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Preface

This book is the result of a long-drawn research process that began with the profound political changes in Indonesia in 1997/8. After closely following the historical events of the liberalization and democratization process for a while, I realized that the new political situation also had deep impact on the political communication among Indonesians. Personal experiences contributed to this perception, such as my witnessing of the pro-democracy rally that was carried out by Indonesian students in Hamburg the day before President Suharto stepped down from office. Different from my experience with German demonstrations, I saw my Indonesian colleagues and friends reciting poems at that occasion – a textual genre that I had considered not to be of central political importance until that event. Other astonishing experiences followed, such as the unprecedented performance of the new Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid, at a televised variety show. In between, I was following closely the political communication distributed via the print media, and I began to ask myself whether all these statements were still indicative of a grass-root level political communication, or were instead much more revealing of a trend towards an increasing professionalization of political campaigning. Also, the question arose to what extent communicative practices from previous political phases, notably the New Order era (1965/6-1998) influenced the political rhetoric of the *reformasi* era that began in 1997/8 and that lasted until about 2001 when the first democratically elected Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid, was forced to step down. Thus, I decided to write this monograph on the political rhetoric of post-Suharto Indonesia. Methodologically and theoretically, it builds on my previous books, especially on *Indonesische Medienrhetorik. Eine methodologische Fallstudie anhand der Kommentarkolumne "Catatan Pinggir" von Goenawan Mohamad* (1998). There, I discussed in some length the theoretical reasons for the expansion of the field of Indonesian literary studies to textual studies, with a special focus on the rhetorical study of texts that are not considered to be "high literature", such as media texts or political statements. Nevertheless, these texts are quite influential for the communicative patterns of many Indonesians. In some cases, these "useful" genres constitute the majority of genres many Indonesians encounter in their daily lives. Thus, the study of these genres is quite relevant for the understanding of the textual practices in the Malay-Indonesian world. In terms of academic discipline, my approach is mainly based within textual studies, although it also has close relations to the study of political communication, to media studies, and to other humanities and social sciences. In this sense, I hope that my findings might be also of interest to scholars in these neighboring academic disciplines.