mice (https://www.facebook.com/BennyMice). Analyses of visual novels and cartoons need to engage on two levels: the visual and the textual. Accordingly, we analysed the samples in a series of three coding steps (open, axial, and selective coding). Open coding was done by both authors individually on a textual and a visual level in order to identify relevant concepts and develop initial codes. In the following axial and selective analyses results of the individual open coding procedure are triangulated to facilitate reflection on different ways of reading and understanding the cartoons, and exploration of the underlying scope of meaning. The analysis focuses on two broad sets of issues, the first relating to health and healthcare from the perspective of traditional and complementary medicine, and the second corresponding to the wider socio-political issues raised by the pandemic.

### 2. Contested Medical Pluralism

The Covid-19 crisis is primarily a crisis of health. Accordingly, considerations of health and healthcare figure prominently in cartoons published during the first wave of SARS-CoV-2 viral infections and ensuing Covid-19 disease. In Germany and Indonesia strict social distancing measures were implemented with the aim of 'flattening the infection curve' and thereby prevent the medical healthcare system from becoming overloaded (for Indonesia: Fachriansyah, Gunawan & Hasani 2020; for Germany: Baars 2020). Interestingly not one cartoon from Germany addresses issues relating to the public healthcare system, whereas a number of cartoons from Indonesia highlight deficiencies in the country's medical system (see below). In Germany, Piero Masztalerz focuses more on non-biomedical approaches, with
frequent references to traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM), and this topic also features in the cartoons by Benny Rachmadi. A number of cartoons by Piero Masztalerz feature or refer to alternative practitioners (Heilpraktiker), the designation for persons who practice medicine without being qualified as a medical doctor or psychotherapist. In order to practice, a Heilpraktiker requires a permit from the state health authority, which is conditional on passing a test of competence, including in-depth medical knowledge. A cartoon published by Piero Masztalerz in May 2020 shows a Heilpraktiker in front of his consulting room, taking down his door sign displaying his profession and the medical services provided (see cartoon 1). The list of medical services shown gives an immediate insight into Masztalerz's low esteem for the Heilpraktiker profession: yodel healing, activation of the pineal gland, Chi-Shamanism and deep coaching all give an impression of treatments without any serious medical or theoretical foundation. Another person, carrying a packet of toilet rolls, asks the Heilpraktiker whether he is giving up his practice and he replies: "I've learned a lot about medicine within the last few weeks from the news and podcasts ... I had no idea it was so complicated".
This answer by the Heilpraktiker reveals his inability to understand or deal with medical aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The portrayal of the Heilpraktiker, who is dressed in a white robe, and wearing a pendant earring, a pendant necklace and large round glasses, all of which connote hippiedom, reinforces the impression of lack of seriousness. Masztalerz shows the Heilpraktiker as lacking knowledge and being overwhelmed by the complexity and seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic. Another cartoon by Piero Masztalerz along the same lines is captioned "When homeopaths dream"¹ (see cartoon 2). The picture shows a sleeping man in his bed.  

¹ "Wenn "Heilpraktiker träumen"". All translations from German and Bahasa Indonesia, here and in the following, are by the authors.
A thought bubble depicts his dream, where he is a star in the spotlight, surrounded by a sea of fans, journalists, cameras and microphones, holding up a tiny homeopathic bottle. It looks like he is a famous pop star. An excited journalist exclaims: "You have managed to save the world from Corona with these globules! You are awesome, smarter than everyone else and a little bit wise too! A triple ethereal Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

The portrayal of the sleeping figure, curled up on his side and wearing pink dotted pyjamas, dreaming of being a star, explicitly suggests a small, naive and stupid child. This little homeopath is not about to save the world, but is just a small and
significant person in context of the Corona virus. That homeopathy is the target of this ridicule is indicated by journalist's call for a three 'ethereal' cheers!

Last but not least, an even more caustic cartoon subtitled "At the Sieg-Heil practicioner"\(^2\) (see cartoon 3), shows an Adolf Hitler lookalike in uniform, with the right arm raised in the Nazi salute, standing in front of a stupid looking patient, who is sitting on a treatment couch adorned with a swastika. The Hitler lookalike says in a strong mock-Austrian dialect "So. Now you are healthy again".


This 'Sieg-Heil practicioner' cartoon directly confronts a German "no-go area", as use of the Nazi salute and the swastika are both criminal offenses, while to compare

\(^2\) "Beim Sieg-Heil Praktiker".
someone to Adolf Hitler is considered completely unacceptable and odious. With this explicit allusion to Nazi Germany, Piero Masztalerz associates the entire medical profession of alternative practitioners with an extreme right political stance. In a personal email, Piero Masztalerz explained that the idea for this cartoon came from seeing reports of 'hygiene demos' in Stuttgart and Berlin, where doctrines of salvation through naturalness and purity were directly linked by participants to beliefs in strange healing methods, dreams of empire ('Reich') and/or the glorification of national socialism (personal communication via email, September 3, 2020).

For Piero Masztalerz alternative practitioners are the bad guys in Germany, and he portrays them as stupid, right-wing, uneducated idiots. Therein Masztalerz does not distinguish between different kinds of medical traditions or complementary approaches, but makes it abundantly clear that he, in his persona as a cartoonist, doesn't expect alternative practitioners to make any significant contribution towards overcoming the pandemic crisis. In fact, he seems to view the profession of Heilpraktiker as a danger to the German democratic constitution.

The cartoons from Indonesia, particularly those of Benny Rachmadi, present traditional medicine in a very different light, focusing on the vital role it has to play in response to the Covid-19 crisis. One cartoon published in March 2020 shows a stage decorated with stars and a banner with the words "Indonesian anti-corona idols" (see cartoon 4). The performers on the stage are four personified roots, identified as pop stars through their visual attributes (dark glasses and an Elvis Presley hairstyle, lipstick and glamorous black hair, and a baseball cap), all obviously having fun and being cheered on by an enthusiastic crowd. The roots can be identified as ginger, galangal, turmeric and lemongrass.
This emphasis on the important role of these roots reflects the fact that a new market for traditional medicine emerged in Indonesia during the Covid-19 crisis, and particularly for *Corona Jamu*³, a mixture of turmeric, ginger and other ingredients that is believed to strengthen the body's immune system against viruses. The use of traditional herbal medicine has been part of Indonesian culture since pre-historical times and is still a common phenomenon, often in combination with biomedical treatments, all over Indonesia (Ferzacca 2001; Weydmann 2019; Woodward 2011, among others). Today traditional medicine is no longer the simple herbal medicine of the poor but an important "economic pillar of the nation" (Prabawani 2017: 81), and large international companies such as Air Mancur, Djamu Djago and Nyonya Meneer produce a wide range of different *Jamu* remedies. In April 2020, the newspaper *The Jakarta Post* reported that *Jamu* producers had seen revenues increase by up to 50 per cent during the pandemic crisis and predicted that the habit of drinking *Jamu* will become the "new normal", hailing *Jamu* as "the new espresso" (Prasidya, 2020).

³ *Jamu*: traditional herbal medicine of Indonesia (for more details see Weydmann 2019; Weydmann et al. 2020).
Another cartoon from Benny Rachmadi (see cartoon 5) shows a woman in traditional Javanese clothing in front of the Indonesian Supreme Court (*Mahkamah Agung*), in which a judge announces: "The increase in BPJS\(^4\) [social security premiums] is revoked" and the woman holding the money she has saved in her hands comments with a smile: "Thank God! The money can be used to buy ginger, turmeric and lemongrass to ward off corona".

![Cartoon 5: Benny Rachmadi, "Iuran BPJS Batal Naik"](image)

This cartoon alludes to the decision in March 2020 by the country’s highest court to roll back the planned increase in payments to the Health Care and Social Security Agency (BPJS Kesehatan), in accordance with an order signed by President Joko Widodo (‘Jokowi’) in October 2019 doubling the first and second class premiums and even raising third class premiums for the low income families by 64% (News Desk 2020). The Javanese woman, who represents the ordinary people, is going to use the money saved as a result of this court decision to buy ingredients for *Jamu* medicine. The cartoonist is pointing to the fact that, in Indonesia today, access to healthcare is still dependent on economic resources. Moreover, the national primary health care system still does not incorporate traditional *Jamu* medicine, which is

\(^4\) BPJS = Badan Penyelanggara Jaminan Sosial – Social Security Organizing Agency.
still bought and sold on the large informal medical market and, increasingly, in supermarkets, whose shelves stacked with Jamu-style soft drinks.

These cartoons from Germany and Indonesia illustrate the wide variation in healthcare responses to the pandemic crisis, and in perceptions of alternative medicine between the two countries. Whereas the German cartoonist Piero Masterlerz scoffs at the 'delusions' of alternative medicine and highlights the appropriation by ethno-nationalist movements of the New Right, the Indonesian cartoonist Benny Rachmadi celebrates the contribution of traditional Jamu medicine, while highlighting the economic dimensions of the pandemic crisis and shortcomings of the Indonesian national healthcare system.

3. Crisis of the state

The wider social and political threats and impacts of the Covid-19 crisis are also presented in different ways by the cartoonists of Germany and Indonesia. Piero Masztalerz focuses on the consequences of the crisis on people's mindsets and behaviour and examines their (misled) political attitudes and social (in-)competences. Many of his cartoons show people downplaying, ignoring or making money out of Corona. His favourite trope is a male esoteric maniac who believes in conspiracy theories, opposes vaccination and tends to be politically right-wing as well rather simple-minded, but perceives himself as extremely clever and well-informed. It is particularly interesting that, in these cartoons, the deadly danger and negative impacts of the Corona crisis are neither questioned nor compared to any other crisis. Those who downplay Corona are depicted as ignoring the facts, with possibly lethal consequences. In this vein, one cartoon depicts the tombstone of someone who died on Corona with the epigraph "Corona is only a weak flu" (see cartoon 6). A visitor to the grave asks "...and what did he die of"; his companion answers: "Corona".
Similarly, the cartoons rarely question, or even depict ironically, preventative measures implemented by the government, such as limits on leaving the house and meeting people outside the household, the obligation to wear masks, or distance rules. Those who criticize and don't adhere to these measures and regulations are predominantly depicted as being selfish and/or foolish. Cartoon 7 shows a man receiving an exemption from the obligation to wear a mask (which may only be issued on medical grounds) from his doctor. The doctor says, "of course I will give an exemption, even though you are healthy." The man replies, "thank you! I feel better already!" The inscription on the exemption certificate reads "I am an anti-social moron" ("asozialer Vollhorst").
In Masztalerz's cartoons all those who criticize measures implemented by the government and mistrust state structures conform to the above-mentioned trope of the right-wing, stupid and misinformed conspiracy theorist. Another cartoon (see cartoon 8) also shows a person on his way to a so called 'hygiene demo'. As mentioned above these demonstrations are widely recognized as being organized and supported by right-wing groups, populists and extremist parties. The man is shown on his way to the demonstration, carrying a copy of the German Constitution in one hand and in the other a signboard with the words "something with GATES", alluding to the conspiracy theories that the billionaire is responsible for the corona...
pandemic. "Mum," he says, "I'm going to the hygiene demo". "About time," answers his mother, "you stink like a polecat!".

Again and again Masztalerz depicts the followers of conspiracy theories as having a psychological problem related to a feeling of social exclusion and displaying a right-wing extremist mindset. Cartoon 9 pointedly sums up the main concerns of conspiracy theorists, highlighting their conviction that Germany is moving towards a dictatorship in which politicians manipulate people through chemtrails and vaccinations. The cartoon depicts a man parking his car in a non-parking zone and shouting at a traffic warden: "This is an oppressive state!! You system whore! Merkel made you compliant with chemtrails, you vaccination victim! Wake up!"
She thinks "O how nice it was in those days when people only called me a stupid bitch ...".

The frequency with which Masztalerz's cartoons address the topic of conspiracy theories and right-wing extremists indicates that he considers the spread of anti-state attitudes of this kind to be the most pressing socio-political issue to have arisen during the Corona crisis. Through his cartoons, Piero Masztalerz attempts to debunk right-wing extremist subversion, while warning of its growing influence.

In contrast to the German cartoons, the cartoons drawn by Benny Rachmadi and Muhammad Mirsad focus mainly on the fears and daily struggles of ordinary people. Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world,
and many of their cartoons illustrate concerns related to the celebration, known in Indonesia as *Idul Fitri*, that was set to occur following the month of fasting (Ramadan) at the end of May 2020. The cartoons of Benny Rachmadi and Muhammad Mirsad regularly feature a personified depiction of the virus wearing sunglasses, annoying people and hanging on to them, sometimes making it difficult for them to move. However, while these cartoons depict the coronavirus as a threat, they also highlight that the pandemic crisis is only one amongst other deep-seated problems, such as poverty and precarious working conditions. In one Mice cartoon (see cartoon 10) a scavenger in tears holds the coronavirus by its neck and says "I am more afraid of hunger than of you!".

Cartoon 10: Muhammad Mirsad, "Scavenger"

The cartoons depicting poverty and hunger openly portray the Indonesian government as dysfunctional government and mock its contradictory regulations. One cartoon of Benny Rachmadi (see cartoon 11) shows faces of criminals in a
cloud of coronaviruses, observed by a frightened family wearing face masks. One of them asks "Criminal terror amidst the pandemic?" This cartoon refers to the rising number of criminal cases reported during the pandemic.

Implicitly, the cartoon accuses the Indonesian government of failing to address the problem of criminality because state institutions have been paralysed by the diversion of resources to deal with the pandemic. Another cartoon (see cartoon 12) criticizing the government's handling of the crisis shows a man on the move with his belongings, wearing a mask incorrectly, with viruses attached to his clothing and luggage. One virus, wearing sunglasses says: "It's up to you ... Call it mudik, pulang kampung, piknik, plesir, or whatever you want, what is certain is we will always follow you!!" Another virus, running after the man, shouts: "Wait for me!"
This cartoon relates to contradictory travel regulations issued by the Indonesian president. *Mudik* is the 'exodus' by Jakarta residents from the capital city to rural areas and other islands to celebrate *Idul Fitri*. *Pulang kampung* is migration by people who have lost their jobs in the city and have to move back to their villages for good. The government allowed *pulang kampong*, even though there was a lockdown in Jakarta and, in contrast, prohibited *mudik*. This was an especially drastic measure and sad for many people in Jakarta as *Idul Fitri* is an important feast usually celebrated by families coming together. The cartoon points out that the effects of moving about the country on the spread of the virus are the same, regardless of the motivation.

Generally, the category class plays a major role in the cartoons of Benny Rachmadi and Muhammad Mirsad, and many depict how poor people are relatively more disadvantaged by the measures to control the spread of the virus. Cartoon 13 depicts an old Javanese couple who are dismayed by the high price of masks in Indonesia. Someone outside the picture, but apparently a bureaucrat wearing a suit, is offering them a pack of 20 masks for 1.3 Million Rupiah (80 Euro). Frustrated, the old woman says: "There is always someone who takes advantage of people and and
exploits them in a difficult situation. We can't afford to buy these expensive masks because it is already difficult for us to buy our daily food."

The category ethnicity also features prominently in the Indonesian cartoons. Traditional Javanese people are portrayed stereotypically wearing a *sarung* (a large piece of cloth wrapped around the waist) and plastic sandals. These stereotypical Javanese are depicted as 'good ordinary people'; they are poor and also gently mocked for being unsophisticated. They definitely want to obey the regulations but sometimes have problems understanding them. Cartoon 14 depicts a Javanese woman, taking her laundry in a bucket with her when queuing up at a public disinfection station. The attendant asks: "Why are you carrying the laundry, Mak?" Some disinfectants in Indonesia contain bleach and she explains: "I want to use the bleach to soak the clothes".

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5 Respectful salutation for an older woman, in the word meaning of mother.
The message is clear: on the one hand poor Javanese suffer more, socially and economically, as a result of governmental regulations aimed at controlling the pandemic. At the same time, they are used to crises and are cleverly trying to make the best out of this one.

4. Litmus test for diverse societies

Covid-19 is a global threat to public health, which has led to radical changes in social behaviour, economic structures and roles of governments across the world. The overarching narrative of the corona crisis differs widely between Germany and Indonesia, and different developments and events are perceived as critical in the two countries. In Indonesia, the pandemic tends to be seen as one more crisis amongst others. By contrast, to many people in Germany, the crisis seems like an eruption 'out of nowhere' that threatens the foundations of the social and political order. In Germany, the effects of the pandemic are reinforcing a widespread distrust in the state that is connected to a deeper crisis of trust in democracy as such, fuelling 'radical' attitudes and actions that increasingly question existing norms and institutions. What Heitmeyer (2008) calls the "radicalization of the complexity problem" has reached a new peak, fuelled by conspiracy theories which allegedly
explain the origins of Covid-19 virus, how the disease has spread, and who is benefiting from it. These conspiracy theories crystallize the immense distress and confusion caused by the pandemic and reveal a deep underlying mistrust of the state, which is seen a threatening the fundamental rights of individuals. The cartoons by Masztalerz, particularly those dealing with healthcare, depict morally 'good' society and government as being threatened by a growing radicalization in society. Mastelerz perceives an underlying logic of fanaticism in the antics of esoteric right-wing conspiracy theorists and the clown-like Heilpraktiker that recalls a dark period in Germany's past. This echoes the finding of academic studies (e.g. Soufan Center 2020) that extremist ideologies are likely find more resonance in the context of the pandemic, so that "[r]eligious extremists, radical left-wing groups, and white supremacists all see opportunities to promote their ideologies and narratives as an explanation for and way to deal with the widespread devastation of the coronavirus".

In Indonesia, politicians are accused of not recognizing the seriousness of the situation early enough. Many Indonesia watchers around the world and Indonesians themselves felt that the government was in denial of the health threat for too long and called for a more clearly structured approach towards dealing with infections and controlling the spread of the disease at its source. A recent study by Sophia Hornbacher (2020) draws attention to the populist rhetoric paired with a neo-liberal policy of the Indonesian government, highlighting once again how the deep-rooted social injustice in Indonesia prevents the achievement of social welfare. Benny Rachmadi's and Muhammad Mirsad's cartoons highlight the economic effects of the pandemic crisis, illustrating how ordinary people are hardest hit by the pandemic, deepening already existing poverty. Their cartoons also allude to the fact that the crisis represents a big economic opportunity for particular sectors, such as the Jamu industries (Weydmann et al. 2020).

The perceptions, reactions, fears and hopes depicted in the cartoons and discussed in this article provide insights into issues that will become critical during the reconstruction of the society after the Corona crisis has ended. The crisis has laid bare social process occurring at the margins of society that may – or may not – become dominant trends for the future. It has highlighted that some members of

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6 An in-depth discussion about rising radicalizations in Europe is given by Lantermann (2016).
society are particularly vulnerable, both economically and psychologically, to systemic shocks. Protecting their rights now, and in the future stages of the pandemic, and during future crises when they occur, will be a litmus test of our commitment to the wellbeing of all members of the diverse societies in Indonesia and Germany.

References


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