

**Socially-engaged theatre performances in contemporary
Indonesia**

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**Royal Holloway, University of London
PhD Thesis**

Declaration of Authorship

I, Tamara Alexandra Aberle, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that performances of contemporary theatre in Indonesia are socially-engaged, actively creating, defining and challenging the socio-political environment, and that theatre practitioners are important members of a vibrant civil society who contribute and feel actively committed to democratic processes. Following an initial chapter about the history of modern theatre from the late 19th century until the fall of President Suharto in 1998, the four core chapters centre on four different aspects of contemporary Indonesian socio-politics: historical memory and trauma, violence and human rights, environmentalism, and social transition. Each of these chapters is preceded by an introduction about the wider historical and socio-political context of its respective discourse and is followed by an analysis of selected plays. Chapter 2 focuses on historical trauma and memory, and relates the work of two theatre artists, Papermoon Puppet Theatre and Agus Nur Amal (a.k.a. PM Toh), to processes seeking truth and reconciliation in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era. Chapter 3, on violence and human rights, discusses the works of Ratna Sarumpaet and B. Verry Handayani, with a specific focus on human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and labour migration. Chapter 4 discusses environmentalism on the contemporary stage. It investigates the nature of environmental art festivals in Indonesia, taking Teater Payung Hitam's 2008 International Water Festival as an example. It also contrasts a recent performance by Teater Payung Hitam with the work of teaterStudio Indonesia. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on theatre practitioners' engagement with political, social and cultural transition. It examines works from Teater Garasi, a group whose performances deal with friction, identity loss and change, commenting on a society in transition.

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Introduction

In Indonesia, rural and urban living spaces and conditions are transforming constantly, and so are the lives of Indonesians. British theatre scholar Nicola Shaughnessy calls this the “new world order” of the 21st century: “digital revolution, political revolution and upheaval, global economic anxieties and ecological concerns about sustainability and the environment are part of the twenty-first-century climate of change with new temporalities, materialities, and ontologies” (Shaughnessy 3). Distance no longer matters so much in the context of the internet and Skype. Events are no longer restricted to particular times and places, as their impacts can be virtually accessed from almost everywhere. The past is returned to the present and preserved in archives. All this challenges the understanding of our own identities, as borders become vague and uncertain (3). Our understanding of culture, identity, socio-economic and political circumstances has become increasingly complex and difficult. New technologies affect our understanding of the world, as they also “undermine traditional nation-states” (Ho Tai Hue-Tam 920). The internet and other technological innovations transcend borders and facilitate “long-distance nationalism” (920), a term first coined by Benedict Anderson in 1993. One form of long-distance nationalism is explained by Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron as the “claim to membership in a political community that stretches beyond the territorial borders of homeland” but which also generates an “emotional attachment that is strong enough to compel people to political action” (4). This state of flux not only influences our perception of who we are, but also informs how we create. Theories of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism try to explain this global interconnectedness. Performances of modern theatre often reflect on this friction in society, as manifest in socio-political and cultural changes.

Theatre challenges, engages with and reflects on contemporary societal issues. Therefore, for Martin Randy, Professor of Art and Public Policy at New York’s Tisch School of the Arts, the importance of theatre “lies in what it reveals about the processes of mediation between different dimensions of society” (Randy x). In relation to Southeast Asia, Malaysia-based scholar Sumit K. Mandal asserts that the:

art worker as a social actor [...] is taking care of keeping open cultural spaces and choices. Cultural space and choice here does not only refer to space in the physical

sense of an independent arts community but also to the choice of articulating pluralistic perspectives on society (391).¹

In Indonesia, an autocratic country until the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, artists have offered open pluralistic perspectives on society and a glimpse of democratic life through their oppositional voices. Since 1998, artists retain this crucial role, offering diverse perspectives on often controversial issues. In the course of its history, Indonesian *teater*² or modern theatre, as it is also called (as opposed to traditional theatre), has always taken a strong socio-political position. In 1945, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed independence for the Indonesian archipelago. The Republic of Indonesia was officially recognised in 1949, following a period of intense conflict with Dutch colonial forces. Years of Guided Democracy³ under Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, followed. In 1966, after the events of the 30 September Movement,⁴ Suharto's "New Order" regime began a new political era, which continued under his dictatorship until 1998 when he was forced to resign in the face of mass protests (for a detailed discussion about Indonesia's political development in the 1970s see Vickers 169ff., Ricklefs 342ff.). Chapter 1 will follow how modern theatre developed over these decades. Notably, despite the political tendencies of many performances during the late 1980s and 90s, modern theatre around 1998 became more radical in both anger and

¹ *Pekerja seni sebagai aktor sosial [...] memelihara ruang-ruang dan pilihan-pilihan budaya tetap terbuka. Ruang dan pilihan budaya di sini bukan hanya ruang dalam arti fisik seperti komunitas seni independen, tetapi juga ruang untuk mengartikulasikan perspektif yang pluralistic tentang masyarakat.* This is my translation; unless otherwise noted all translations from Indonesian, Malay and German sources are my own.

² Barbara Hatley uses the term *teater* in contrast to traditional theatre forms. *Teater* stands for modern theatre in the archipelago. Both Hatley and James Brandon distinguish the modern from the traditional in similar ways. Hatley notes that "if performances of traditional theatre genres, bound up with the world around them, tend to celebrate the world as is, modern theatre typically interrogates and problematizes from a distance" (Cultural Expression 268). Brandon maintains that, while in traditional theatre performances the audience sees an epic world of myths and legends and thus is supposed to learn to see reality behind real life, modern theatre wants to address real problems that surround the audience members in their daily living environment (130).

³ Guided Democracy or *Demokrasi Terpimpin* was the political system in place during the so-called Old Order (in contrast to Suharto's New Order) under Sukarno in Indonesia from 1957 until its collapse in late 1965. It is a semi-authoritarian system based on the idea of a traditional hierarchical organisational structure in Indonesian villages as Sukarno considered the Western democratic system to be unfit for Indonesia. However, the system removed power from the elected cabinet and invested it in the president and a non-elected cabinet. Sukarno also strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and supported the Partai Komunis (see PKI) against the increasingly powerful Indonesian army which allied with the Islamic factions in parliament.

⁴ During the night from 30 September to 1 October 1965 a group of six generals, the "self-styled Council of Generals" (Anderson and McVey 134), who allegedly had plotted against President Sukarno, were captured, assassinated and thrown down an unused well in Lubang Buaya within the area of Halim Air Base in Jakarta. This resulted in widespread violence against Communists who were named the masterminds behind these events. Over 500,000 alleged communists were killed in the aftermath.

expression. However, after Suharto stepped down, many artists experienced the first years of the Reformation period (*reformasi*) as a time of chaos.

Professor of Theatre at Soochow University, Catherine Diamond, writes that “most Southeast Asian theatres, whether traditional, modern, or contemporary, even those that have played a central role in their cultures’ well-being and self-definition, exist on the periphery, constantly forced to reinvent their own *raison d’etre*” (1). Practitioners of modern theatre in Indonesia, whose work during the New Order was often opposed to the state, were also forced to rethink their artistic ideas after 1998. “Oppositionist art, particularly contemporary theatre, which had thrived as an outlet for political critique under Suharto, experienced a loss of focus and rationale,” notes Australian expert on Indonesian theatre Barbara Hatley (‘More Voices’). Putu Wijaya, an important theatre practitioner of the New Order era and beyond, writes in an essay about the theatre of *reformasi* that theatre lost its function at this time. In a translation of this text by ethnomusicologist R. Anderson Sutton, the following is noted:

Nowadays the fate of the arts is really no different from what happened during the New Order, but still [it is] different [...]. The otherness: if before the powerlessness of the arts was [from being] engineered; now it is the result of [Indonesia’s] emergency situation [...]. If previously the arts were interrogated, now they serve no function” (‘Seni Reformasi?’).

Nano Riantiarno, director of the well-known group Teater Koma, declared shortly after the end of the New Order that he would never again write a new play. Of the former president, Suharto, he noted sardonically: “Personally, I’m sad to see Suharto go. For over 20 years, he gave me inspiration. It would be very difficult to find anybody else so obnoxious in such a complex way as he” (Nano Riantiarno qtd. in Napack). These comments serve as examples of the general sense of disillusionment felt in Indonesia’s theatre world at that time. This feeling, however, would not last for long.

In her thesis on performances in the Indonesian *reformasi* period, Lauren Bain describes “various ways in which theatre artists, and ordinary Indonesian citizens, have responded to the challenges posed by ‘the electricity being turned off’ by participating in the on-going contest over defining and imagining post-New Order futures” (275). She concludes that “almost seven years on from the fall of Suharto in May 1998, the contest over defining and imagining the post-New Order future - and the project of performing this contest - continues”

(275). The “electricity being turned off” refers to a comment by writer and poet Afrizal, who characterised the impact of the New Order’s demise on Indonesian theatre as being “like the electricity had been suddenly turned off” for art practitioners. Yet, the climate and political context in which performances have taken place since 2005 has fundamentally changed. In an article on the state of Indonesian modern theatre ten years after *reformasi*, Hatley noted that:

there is no single, authoritarian state to confront, no all-powerful leader to demonise and satirise. Similarly there is no broad-based opposition movement to work with and no mobilised body of students, NGO workers or other young people like those who flocked to critical theatre performances in the past. And in the new climate of freedom and expression, political commentary and criticism can be stated publicly and conveyed through the press and electronic media. There is no longer a sense of shock and dramatic urgency in hearing views proclaimed from the stage (58).

Building on these ideas, this thesis focuses on the role of theatre actors in Indonesian society following the Reformation period. It gives particular attention to the idea of theatre artists as socially-engaged practitioners, who actively create, define and challenge their socio-political environment and are part of a vibrant civil society.⁵ The thesis looks at performances that took place during the term of office of the sixth Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), successor of Megawati Sukarnoputri in the presidential elections of September 2004, who was sworn in for his second term on 20 October 2009. His presidency can be identified with the end of Reformation and has marked a new era in Indonesian politics. This thesis discusses performances from between 2005 until 2012. The next presidential elections in Indonesia will be held in 2014. Whether this will change the way of working for theatre practitioners, remains open for discussion.

Looking at the contemporary stage from 2005 onwards, one can witness theatre practitioners actively engaging with socio-political issues such as environmental problems, problems of land rights and use, on-going corruption, coming to terms with the past, human trafficking, HIV, a society in transition, and conflicts such as Papua’s struggle for independence or the religious struggle on the Maluku islands. Some of these theatre workers also reflect on their own living conditions in very private terms. These issues arise in a variety of performances, such as mainteater Bandung’s work *Ladang Perminus* (2009), which deals with the issue of

⁵ ‘Civil society’ is a contested term, which will be discussed in more detail below.

corruption in the post-Suharto era, stating that “in this country, and only in this country, a corruptor can become a hero”⁶ (programme notes 1), Teater Garasi’s recent works, *je.ja.l.an* (throng, or Crowded street 2008) and *Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara* (The third body: On embracing the in-between, 2010), that critically reflect on issues such as identity, hybridity and transition within the Indonesian nation, Saturday Acting Club’s performance *Holocaust Rising* (2009), which contemplates the issue of violence in Indonesia’s contemporary society, or *Gegirangan*⁷ (2011) by Kelompok Teater Kami, which comments on the daily lives and hardships faced by two couples earning their living in Indonesia as theatre workers (Nunuy Nurhayati ‘Gegirangan’; Harris Priadie Bah personal communication 11 Jan. 2011). These works are not seen as standing alone; rather they are interconnected with wider debates and movements in society. American scholar and expert on Indonesian theatre Michael Bodden has argued that “under such circumstances, in which new events and crises seem to demand continually innovative aesthetic responses, the post-Suharto languages of theatre are tentative, constantly changing and challenging theatre workers to learn how to speak anew” (‘Languages of Trauma’ 120).

When analysing the performances discussed in this thesis it is therefore necessary to see them not as universal codes that can be interpreted in similar ways in very diverse socio-political contexts, but rather as culturally and temporally specific expressions. Following Canadian scholar Ric Knowles, who notes in *Reading the Material Theatre* that we need to develop more complex modes of analysis that are “rooted, as is all cultural production, in specific and determinate social and cultural contexts” (10), I consider the theatrical performances in my thesis to be:

cultural productions which serve specific cultural and theatrical communities at particular historical moments as sites for the negotiation, transmission, and transformation of cultural values, the products of their own place and time that are nevertheless productive of social and historical reification or change (10).

Furthermore, as Knowles argues, the cultural and ideological work implemented in a particular production “may be seen to have been mediated by the cultural and, particularly,

⁶ *Di negeri ini, hanya di negeri ini, koruptor bisa menjadi pahlawan.*

⁷ The term *gegirangan* is a Betawi term that expresses a state of extreme happiness.

theatrical conditions through which it has been produced by theatre workers, and through which its meaning is produced (as opposed to being merely received, or interpreted) by theatre audiences” (10). Thus, one has to take into consideration the theatre practices and conditions (training, traditions, practices of acting, design, and so on) as well as working conditions and aspects of theatrical organization, such as institutional and professional structures, funding, or venues. Knowles notes that these practices and conditions “function within larger social, cultural, and historical contexts, as meaning is shaped directly, performance by performance, by the local, regional, national and global events of the moment” (10f).

This thesis adopts Knowles’ modes of analysis, following the argument that “cultural productions neither *contain* meaning nor uni-dimensionally shape behaviour and belief; rather they *produce* meaning through the discursive work of an interpretative community and through the lived, everyday relationships of people with texts and performances” (17). Every performance analysis in this thesis is embedded in a thorough discussion of the socio-political and technical (funding) circumstances surrounding the production process, pointing out why the performance has been produced in its own particular way at that particular point in time and place.

My research—apart from the work of Teater Satu which is based in Bandar Lampung, Sumatra—centres on performances and theatre communities in the regions of Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta on the island of Java. This choice was influenced by both academic and practical reasons. During my research and at the time of my interview sessions I was also working as a lecturer and teaching assistant in German at the Universitas Negeri Jakarta (State University Jakarta), which made regular travel difficult. On the other hand, however, Java still offers the most eclectic modern theatre scene, when compared to other islands in Indonesia. The post-Suharto era, with its processes of decentralization and democratization, has also seen a greater variety of modern theatre groups in other parts of Indonesia, such as Sulawesi (for instance, Teater Kita Makassar and performance artist Luna Vidya), Bali (Bali Experimental Theatre – BET, Teater Kini Berseri) or Kalimantan (Komunitas Seni Kota Baru). Also, in Java itself, many groups are emerging in smaller towns and districts, whereas during the New Order modern theatre tended to be located in the urban centres of Jakarta,

Bandung and Yogyakarta. This trend is slowly shifting, as is the internal organization of theatre companies.⁸

Contemporary theatre groups are also better connected, and events such as the Mimbar Teater Festival, organized by a group of art workers centring on the cultural figure and networker Halim HD, try to enhance this networking and communication. Transnational collaborations between artists, often from other Asian countries such as Japan, Singapore, or the Philippines, are also of increasing importance and play crucial roles in facilitating cultural exchange and producing funding opportunities as artists at the same time try to become more independent from European and American funding and want to be recognized as independent artists on the same level as their Western counterparts. Catherine Diamond notes that:

by participating in international festivals and performing in other countries, Southeast Asian postmodern performers belong as much, if not more, to an international circle of artists rather than rooted in their original locale. That the postmodern figure is often represented in transit is another characteristic of both the new mobility afforded by air travel as well as the sense of displacement caused by the rapid pace of development over the past three decades (15).

Social media, especially Facebook, Twitter and individual blogs, has played an important part not only in maintaining the public presence of theatre groups and artists, but also in engaging the public in a dialogue about various, often socio-political, issues. Most Indonesian theatre groups have Facebook profiles on which they are actively involved in posting news about their group, notes on their upcoming and past performances, and/or the history and interests of the group's members. At the time of writing, Indonesia has the world's 4th largest Facebook community ('Indonesia Fourth Biggest'). This web presence is vital in maintaining a public profile, spreading the word and connecting on a transnational and international level. The blogosphere also generates a new kind of criticism and changes the way in which theatre is reviewed.

⁸ It would have been interesting to research this development in more detail, but it was not possible during this project. There is, however, potential for future scholarship.

The political in engaged/applied theatre

One useful concept to apply to the performances discussed in this thesis is the theory of applied/engaged theatre, which is a term used for practitioners and performances that “care about and/or care for the communities they are working with; the work is often politically or pedagogically motivated; it has conscience, integrity and commitment,” as defined by Shaughnessy (x). I chose this theoretical approach for my analysis as I felt that many of the performances I was watching during my research, and also the artists that produced this particular type of work, were socially aware and reflected critically on their surroundings. They often would see themselves not only as artists but also as activists, and they cared for their community and their society. I felt that this approach was more appropriate than one that focused only on “political theatre”, as the works discussed here respond to society more generally, rather than primarily criticizing the government or voicing direct political opposition. The performance works discussed by Shaughnessy share “ideological and political objectives that are espoused through practices which have the potential to challenge, innovate and transform, respecting and promoting individual agency as well as embracing collective identities” (3).

Central to applied theatre is the notion of efficacy. From 14 to 16 December 2008 the conference *CultureAsia: Connecting Asian Cultural Actors* was held in Bangalore. The organizers were HIVOS (Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries), Open Society Institute, and Centre for the Study of Culture and Society. One of the key issues discussed was the nature of contemporary artistic creativity and civil society in Asia, and a major conference objective was to “articulate and disseminate productive strategies of cultural activism and work towards a building of a civil society in Asia that would advance pluralism, participation, equality and justice” (Rhadika 4), and to explore how performances can be translated into social action. Senior theatre scholar Baz Kershaw asks how we can accurately assess the relationship between theatrical effect and subsequent audience behaviour (3). This is a major problem when looking at the effect of theatre performances, as the audience walks away after having watched a one or two hour play. Assessing the long-term effect of a performance is therefore rather difficult. Kershaw suggests paying more attention to “the conditions of performance that are most likely to produce an efficacious result (3),” to “broaden the canvas for analysis beyond the individual show or production (but still including it) in order to consider theatrical movements in relation to local and national

cultural change” (3), and to consider the “potential of performance (both in its specific sense as ‘individual show’ and in its general sense as ‘a collection of practice’) to achieve efficacy in a particular historical context” (3). Performances have to be considered as a “cultural construct and as a means of cultural production” which cannot be read independently of their social and political environment (5). This thesis aims to achieve this analytical perspective.

For scholar David Schlossmann, the relationship between politics and art “constitutes one of the foremost contemporary issues [...] regarding the humanities” (1). He furthermore suggests that the debate offers “a model of the relationship of performance and politics as an exchange between people working in different but overlapping social environments” (1). In contrast, Martin Randy, in his book about theatre and the state in Cuba and Nicaragua, argues that theatre “can scarcely be considered central or instrumental to contemporary processes of social change” (xi). Schlossmann contradicts this assertion, arguing that both the production process and audience reception should not be considered as isolated events, but as parts of larger social processes. He also maintains that performances staged at the intersection of political and performance worlds create meaning for audience members by offering them “pieces” in a social jigsaw puzzle, that individual audience members link with other experiences as part of an on-going engagement with political issues (Schlossmann 11ff), an idea also expressed by Indonesian theatre practitioners. Although the two authors cited above are not directly debating with each other’s hypotheses they discuss very similar concerns. In Indonesia, many modern theatre performances that took place between the late 1970s until May 1998 can be considered as politically engaged, as they were, mostly indirectly, sometimes openly, opposing the repressive government. This period will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, which presents an overview of the history of modern theatre in Indonesia. Prendergast and Saxton see the global historical role of theatre as a “relatively safe way of talking back to power” (7). Playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Ariel Dorfmann or Bertolt Brecht “have focused much of their theatre on exposing and exploring social and political issues in their plays” (7). Contemporary performances such as *RoadKill* by Cora Bissett tackle the issue of human trafficking. Urwintore’s adaptation of Peter Weiss’s *Die Ermittlung* is concerned with the Rwandan genocide, using the theatrical form of documentary theatre. Those are examples of performances that in some form are “talking back to power”. This does not mean that Indonesian groups are following a global trend. Their work is very much based in the cultural context that surrounds them. Yet, there was and still often is a tendency in theatre performances to address politics.

In Indonesia, censorship and cultural politics would often hinder the free expression of theatre practitioners but through physical performances or the use of jokes it was still possible to resist the state, albeit indirectly. Teater Koma's witty and thoughtful performances of the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Opera Kecoa* (Cockroach Opera) or *Bom Waktu* (Time Bomb), which catered mainly for a middle-class audience, would often comment on the political situation in the country, using a comedic disguise. As Bodden notes, Teater Koma's performances were so popular in Jakarta that tickets could be sold on the black market for many times their original price (261). Putu Wijaya writes that:

I am really amazed by this group, right up until now, because they have like a kind of flame, which burns you if you watch them, and the idiom is the joke. They deliver things in jokes. This is very clever and important, especially in Indonesia because in this heterogeneous society – you know we are divided in religion, divided in everything, divided in language – if you are not careful you can make enemies, but with jokes you are safe (110).

This was true for many theatre works of those years. But there were also more serious attempts at critique. For instance, Ratna Sarumpaet, together with her theatre group Satu Merah Panggung, commented on the Marsinah⁹ labour rights case. An analysis of a more recent work by Ratna Sarumpaet, *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* (The prostitute and the president), will form part of my chapter on theatre and human rights. Another strand of socio-politically engaged theatre during this period was the Theatre of Liberation movement discussed by Eugène van Erven (37ff), which today is still very much alive and kicking in the PETA theatre, which is based in the Philippines and is arguably the most important group still working in this context. This movement was influential for the development of Indonesia's worker's theatre in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The applied in political theatre

Shaughnessy notes that “kinaesthetic knowledge and understanding is at the heart of applied theatre practice where participatory performance is used to ‘effect’ change (defined variously as ‘transformation’ or ‘transportation’) through its ‘affect’ on participants” (4). Practitioners

⁹ Marsinah is a true case story of the unsolved murder of worker Marsinah who was raped, tortured and killed after being outspoken about workers' rights. Her murderers were never convicted.

and participants/audience members are “active producers” who “are enabled to move... through creative activity, towards a valuable goal of applied theatre praxis: social transformation” (Sutton qtd. in Shaughnessy 4); they do not remain in the position of pure consumers. Many of the performances discussed in this thesis have links to applied theatre, although they may not fall exactly into its definition. Some performances are “played in spaces that are not usually defined as theatre buildings” (Prendergast and Saxton 6), such as Agus Nur Amal’s TV Eng Ong project (2005 – on-going), which travels through remote parts of Aceh, or teaterStudio Indonesia’s *Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah* (Earthenware women or the ritual of marrying the land) from 2009, whose large bamboo constructions are built explicitly for outdoor use. Other performances are staged with participants who may not be skilled in theatre arts, such as Lena Simanjuntak’s work *Gerhana dan Gerhana* (Eclipse and eclipse) from 2005, which were developed and performed by professional sex workers from Surabaya. Prendergast and Saxton also discuss the ambivalent role of the script in applied theatre. They note that whereas “traditional mainstream theatre is most often centred in the interpretation of a pre-written script, applied theatre [...] involves both the generation and the interpretation of a theatre piece that in performance may or may not be scripted in the traditional manner” (7). This is also true for many of the Indonesian performances discussed in this thesis. If they use verbal expression at all, it can be subject to interpretation and improvisation. Prendergast and Saxton also express the need for an audience with a “vested interest in the issue taken up by the performance” or whom are members of the community addressed by the performance (6).

As most of the performances discussed in this thesis tend not to tick all the boxes necessary to be considered definitively as ‘applied theatre’, I adopt Jan Cohen-Cruz’s terminology of “engaged/committed theatre,” which I argue is a more fitting term in relation to the works of these Indonesian theatre practitioners. For Cohen-Cruz, the problem with identifying the “otherness” of applied theatre is that it:

inadvertently limit[s] such performance by foregrounding its difference from other theatrical undertakings. [...] Then, too, there is the unfortunate association of “applied” with the professional who has all the answers and simply bestows (applies) them upon “a community”, rather than co-producing work drawing on both parties’ strength (5).

Her discussion of engaged theatre is based on the idea of “call and response,” a simple concept that “foregrounds the many opportunities for interactivity between a theatre artist and the people involved in the situation in question” (1). Cohen-Cruz “resuscitate[s] the term “engaged” with its historical connotation of commitment, but unfettered by assumptions of aesthetic mediocrity and strictly material usefulness” (3), as “engaged performance includes, but is larger than, *applied theatre*” (5). Highlighting this subtle distinction, Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, describe applied theatre as “a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities” (9).

It could of course be asked what “non-engaged” theatre might look like, but for the purpose of this thesis I view the performances discussed as socially engaged works that attempt to serve their communities in a purposeful manner. I argue that these performances are engaged in the sense that they are committed to socio-political discourse and are part of broader democratic processes in Indonesia. This is not a new phenomenon, as much modern theatre in the 1980s and 1990s was also committed to political discourse: the workers’ theatre of the late 1980s and 1990s, including groups such as Teater Buruh Indonesia (TBI) or Teater ABU for instance, was strongly influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Michael Bodden argues that, during the *reformasi* period,

modern theatre, literature and other cultural forms are attempting, within their sometimes limited but not unimportant sphere of influence, to reach out to different and wider audiences, to expand the possibilities of creative and social expression, and to help articulate dissatisfaction with the legacy of the New Order as it manifests itself in the Reformasi period. They are thus helping to open up spaces and opportunities for several kinds of broader creative freedoms and in so doing, they are contributing to the deepening of the pro-democracy environment in Indonesia (‘Satuan-satuan kecil’ 52).

This is an on-going process. I also argue that what differentiates the performances discussed in this thesis from those performances of the 1980s and 90s is not only connected to the distinctive political situation of the post-Suharto years, but also to a change in possibilities for theatre artists in Indonesia. Transnational and international artists’ collaborations offer opportunities for exchange and innovation. The discourses of human rights and violence, environmentalism, historical memory and trauma, as well as social transition that will be

discussed here in relation to current modern theatre performances, exemplify how performances that explore such concerns or concepts cannot be read as alienated cultural products, but rather as elements of larger discourses.

Genres

During my various stays in Indonesia I was able to watch many and varied performances. Although this thesis centres on drama as socially engaged theatre, there are other types of plays and performances with different kinds of agendas. The Indonesian stage has become much more diverse both in aesthetics and form since the turn of the millennium. Genres I have observed during my field work include monologue, dance, opera, performance art, and commercial musicals. These genres often feed off each other and sometimes compete against each other as well. For instance, during my research in December 2010, I observed the Festival Teater Jakarta, which since 1973 has hosted an annual competition for theatre groups in Jakarta organized by Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta Arts Council, DKJ). The competition aims to determine the best Indonesian theatre group (*Group Teater Terbaik*), which then is granted permission to perform at TIM (the Taman Ismail Marzuki art centre).¹⁰ Most of the groups that performed at this festival were student groups, and one major focus of their performances was realistic acting and innovative stage design. One problem that the competitors face is the time and effort they spend on rehearsing for the festival. Much of their theatrical work revolves around the demands of this annually reoccurring festival and, as a result, their wider outreach is very small. Performances were often staged in front of a half-empty auditorium with similar faces in the audience day after day, small audiences often being a general problem for modern theatre performances in Indonesia. During the same field work period, the musical performance of *Laskar Pelangi* (The rainbow troops) was held in Teater Besar and attracted huge crowds.¹¹ Modern theatre artists I spoke to sometimes expressed their frustration that their own genre did not draw such large audiences. In an interview, writer Agus Noor declared modern theatre to be a dying art form for the middle

¹⁰ A major public centre for modern arts that was opened in 1968 in Indonesia's capital Jakarta.

¹¹ Both *Laskar Pelangi* the book by Andrea Hirata (2005) and the movie adaptation (2008), directed by Riri Riza, were a huge commercial success in Indonesia.

class because theatre seemed to be “out of date” and not reflective of their contemporary lives (Agus Noor personal communication 20 Jan. 2011).¹²

Arguably, modern theatre is often still perceived as a predominantly urban phenomenon: alien, problematic to access (due to city centre venues and, sometimes, ticket prices) and difficult to understand. In 2005, for instance, founding director of Teater Garasi Yudi Ahmad Tajudin pointed out in his essay “Some thoughts on theatre in Indonesia” that:

Within the framework of modern performing arts history, theatre is still considered by many Indonesians as an alien formulation of conceptions and artistic expression, which is not part of ‘genuine’ Indonesian cultural narratives. Like other products of modernity, theatre is something that came ‘later-on’ in the evolution of Indonesian culture. Nevertheless, while other aspects of modernity, as ‘nation’, ‘state’, ‘developmentalism’ and ‘industry’ are widely accepted, the relevance of contemporary theatre is still highly contested.

However, a shift can be observed as new theatre communities are established in more rural areas, such as the Jatiwangi Art Factory (based in the Jatiwangi-Jatisura-Surawangi area near Cirebon in West Java) or teaterStudio Indonesia in Serang, Banten, which specifically aim to attract a wider, more diverse audience, opening up accessibility of *teater*.

Currently, the most innovative genres of performing arts, which attract wider audiences, are arguably musical, dance, performance art, and a vibrant festival culture, all of which are briefly discussed below. These genres work in parallel to modern theatre, sometimes collaborating and sometimes competing with each other. How these other genres develop also influences the trajectory of modern theatre to some extent.

Dance

Modern dance is arguably one of the most vibrant and progressive contemporary art forms in Indonesia at present. Artists such as Fitri Setyaningsih critically examine the changing form of dance. In an interview with Christina Schott for the *Jakarta Post* on 28 August 2009, Fitri

¹² *Teater out of date, mereka pengen sesuatu yang baru, ketemulah, ketemu Onrop dan tiba tiba mereka, oh, ini dunia saya, ini apa yang saya butuhkan. Kalau ini analisis benar, teater akan mati di kelas itu.* [my translation: Theatre is out of date. They want something new, they meet it, they watch *Onrop*, and suddenly they go: “Oh, this is my world, this is what I need.” If this analysis is correct, theatre is going to die in that class.]

is cited as saying: “I believe that we can give dance many more forms and colors by liquefying it. We just have to dare.” Also in August 2009, I observed a regional dance summit themed “Transforming Tradition,” hosted by the Goethe-Institut Jakarta. The Goethe-Institut’s transnational “Tanzconnexions” dance project aims to facilitate contemporary dance in the Asia-Pacific region. The project’s website notes that:

Countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia have a rich traditional dance culture that has been cultivated or suppressed in recent decades depending on the political conditions. There has been little need for contemporary forms of expression to date there, however. Thus, in building up joint structures in this region of the world under the auspices of its regional headquarters in Jakarta, the Goethe-Institut has set itself an enormous logistical and financial task since 2008 (Cramer).

At this summit, dancers and choreographers from all over the region were invited to perform significant dance works on the theme of transforming tradition. Similarly, in 2010 the Cambodian Khmer Arts programme hosted a small gathering of choreographers—Eko Supriyanto, from Indonesia, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro, from Cambodia, and Pichet Klunchun, from Thailand—in order to “re-connect, and to learn from and about each other's approaches to creativity” (Shapiro-Phim). Re-inventing tradition seems to be a recurrent theme of interest, but contemporary dance performances sometimes also have a socio-political message. In January 2011, at the conference on “Indonesia & The World 1959-1969: a Critical Decade,” the performance *Tjap Merah* (Red stamp), choreographed by Vincentius Yosep Prihantoro Sadsuitubun and performed by eight female dancers, explored the different facets of actual and fantasised accounts of Gerwani, the PKI-aligned women’s organization banned after the military coup in 1965/66. This event will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Performance art

Performance art in Indonesia is a relatively young genre and has not been much discussed in the academic literature. Early, sporadic performance art events included Semsar Siahaan's *Oleh-oleh dari Desa II* (Souvenirs from the village II), which involved the public burning of the sculpture *Citra Irian dalam Torso* (An image of Irian in a torso) by Sunaryo in 1981. This action opposed the national identity approach taught in Indonesian art institutions at that time. During the New Order, Indonesia promoted national unity and integration. Cultural and

ethnic minorities, perceived as a threat to national stability, were ignored or silenced. Although the state ideology of Pancasila¹³ promoted plurality and diversity, the New Order government actively undermined this principle. In the 1990s, performance art and happenings became part of an artistic movement within the context of growing criticism of Suharto's government and more general social problems. Sumit K. Mandal notes that "there was a sharp rise in activism in the performance arts, often in venues open to the public without charge, and playing to large audiences. [...] [A]rt happenings and other performing arts flourished in response to the serious crises of 1998 and 1999" ('Creativity in protest' 184). Problems caused by a changing world order were also addressed by artists in other Southeast Asian countries. Performance artists such as Mideo M. Cruz from the Philippines raged not against the regime but against a world order that was fuelled by consumerism and increasing globalization. In the post-Suharto era, events such as the BaPaf (Bandung Performance Art Festival), IIAEP 2006 (Indonesia International Performance Art Festival), which was held from 7 to 10 December at the National Gallery Jakarta, and brought together performance artists from all over Asia (China, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia), or the Perfurbance Festival series in Yogyakarta (Cornall 8) indicate a change in the public's interest in performance art in general. These performance art events often have a strong socio-political agenda. Jan Cornall notes that during the first and second Perfurbance festivals held in Yogyakarta artists were invited to submit proposals for 10-minute performance pieces in outdoor locations around the city. They were also given a theme to base their performances on. In 2005 it was urbanisation; in 2006 the industrialisation of education— both current issues of social concern.

In Cirebon, the Jatiwangi Art Factory frequently organizes contemporary art festivals where local and international artists come together; it also invites professional artists to stay for a short period of time in the local performers' residences. "During the period of residence, artists collaborate with the locals to create works of art for the festival," as an announcement for the 2006 festival outlines ('Jatiwangi Arts Factory'). One major outcome of this festival has been performance art events. The genre also seems to be coming of age on other islands

¹³ Featuring the motto "unity in diversity" (*bhineka tunggal ika*) the five principles of the Pancasila were defined by Sukarno in his autobiography as his "five precious pearls: Nationalism, Internationalism, Democracy, Social Justice, and Belief in one God [...]" (Sukarno 196). These principles were intended to be the basis of the state and should not only guarantee religious freedom and bring the scattered islands into a single entity; there should be no ideological basis for separatist movements in this multiethnic society.

outside of Java.¹⁴ Festivals in Indonesia will be explored in the discussion of environmental problems in Chapter 4.

Commercial musicals

During the last part of my research in 2010/11 commercial musicals became prominent in the theatre scene, as they grew popular mainly among Indonesia's upper middle class in the urban centres of Java. An article in *Tempo* magazine from 2 January 2011 maintained that “this year [2010] the Indonesian world of stage has been marked by the rise of musical performances.”¹⁵ Riri Riza's¹⁶ *Laskar Pelangi* performed in front of a sell-out audience for a three-week run in December 2010. It was even watched by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Ticket prices at Teater Besar (at TIM) ranged between 100,000 to 750,000 Indonesian Rupiah (ca. £6.50 to £45), the latter figure amounting to a total monthly income for some Indonesian households. By popular demand, the musical was performed again from 1 to 11 July 2011, at Teater Jakarta (also at TIM), and then travelled to Yogyakarta in May 2012. It also had a run at the Esplanade complex in Singapore in October 2011, which was noted by the *Jakarta Post* as a step onto “the international stage” (‘Laskar Pelangi Musical’). In the same year, three other musicals—*Diana: Rahasia Hatiku* (Diana: The Secret of my Heart) by Garin Nugroho, *Gita Cinta, The Musical* (Love Song: The Musical) directed by Ari Tulang, and *Onrop! Musikal* by Joko Anwar—premiered in Jakarta in front of excited crowds. *Onrop! Musikal* was performed from 13 to 21 November 2010 at Teater Jakarta (TIM). Joko Anwar brings a highly political theme to the stage in this satirical musical comedy. *Onrop*, which is Porno spelt backwards, is set in Jakarta in 2020. It is a time when anti “onropgraphy” and “onrop”-action law have suppressed the rights of self-expression for women, homosexuals, and artists. In post-Suharto Indonesia, a first version of the anti-pornography law (later: *Rancangan Undang-Undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi* - Bill against Pornography and Porno-Action) was announced in 2006, however widespread protests forced legislators to amend the controversial bill which then finally came into action in October 2008 (Hariyadi). This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next section. In

¹⁴ See Hypatia Vourloumis' essay on Cok Sawitri's work.

¹⁵ *Dunia panggung Indonesia tahun ini diwarnai oleh maraknya pertunjukan musik.*

¹⁶ Riri Riza studied film directing at Jakarta's Arts Institute (IKJ – Institut Kesenian Jakarta) and also holds an MA in Feature Screen Writing from Royal Holloway, University of London. His films include *Gie* (2005), *Untuk Rena* [For Rena] (also 2005), and *Laskar pelangi* [The rainbow troops] (2008).

Onrop, the police will arrest anyone who violates the law and send them to Onrop-island, a feared place full of criminals and violence. It turns out, however, that the island is a carefree oasis of freedom of expression. The story centres on the characters of Bram, a conservative writer who is exiled to Onrop-island, his girlfriend Sari, and Bram's personal assistant Amir, who is gay but pretends to be straight. Ika Krismantari writes in the *Jakarta Post* that:

Onrop! [...] tackles with humour the controversial anti-pornographic law passed by the current government, which is deemed a threat against women, the art world and freedom of expression. While delving into a serious subject, the musical entertains viewers through punchy dialogues and hilarious characters created to make fun of depressing social realities.

This show is an example of a certain critical awareness also present on the contemporary musical stage.

Socio-political climate: Islam and civil society

The social and political climate in which contemporary theatre practitioners are currently working is as diverse as the theatre scene. Islamization and democratic civil society have both had an impact on the creation of new performances. Taking up the theme of *Onrop!* in his introduction to *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*, Professor of theatre Andrew Weintraub, notes that “sermon-filled soap operas, veils on rock stars, Muslim magazines, newspapers and portals, consumption of special Ramadan foods at McDonald's, Facebook ‘Hadiths of the Day’, and the rippling effects of Prophet cartoons saturate the mediascape of the contemporary Malay world” (1). An example of increasing Islamization is the case of *dangdut*¹⁷ singer Inul who, as Ariel Heryanto notes, was banned from performing by local government and religious edicts from local Councils of Ulama in early 2003 (‘Pop Culture’ 7). Further, “nothing has articulated the fierce and ideologically laden contestation [...] in contemporary Indonesia more vividly than the 2003 controversy over the performance of the *dangdut* singer-dancer Inul Daratista” (15). He notes that “many see ‘Inulmania’ and the failure to repress Inul being one main impetus to this new bill, and that the moves to repress Inul and then to propose the new law are parts of concerted efforts by the Islamist

¹⁷ The music genre *dangdut* was developed during the 1970s in Indonesia. One of its most popular figures is Rhoma Irama. Named onomatopoeically for the music's characteristic drum sounds “dang” and “dut,” it is Indonesia's most popular music. Within the *dangdut* genre there are different styles (for a more detailed discussion of *dangdut* see Weintraub *Dangdut Stories*).

politicians and social organizations to islamize the Indonesian state” (15). Weintraub discusses the politics surrounding the Inul case noting that “at a protest rally in Jakarta, demonstrators shouted “Dance drills, faith spills”, a slogan that reflected a causal relationship between the rise of Inul and the drop in religious faith” (*Dangdut Stories* 174). Only two years after ‘Inulmania’, Indonesia “was further divided by the proposal of an anti-pornography law from the more Islamist inclined parties inside the parliament and supported by many outside it” (Heryanto ‘Pop Culture’ 15). The law, which has wide support among Islamic parties, is seen by many Indonesians as a threat to pluralistic society. Opponents argue that traditional customs, such as the wearing of penis gourds by some ethnic groups in Papua, could come under threat, or that nightclubs in Bali could be closed down to adhere to this legislation. Others see the law as a first step towards the introduction of Sharia law for the whole of Indonesia. Journalist Mathias Hariyadi writes that the fear is that the proposed law could spread a climate of ‘anarchy’, because it does not define precisely what can be defined as “contrary to morality”, and above all what are the “criteria” to be adopted in order to establish whether “a behaviour or an artistic/cultural expression” should be censored. This is also a concern for artists who see this as an assault against artistic freedom.

However, religious censorship is not restricted to this bill. Controversial issues, such as the violent anti-communist history of Indonesia, can still generate massive protests from certain religious sections of society. In 2011, for instance, the performance *Mwathirika* by Papermoon Puppet Theatre, a Yogyakarta based puppet company, was part of a programme accompanying a conference titled ‘Indonesia & the world 1959-1969: A critical decade’. On the first day of the conference a demonstration was held outside the Goethe-Institut. As political scientist Robert Tanter notes, two religiously motivated youth groups, the *Gerakan Pembela Islam* (GPI - Islamic Youth Movement) and the *Laskar Empati Pembela Bangsa* (Warriors of Empathy, Defenders of the Nation), demonstrated against the event. According to Tanter, the demonstrators were carrying banners proclaiming “*Setan Komunis Telah Mati* [The communist devil is already dead]” and “*PKI Adalah Pelaku dan Dalang Tragedi 1965 Bukan Sebagai Korban* [PKI is the performer and puppeteer of the 1965 tragedy – Not a victim]” (1). The demonstrators claimed that the event was neo-Communist propaganda, and accused the puppeteers and other participants of promoting this political position (Triyono). These issues of censorship and restriction have a heightened importance for theatre relating to human rights and violence, as well as historical trauma and memory (see chapters 3 and 4). *Dangdut* and transition will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

A second important socio-political environment for performances of Indonesian modern theatre is discussed by German scholar Verena Beittinger-Lee. Her thoughtful discussion of civil and uncivil¹⁸ society groups in Indonesia aids our understanding of the current political climate and the role of civil society, which in turn reflects the role of theatre practitioners who are a key part of the country's nascent and vibrant civic life. Shortly before and after Suharto's retreat from power, the term "civil society" gained significance in Indonesia, due in part to the successful actions of members of the pro-democracy movement. Students, workers, artists and NGO activists were expressing their discomfort with the Suharto regime and demanding social and political change. Beittinger-Lee notes that "the expectations that the country would become a democracy after the Western liberal model were high in Indonesia and abroad" (1). Civil society groups, especially the student movement, "moved civil society in the centre of international attention" (1). The term civil society was initially introduced into Indonesian discourse by mainly Western-based scholars, writing about the development of Indonesian politics in the late 1990s. But, as Mikaela Nyman, a researcher of civil society in Indonesia, maintains, Indonesian scholars also began stressing "[...] the importance of non-state actors other than the political elite and the existence of civil society as a prerequisite for genuine democratization and reform" at this time (252). In the first years of *reformasi*, according to Singapore-based scholars Stefano Harney and Rita Olivia, "a lot of faith [was] being placed in this idea of civil society" (1). Indeed, they noted that "if student protest and a collapsed economy brought down Suharto, it is civil society that is held out as the force that will bring down Suhartoism" (1).

That the term civil society has become of political importance in Indonesia at all provoked historian Carol Gluck and anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing to consider the phenomenon of "words in motion" in their edited anthology of that title. Their first discussion of the topic sprang from their awareness that, by the late 1990s, terms such as "good governance", "civil society", and "globalization" were "everywhere in circulation throughout the region, and the question of how these words were to be rendered in local languages and political cultures occupied many Southeast Asian policymakers and public intellectuals" (Lowenhaupt Tsing 'Introduction' 12). They argue that "the expanding vocabulary of

¹⁸ The term uncivil is used for "bad forms" of civil society. Beittinger-Lee gives the example of militant religious groups, violent vigilante groups, militant youth groups, violence-prone militias, and racist/radical ethnonationalist groups (159).

globalization brought terms such as “human rights”, “civil society”, and “the environment” into ever-increasing play around the world. Islamic words like “*shari’a*” moved anew across Muslim societies; “terrorism” and other fear words took on expanded global meanings” (Gluck 3). Lowenhaupt Tsing claims that these words and our worlds “are made at different scales, ranging from particular class niches and political campaigns to transnational realignments of culture and power” (‘Introduction’ 11). They also note that words have “particular meanings and affinities in particular places” and so scholars will need to work with awareness of the specific regional and cultural perspectives they represent in their writing (16). Scholars of political science in so-called developing countries applied the concept to the situation in their respective home countries. In Indonesia, for example, there was a stronger focus on Islam, and the Muslim community or *masyarakat madani*.¹⁹ Indonesian scholar Muhammad Hikam writes, in general terms, that “one has to understand [...] that the development of civil society in Indonesia will be different to the one in modern Western capitalist societies. This is related to the different economic, political, cultural history” (x).²⁰

Much was written about Indonesia’s civil society and its role in the process of democratization and democratic consolidation, as Verena Beittinger-Lee notes.

Especially among the international donor community that supported Indonesian NGOs and had established various programs on democracy, civil society, good governance and the like, hopes were high that Indonesia’s civil society would profit from the political opening and the suddenly arising new spaces. Civil society was widely expected to promote democracy and help establish democratic norms and values – in short: a democratic culture (1).

My starting point for this thesis was my reading of written statements by Indonesian theatre practitioners who, in their vision and mission, also pointed out that they were interested in the process of building a more mature and healthy civil society.²¹ In interviews conducted with theatre practitioners in 2010/11, the ideal of civil society seemed to be used by many of the

¹⁹ *Madani* stands for society/community in the town of Madina at the time of the prophet Muhammad, 622 A.D.

²⁰ *Harus dipahami [...] bahwa pertumbuhan dari perkembangan civil society di Indonesia akan berbeda dengan yang ada di masyarakat kapitalis mutakhir di Barat, berhubung dengan sejarah ekonomi, politik, kultur yang berbeda.*

²¹ Possibly following the political terminology of the time.

artists I spoke with as a reference to apply their art to the “real”, to their political, social, and cultural concerns. Michael Bodden sees this emphasis as a continuation from the politically-engaged theatre of the New Order period. “New causes emerged in the theatre as well as the wider society,” he notes, offering examples of work created around the trauma of New Order violence, and the emergence of theatre concerned with women in the reform era, or with environmentalism (*Resistance on the National Stage* 314-315). He therefore concludes that “though the themes may be changing, it seems clear that Indonesia’s modern national theater remains committed to raising pressing issues and giving voice to some of those who otherwise have a difficult time being heard” (315).

Before embarking on the interviews, I was already interested in the idea of the socially-engaged art worker, and intrigued by the idea of how performances can be made into social action. As a student in Germany I had watched many performances that were entirely focused on the aesthetics and very intellectual in their approach, especially those performed in large, subsidized venues such as the “Staatstheater”. In 2002 and 2003, I was part of an improvisation theatre group that used Augusto Boal’s idea of forum theatre for theatrical intervention and thus became aware of different forms of theatre that reach out to the community rather than performing in an enclosed space. This approach, which I find most useful for getting across a message to a wider audience, is one I share with some of the companies discussed in this thesis.

Many of the practitioners I interviewed implied in their vision and mission statements that they were interested in building a more mature civil society and felt committed to change. These readings influenced my decision to select them as case studies for my work and I brought the relevance of civil society for their work up as a question during the interviews. This intention will be discussed in more detail in the individual chapters, when the theatre groups are introduced. My initial presumptions about their positions were often born out in my interviews. One notion that repeatedly emerged in the interviews was the idea of staging an alternate interpretation of reality. Yudi Ahmad Tajudin noted, for instance, that he doesn’t “believe that art can cause a social or political revolution [...] but that art could be an alternative reading of reality” (personal communication 26 Jan. 2011)²² and thus might

²² *Aku ga percaya bahwa kesenian bisa bikin revolusi sosial atau revolusi politik [...] dia bisa jadi satu alternatif alat membaca kenyataan.*

provide an alternative space for critically re-thinking or even re-shaping society. A similar concept was explained to me by Radhar Panca Dahana, the Head of the Indonesian Theatre Federation (FTI), who argues that, for him, artistic work should be:

a reference medium which also can explain reality/real life. If s/he [referring to audience members] is not satisfied with the explanation of reality by the media, s/he should come to watch my performance in order that s/he will find a different explanation of reality. That's it. I don't want to teach, I just want to give an alternative. What kind of decision s/he will make is in their hands, it's not me who decides" (personal communication 15. Feb. 2011).²³

This stance is also supported by Rossa Rosadi, director of the Yogyakarta-based Saturday Acting Club. For him, art works are related to the real life of individual practitioners, both in traditional and contemporary contexts. "If [the practitioner's] life has no strong relationship with society, [he/she] has no empathy or strong concern about society, in my opinion it is impossible to create a piece of art that has an objective towards reviving [society]. Or develop society, in all different sorts of ways" (personal communication 21. Jan. 2011).²⁴ A few artists, such as Ratna Sarumpaet, Wawan Sofwan, B. Verry Handayani and Lena Simanjuntak, described their work explicitly in relation to activism, as performances with efficacy which are staged as means of provoking change. The Indonesian NGO Yayasan Kelola runs a programme called "Theater for Development", which is organized by the Dutch Egbert Wits. Kelola organize workshops for theatre practitioners and provide funding for particular projects. Some of the groups that are discussed in this thesis work with Kelola.

According to Shaughnessy, the term "theatre for development" is often contested "due to its association with cultural hegemony and the 'developing world'." It raises "a series of questions [...] concerning the agent for change, the politics of cultural intervention and the problems of cultural hegemony" (7), issues that will also arise later in the thesis. None of the performances discussed in the thesis are part of the "Theater for Development" programme,

²³ *Saya pengen kesenian itu sebagai salah satu medium referensi juga untuk menjelaskan kenyataan. Kalau dia tidak puas dengan penjelasan kenyataan dari media, datanglah ke pertunjukan saya maka akan menemukan penjelasan yang berbeda tentang kenyataan. That's it. Saya tidak ingin menggurui, saya hanya ingin memberikan alternatif. Bagaimana decision akan dibuat, itu ada di tangan mereka, bukan saya yang buat*

²⁴ *Saya rasa [...] ketika seorang seniman berkarya, apakah dia teater kontemporer atau tidak, itu sangat dipengaruhi oleh cara seniman itu hidup. Kalau memang hidupnya tidak ada di dalam hubungan yang kuat dengan masyarakatnya, tidak punya empati atau concern yang kuat dengan masyarakatnya, saya rasa sangat tidak mungkin mereka membuat karya yang tujuannya adalah penyadaran. Atau membuat masyarakatnya berkembang lebih baik, di dalam banyak hal.*

but a few groups have overlapping agendas. Teater Garasi's collective performances, for instance, address their socio-cultural concerns in rather abstract terms. However, B. Verry Handayani, one of Teater Garasi's actresses, in her performance *SUM: Cerita dari Rantau* (SUM: Stories from Abroad), is concerned with the problems of domestic workers. She brings the performance to remote villages that have a high percentage of female migrants who travel to Singapore, Malaysia or South Korea in the hope of finding a better standard of living.

Funding

More practical concerns that affect theatre practitioners are funding and the choice of performance space. In the last few years, funding has become more accessible. It is still possible to apply to the government for funding, though, as Hatley notes, positive outcomes may "be reliant on the goodwill of particular officials and the negotiating skills and connections of artists" ('Ten Years Reformasi' 66). Hatley also notes that funding for local festivals can be obtained from the Department of Tourism and from regional officials, and that regional traditional theatre forms (especially Kethoprak groups) have also been successful in obtaining funding from district budgets (Hatley *Javanese Theatre* 287). During my research in Indonesia, some of the theatre practitioners I spoke with mentioned funding they obtained from the government (personal communication Radhar Panca Dahana 15 Feb. 2011; personal communication Nandang Aradea, 9 Feb. 2011). However, this funding would also often rely on personal relationships with government officials. Other forms of funding can be obtained from international organizations such as HIVOS, the Ford Foundation, or NGOs that attach a theatre practitioner to a particular cause,²⁵ as when UNICEF funded research for Ratna Sarumpaet's performance *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden*, which dealt with child sex trafficking (see Chapter 3). Other funding opportunities might be connected to performance venues. One example is the performance of *Tubuh Ketiga* (The third body) by Teater Garasi, which was funded by Komunitas Salihara, who invited the group to present a new piece at their biennial Festival Salihara and provided part of the financial backing for the performance (personal communication Yudi A. Tajudin 21 Jan. 2011).

²⁵ www.hivos.org, www.fordfoundation.org, asialink.unimelb.edu.au

Spaces and venues

Modern theatre in Indonesia is still mainly bound to urban areas, though a variety of groups and theatre communities are emerging in more rural areas since decentralization. As previously noted, West Java's Jatiwangi Art Factory, Serang-based teaterStudio Indonesia (see Chapter 4), and Tegal-based Teater Qi are all gaining prominence. In Bandar Lampung, Teater Satu has initiated a programme that aims to connect modern theatre groups from all over Sumatra to create an island-wide theatre network (field notes 2010). Intranational collaborations between modern groups—such as Teater Qi from Java and Komunitas Seni Teater Baru from Kalimantan, who collaborated on the *Titik Koma* project about prostitutes and their role in the spread of HIV/Aids, or the Mimbar Teater Festival organized by Halim HD in Solo, which featured performances by artists from Sulawesi and Papua—are indications of the emergence of a more diverse theatre scene. Arguably, however, Jakarta still hosts the most important performance spaces on a national scale. This will surely change soon, as places such as Makassar are developing their own vibrant modern theatre scene.

Crucially, it is no longer the Taman Budaya institutions (municipal cultural or art centre) that provide for artistic needs. Between 1968 and 1973, the New Order's General Directorate of Culture established a Taman Budaya in each of Indonesia's provinces (Miksic et al. 168). Until decentralization, these were major gathering points for the performing arts and funding tended to be channelled towards events taking place on their sites. However, this focus has made difficult to obtain funding for alternative projects, as Halim HD points out in private conversation. In reference to the funding of Mimbar Teater 2010, he noted that it was difficult to interest the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture in new projects, as they are more interested in commercial projects that support tourism by having a stronger traditional focus (personal communication 19 Jan. 2011).

Jakarta's Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) has similarly lost much of its attraction as a performance space for theatre practitioners. In his *Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, James Brandon calls TIM "the most successfully conceived arts centre in Asia" (133), and for Putu Wijaya it was "a window to the world" (Gillitt Asmara *Tradisi Baru* 168). The latter remark in particular is suggestive of the potential of TIM at the time of opening in 1968. But these municipal performance spaces have become much more commercial in recent years. Teater Besar, one of the TIM stages, was refurbished and used for the sell-out performance of Riri

Riza's musical *Laskar Pelangi*, discussed previously. Graha Bhakti Budaya and Teater Kecil are used for similar popular events. In 2010, Garin Nugroho's *Tusuk Konde*, the second part of his stage-version of *Opera Jawa*, premiered at Graha Bhakti.

Arguably, privately funded venues, such as the stage of Komunitas Teater Salihara, often provide a space for more experimental creativity. For instance, Teater Garasi's *Tubuh Ketiga*, one of the performances discussed in Chapter 5, was partially funded by Komunitas Teater Salihara so it could be performed at the Teater Salihara Festival in autumn 2010. Other major performance spaces in Java are often international institutions such as the German-funded Goethe Institut, the Alliance Francaise (Lembaga Institut Perancis), the British Council, or the Russian Cultural Centre in Jakarta, which hosted a performance of teaterStudio Indonesia's *Bicaralah Tanah* (Speak, soil) on 20 August 2007.

A few notes on the literature of modern national theatre in Indonesia

The body of academic literature on Indonesian modern national theatre is rather small and, although a few publications on current developments in theatre have been published since 2010, the majority of works centre on theatre performances in Java. Older Indonesian scholarship, most notably Boen S. Oemarjati's 1971 *Bentuk Lakon dalam Sastra Indonesia* (The form of the play in Indonesian literature) and Jakob Sumarjdo's 1992 *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia* (Development of modern theatre and Indonesian dramatic literature), tends to be more descriptive than analytical. Jakob Sumarjdo's work is based on Boen S. Oemarjati's text, with the addition of many later examples. Although the book was published in 1992, he ends his story in the late 1980s. It thus includes a discussion of important theatre practitioners of the 1970s and early 1980s, such as W.S. Rendra, Putu Wijaya, Arifin C. Noer and Teguh Karya. Other historical works do not give an overview of the development of modern theatre in Indonesia, but focus on one specific time period.

Matthew Isaac Cohen's *Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theatre in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903*, for instance, traces a popular form of Malay language based musical theatre which was a well-known form of entertainment at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the Netherland Indies. *Komedie Stamboel* can be seen as one of the early forms of popular culture in the archipelago that was not restricted to a single ethnic group, but which worked as a transethnic form of entertainment. Its influences can still be found in today's

contemporary theatre world, such as the witty and colourful performances of Teater Koma (377f). Fandy Hutari's *Sandiwara dan Perang: Politisasi Terhadap Aktifitas Sandiwara Modern* (Theatre and war: the politization of modern theatre activities, 2009) focuses on performances during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942-1945). Such studies of discrete periods are useful in building up a detailed historical chronology of Indonesian modern drama.

Scholarship about modern theatre performances during the New Order have largely, and suitably, focused on the ways in which theatre resisted state power. Michael Bodden's *Resistance on the National Stage: Theater and Politics in Late New Order Indonesia*, published in 2010, brings together ideas from his earlier publications on worker theatre, Islamic theatre and censorship during the New Order. It also includes a comprehensive chapter on Teater Sae and Teater Kubur, two groups about which little has been written to date, despite the fact that they are of major importance for the development of post-1990s modern theatre. Marianne König's published thesis on Boedi S. Otong, *Theater als Lebensweise—Theater als Ethnologie: Der indonesische Regisseur Boedi S. Otong* (Theatre as a way of life - theatre as ethnology: the Indonesian director Boedi S. Otong) from 1997, discusses the work of Boedi S. Otong's Teater SAE but is only available in German as yet. In particular, König offers a thorough analysis of the working process of Teater SAE's *Sweeney Todd*, which was created in collaboration with British director Richard Williams and was funded through the British Council. *Sweeney Todd* was thematically very different from Teater SAE's other works, which usually dealt with human alienation, poverty and problems of globalisation. Three other major publications on modern Indonesian theatre that have been released since 2000 are Barbara Hatley's *Javanese Performances: Contesting Culture Embracing Change* in 2008, Evan Darwin Winet's *Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre: Spectral Genealogies and Absent Faces* in 2010, and Afrizal Malna's *Perjalanan Teater Kedua: Antologi Tubuh dan Kata* (The second journey of theatre: an anthology of body and word) also from 2010. Hatley in *Javanese Performances* mainly focuses on performances in Yogyakarta, where she undertook many years of research. "By looking at the way popular theatre developed in response to socio-political circumstances, it illuminates both the workings of Javanese theatre and the local impact of major social change" (1). The first part of the book deals with the 1970s onwards, and how *ketoprak* and *teater* developed as popular theatre forms in Central Java. The second part discusses contemporary performances of *ketoprak* and *teater* since the fall of Suharto, when there was no longer mass support for

theatre as a political opposition. Hatley argues that modern theatre thus shifted its concentration to campus-based activity rather than productions by independent groups. She argues that the decentralization of political power affected social and cultural life (194, 209). Moreover, “an important element in the establishment of regional autonomy has been the heightened attention directed to local and regional forms of cultural expressions” (199) as manifested, for instance, in Teater Garasi’s *Waktu Batu*.

Winet’s book approaches contemporary performances from a completely different angle. He argues that colonial remnants and Western legacies continue to haunt modern theatre practices across the archipelago through the eras of nation-building, guided democracy, New Order, *reformasi* and up to the present day. Modern theatre in Indonesia, according to Winet, has “never stepped beyond the shadow of coloniality” (xv). The focus of his analysis is Jakarta. He maintains that “three generations of nationalist cultural polemics have claimed independence as a moment of rupture, after which foreigners were disenfranchised and all who remained were accepted as Indonesians. However, Jakarta’s theatre buildings, acting pedagogies and dramatic repertoires are still haunted by the colonial experience” (xiv). As the nation of Indonesia did not exist prior to colonialism all articulations of an Indonesian history and culture are, for Winet, ultimately postcolonial projects. He draws heavily on Pheng Cheah’s idea of spectrality: “[T]he claim for a new organic life remains haunted by the lingering parfix, and the unsettling, ghostly faces of the father speaks through the alienated faces of a new generation of Indonesians” (207). Although Winet’s discussion of post-colonialism in Indonesia is not of particular relevance for this thesis at this point, it does inform my analysis of some of the works selected. Winet’s book is (to my knowledge) the first to engage so fully with post-colonialism on Indonesia’s modern theatre stage.

Finally, Afrizal Malna’s *Perjalanan Teater Kedua: Antologi Tubuh dan Kata* is based on his life-long involvement with theatre, which started when he met Boedi S. Otong and connected with the Teater SAE group in the late 1980s. He worked on the book for 12 years (Afrizal Malna personal communication 25 Jan. 2011). The book is both an anthology of modern theatre groups in Java and Sumatra and an exploration of the contested and contextualized body on the Indonesian modern stage.

Recently completed PhD theses on modern performances in Indonesia have also been a useful resource. Cobina Gillit’s *Challenging Conventions and Crossing Boundaries: A New*

Tradition of Indonesian Theatre from 1968 to 1978 from 2001 and Lauren Bain's thesis on performances of the post-New Order from 2005, the latter of which explores the ways in which gender, violence and regional/ national identity can provide a means of understanding "better the dynamic between performance and its context" (21), have both proved invaluable.

However, my main sources for this thesis are interviews, field notes, newspaper and magazine clippings, and video documentation from my three research trips. While I was able to watch many performances live, this was not always possible. In these cases, my observations are based on video recordings obtained either directly from the artists, or through a friend, Joel Taher, who works as a cinematographer for the Jakarta Arts Council, or from video recordings uploaded on YouTube. The advantages and disadvantages of live viewing versus DVD recording are manifold. For me, the biggest plus of watching a DVD is the fact that I can revisit it any time to gather more details or a better understanding of a scene I want to discuss. Also, if the quality of the recording is good and the artists used different camera angles, it allows me as the viewer to see the show from different perspectives, not only from the allocated seat. This, however, can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. It might enable me to see more details but when watching a show like *je.ja.l.an* or *Perempuan Gerabah*, which allows the audience to move around and look at different things from different positions, I have to allow the film-maker to be my eye, whereas when watching such a show live I can go to where my interest is drawn rather than having to rely on what is offered in a recorded version. Other disadvantages of watching a DVD are not being able to feel the atmosphere and directly observe the immediate audience reactions, which often is an interesting addition to other observations. Also, if the quality of the DVD is poor it can be difficult to see what is actually happening on stage. As Carey Jewitt notes, researchers need to understand the "history of a video, its context of production, its original purpose and audience, and how these factors are embedded in the video as an artefact, as well as what is missing in the video recording" (3). This refers, for instance, to immediate audience reaction or the fact that a DVD may have been created as a promotional tool, and so on. These issues will be revisited in relation to individual performances when appropriate during the course of the thesis.

My journey into modern Indonesian theatre

My first observations of Indonesian theatre took place in 2005, during a 6-month period during which I witnessed the rehearsal processes of Teater Garasi. I became interested in Indonesia while studying theatre, political science and anthropology at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich in Germany. Students of the anthropology department at that time had the opportunity to learn a foreign language, but the choice was limited to Swahili and Indonesian. At that time, I was more interested in the Asian continent so I decided to follow the Indonesian language option. Our teacher, Tiwi, wanted to interest us in Indonesian culture, and often brought Indonesian food to the class and invited us to traditional dance performances, as well as *angklung*²⁶ and *wayang kulit*, the Indonesian shadow puppet performances. I wanted to combine my interest in Indonesia with my passion for theatre and decided to apply for an internship in Yogyakarta. In 2005, the Goethe Institute collaborated with Yogyakarta-based Teater Garasi to stage Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine*, and forwarded me the contact of Teater Garasi's artistic director, Yudi Ahmad Tajudin, so I could ask whether I could join the process as an observer/intern. He approved my request so I got a visa and went to Indonesia. With my then limited Indonesian skills, I began to observe the rehearsal processes of Teater Garasi.

In 2007, I graduated from the Department of Drama and Theatre studies in Munich having written a Masters thesis titled *Das javanische Theater – Die Stimme des Volkes? Politische Reflexionen am Beispiel des zeitgenössischen Sprechtheaters* (Javanese theatre - The people's voice? – Reflections on politics by using contemporary theatre as an example). The thesis explored the political context of contemporary Indonesian performances on the modern stage, comparing Rendra's *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* (The struggle of the Naga tribe, 1975) and Nano Riantiarno's *Opera Kecoa* (Cockroach Opera, 1985) with *BAN-POL. Banyolan Politik (Keroncong Demokrasi Dua)* (BAN-POL. A political joke. Keroncong of democracy part 2, 1999) by Yusuf Muldiana and the *Waktu Batu* (Stone time, 2001-2004) trilogy by Teater Garasi. After starting this PhD in January 2009, my initial research was followed by second trip in summer 2009 (July – September) and a third trip in 2010/11 (August 2010 – March 2011), when I undertook the majority of the interviews used in this

²⁶ Angklung is an Indonesian musical genre, most associated with West Java. Angklung as an instrument consists of two to four bamboo tubes suspended in a bamboo frame, bound with rattan cords. Each Angklung produces a single note or chord, so typically various players must collaborate in order to play melodies.

thesis. Translations provided in this thesis, if not stated otherwise, are my own. I contacted theatre practitioners whose work I had previously seen or read about, and the interviews focused on their work practice, particular projects I felt were contributing to democratic processes in Indonesia, and their thoughts on their own positioning as civil society actors. Some of the practitioners I knew from my first visit in 2005; others I contacted for the first time in 2010, asking them for permission to meet them for discussion of their life and work. When using names of Indonesian artists in this thesis, I introduce them using the full name and then usually refer to them by their first name, as this is common practice in Indonesia. It is unusual to use the Western system of first and last names and it is also uncommon to address someone by their last name alone.

Chapters

This thesis is not intended as a comprehensive survey of engaged performances in Indonesia, but should be read as an indicator of how theatre practitioners are actively taking part in and contributing to democratic processes. It takes examples of striking performances that took place during a specific period of time and analyses these in four different, yet intertwined, socio-cultural contexts: historical memory and trauma, violence and human rights, environmentalism, and social transition.

The Malay-based IFIMA (International Forum for InterMedia Art), founded and directed by Jay Koh, states that:

We believe that for contemporary art to play an effective role as a catalyst for change, it has to go beyond display (show), spectacle, and critique. It needs to situate itself as part of a wider network of practices, and be willing to engage in dialogue with other practices, disciplines, publics and structures ('International Forum').

How and if Indonesian theatre fulfils these criteria is one of the topics of the thesis. It explores the role of theatre practitioners from 2005 to 2011, and embeds the works discussed in the broader contemporary debates and movements in Indonesian society, thus viewing the artist as a social actor. The thesis is underpinned by several interconnected and recurrent questions. How has theatre developed in the post-Suharto period? How is theatre challenging the continuous changes and transitional processes taking place in Indonesia? Can the performances discussed here be considered as socially-engaged theatre? How do theatre

practitioners respond to a changing civil society? As noted, the four core chapters centre on four different issues underlying the current socio-political context of Indonesia: historical memory and trauma, violence and human rights, environmentalism, and social transition. The thesis examines how these issues find their way onto the contemporary stage as “engaged performances.” Multiple readings are possible for most of these performances, but the thesis seeks to embed them within ongoing socio-political dialogues in order to analyse them in an appropriate political and cultural frame.

The **first chapter** provides an introduction to the history of modern theatre from the late 19th century until the fall of Suharto in 1998. The chapter precedes the discussion of contemporary performances in Indonesia and will help to contextualize more recent developments on stage and position the idea of socially-engaged performances in its historical frame.

The **second chapter** focuses on historical trauma and memory and discusses two contemporary performances, *Mwathirika* (2010) by Papermoon Puppet Theatre and *TV Eng Ong* (2005-ongoing) by Agus Nur Amal (a.k.a. PM Toh), in relation to processes of seeking truth and reconciliation in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era. It argues that these performances are establishing “sites of memory” as counter-narratives to the established historical narratives of the New Order period and, by doing so, are engaging audience members in a civic discourse of coming to terms with the past.

The **third chapter**, on violence and human rights, takes as its starting point Lauren Bain’s argument that Indonesian contemporary theatre practitioners in the early *reformasi* period (from 1999 onwards) were challenging what she describes as the “un-representedness” or the “not-representation” of violence during the New Order. She argues that performances in the early *reformasi* period seem to depict violence in very abstract ways (see, for instance, performances by Teater Payung Hitam), which is arguably not the case for later performances which often have specific objectives in their display of violence. The performances I discuss in this chapter are Ratna Sarumpaet’s *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* (The prostitute and the president), which deals with human sex trafficking and has also become a major motion picture, and B. Verry Handayani’s project *Sum: Cerita dari Rantau* (Sum: stories from abroad), which focuses on the problems faced by female domestic workers.

The **fourth chapter** addresses environmentalism on the contemporary scene. It discusses the emergence of environmental activism in Indonesia and how Indonesian theatre practitioners have responded to this. The discussion also looks back to pre-*reformasi* works such as Sardono W. Kusumo's *Meta-Ekologi* (Meta-ecology) or Ikranegara's *Rimba Triwikrama* (The great anger of the forest). The chapter investigates the nature of environmental art festivals in Indonesia, taking Teater Payung Hitam's International Water festivals as the main example. Payung Hitam's *Air Mata Air* is contrasted with the work of teaterStudio Indonesia, whose artistic director Nandang Aradea is concerned with humans' alienation from nature. In their work *Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah* (Earthenware woman or a ritual of marrying the land), teaterStudio Indonesia stage a ritual where the human actors engage with earthenware objects, symbolizing the land.

The **fifth and final chapter** focuses on theatre practitioners' engagement with political, social and cultural transition. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing notes that "cultures are continually co-produced" in the interactions that she calls "'friction': the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (*Friction* 4). Chapter 5 analyses Teater Garasi's performances *Waktu Batu 1-3* (*Stone time 1-3*) (2001-2004), *je.ja.l.an* (2008), and *Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan yang ada di Antara* (*The third body: on embracing the in-between*) (2010); all of these performances deal with friction and change, and comment on a society in transition.

Chapter 1: A history of modern Indonesian theatre

This chapter engages with the history of Indonesian *teater* from the late 19th century (late colonial period) until the fall of Suharto in 1998. This historical narrative is used to identify and discuss continuities and differences in contemporary performances in the post-Suharto era; it also provides the necessary historical context for the issues raised in subsequent chapters. During the development of the *teater* form, concepts of nation-building and Indonesian identity were important themes for theatre practitioners.

Benedict Anderson famously described the nation as “imagined”: most of its members do not know each other but in every single mind the community exists as an entity, and it is a community because, independently of real inequality and exploitation, exists the idea of a companionate bond of equals (*Imagined Communities* 14f). For Indonesia, during the Independence struggle and later as a post-colonial country, it was essential that the concept of nationhood grew in the minds of its citizens. Yet, over the years, the idea of Indonesia has been contested, as evident in the various separatist struggles that have defied the unity of the nation. In 2002, Goenawan Mohamad noted that “over decades [Indonesia] has become a self-naturalizing border of ideas, practices, desires, symbols” (‘What Indonesia was’ 18). However, following an interview with members of the Free Aceh Movement he also concluded that, in his opinion, this idea was one they “did not believe in” (18). This is also relevant for theatre and performance as theatre can be used as a means by which a nation is represented and therefore has the power to take part in the struggle of how a nation is perceived by its citizens. This will become clearer in the course of this thesis. Some of the performances used as case studies in Chapters 2 – 5 challenge the idea of the nation as it was created by its politicians while at the same time believing in Indonesia but asking for change in some form. The performances discussed in Chapter 2 on history and memory for instance question the ways how historical trauma is dealt with in contemporary Indonesia and Chapter 5 looks at the transition happening in Indonesia which impacts individual and national identity.

In the introduction to *Contemporary Southeast Asian Performance*, Matthew Isaac Cohen and Laura Noszlopy note that national culture has “particular meaning and power in post-colonial contexts as an authoritative discourse informing representations of creative practice as well as practice itself” (1). However,

the sources of inspiration for contemporary performance makers are not bounded by their nations of origin. Their social networks are not limited to their fellow citizens. Many aspire to be recognised far beyond the national boundaries of the countries they were born into. In this global context, the national identity of an art form or artist cannot be taken for granted. The nation, to be meaningful, must be actively imagined and performed into existence in specific staging grounds and socio-political contexts (1-2).

They furthermore argue that “Southeast Asia’s nations are not monocultural monads but geopolitical products of modern histories of colonialism and nationalism. These countries were once called ‘new states,’ but are made up of culturally overlapping old societies” (3). These multi-layered facets also find their way in the creation of theatre forms, not least modern theatre that mirrors the contemporary environment of society.

From the beginnings of Indonesian modern theatre, the idea of living in a post-colonial nation seemed arguably to be of less importance to theatre practitioners than the formation of a truly Indonesian identity, and/or concepts of language and tradition. Despite his focus on postcolonial theatre, Winet maintains that modern theatre in Indonesia has “never stepped beyond the shadow of coloniality” (*Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre* xv). Indeed, as the nation of Indonesia did not exist prior to colonialism and independence, all articulations of an Indonesian history and culture are, for Winet, primarily postcolonial projects: “modern Indonesian theatre remains in a state of cultural debt in its dramaturgy, repertoire, pedagogy, patronage, spatial discourse and imbrication in global neoliberal economies.[...] Indonesian history has been haunted by ‘spectres of comparison’ with powerful external others” (4). Keith Foulcher, on the other hand, finds in Indonesian post-war literature a remarkable disinterest in Dutch legacies. He suggests that:

Indonesian literature, in both its radical and conservative traditions, became linked to the aspirations of the state, on the side of building the future, incorporating the marginal, and subduing the breakaway. It never looked back to ask the questions that produce postcolonialist answers, such as ‘What has become of us?’ and ‘What has made us what we are?’ Rather, it looked forward, and asked, ‘How can the national and nationalist project be furthered?’ and ‘What is to be incorporated?’ (‘In Search of 161).

From a performative perspective the idea of living in a postcolonial era is definitely present in some current theatre works, and has been present in earlier works as well. One example is the play *Siti Jamiliah* (1956) by Yubar Ayub, which was published in the second volume of

The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama 2 edited by Michael Bodden.²⁷ In Teater Garasi's trilogy *Waktu Batu*, which will be discussed in the chapter on social transition, Dutch textual fragments are used to comment on the colonial period, which Teater Garasi's director Yudi Ahmad Tajudin felt to be an important factor in creating and shaping Indonesian modernity/modern life. However, I would dispute that this is related to being "haunted by 'spectres of comparison with powerful external others'" (Winet *Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre* 4). It is rather a dialogue with the past that informs the theatre practitioners' present and is therefore important to questions of identity and transition. Thus, for this narrative of modern theatre, the discourses of post-colonialism will not play an important role. I agree with Foulcher on the point that the foregrounding of the Indonesian nation as a new and multi-faceted entity was much more important than dealing with the Dutch legacy. Foulcher argues that "whereas most postcolonial nations struggled to articulate their new identities in a European language, postcolonial Indonesians articulated their struggle in their own new language," and "whereas most postcolonial nations articulated 'nativist' projects in relation to 'pre-colonial' traditions, Indonesia's lack of a common history necessitated an emphasis on new traditions" (qtd. in Winet *Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre* 6). Plays and other literary works of the early post-independence period clearly evidence this. Although there were efforts to "indigenize" drama in the late 1950s and early 60s, which is a typical post-colonial phenomenon (Bodden *The Lontar Anthology* 1f.), many plays during this period embraced a social realism that displayed domestic life, gender, traditional familial customs etc. of the era on the stage in the new national language *bahasa Indonesia*. While there was a focus on Western plays in general as a reference for theatre work, many of the new Indonesian scripts did not predominantly deal with the Dutch legacy. (This will be discussed in more detail in section "1950 – 1967: National theatre and the state".)

Paradigmatic of the period was playwright Utuy Tatang Sontani. His plays are gritty samples for socio-realist work of the time. In *Awal and Mira* (Awal and Mira, 1951) he tells the story of coffeeshop owner Mira and Awal, an educated young man who is in love with her. The play is set in 1951, the year of its publication, only two years after Indonesia officially gained

²⁷ The play is set in the traditional Minangkabau society of Western Sumatra. It tells the story of Siti Jamilah who takes her own life and the lives of her children after her husband Lawas Simarang divorces her to marry a younger woman. In introduction to the second volume of *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama* Michael Bodden suggests that "Siti Jamilah projects a radical nationalist anger that is reminiscent of strong Soekarno-era political feelings toward the former Dutch colonizers. [...] Ayub's play also represents the Dutch, with considerable historical accuracy, as ruling through collaboration with local elites – in this case, Laras Simawang – to the detriment of their Indonesian subjects" (xiii).

independence. Times are difficult, the masses are struggling, and there is not much money to be spent. The Old Man points out that Mira is “performing a useful service” with her coffee shop because “people who can’t bear staying at home at night have to get out and go somewhere, and they can sit here and talk and forget all their troubles” (Bodden *The Lontar Anthology* 190). People are frustrated and disillusioned. When the radio proclaims that “it is the responsibility of the women folk [...] to be more diligent in fighting side by side with the menfolk to build a peaceful society [...]”, Awal dismisses this as “nonsense of clowns” (179). Awal wants to persuade Mira to run away with him and live together but Mira says her responsibility is to the coffee shop. In the end it is revealed that she lost both her legs in the war. The play draws on notions of humanity, hope, trust, and the need to believe in something in order to be able to move forwards. That something can be anything- even just one’s own self.

The focus of the present narrative of modern theatre in Indonesia will be its relation to politics and civil society. Modern theatre has often been closely related to political developments in Indonesia and was used as a vehicle for transporting ideas of socio-political and cultural transformation. This has been discussed, amongst others, by Michael Bodden (2002, 2010) and Barbara Hatley (1999, 2006). In the 1920s and 30s theatre was considered to be an important tool by elitist intellectuals for paving the way to an independent, united Indonesian nation. In later years, it has sometimes been affiliated with political groups, such as LEKRA, the cultural arm of the Indonesian Communist party, and later, under Suharto, it was often used as a means of expressing political discontent in various ways, increasingly so towards the end of the New Order when theatre artists joined forces with activists and NGOs to dismantle practices of the regime. This chapter is an attempt to embed these differing ideas within the larger context of a history of modern theatre in Indonesia, mainly focusing on developments in Java where most of the modern theatre groups discussed in this thesis are based. Using Java as a point of origin for the discussion will arguably provide the most eclectic approach because Java is where the modern theatrical scene is most diverse, where ideas of nation and identity were first formed and debated; Java was the centre of nationalist struggle and has been the centre of governance for many decades since. However, through the introduction of political decentralization after the end of the New Order, the provinces have been given more power in executive, legislative and judicial matters. This decentralization is also reflected in the organization of the theatre scene and in the rise of modern theatre groups outside of the urban centres, as discussed in the introduction.

1891 – 1903: *Komedi Stamboel* – a “trans-ethnic theatre”?

Barbara Hatley notes that practices of “*teater* [...] appeared in the early twentieth century as part of the transformative changes taking place in Indonesia at that time—intensified urbanisation, European influence and emergent nationalist politics—and are marked by that history” (*Javanese Performances* 11). The first form of popular, modern theatre in Indonesia outside the realm of traditional art forms emerged at the end of the 19th century, when the Dutch East Indies were experiencing an era of new departures. It was in Haji Misbach’s terms a “*djaman balik boeono* (Javanese: age of the world upside down)” (qtd. in Anderson ‘Language, Fantasy, Revolution’ 33). The first railway line between Semarang and Surakarta had opened in 1870, transporting not only sugar, as initially intended, but also people, across Java. From then on, fire-spitting wagons could be seen passing by both day and night, connecting hitherto alien landscapes with goods, people and, most importantly, news from other parts of the world. Newspapers were printed and distributed across the archipelago and the *mesin bitjara* (literally: the speaking machine) and other European technologies were introduced (see Cohen 2006, Anderson 1991, 1996, 1998). In short: “Modernity echoed throughout the Indies” (Suryadi 270).

In these exciting times, in accordance with the zeitgeist, a new form of popular theatre emerged in Indonesia: the *komedi stambul* [*stamboel*].²⁸ According to Adrian Vickers *stambul* was “a rejection of the formalised and highly conventional nature of indigenous theatre in favour of novelty and exoticism” (68). The first *stambul* troupe was formed in 1891 in Java’s port town of Surabaya, under the direction of Auguste Mahieu, who was of Dutch descent and whose ancestors arrived in the Dutch East Indies in 1804. The troupe called itself *Komedi Stamboel*,²⁹ a name that would later come to define the genre. Up to this point traditional theatre was either part of religious ceremonies or was associated with language related groups, a process similar to the political stage at that time. The Javanese court of Yogyakarta and its performances of *wayang wong* were a stronghold of cultural demarcation. Since its reestablishment by Sultan Hamengkubuwana I in 1755, *wayang wong* served as a

²⁸ *Stamboel* with oe is used in old Malay spelling, *stambul* with u is the contemporary spelling. I will use the latter spelling unless citing the older one in another author’s work.

²⁹ Although Mahieu’s troupe was the first on the archipelago, they were soon followed by others, such as *Komedi Perzie*, founded 1893 in Semarang.

state ritual to strengthen the legitimacy of the Sultan as the true ruler of Mataram and the rightful heir of the first legendary king of Java, Wisnu (Soedarsono 40). Barbara Hatley sees within this symbolic embodiment of Javanese noble identity the “cultivation of theatre by power-holders to celebrate their greatness and consolidate their control” (‘Theatre as Cultural Resistance’ 322). In this sense, it was a very exclusive notion of displaying identity, in contrast to the idea of theatre as a form of cultural resistance against current power holders, a role modern theatre would later take on.

Influences on *komedi stambul* are manifold and can be traced back to European, Indian and Chinese sources. European opera, which in 1836 could be seen for the first time in the capital, was apparently very popular in the mid-19th century, although ticket prices were usually high and “attendance was limited to Europeans and the thin upper crust of affluent, Dutch-speaking Asians” (Cohen *The Komedie Stamboel* 36). However, this form of European entertainment certainly must have held a deep fascination for all kinds of people as it was something new and previously unseen. Another influence on *komedi stambul* was *wayang parsi*, travelling Indian troupes, which performed widely around the archipelago. Although they used Hindi as a stage-language, these shows were also highly favoured and, in contrast to European opera performances, were not only open to a small upper class. One reason for this popularity might have been their “fanciful” and “brightly glittering” costumes (Camoens 3) and music, stylistically reminiscent of today’s Bollywood movies. Cohen and Noszlopy note that:

Parsi theatre companies from the Indian subcontinent, which toured Southeast Asia extensively in the second half of the nineteenth century, greatly impressed local audiences with their massala mix of lively songs and dances, elaborate costumes, declamatory acting, romantic love interests, adventure, supernatural apparitions and stage spectacle (6).

Southeast Chinese opera had also been immensely popular among Chinese settlers of the archipelago since the 18th century. As mentioned in the first volume of *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama*, in nineteenth-century Chinatowns in Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan, Chinese opera was staged in both permanent and temporary theatres. Performances in western Indonesian public theatres attracted ethnically mixed audiences, similar to those for *komedi stambul*, as the Chinese performers often used Malay language. Plays however were mainly derived from Chinese classical tales (Cohen *The Komedie Stamboel* xi). Noszlopy and

Cohen argue that these differing influences led to an “internationalization of Southeast Asia’s performing arts” (6).

This internationalization becomes evident in the choice of plays performed by Mahieu’s troupe Komedi Stambul. Mahieu, in order to attract a varied crowd from different social classes, strove to create performances with a broad appeal. He often took his repertoire from fairy tales and melodramatic stories about noblemen or demons, and legends from India or the Arab World, such as *The Arabian Nights* (Cohen *The Komedi Stamboel* 45-46). Apart from European opera scores such as Bellini’s *Norma* and Indian stories, the ensemble also included Indonesian myths and Mahieu adapted some of Shakespeare’s plays for a Southeast Asian audience (309). As a hybrid form of theatre, *komedi stambul* embraced European stagecraft such as the proscenium stage, lighting, and management, but adapted it for the Southeast Asian stage. For the first time in history, actors were also performing in Malay and not only addressing one ethnic group, as for instance was the case with Chinese artists, but reaching people from different ethnic backgrounds. *Stambul* shows embraced elements from diverse cultural backgrounds and theatrical genres, and their audiences that came from different social classes; it was a form of theatre that could cater for a large audience beyond social, religious, ethnic or political boundaries. Saini K.M correctly states that *stambul*, “did not express the awareness and aspirations towards nationhood,” and was not only highly commercialized but also influenced by Western productions. However, thanks to a common language, *stambul* could easily be received by many ethnic groups, including Chinese and Eurasians. Quite suitably therefore, this theatre is referred to as “trans-ethnic theatre.” Although it can be argued that large portions of society probably did not speak any Malay as it was a lingua franca for traders and certainly most common in urban areas, everybody could be part of the audience, enjoying the songs and costumes and, as such, being part of the community. Lo and Gilbert argue that these early forms of travelling theatre are part of a “colonial cosmopolitanism”, as travelling shows would often follow colonial trading routes (24). Modern theatre in Indonesia would only have this kind of international, cosmopolitan flair until the 1930s, as afterwards *teater* was to become more elitist.

Unfortunately there are not many *komedi stambul* scripts accessible today. One play that can be found in translation in the first volume of *The Lontar Anthology of Indonesian Drama* (edited by Matthew Isaac Cohen) is H. Krafft’s play *The Boatman’s Tale*. According to the translator, this play was published circa 1893 (an exact date cannot be given) in a booklet

titled *Playscripts to be used for komedi stambul*³⁰ (Cohen *The Lontar Anthology* 2). In contrast to later literary works that realistically historicize the late colonial period, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*, *The Boatman's Tale* reads much more like a fairy tale, as open reflection on colonialism was not possible at that time.³¹ As a result, *The Boatman's Tale* is a story that could take place anywhere. The main character is Ali, a young man who enjoys playing his guitar. However, his mother Brasidah wants him "to make something of himself" as she is "old and unable to provide for him anymore" (22). Ali therefore decides to become a boatman. As the play goes on—due to luck, leading a good life and not forgetting his friends—Ali makes a fortune, inherits the title of a merchant and marries Saidah, the woman he loves. The play ends with Ali reflecting on what he has achieved: "Who could have possibly anticipated, that I might become well-off like this? My fate has now been actuated. I have wealth in the thousands, what bliss. I can say with all honesty and truth. I like my work and my life" (27). Ali's story bears a resemblance to the American dream—the self-made man going from rags to riches—and the play can be read as a parable for a life in which everything is possible if one only tries hard enough. This theme also, perhaps, embodied the spirit of late 19th century Indonesia when people were living in an era of new departures: with industrialization, modernity and novelty right in front of their eyes, everything was, at least in dreams, possible.

Towards the late 1890s, Mahieu's plays became more realist. In 1898, the troupe for the first time performed a social drama within a contemporary setting (*Secrets of Semarang by day and night*). Mahieu, who himself was of European descent and whose family had immigrated to Indonesia, became active in the *Indische Bond*, which promoted the idea of the Indies for the 'Indiers' and *Indisch* nationalism. Its intellectual founder was Edward Douwes Dekker, author of *Max Havelaar*, who, as Anthony Reid points out, was "one of the few early Indonesian nationalists who could accept a Dutch created historical unity with equanimity" as he was a Eurasian uncommitted to any particular Indonesian cultural tradition (282). Douwes Dekker and Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo were the founding fathers of a short-lived political party named *Nationale Indische Partij*, which was based upon the idea of Eurasian-Indonesian co-operation and which, according to Kahin, featured the motto "The Indies for those who make their home there" (*Nationalism and Revolution* 70). Mahieu's political

³⁰ *Boekoe Komidi Terpake bagi Komidi Stamboel*

³¹ *Bumi Manusia* (This earth of mankind) is the first part of a tetralogy followed by *Anak Semua Bangsa* (Child of all nations), *Jejak Langkah* (Footsteps) and *Rumah Kaca* (House of glass).

engagement with this group was short-lived as he died in 1903 and, despite this brief period of political activism, it can be assumed that Mahieu and his *Komedie Stamboel* did not perceive their theatre as political, nor were they perceived by their audience as part of a political movement in the realm of an emerging nationalism. Mahieu did not address his audience as citizens of a potential Indonesian nation, but as a crowd to be entertained. As previously mentioned, shows were intended as pure entertainment and a commercial enterprise.

However, Benedict Anderson has suggested that *komedi stambul* provided some of the tools for communication and public speech that underpinned nationalism. He maintains that political activists at the beginning of the 20th century often borrowed rhetorical patterns, as well as their gestural repertoire for presenting speeches in the newly political environment from *stambul* ('Language, Fantasy, Revolution' 36). As a concept, this seemed natural because, for the first time in Indonesia's history, 'natives' stood up on public stages and addressed large numbers of people they did not know with words more or less fully prepared or memorized beforehand (36). It can be argued that this early beginning of an Indonesian political culture is intertwined with an idea of civil society. Anderson goes further, arguing that "the turn of the century urban stage offered a conception of representation, which linked it directly to the new world of politics" ('Language, Fantasy, Revolution' 36). In two of his essays—"On the Logic of Seriality" and "Language, Fantasy, Revolution. Java: 1900-1950"—Anderson notes that the fixation of characters in traditional Indonesian theatre, where Arjuna can only be Arjuna in one possible way, is broken on the popular stage. Characters here are types, "general categories of real fictive persons, whom anyone, in principle, could 'act'" ('On the Logic of Seriality' 37). Following this example, early politicians went on the political stage personifying leaders, revolutionaries and so on (37). If this early political movement was indeed the first civil society movement in Indonesia that aimed to achieve transition on a political level and address state issues, it can be argued that popular theatre at the end of the 19th century played an important role in forming the political identity of its members. This idea can be followed through the development of modern popular theatre from 1900 to the mid-1930s. After Auguste Mahieu's death in 1903 the popularity of *komedi stambul* declined and gave way to different forms of theatre, one of which, the *opera Melayu*, was in style and content very much influenced by *komedi stambul*.

1925 – 1935: The Populist Theatre of the early 20th century

In the 1920s and 30s two new forms of theatre emerged in Java, both of which can be described as modern, though they were diametrically opposed in their means of addressing Indonesian citizens. One was the political student theatre with strong links to the national movement, which will be discussed later in the subsection 1926 – 1941: The “new” national theatre and *polemik kebudayaan*. The other was a form of popular theatre, commonly referred to as *opera Melayu* (Malay opera), an alternate term for *bangsawan* and *komedi stambul*, which found a large audience mainly in Jakarta. Many scholars consider this genre to be Indonesia’s first professional theatre (see Oemarjati 1971, Sumardjo 1996). *Opera Melayu* performances can be roughly defined as realistic psychological plays with musical intervals. Arguably, the best known groups in this genre were Jakarta-based Miss Riboet’s Orion, established by the Chinese Tio Tek Djien in 1925, and Teater Dardanella, set up by the Russian Willy Klimanoff, known as A. Piëdro, one year later. Other troupes of the same genre that were able to draw huge crowds included the Padangsche Opera, The Union Dalia Opera or the Malay Opera of Malacca. Common to all of them was their performance style, a form of opera production that successfully fulfilled its role as an entertaining pop culture medium. They preferred their art to be called *tooneel* (also: *tonil*, from Dutch: theatre) to maintain proximity to European mainstream theatre and their most important goals were to entertain crowds and make profit.

Especially in terms of organization and *modus operandi* *opera Melayu* was closer to what is today considered modern drama than was *komedi stambul*. Fandy Hutari highlights key modern characteristics, such as working discipline and the growing importance of the role of a director in Teater Dardanella’s work. “Dardanella was a performance collective that considered discipline as most important. [...] Although improvised performances could still be found, there was already a person who inherited the function of a director” (18),³² the so-called *programma meester*, who, according to Boen S. Oemarjati, reigned with an “iron hand” (qtd. in Hutari 31). Another characteristic was its system of featuring popular actors and big names like Dewi Dja or Tan Tjeng Bok, also referred to as the “Douglas Fairbanks of Java”, who pulled large crowds into the theatre.

³² *Dardanella adalah perkumpulan sandiwara yang mengutamakan disiplin [...] meskipun masih terdapat permainan secara improvisasi tetapi telah ada seorang yang memiliki fungsi seperti sutradara.*

Scripts of the time often dealt with morality in some form. This can be seen, for instance, in the stories of *Dr. Samsi* and *Gadis Desa* (Village girl) written by Andjar Asmara in the early 1930s, which both show conflicts between an experienced character and an inexperienced one, who is still young and “has not yet tasted the saltiness of life”.³³ *Dr. Samsi* is a sentimental story about a doctor and a switched child, set in Batavia (as Jakarta was known prior to independence) in 1920. At the end of the play Dr. Samsi’s son learns that he is not the child of the mother he grew up with but of Samsi’s affair with another woman, Sukaesih, who was seduced and then abandoned by Dr. Samsi. According to Matthew I. Cohen, the translator, some of the play’s contemporaries believed that the play aimed “to stir up the feelings of intellectuals throughout Indonesia”³⁴ (Cohen *The Lontar Anthology* 119), though the destiny of the characters is connected to very human failures and so the story could appeal to a larger audience. *Dr. Samsi* presents a social portrait of people living in colonial Batavia that could be read as a statement about, or even a criticism of, contemporary social and political circumstances, as Cohen points out (119). It is certainly a morality play, albeit without particular proposals for improving the situation. With this reading, Dardanella’s plays could almost be seen as a light, entertaining version of educational theatre.

In the mid-1930s, with the growing importance of film as a form of urban entertainment and many former opera stars becoming movie stars, the popularity of commercial productions à la Dardanella declined. In January 1935, Teater Dardanella “left Java on a planned four and a half year world tour” (Cohen *Performing Otherness* 184). According to Sumardjo, travel destinations included China, Indochina, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, India and Tibet. The troupe also travelled the Middle East (Baghdad, Basra, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem) and later, members of Dardanella even went as far as Europe and America. Some of them did not return to Indonesia and, as a consequence, the end of the tour also brought the end of Teater Dardanella (Sumardjo 120; Cohen *Performing Otherness* 184f). During their travels they called themselves “The Royal Bali-Java Dance”, as recounted in 1982 by Dewi Dja, one of the famous actresses of Dardanella (‘Primadona yang rindu pulang’). Particularly striking about this tour is the fact that the group only performed *tooneel* on a few occasions; they mainly focused on Indonesian dances and songs, such as “Serimpi, Bedoyo, Golek, Jangger,

³³ *tjermin perbandingan bagi jang telah berpengalaman dan tjontoh-teladan bagi jang masih moeda belia, jang beloem banyak mengetjap garam penghidoean.* (Dardanella. Opera Melayu)

³⁴ “menggemparkan perasaan kaum intellect di seantero Indonesia”.

Durga, Penca Minangkabau, Kong, Penca Sunda, songs from Ambon, dances from Papua and more” (Hutari 23). Benedict Anderson writes about the imagined community inherent in every nation, noting that communities are imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (*Imagined Communities* 224). Teater Dardanella evoked ideas of nationhood by showing Indonesian dances and songs from different regions of the colonized islands. Their repertoire thus already reflected Indonesia as a cultural community, as the diverse nation it would officially become after 1949.

1926 – 1941: The “new” national theatre and *polemik kebudayaan*

At the height of *opera Melayu*'s popularity, another form of theatre closely related to the national movement began to emerge. Political subversion in support of a nationalist revolution began to take hold among groups of mainly young, well-educated men, who forced the Indonesian nation-state into history. During this period of political transition, theatre was, arguably, active as a motor of civil society. In 1908, the founding of *Budi Utomo* officially ushered in the beginning of the national awakening. Youth organizations such as *Jong Java*³⁵ or the *Jong Sumatranen Bond* (1917) were initially formed along ethnic lines, strengthening communal identities, and emphasizing the cultural heritage of specific regions. However, in the early 20th century with the development of the nationalist movement, the focus on an Indonesian identity had become more conspicuous and the struggle of how to best define this new identity became a major concern for artists and intellectuals, as did the longing for imminent political transition (Ricklefs 211f).

The aforementioned youth organizations were part of a civil society movement in Indonesia that shared a desire to bring about independence. In Robert Cox's terms, it can be argued that their political participation was “a surrogate for revolution to construct an alternate social and world order” (3). This was also a major concern for theatre practitioners. Whereas political activists were fighting for a new governmental order, cultural activists were interested in how best to form the new Indonesian identity that would result from the political transition. Often the political and cultural sides joined their interests, as many activists were involved on both sides of the struggle. At the *sumpah pemuda* (youth pledge) of 1928 “the cultural and

³⁵ This organization was established under the name *Tri Koro Dharmo* in 1915, but was renamed *Jong Java* in 1918 (Ricklefs 211).

political trends towards Indonesian unity were formally joined [...]” (Ricklefs 222). On this occasion, the participants proclaimed their commitment to the threefold ideal of one nation, one people and one language. Such congresses were often also supported by theatre performances. This new form of political national theatre is sometimes referred to as *closet drama*, drama that is not staged, the fight is a literary one, though this term is not entirely fitting as performances such as Muhammad Yamin’s *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (Ken Arok and Ken Dedes) on 27 October 1928 at the *Kongres Indonesia Muda* (Congress of Young Indonesia) in Jakarta demonstrate that theatrical performances were indeed used in support of the national movement. Subsequently, the play was performed at least 39 times (Teeuw 27).

The ethos of a unified nation was reflected on stage and in literature. Both artistic forms of expression were seen as crucial tools for articulating nationalist ideas and provoking change. Most writers, however, were intellectuals writing mainly for a rather small circle of peers, journalists or students who were themselves involved in the national movement. As such, although their voices were strong, their audience was far smaller than that of the cosmopolitan theatre that had gone before – the *komedi stambul*.

Indonesian authors of these early years, like Sanusi and Armjin Pane, were men of letters more than men of the stage. Almost all of them were educated in Dutch schools, a fact that certainly influenced not only their work but also their views on ideas of nation and cultural identity. Their bilingualism, according to Anderson, “meant access [...] to modern Western language in the broadest sense, and, in particular to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century” (*Imagined Communities* 116). Dutch education for Indonesians had its roots in an ethical reform policy that had been established by Queen Wilhelmina in 1901. Although Western education was initially treated with fascination, it was perceived by Indonesia’s elite with some anxiety as it rendered a sense of cultural dislocation. To overcome this estrangement from their cultural roots, these writers were:

seeking to reconcile their perceptions of European cultural norms (their ‘modernity’) with a profound emotional and psychological attachment to their indigenous identity, uniting as “moderns” to foster their “traditional” heritage (Foulcher *Pujangga Baru* 2).

This position was however challenged by other writers of the epoch, and was a major point of debate in the *Polemik Kebudayaan* (Polemics of Culture) movement in 1935. Essays on the

subject of what the new Indonesian culture and new Indonesian identity should look like were published in the literary magazine *Poedjangga Baroe*, which soon became a key media for disseminating these nationalist ideas (Foulcher *Pujangga Baru* 2; Teeuw 6). Its editors were Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, Sanusi and Armijn Pane. In one article, Sanusi Pane discusses a reconciliation between Arjuna, the Pandawa hero of the Indian Mahabaratha epic, and Goethe's Faust, as a metaphorical resolution to the tension between tradition and Westernization. In his essay *Persatuan Indonesia* (Indonesia's unity) he argues that:

the West accentuates the body with the result that it is forgetting about the spiritual. The mind is used to subjugate the power of nature. It can be characterized as Faust, an expert on knowledge (Goethe), who sacrifices his soul to dominate the body. The East considers the spirit as important with the result that it is forgetting about the body. The mind is used to find a way to unite itself with nature. It can be characterized as Arjuna, who lived as an ascetic at Indrakila. The perfect bow would be to unite Faust with Arjuna, assimilating materialism, intellectualism and individualism with spiritualism, feeling and collectivism (23).³⁶

Pane's thinking contrasts with that of Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, however, who considers dynamic modernism to be the only way forward for Indonesia's progress. In the collection of essays *Polemik Kebudayaan*, he writes that the concept of Indonesia is a 20th century construct (14) and that the new Indonesian culture needs to be "dynamic" like Western societies in order to stay competitive as a nation-state (16). This dynamism could be borrowed from the West, just as Indonesia had previously borrowed from and adapted Hindu or Arab culture (one example for this is *wayang kulit*). He argues that elements of pre-Indonesian society should still be included in the new Indonesian culture, but that these elements must be transformed so that they engender a modern meaning that is coherent within the new Indonesian spirit (18). These two positions exemplify the eclectic cultural discussion among Indonesian thinkers in early 20th century.

It is commonly considered that the origins of modern Indonesian drama on a "literary level" lie with the first drama written in the Indonesian language by a native writer: Rustam

³⁶ Barat, sudah seperti kita lihat, mengutamakan djasmani, sehingga lupa akan djiwa. Akalnja jang dipakainja menaklukan tenaga alam. Ia bersifat Faust, ahli pengetahuan (Goethe), jang mengorbankan djiwanyja, asal menguasai djasmani. Timur mementingkan rohani, sehingga lupa akan djasmani. Akalnja dipakainja menjari djalan memersatukan dirinja denggan alam. Ia bersifat Ardjuna, jang bertapa di Indrakila. Haluan jang sempurna ialah menjatukan Faust dengan Ardjuna memesrakan materialism, intellectualisme dan individualisme dengan spiritualisme, perasaan dan collectivisme.

Effendi's 1928 play *Bebasari* (which Evan Darwin Winet translates as "Sweet Liberty")³⁷ (see Saini ; Ikranegara 'The Making of Indonesian Theatre'; Akhmad). This is true in so far as *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language) was only officially acknowledged following the famous youth pledge in 1928. There is, however, a history of published texts in the Malay language that dates back earlier, arguably originating from Chinese settler communities. Claudine Salmon notes that the "first printed works in book form by Chinese writers in Malay language seem to have appeared towards 1870" (16). From 1900 onwards, the Dutch Indies press in Malay also started to play a more important role: "[Malay] was the language in which the masses could be reached; it was the language in which the masses expected to hear new things which lay outside the daily, local sphere of interest" (Teeuw 7). For writers, this development also offered wider opportunities for publication, such as the aforementioned magazine *Poedjangga Baroe*, for instance.

Effendi's allegorical play about Indonesia's struggle against the Dutch tells the story of beautiful Princess Bebasari (*bebas* means "free"), who is kidnapped by the demonic king of Langka, Rawana, the main antagonist in the *Ramayana*,³⁸ but he is later freed by Budjangga,³⁹ an Indonesian youth. The closing lines of the play express Princess Bebasari's feeling towards the national project in a rather euphuistic way that, as such, may reflect Effendi's attitude towards the same:

At a glance like a dream,
That is the desire of our epoch,
Love is an effort to fly so high,
Love towards our nation/people/folk.⁴⁰

³⁷ The introductory notes to the play's publication from 1953 tell the reader that *Bebasari* was published for the first time in 1928. Others, however, set its year of publication in 1926 (Sumardjo 243) or even in 1925. Rustam Effendi himself states in the introductory notes to his play *Pertjikan Permenungan* that "*Pertjikan Permenungan* was born in Padang in March 1925, not long after "Bebasari" had been published" (Effendi; Teeuw 18).

³⁸ After the Mahabharata, the Ramayana is one of the most important Indian national epics. It tells the story of Prince Rama, who is banned from his father's kingdom into the forest. Later in the story he defeats Rawana, the demonic king of Langka.

³⁹ The word *budjangga* can be translated as sage, scholar, wise person, man of letters or poet.

⁴⁰ *Selintas lalu sebagai mimpi, Itulah kehendak zaman sekarang, Asmara sajak usaha yang tinggi, Asmara kepada Bangsa sendiri.*

As indicated in my translation above, the word *bangsa* not only means nation, but also people, or folk. The writer could thus refer to love towards the nation and the implied longing for a united Indonesia, while also suggesting the necessity of standing together as one people in order to form the nation. From its historical context, this can probably be considered as intentional; the idea also appears later in the famous expression “one nation, one people, one language.”

Similar ideas were discussed by Sanusi Pane, a Sumatran who, like many other men of that period, had moved to Java in the 1920s for his education. His last work for the stage, the play *Manusia Baru* (The new human), was published in 1940 but was never actually brought to the stage (Brandon 130). The playwright’s central concern within *Manusia Baru* is the new human being forming a new identity, taking the best virtues from both tradition and modernity, Arjuna and Faust. Pane reflects upon modernity and the state, the workers’ difficult situation in a newly industrialized country, the new spirited human being, old against modern virtues, people who fear the dawning of modernity and cling to old religion and customs (55), and the position of independent women in a modern nation (10, 32). This last point is quite striking as the female character of Saraswati has a central role in the play. She is strong, knows what she wants, and more than once refers to her *jiwa* (soul) or becoming *berjiwa* (inspired, alive), which can be read as a form of enlightenment. At the end of *Manusia Baru* it is also Saraswati who decides to live with Surendranath Das and not vice versa. “Mother, I am in love with Surendranath Das and I will accompany him wherever he goes. I hope mother understands that I have a soul of my own” (62).⁴¹ On a higher level, her personal liberation could also be read as the liberation of Indonesia.

The play is located in Madras, India. There is more than one possible reason for this choice of setting. Pane may have been led by the wish to hide the play’s underlying nationalist message for fear of possible censorship or punishment by the colonial authorities. Another reason could be the influence of Rabindranath Tagore. The work of this Nobel Prize winning Indian poet and philosopher, who was a contemporary of Pane (though much older), was very influential for the group of intellectuals around *Poedjangga Baroe*. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that Pane had visited India in 1929-30, where he was an eyewitness to the

⁴¹ *Ibu, saya cinta kepada Surendranath Das dan saya akan mengikuti dia ke manapun ia pergi. Saya harap ibu mengerti, bahwa saya mempunyai jiwa sendiri.*

effects of colonialism in another country. When analyzing the play it becomes apparent that the author was writing about Indonesia and his feelings towards the united Indonesian nation, especially towards the end of the play when Saraswati expresses her hope for a united 'India' (62). According to Rajendra's last remarks in the play, this unity will make all the difference. Yet, the longing for one nation expressed by both Saraswati and Rajendra resonates strongly with its Indonesian context.

Indeed, I see India united, I see the Indian people happy, peasants, workers, capital, ethnic groups educated to work together in a new society. An India that is moving, alive, prosperous, the new Indian men (64).⁴²

With plays like *Manusia Baru*, artists tried to reach the nascent Indonesians as citizens of a country yet to become, stirring the revolutionary spirit that would result in political transition. At this point in history, however, modern drama only really touched the very thin upper crust of Dutch-Indonesian-speaking intellectuals and did not reach out on a grassroots level. Ironically, it was the Japanese occupation that awakened the spirit of Indonesian togetherness, what Takdir Alisjabahna called *semangat ke-Indonesiaan* [spirit of Indonesian-ness] (Takdir 12), among the rural population. The Japanese invaded Indonesia in 1942 during the Second World War, and the occupation was initially considered positive by many as the Japanese had liberated Indonesia from the Dutch.

1942 – 1945: The Japanese influence

Although Indonesia was not yet an independent state and the Indonesians were not yet in a position of real political power, Indonesians could finally call themselves Indonesians in public. The name of the capital of Java was changed from Batavia to Jakarta, and signs of Dutch rule, such as street names, disappeared. Briefly, it was even possible to sing "Indonesia the Great" in public and hoist the red and white national flag that had been introduced for the first time at a youth congress in 1929 (Vickers 87). This openness did not last long, however. Indigenous political activity was banned "within a fortnight of the Japanese victory and all political parties formally disbanded four months later" (Elson 98). A direct governing role for Indonesian leaders was thus made impossible. This also included groups promoting

⁴² *Saya melihat India bersatu sesungguhnya, saya melihat rakyat India berbahagia, tani, buruh, modal, kaum terpelajar bekerja bersama-sama dalam masyarakat baru. India yang bergerak, yang hidup, yang subur, India Manusia Baru.*

Indonesian nationalism or Indonesian cultural identity. In fact, every public action that could not be controlled by the Japanese was curtailed.

The Dutch and their allies were unable to resist the Japanese invasion and within a few months of the first attack the Japanese overpowered them. They did not hesitate in establishing cultural propaganda tools aimed at achieving their goal of creating a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (known in Indonesian as *Asia Timur Raya*), with the Japanese as the leading force and with Indonesia as a dependable partner. As Aiko Kurasawa points out, the Japanese “considered it indispensable for their war effort to mobilize the whole society (total mobilization) and entirely change the people’s mentality” (Kurasawa 59). This intention was reflected in many levels of society, especially in the cultural sector which was used by the Japanese for propaganda purposes. From June 1942 until the end of the occupation in 1945, the propaganda department *Sendenbu* controlled all propaganda activities in the mass media sector, which included movies, newspapers, pamphlets, books, posters, photographs, music, broadcasting, speech, traditional performance and the modern *sandiwara* dramas. Dutch and English, as official languages for writing, were banned under the Japanese as was the term *tonil* or *tooneel* (the Dutch term for theatre). “The Japanese military government deliberately wanted to get rid of this term that ‘stank of’ the West” (Hutari 8).⁴³ Indonesian, together with Japanese, became the only languages used for official purposes, including education, which made Indonesian more accessible to large parts of society than it had ever been before. As Teeuw puts it, “there was nothing else but *bahasa Indonesia* to succeed Dutch in all its functions” (Teeuw 106), a fact that certainly also supported the increasing “Indonesian spirit”. Mohammad Hatta and Sukarno had also mentioned that an occupation of Indonesia might help the independence cause.

In April 1943, the *Keimin Bunka Shidosho* or *Poesat Keboedajaan* (Cultural Centre) was established in Jakarta.⁴⁴ Its main task was to promote traditional Indonesian arts, to introduce and disseminate Japanese culture, and to train and educate Indonesian artists. Very strict censorship rules were imposed however, and it was prohibited from publishing written work that was “inimical or harmful to the Japanese cause” (Teeuw 108). Civil society as a public forum, autonomous from or opposed to state order, was not possible in such an environment,

⁴³ *Pemerintah militer Jepang sengaja menghilangkan istilah yang ‘berbau’ Barat.*

⁴⁴ *Djwawa Baroe*, No. 3, 1943

nor were plays that criticized Japanese political activity. In 1943, the magazine *Djawa Baroe* announced the opening of *Keimin Bunka Shidosho*. In this article, the leader and manager of the department for *sandiwara* and dance, K. Yasoeda, explained what he hoped to achieve with the establishment of this cultural centre. Its first and foremost goal was the creation of a new culture that would embrace all Asian states.⁴⁵ Yasoeda expressed a desire for *sandiwara* to be used as a “fine weapon in the creation of a ‘mind war’.”⁴⁶ Well-known writers and artists, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Muhammad Yamin, Sanusi Pane or Armijn Pane were recruited for the war effort, producing art for propaganda purposes and working actively for *Sendenbu* (the propaganda department) and *Poesat Keboedajaan*. Here, for the first time, it was possible for nationalists to bring forward, develop and spread a “popular understanding of the idea of Indonesia through the layers of indigenous society” (Elson 102), although of course the Japanese supervising the activities had clear ideas about what should or should not be portrayed. Scripts were scrutinized to ensure that they fell in line with the Japanese political position.

The themes found in drama performed for propaganda changed slightly over the years and were adjusted to fit specific political situations. Aiko Kurasawa names 22 plays that were performed in the Japanese period, although there were probably many more. Plays such as *Kami Perempoean* (We (are) women) by Armijn Pane (see Kurasawa 82) featured themes such as the value of joining PETA (*Pembela Tanah Air* – “Protectors of the Homeland”, a volunteer defence army) or celebrated the outbreak of war (*Samoedera Hindia* – The Indies Ocean). In 1945, towards the end of World War II, historical plays such as *The Mataram Signal Gong* and farces (*lelucon*) were particularly encouraged by the Japanese authorities. One example of such propaganda *sandiwara* is *Hidoep dan Mati* (Living and dying), a burlesque written by Kaimin Bunka Didoosya. It was published in 1945 in the journal *Djawa Baroe*, shortly before the Japanese surrender. Although conceptualized as a comedy, this *lelucon* emphasizes the necessity of being willing to die for the causes of independence, freedom and nation. In 1945 the period of Japanese occupation was almost over. On 7 September 1944, the Japanese premier Koiso Kuniaki had already announced that “Indonesia, with the exception of New Guinea – was to be granted its ‘independence in the near future’” (Elson 103). A programme to reach this target was set up soon afterward. Possibly with this

⁴⁵ *Keboedajaan jang baroe, jang dibentoeek bersama-sama oleh seloeroeh negeri Asia.*

⁴⁶ *Sendjata jang tadjam dalam melakoekan “peperangan pikiran”.*

short propaganda play the Japanese wanted to remind the Indonesians of the demands of independence. In the beginning of *Hidoep dan Mati* the characters Djangkoeng and Krémpéng are discussing life and death in a rather humorous way and bantering with each other. However, with the appearance of Widjaja, the play's underlying message becomes more obvious. Widjaja explains to Djangkoeng and Krémpéng that he or she “who is brave enough to live also has to be brave enough to die” (Didoosya 24).⁴⁷ This, according to Widjaja, is one of the main strengths of the “Dai Nippon”, the great Japanese. At the end of *Hidoep dan Mati* Djangkoeng and Krémpéng seem to be convinced of the importance of dying for the greater good and it can be assumed that so should the audience. In a very pompous manner they announce the following:

Krémpéng: We redeem the Indonesian independence with our soul!
 Djangkoeng: We care for the prosperity of Greater East Asia with our blood! [...]
 Semoea: Best wishes for the struggle! Until we meet again in heaven!⁴⁸

This patriotic play was part of a propaganda campaign aimed at promoting Japan's victory. It is unclear what happened to this play following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I have no knowledge of any stagings of this particular performance after the Japanese surrender.

1945 – 1949: Revolution and independence at last

On 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender, Sukarno declared Indonesian independence in front of his home in Jakarta. However, the Dutch, who had been forced out of the country by the Japanese three years earlier now tried to tighten their control over Indonesia once more. It took the Indonesians four years of revolution before the Dutch, under severe international pressure (especially from the USA), finally capitulated. On December 27, 1949 they transferred full sovereignty to Indonesia, with the exclusion of New Guinea (Kahin 232). The reason the Dutch conceded defeat had little to do with the politics of the Republic: “The prime factor was a highly localized popular resistance, above all in Java and Sumatra,

⁴⁷ ...siapa berani hidoep haroes djoega berani mati!

⁴⁸Krémpéng: Kita teboes kemerdekaan Indonesia dengan djiwa kita!
 Djangkoeng: Kita galang kesedjahteraan Asia Timoer Raja dengan darah kita!
 Semoea: Selamat berdjoelang! Sampai ketemoe di..... soearga (24).

expressed through a myriad extra-state politico-military organizations [...]” (Anderson ‘Language and Power’ 101).

Indonesian modern drama was not a very strong force in this transitional revolutionary period and only a few plays were published. Boen S. Oemarjati mentions *Suling* (Flute, 1946), Utuy Tatang Sontani's first play in Indonesian, and *Bunga Rumah Makan* (The Flower of the restaurant, 1947), and *Keluarga Soerono* (The Soerono family, 1948) by Idrus, and *Tumbang* (1949) by Trisno Sumardjo as the exceptions (48). The long struggle for independence had left many playwrights disillusioned, and a similar sense of disillusionment would be expressed after 1998. The reforms they had hoped to achieve by becoming an independent nation were not immediately implemented by Sukarno. In fact, although a Republic of Indonesia had been proclaimed, “it enjoyed as yet no international legitimacy, and its control—not to mention its internal legitimacy—was not unqualified across the archipelago” (Elson 118). The state as a concept was still an empty shell and many different forces endeavoured to implement their own vision of Indonesia, each wanting to have their say in the construction of the state. Plays such as Utuy T. Sontani's *Bunga Rumah Makan* or *Awal dan Mira* (Awal and Mira, 1951) took on this sense of disillusionment. Harry Aveling argues that the characters in *Bunga Rumah Makan* are nothing more than types, one-dimensional puppets representing one-sided aspects of life (17). This could be interpreted as Sontani's disappointment in society, in people who are no more than constricted figures without any real power. However, as Bodden notes, the end of the independence struggle and the parliamentary democracy period of the early 1950s also marks the high point of realist drama in Indonesia (*The Lontar Anthology* 2 x).

The issues neglected by theatre authors were nonetheless supported by a whole generation of literary figures, such as the audacious poet Chairil Anwar or Mochtar Lubis who, with their colleagues, were generally referred to as *Angkatan 45* (the generation of '45) and were writing in the name of revolution and contributing their art to the political power struggle in Indonesia (Ricklefs 251). The ideas of *Angkatan 45* were published in a series of new weekly and monthly cultural magazines in the style of pre-independence *Poedjangga Baroe*. These included *Pantja Raja* with H.B. Jassin as literary editor, *Siasat*, *Mimbar Indonesia*, and *Indonesia*, which appeared in 1949 under the editorship of Idrus and was published by Balai Pustaka (Teeuw 116). The writers of *Angkatan 45* were a new generation of writers, whose works were distinct from the *Poedjangga Baroe* movement, as they had experienced little of

Dutch colonization themselves. While they had grown up under the Dutch, it had been a time of national struggle and now, as young adults, they had suddenly found themselves on a world stage (124). In a sense, as in the context of the late 19th century, a world of novelty lay in front of them, but with political circumstances so unstable many felt ill at ease with the changing times. In 1943, Chairil Anwar had already turned against the *Poedjangga Baroe* generation with his explicit outcry for a new form of art. In an untitled speech before the Japanese-sponsored *Angkatan Baru Pusat Kebudayaan* he expressed his attitude rather bluntly:

According to them the ideas, the principles of art or of philosophy drop down to us out of the sky, like sunlight, warming us up and ripening just like that! What do you get that way? Warm chicken shit!! [...] Till now our art has been thin, superficial. No more of the old farts. No more gentle breezes of that kind! (Raffel 165).

Artists of the revolutionary period looked at things with fresh eyes and felt alienated from pre-independence ideas. A universal humanism, as a contemporary philosophy, was the basis for a new Indonesian culture.

1950 – 1967: National theatre and the state

This universal humanism, as a synthesis between the world and the individual artist, were debated and finally formulated on 18 February 1950 in the *Surat Kepertjajaan Gelanggang* [Arena's Letter of Belief]:

When we discuss Indonesian culture, we do not intend to polish up the products of the old culture until they shine, so that we can boast about them. But we intend to give birth to a sound new culture. [...] For us, revolution is the substitution of new standards for the outmoded ones which must be demolished. Thus we hold that the revolution in our own country is not yet finished (Teeuw 127).

Based on the last remarks of this quotation, the intention of cultural work in the 1950s can be interpreted as contributing to a continuing revolution, eradicating remnants of a colonial past, and as providing the means to “give birth to a sound new culture” (and cultural identity) articulated in an Indonesian voice. However, at least in terms of theatre, artists were still focussing more on the West than on their own traditions. The Western influence became

obvious both in theatre education and in what was staged. Michael Bodden notes that the first four decades of the national art theatre in Indonesia (until 1965) “were a period of fascinating experimentation [...] however in the late 1950s and early 1960s a number of playwrights made use of techniques and scenarios that owed much to styles like expressionism and absurdism” (*The Lontar Anthology 2* vii).

Theatre education became a crucial task for the first time in Indonesian modern theatre history. In 1948, a small but well-received art school named *Cine Drama Institut* had opened its doors in Yogyakarta, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In 1954, it changed its name to *Akademi Seni Drama dan Film- ASDRAFI* (Oermajati 47f.). One year later, coinciding with the first democratic elections in Indonesia, film director and screen writer Usmar Ismail established the *Akademi Teater Nasional Indonesia* (ATNI) in the capital Jakarta. Although the latter operated privately, both of the schools aimed to serve as educational institutions for the whole of Indonesia. Both schools mainly staged the “well-made play” [...] dramas by Ibsen, Arthur Miller, Anton Chekhov, Molière, Tennessee Williams [...]”⁴⁹ (Akhmad 104). Indonesian scholar Boen Oemarjati remarks that only one percent of the plays taught in these schools were of Indonesian origin, despite the growing corpus of plays written by Indonesians, such as Achdiat Karta Mihardja, Sri Murtono, Trisno Sumardjo, Sitor Situmorang, B. Soelarto and Kirdjomuljo at that time (76).

Actor education was centred on the Stanislavsky method, which was very different to traditional theatre education in Indonesia with its strict aesthetic rules. Now, the individual and their inner self became central to an actor’s personal expression. Winet argues that by identifying themselves emotionally with Western characters through method acting, Indonesian actors “turned away from the representation of mythically idealized images of anti-colonial and revolutionary heroes” (‘Interpolating American Method Acting’ 98). Actors therefore not only identified but also contrasted their personal identity with foreign roles and in doing so, continued this inner revolution, the search for an Indonesian soul. This process, according to Winet, can only be successful when the characters performed are foreign (99). This is the most intimate representation of Indonesian identity through the struggle of the actor (103). However, while both theatre and actors were occupied with their inner development, theatre would not have any influence on the wider Indonesian public.

⁴⁹ *Lakon-lakon yang menjadi panutan adalah lakon “well-made play” [...] seperti lakon-lakon karya Ibsen, Arthur Miller, Anton Chekhov, Molière, Tennessee Williams [...].*

From 1950 onwards, *bahasa Indonesia* established its role as the national language. As well as being Indonesia's official language it was also used in the media sector. As education was given high priority in the early 1950s, literacy was growing and, as a result, the circulation of daily newspapers increased. These were crucial factors in building up a national sense of community, place and territory. Based on the state philosophy Pancasila, which Sukarno introduced in 1945, it was anticipated that the new Indonesia would prosper and grow into the long awaited nation. In Suharto's autobiography, he remarks upon the Pancasila principles, stating that "if I compress them all into one genuine Indonesian term then I get— *gotong royong*. This means toiling hard together, sweating hard together. Acts of service by all for the interest of all" (197). *Gotong royong*, as a concept of sociality similar to mutual cooperation, necessitated many people working together towards one goal, which, according to Sukarno, was the underlying meaning of Pancasila and the means to tackle the enormous project of building the new Indonesia.

Although Indonesia's birth was propelled by a sense of euphoria and people's power, the first years of independence were anything but smooth and easy. At an early stage, Indonesia already had to face manifold social, economic and political problems. After years of Japanese occupation and the subsequent Indonesian revolution, large parts of society were impoverished. The population of Indonesia was growing quicker than its food production, and people began moving to urban areas in the hope of finding prosperity. Cities grew quickly and poverty increased. The radio play *Lapar* (Hungry), written in 1952 by Muhammad Ali, reflects on these difficult living circumstances. The play is framed by two railway workers who hear ghostly voices, ghouls and spirits that, according to Bodden, "still seem all too real for Indonesians" (*The Lontar Anthology 2* xii). It is the grim story of Putro and Tini, and their descent into criminality and prostitution. After a huge fight, the unemployed Putro throws Tini and Tati, their 5-month old baby, out of the house. In the following scenes it becomes clear that Putro has become a brutal petty criminal and Tini has sold her baby to a rich family and, having been rejected by her own parents, begins working as a prostitute. At the end of the play Putro and Tini meet again and Putro suggests that they get together as he, so he says, still loves Tini. However, Tini is disillusioned. She tells Putro: "You don't even know what life is! There is no life for me, either. We are zombies, living corpses, Putro! And corpses have no right to talk about life" (217). When Putro and Tini try to escape their persecutors they are both run over by a train, which explains the ghostly

voices Amat and Tono, the railway workers, can hear (217). The crux of this grim and depressing story was a reality for many Indonesians at that time.

On the political stage, several parties with various political agendas vied for position in an ideological struggle that reached its peak in the early 1960s. The main players were Islamic forces like *Masyumi* and the splinter group *Nahdlatul Ulama*, nationalist (*Partai Nasional Indonesia* - PNI), Communist (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* – PKI), as well as the military. Rebellions on outer islands like Ambon were tearing at the fragile nation. Ricklefs notes that by 1957 “this first democratic concept had collapsed [...] and the expectations generated by the Revolution were frustrated” (273). In February 1958, Indonesian army officers established a revolutionary government (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia* – PRRI) in Sumatra but in August of the same year the revolution, under immense military pressure from Jakarta under the leadership of General Nasution, was forced to concede. In 1959, in response to these growing tensions, Sukarno presented his strategy of “guided democracy” to regain “leadership” over a struggling country (Sukarno 279). In many ways, this meant crushing his enemies and establishing an authoritarian system. In a speech on 17 August 1957, Sukarno had already presented his plans for Indonesia’s future. The acronym Manipol-USDEK⁵⁰ was a shorthand for the Guided Democracy programme. Western-style democracy, in Sukarno’s view, was not in harmony with the Indonesian political and cultural climate, whereas Guided Democracy conformed to the identity and basis of Indonesian life (Yamin qtd. in Elson 215). Sukarno used his relationships with the Communist Republic of China and the military to strengthen his position as “father of the nation” and to clearly distance Indonesia from NEKOLIM (Neo-Colonialism, Colonialism and Imperialism). For the media and arts, this move resulted in censorship, which did not allow for sympathies towards any matters affiliated with NEKOLIM.

The repercussions of political struggle influenced cultural works. Starting in the late 1950s, theatre works increasingly mirrored the political situation of the young nation-state. Michael Bodden notes that:

in the late 1950s and early 1960s a number of playwrights began to turn toward alternative forms of drama to represent issues and meanings somewhat new and

⁵⁰ Manipol = Manifes Politik (Political Manifesto). USDEK= *Undang Undang Dasar* 1945 (the Indonesian constitution from 1945), *Sosialisme Indonesia* (Indonesian socialism), *Demokrasi terpimpin* (Guided Democracy), *Ekonomi terpimpin* (Guided Economy), *Kepribadian Indonesia* (Indonesian identity).

unusual for the Indonesian theater. These playwrights made use of techniques and scenarios that owed much to styles like expressionism and absurdism; they also attempted some initial gestures towards “indigenizing” theater practices, a typical postcolonial phenomenon (*The Lontar Anthology* 2 vii).

Over the years when Indonesian parties were establishing cultural institutions, artists affiliated themselves to these institutions according to their own political beliefs. In contrast to Alexis DeTocqueville’s notion, which identifies civil society organizations on a provincial level as “schools of democracy”, where democratic thinking and civil acting can be exercised (97f), the circumstances of 1960s Indonesia were much closer to Antonio Gramsci’s understanding of civil society. He was convinced that civil society was not a buffer against the state, but an arena of ongoing conflict, competition and ideological clashes. Ultimately, whoever gained control over civil society would succeed in creating consent among the masses. In his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci understands civil society as cultural and political hegemony of a social group over the whole of society (21)). Edward Aspinall concurs with this argument, maintaining that “civil society [in 1960s Indonesia] became a mechanism, not for generating civility, but rather for magnifying socio-political conflict and transmitting it to the very bases of society, and thus inflamed the cleavages of ‘social capital’” (64). Modern theatre in Indonesia was trapped within this political dilemma, which had far-reaching consequences for the role of theatre practitioners. This period has been characterized as being a time of “social realism” (Foulcher *Social Commitment*) in the arts, which stood in contrast to the universal humanism proposed by *Angkatan 45*. The writer Sitor Situmorang, who as a member of the Institute of National Culture (LKN, *Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional*) and was affiliated with the *Partai Nasional Indonesia*, described Indonesian aesthetics as bourgeois and the ideal of great art as “a longing for a National Tradition as its essence: a *gotong royong* spirit in aesthetics or in artistic individualism” (Situmorang 1960).

Political and social forces, now competing with one another, also impacted on the contemporary theatre world. For instance, LEKRA (the Institute of People's Culture, *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*), established in 1950 in opposition to the *Arena* movement (see Cribb and Kahin *Historical Dictionary*) and as part of the PKI, was active in rural touring performances of modernized and politicized versions of traditional theatre forms like the *ludruk* of East Java and the *wayang orang* dance-drama, with which it intended “to inspire the self-respect of the peasants and to consolidate the strength of the peasant organization” (van Erven 185). These hybrid forms of traditional theatre propagated by LEKRA were

following the idea of *teater untuk rakyat* – theatre for the people. These theatre groups tried to educate people living in rural areas by means of traditional art forms, and to open their minds to social reality. All these politically-based cultural institutions tended to be rather aggressive in their modus operandi, each according to its own agenda. Cobina Gillitt notes that LEKRA “mandated that all works of art promote ‘Nationalism, Religion, and Communism’, the unitary principal espoused by President Sukarno” (*The Lontar Anthology* 3 vii). Gillitt describes further how the government funded LKN enforced regulations that dictated that no traditional and modern plays would violate this policy. LEKRA plays, similarly to Ali’s play *Hungry*, would reflect on poverty and the hardships of the poorer social classes. As a result, all modern theatre work, apart from LEKRA-sponsored activities, had ceased by the end of 1963 (vii).

In October 1963, two years before the military coup that would bring Suharto to power, a group of anti-LEKRA artists published a *Manifes Kebudayaan* (Cultural Manifesto)—titled with clear reference to Sukarno’s *Manifes Politik*—in which they declared that the arts should be free from any indoctrinated suppression and sectarianism, political or otherwise. It was signed by twenty artists and intellectuals, such as Goenawan Mohamad, Boen S. Oemarjati, Trisno Sumardjo, and H.B. Jassin, and was published in *Sastra* on 3 October 1963 and republished soon afterwards in *Berita Republik*.

We, Indonesian artists and intellectuals, herewith announce a Cultural Manifesto, which declares our principles, ideals and politics regarding a national culture. For us, culture is the struggle to bring the humanity’s living conditions to perfection. We do not prioritize one cultural sector over another. All sectors are struggling together for this culture conform to their nature. [...] Pancasila is the philosophical base for our culture (*Manifes Kebudayaan* par.2-3).⁵¹

However, by 1964, just one year later, the manifesto had been banned. The events of 1965/6 that followed, the so-called *musim parang* (season of the chopping knives), when alleged Communists were killed in their thousands, led to political uproar and left Indonesia in a state

⁵¹ *Kami para seniman dan cendekiawan Indonesia dengan ini mengumumkan sebuah Manifes Kebudayaan, yang menyatakan pendirian, cita-cita dan politik Kebudayaan Nasional kami. Bagi kami kebudayaan adalah perjuangan untuk menyempurnakan kondisi hidup manusia. Kami tidak mengutamakan salah satu sektor kebudayaan di atas sektor kebudayaan yang lain. Setiap sektor berjuang bersama-sama untuk kebudayaan itu sesuai dengan kodratnya. [...] Pancasila adalah falsafah kebudayaan kami.*

of trauma and inertia for some time, with little or no reported theatre activity. However, the first years of Suharto's reign saw the rise of a new creativity among theatre practitioners.

1968 – 1988: Realizing the possibilities – the political theatre of the 1970s/80s

In the introduction to the third volume of *The Lontar Anthology of Modern Drama* Cobina Gillitt notes that “the end of artistic repression, a newfound appreciation for traditional performance, and the need to circumvent censors are the three conditions that helped shape the early years of the New Order modern theater” (xvi).

As Indonesia suffered from the aftermath of the events of 1965/6, all those who were not suspected Communists regarded the initial New Order years as a “honeymoon” period (Vickers 161). This was also true for theatre. Probably, the first years of the Suharto government were the most creative years to date for non-traditional performers. The opening of the Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) in 1968 offered theatre practitioners a place where they were free to try out new forms and aesthetics of theatre. In her essay about the “new tradition” in Indonesian theatre Cobina Gillitt writes that “[TIM] quickly became a meeting ground where artists of traditional dance forms, folk theatre, modern dance, and foreign performing arts could interact” (168). In the same year, the playwright Rendra established his Bengkel Teater in Yogyakarta, having returned from studies in the USA. This was a turning point for the aesthetics of modern theatre in Indonesia. Rendra's performance of the abstract, vanguard and non-linear play *Bip-Bop* in 1968, and his later plays with the same *mini kata* (“mini word”, a description coined by Goenawan Mohamad) aesthetics,⁵² stood in extreme contrast to the naturalistic theatre of the 1950s, and especially to the socialist realism of the 1960s. This was probably due to a “distrust in words influenced by the political propaganda plays of the 1960s. For a long time words had been used as an instrument of power and suppression and therefore lost their ability to express the multifarious aspects of life” (Mohamad xif). Therefore, the fragmentary *mini kata* pieces were a reaction to, and differentiation from, earlier theatre movements. However, it was not only Rendra's work which was influential in these years. Other theatre practitioners— such as Arifin C. Noer (Teater Kecil, established 1968), Teguh Karya (Teater Populer, 1968), Putu Wijaya (Teater Mandiri, 1971) or Nano Riantiarno (Teater Koma, 1977)—both in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, also shaped the Indonesian theatre landscape. All of these groups were led by a charismatic

⁵² Others refer to it as “primitive theatre” (Arifin C Noer) or “poetic theatre” (Dami N Tonda) (Sumardjo 185).

“father” figure, who was also playwright and director. Often the whole ensemble would not only work together but also live communally in a *kampung* (village) in order to maintain proximity. Suon Bun Rith notes that, in Indonesia, art springs from community: “People feel they must say or make some comment on issues in their community or country. This freedom of expression is part of their duty as citizens and artists” (Rith 9). The roots of the relationship between modern theatre and the idea of establishing civil society through performance can be found in this community principle, albeit in varied forms.

Teater Rakyat (People's Theatre), for instance, was organized by non-governmental organizations to strengthen and educate the rural poor, but urban theatre in cities such as Yogyakarta and Jakarta also engaged socially and politically. As Hatley notes, “the intimate audience connection and ideological influence of traditional, regional forms of theatre made them attractive models to follow” (‘Cultural Expression’ 268). This first generation of theatre practitioners in the post-Sukarno period was immensely influential for many years to come and, although their respective artistic styles differed, all of them contributed to the creation of a new form of Indonesian drama. Putu Wijaya refers to their way of working as the making of a “new tradition (*tradisi baru*)”, which allowed practitioners to experiment with new aesthetics and also enabled them to draw upon a range of Indonesian traditional forms outside their original religious or ritual context: “*tradisi baru* artists are addressing (and often criticizing) a more inclusive idea of an Indonesian identity that in part speaks to the national motto: Unity in Diversity” (Gillit ‘Tradisi Baru’ 169). Looking back to the 1960s, the seeds of this idea can be found in Jim Lim’s work, for instance. In 1960, Lim directed the play *Bung Besar* by Jusa Misbach Biran and used the traditional Sundanese dance drama *longser*. This, according to Saini KM, created something of a scandal. In his adaptation of *Hamlet* in 1964 Lim again included traditional elements in the form of gamelan, mask dance from Cirebon, and *longser* (see Sumardjo, Saini). This was an early experiment in liberating plays written by Western authors from their cultural conventions and transferring them to Indonesian concepts of society. In the new millennium, groups such as Teater Garasi still find their inspiration in “[...] the interaction of ‘many traditions’, wherever they come from” (‘Some thoughts on theatre’). Yudi, the director of Teater Garasi notes that “traditions [...] are inspiration. The group’s reading and learning of traditions—both ‘close’ or ‘distant’—is central in the process of re-interpretation and recreation” (‘Some thoughts on theatre’).

In the early 1970s, Ali Murtopo, Suharto's Minister of Information, announced a twenty-five year modernisation strategy, or *Repelita*, consisting of five five-year plans (Vickers 164f). In the following years, Indonesia saw rapid economic growth, which brought wealth to some, a growing number of tertiary-educated Indonesians, and the emergence of an affluent urban middle class, despite tightening military control, escalating corruption, a new and somewhat dominating form of Javanism, as well as environmental problems due to rapid industrialisation. The growing societal discontent was first expressed by students on campuses in 1974. In the same year, the production *Madekur dan Tarkeni atawa Orkes Madun Bagian Satu* (Madekur and Tarkeni or the Madun Orchestra, Part One) by Arifin C. Noer was banned, following a heated discussion about a combination of religious and secular motifs depicted in the poster for the show (Gillitt *Challenging Conventions* 193f). In the late 1970s, a "New Art Movement" of young artists from all over Indonesia was introduced in Jakarta by a series of paintings and sculptures satirizing the New Order's "carrot and stick" vision of progress and military force. Vickers points out that in order to keep students quiet, state universities were moved out of the city centres into underdeveloped areas. Here, it was assumed, demonstrations would not spill over into busy public spaces (Vickers 174). Censorship was handled in the same way. Plays which were granted permission to perform in smaller, remote areas would not have the same luck in Jakarta. In 1985, for example, Teater Dinasti failed to obtain a permit for *Sepatu Nomor Satu* (Shoe number one) in Yogyakarta, but managed to get a permit for performances of the same play in both Solo and Salatiga, probably due to fears of possible political turmoil in Yogya. Nano Riantiarno's production of the Chinese folktale *Sampek Engtay* was banned in 1989 during its tour to Medan in Sumatra. Although the play is a simple love story it deals with inter-racial relationships between Chinese and indigenous communities. As Gillit remarks, another factor contributing to the ban could also have been Nano's Chinese background (172). Censorship tightened again in the early 1990s, a development which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Due to increasing political problems from the mid-1970s and into the 90s, non-traditional theatre became increasingly socially and politically aware. Groups began to position themselves in opposition to the government. Beitinger-Lee (2009) notes that "whenever the state injures the autonomy of its communities, disrespects its diversity or rejects its legitimate collective concerns, civil society may have a conflict with, or even turn against the state" (25). Theatre, arguably, consciously positioned itself in this critical civil society role in the 1970s and 80s. Rendra's performances of adaptations of Western plays, such as *Oedipus*,

Macbeth and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* renewed in a Javanese setting, were followed by his own plays *Mastodon dan Burung Kondor*, *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* and *Sekda*, all of which had elements of socio-political criticism. When Rendra left Yogyakarta for Jakarta in the late 1970s, “other theatre groups continued to develop the practice of a popular, socially-involved modern theatre” in Yogyakarta (Hatley ‘Not by Royal Command’ 26). Thus, a new generation of theatre groups in Yogyakarta became popular, such as Teater Dinasti, which had connections to the controversial Islamic-trained literary figure Emha Ainun Najib, or Teater Jeprik. One of the groups, Teater Gandrik, performed for the first time in 1987 in Yogyakarta, becoming quite popular for using colloquial *bahasa Indonesia* enriched with “Javanese flavour”, and is still active today. Hatley notes that “they presumably appeal to Javanese across the social spectrum, to both village and *kampung*-dwellers and the middle class” (28). Their plays often contain elements of social criticism, although, as Hatley maintains, these are mostly presented in a mild and humorous way. Critics argued that Gandrik should educate and inspire audiences rather than being occupied with entertainment (see Hatley ‘Cultural Expression’). However, plays such as *Orde Tabung* (Test-tube order), which look “at the ways in which the state controls people, even to the extent that it controls their dreams” (Tranggono 102), are quite serious in their treatment and subject matter. In the same way as Bengkel Teater and Teater Dinasti, Teater Gandrik was also active on a very local *kampung* level. Therefore, Tranggono emphasizes the “very warm connection between the audience and the performers” in Gandrik’s work and the idea of criticizing without harming (105). However, in the late 1980s and 90s, theatre became more radical and angry in its expression.

Student protests were often accompanied by theatre performances. NGOs were using theatre as a means of education, and whereas the audience of modern drama until the late 1950s often comprised of a small elite, it was becoming more varied and socially diverse. Theatre practitioners also joined with NGO workers or journalists to reach out to people across the social spectrum. During the tentative beginnings of this new politically-aware theatre making a stand, plays were often enriched with jokes, especially in the 1970s and 80s. Putu Wijaya notes in an interview that “this is very clever and important, especially in Indonesia because [...] if you are not careful you can make enemies, but with jokes you are safe” (‘I really want to’ 110). The performances of Jakarta-based Teater Koma led by Nano Riantiarno characterize this satirical style well. Works such as the trilogy *Bom Waktu* (Time Bomb), *Opera Kecoa* (Cockroach Opera) and *Opera Julini* (Julini’s Opera) referred to the difficult

living circumstances of Jakarta's poor and satirized the Indonesian bureaucracy by, for instance, using conspicuously pompous Indonesian language for dialogues between government representatives. However, by using opulent costumes and music, as was done in the *komedi stambul* tradition, they concealed the underlying severity of the subject matter. As Riantiarno states in an interview, he sees his work as:

fulfilling a need in the community. [...] When the Suharto government's power and domination was at its height, people were not brave enough to say what they thought of Suharto or criticize his government, but Teater Koma was able to articulate some of these thoughts. We expressed things which people were feeling but not saying ('An Urban Folk Theatre?' 122).

In his 1985 play *Opera Kecoa*, Nano Riantiarno reflects both critically and ironically on the problem of the urban poor and Jakarta's overpopulation, a city which grew from 2 to 6.5 million in only 30 years. This is a city where: "If you don't have a job, life in Jakarta is tough. You're a worm to be stepped on" ('Cockroach Opera' 115). In Scene 10, Julini tells the story of how he and Roima tried to live in a village at one point, but "[...] it was all IOU, IOU. So we packed up and...." At this point, two characters, called "first" and "second" person, start to sing: "And so back to Jakarta I came..." (108). These lines clearly show the reality that people from rural areas move to urban centres with rarely fulfilled hopes for a better life. Discussing the work of *Teater Koma* in the context of social change, it was notable that its audience mainly consisted of people from the newly emerging middle classes and, as such, it did not reach those who were the main subject in the performances—the urban poor—as ticket prices were usually high. Bodden notes that these performances were so popular in Jakarta that tickets could be sold on the black market for many times the original price ('Teater Koma's Suksesi' 261).

As such, Mary Zurbuchen maintains that Riantiarno's political theatre is neither "didactic [n]or programmatic" ('Images of Culture' 130). However, political consciousness is often linked to education and as Virginia Matheson Hooker and Howard Dick note, the confidence, knowledge, and experience of the urban middle class made dissident members into active participants in public arenas, such as the press, education and non-governmental organizations, addressing concerns about the present and future direction of Indonesian society (2). These citizens also became interested in the struggle of peasants or industrial workers, particularly in the 1990s. In parallel with heightening social and political problems,

tensions between the state and the people, and the expression of a new radicalism on stage, the last years of the New Order also saw a tightening of censorship, despite Suharto's announcement of more openness (*keterbukaan*) at his Independence Day speech on 17 August 1991.

1989 – 1998: The 1990s – Raging against the regime

Censorship during the New Order was often as confusing as it was unpredictable. As noted, the authorities often feared political uproar in key centres such as Jakarta or Yogyakarta, so performances scheduled for these cities were particularly vulnerable. On 9 October 1990 the police revoked the staging permit for Teater Koma's performance of *Sukses*, although the play had already been performed eleven times prior to that date. A journalist in the Jakarta Post on 12 October noted that:

the timing of the police decision is indeed unfortunate since what is considered as an ongoing debate in our country, whether we should proceed with more openness in order to enhance Indonesia's political development, or whether we should restrain ourselves, is followed closely by foreign observers ('*Sukses* Banning Rued').

As Andrea Webster points out, there were already three artists who automatically required a special permit to perform: W.S. Rendra, choreographer and songwriter Guruh Sukarnoputra and Rhoma Irama, a popular Islamic singer (3-5). These bans provoked a significant response in the Indonesian media, as the promised *keterbukaan* had so obviously failed to materialize. Sudomo, then the Coordinating Minister for Political Affairs and Security, declared in a statement in December 1990 that it was the duty of the government to explain to the public what may and may not be performed by artists, to prevent such incidents in the future. "If people do not know which things are allowed and which are not, they can get confused" (Jakarta Post, 3 December 1990). The public did not know what was covered by this ethos of "openness". According to Sudomo, people were free to criticize as long as they stayed within the framework of Pancasila. Furthermore, artists were expected to show decency and respect, particularly in their use of language; but these were rather vague, subjective parameters.

Two movements in oppositional modern theatre of the 1990s are especially striking in the context of this thesis. The first movement was a development of the aforementioned political theatre from the 1970s and 1980s, further amplified during the 90s. In 1997 and 1998, non-

traditional theatre not only took a strong stand against Suharto's politics but also took a firm position against the social problems Indonesia was facing. This was particularly well expressed via workers' theatre (Bodden *Resistance on the National Stage* 228). These plays wanted both to educate (often through role-playing techniques) to prepare the ground for changing the conditions of workers' lives. However, as Bodden points out, "theatre was important to workers not simply for solidarity building and consciousness-raising, but also for personal growth and emotional health" (*Resistance on the National Stage* 228). Parallel to workers' theatre, there was also theatre about workers, which addressed a different, more middle-class audience. One example is Ratna Sarumpaet's 1994 play *Marsinah – Nyanyian dari bawah tanah* (Marsinah – Songs from the underworld) and the 1997 monologue *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah accuses), which is based on the play and was written after the case was closed due to contaminated DNA evidence. Both works tell the true story of Marsinah, a young female worker and activist, who was brutally tortured and murdered because she publicly articulated her anger about working conditions in an East Javanese factory. No one was found guilty of her murder or brought to justice. In *Marsinah Menggugat*, Ratna, speaking in Marsinah's voice, asks the audience to take a stand on this issue.

A corrupt land, a people for whom power is everything, a nation where the exercise of power justifies anything. [...] To all of you I leave this reminder: you allowed my life to be taken from me. Don't let my death be for nothing (Sarumpaet 166).

The nation here is shown to be corrupt and polluted, having failed to develop an honest legal framework to restore justice and prosecute the murderers of Marsinah. Bodden argues that both forms of theatre - theatre for workers and about workers - could be seen as part of a process of a rising, but loosely organized social movement, "pressing for political reform and widening opportunities for democratic participation in government decision making" ('Utopia' 88).

Whereas the strength of Sarumpaet's play lies in its vigorous language, the second movement of modern, experimental theatre in the 1990s used different techniques. This was physical theatre, and language was mainly used to express emotions in confrontation with changing personal living conditions. Theatre practitioners were much more involved in issues of individual identity than political state affairs, although their work was subversive and

dissident in a more subtle sense. This form of theatre invited multiple, pluralistic responses from audiences, and as both Bodden and Lauren Bain argue, in a Western theoretical framework could be described as postmodern. Bodden maintains that at a time when Indonesian culture was increasingly commercialized and a mounting middle-class dissatisfaction with New Order politics became apparent,

this Indonesian postmodernism was both an effort to produce new discourses and practices of resistance to the pervasive social and cultural manifestations of President Suharto's authoritarian regime, and a response, either alienated or celebratory, to new conditions of life and artistic production ('Satuan-Satuan Kecil' 293).

The best-known exponents of this movement are arguably two Jakarta-based groups: Teater SAE, with its artistic director Boedi S. Otong, and Dindon WS's theatre group Teater Kubur (*kubur* means "grave" and the troupe rehearsed in a former graveyard). Radhar Panca Dahana notes that what was new about these two groups was their unpredictability: "We never know where they come from" ('An Archipelago' 64).

Both groups are also notable for the shift in performance spaces to more uncomfortable venues. In both location and their handling of different topics, they "created an acute sense of unease and discomfort" (Malna qtd. in Bodden 'Satuan-Satuan Kecil' 306). Teater Kubur and Teater SAE were the new generation following Arifin C. Noer's Teater Kecil, Putu Wijaya's Teater Mandiri or Bengkel Teater Rendra and their performances were different in many ways. As Marianne König notes, so was their approach to the performance text (*Theater als Lebensweise* 34). She argues that this change is connected to a different kind of education. Whereas Putu Wijaya or Rendra, for instance, were still very much grounded in their traditional background and had enjoyed a university education, many of the younger generation of theatre practitioners in Jakarta had not proceeded past middle school for various reasons. They are autodidacts, immersing themselves in the theatre world, learning from the established groups by watching and helping out at rehearsals. Unlike the established older generation, many of whom owned their own studios and had achieved a certain kind of material wealth and reputation by the early 1990s, the younger generation compensated for this lack through their idealistic values, discipline and unconditional love and commitment to theatre. König also notes that theatre was for them existential; it was the "direct examination of their own living environment" as shown, for instance, in the performance *Sirkus Anjing* (Dog circus, 1989-90) by Teater Kubur (*Theater als Lebensweise* 34).

According to König the language of *Sirkus Anjing* does not follow any rules in terms of syntax and semantics: “[W]ords and sentences are either strung together in an endless, automatic stream or can only, after many attempts, be regurgitated in a painfully stuttered way. [...] Language only means the oral expression of emotions and sentiments, whereas the original meaning of words bears no relevance” (*Theater als Lebensweise* 11).⁵³ Indonesia in the 1990s saw vast economic development. One of its most obvious signs was the omnipresent shopping mall, standing as a symbol of a new consumer culture, which rapidly spread through the archipelago. This development is reflected in a performance by Teater Kubur where the actors brought the audience face to face with characters made insane by the incoherence of a world full of poverty, dirt, bugs and noise, juxtaposed with an alternate world of luxury and prosperity seen in omnipresent advertising, propaganda and economic welfare produced by the government. The characters of Ma, Pa and the wild child (*anak liar*) resemble these positions (*Theater als Lebensweise* 11). Implied within the context of the performance might be a rising consciousness of individualism in society versus traditional community networks.

The work of Teater SAE addresses similar topics. Moral questions are central to Teater SAE and its scriptwriter Afrizal Malna includes issues of ethically correct behaviour between humans and their environment, community and commonality. Likewise, topics that were often exhibited in Boedi S. Otong’s work include helplessness in facing modernity and the problem of shaping one’s own identity in a fast developing, globalized world. In personal conversation in 2011, looking back at Teater SAE’s work, Afrizal Malna noted the feeling of alienation from society that was present for most of SAE’s members at that time. He argues that, apart from their theatre activities, the group was searching for an answer to the question of “who are we”? They felt “neglected”. Especially for Afrizal, who grew up without a regional language, having Indonesian as his mother tongue felt as if he had been excluded from tradition. His father rarely ever spoke about his past, which made Afrizal feel like part of a “lost generation”. The group did not understand or like the concept of “Indonesia” and thus were looking for their own personal, internal Indonesia which they expressed, sometimes, on stage (Afrizal Malna personal communication 25 Jan. 2011).

⁵³ *Die Sprache gehorcht in Sirkus Anjing in Syntax und Semantik keinen Regeln mehr. Worte und Sätze reihen sich entweder in einem endlosen, automatischen Fluss aneinander oder werden mühsam stotternd, in vielen Anläufen hervorgewürgt. [...] Sprache bedeutet hier nur mehr stimmlicher Ausdruck von Emotionen und Stimmungen, wobei der ursprüngliche Sinn der Worte nicht mehr relevant ist.*

Other groups, such as Teater Payung Hitam (Black Umbrella Theatre), which was established in Bandung in 1994, or the Bali Exsperimental Teater based in Denpasar, were working in a similar style to SAE and Kubur. Within this physical theatre movement the performance art scene in Indonesia also established itself on a larger scale. Previously, there had been a few sporadic performance art events, such as Semsar Siahaan's *Oleh-Oleh dari Desa II* (Gifts from the village II), which involved the public burning of the sculpture *Citra Irian dalam Torso* by Sunaryo in 1981. This action opposed the national identity approach taught in art institutes at that time. In the 1990s, performance art joined the ranks of an artistic movement expressing the growing criticism against the New Order and the social problems it was held responsible for. Problems caused by a changing world order were also addressed by artists in other Southeast Asian countries. Visual artists such as Manit Sriwanichpoom from Thailand with his Pink Man Series, or performance artists such as Mideo M. Cruz from the Philippines, raged not against their home governments but about the global problems of consumerism and increasing globalization.

When the Asian economic crisis hit Indonesia hard in 1997, political protest became increasingly specific, outspoken and public. Students were at the forefront, but they were supported by other civil groups, such as workers and theatre troupes, which had often grown out of campus-based activities (e.g. Teater Garasi). The *ruwatan bumi*⁵⁴ event, for instance, brought together activists from all over Indonesia. This event was designed to show how the environment needed cleansing. This was understood on many levels: economic, political and spiritual. After 30 years of New Order rule, due to increasing public and civil society pressure, Suharto finally stepped down on 21 May 1998.

The focus of this chapter has been the trajectory of the development of modern theatre. It described how, in the prelude to the fall of Suharto, student protests were often backed by theatre performances and NGOs were using theatre as a means of education. Where the audience of modern drama until the late 1950s had mostly comprised a small elite, it now became more varied and socially diverse. Theatre practitioners also often joined with NGO workers or journalists to reach out to people on a broader basis.

⁵⁴ *Ruwatan* is a Javanese term for a traditional rite of purification, *bumi* means "earth".

Since 1998, a political transition towards democracy and decentralization has been initiated since the end of an authoritarian regime that had lasted in excess of three decades. “The collapse of the Soeharto regime was accompanied by massive economic decline, widespread rioting, communal conflict, and fears that the nation was approaching the brink of disintegration” (Crouch ix). The first years of *reformasi* were experienced by many as chaos. Practitioners of modern theatre in Indonesia were forced to rethink their artistic ideas. “Oppositionist art, particularly contemporary theatre, which had thrived as an outlet for political critique under Suharto, experienced a loss of focus and rationale”, notes Hatley (‘More Voices’; see also Hatley’s 10 Years After Reformasi’).

This period of disorientation and disillusionment would not last long however. Soon after 1998, the theme of democratic responsibility was to be presented on stage in a playful, educational manner. In a time when modern theatre was in confusion about its future role in society, when artists no longer needed to act as an oppositional voice against current holders of power, plays such as Yusef Muldiyana’s *BAN-POL: Banyolan Politik (Keroncong Demokrasi Dua)* (*BAN-POL: A political joke (Democracy song two)*, 1999) presented the possible responsibilities of future democratic citizens in an Indonesian nation. In front of Taman Ismail Marzuki, independent artists erected the *Panggung Bongkar* (the “Demolition Stage”, which later became the *Panggung Reformasi* or “Reformation Stage”). The project aimed to dismantle bureaucratic structures. Anyone and everyone could enter the stage and say whatever came to his or her mind. Plays such as *Opera Sembelit* (Constipation opera) by Nano Riantiarno, or the monologue *Lidah (masih) Pingsan* (The tongue is still paralyzed) by Butet Kartarejasa, attracted large audiences.

I argue that theatre since late 2005 in the political era of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has become much more diverse in approach, content and form. As pointed out in the introduction, over the last ten years the climate and the political context in which performances take place have fundamentally changed; there is no longer a “single, authoritarian state to confront, no all-powerful leader to demonise and satirise” (Hatley ‘Ten Years After Reformasi’ 58). The idea of “the electricity being turned off” for artists (Bain *Performances of the Post-New Order* 275) become irrelevant for theatre practitioners after 2005. Theatre practitioners are still, arguably, politically and socially engaged and trying to develop a new language; but they have emancipated themselves from the political opposition of earlier years. This thesis only focuses on a very small fraction of Indonesian theatre’s diverse forms. The four

subsequent chapters focus on current socio-political dialogues and how modern theatre practitioners engage with and are very much part of the vibrant civic life of Indonesia.

Chapter 2: Performances as sites of memory and trauma in Indonesia

Seeking truth and reconciliation following violations of human rights during war, local conflicts, regime change or colonial rule, has become an important aspect of collective conflict resolution and the healing of trauma worldwide. Germany, and its handling of the aftermath and trauma of the Holocaust, was formative in developing truth and reconciliation processes, but many other nations have subsequently taken a similar approach to dealing with trauma. South Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Croatia, Serbia, Haiti, Indonesia have all experienced violent conflicts, large-scale human rights violations and/or natural disasters in recent years. Klaus Schreiner argues that trauma “marks a deep interruption in the life story of any individual and in the history of a society, but at the same time represents the beginning of a new history that is linked to that very event” (271). In this way, the trauma is an interruption of history, but it is also the continuation of the past into the present (271).

There are different kinds of trauma. For those personally affected by the event that caused the trauma, it can inflict very real psychological problems, but there are also more widespread and long-term societal effects. A trauma can impact upon generations to come, especially when the people of the traumatized nation were not given space to reflect on what happened, or in cases where the state coerced its citizens into remembering a particular version of history that may not necessarily correspond with the reality. In Indonesia, such skewing of history and the negation of personal experience has had huge impact on the New Order generation. History-writing “was supposed to follow government master narratives” (Sears 18). Bimo Nugroho calls this writing “with a golden pen,” which, he argues, is applicable “not just [for] those [histories] of the New Order period but also those concerning the Sriwijaya and Majapahit kingdoms, Dutch colonialism, the Japanese occupation and Sukarno’s reign [...]” (216). This form of glorified history, which has formed a major part of identity politics in Indonesia, affects the way that things are remembered and reflected upon by citizens. Suharto’s administration took the task of producing an official narrative of the events preceding his rise to the presidency seriously. Histories were (re)written, monuments erected, and ceremonies inaugurated to establish a particular memory and memorializing process that ultimately served to legitimize and stabilize the new regime.

These entities—monuments, ceremonies, commemorative holidays, and so on—where memory manifests itself can be explained, in French historian Pierre Nora’s terms, as sites or realms of memory or, as he calls it, “*lieux de memoire*”. Memory studies have become of relevance for a variety of academic disciplines. Nora’s work has also been widely applied to theatre and performance studies, notably in Joseph Roach’s *City of the Dead* (26ff) and Chris Morash’s and Shaun Richards’ *Mapping Irish Theatre* (42, 105). Nora’s approach offers a vital lens through which to look at the performances discussed in this chapter.

Nora argues that sites of memory are “where [cultural] memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (‘Between memory and history’ 7). They are in contrast to *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory, “the largely oral and corporeal retentions of traditional cultures” (Roach 26). Nora defines a site of memory as “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (‘Preface’ xvii).

In the Indonesian context, these constructed “histories, monuments and ceremonies can [also] be examined critically as sites of memory. They are symbolic, material and functional manifestations of the regime’s power to define the collective meanings of events” (Schreiner 262). Schreiner goes on to explain that “the intentional creation of sites of memory raises questions of who has the power to create them, when they are created, what alternative forms they might have taken, and the relationship between what is memorialized and what is not ” (270). He notes that Nora’s theory is not a sufficient explanatory framework. Using the example of Lubang Buaya,⁵⁵ he notes that:

as a site of memory, Lubang Buaya supported for many years the official acceptable version of history. It epitomized the triumph of the military and the foundation of the New Order. It is, however, not only a symbol of power and authoritative interpretation of history but also the negative expression of the trauma surrounding the general’s deaths and the mass killings (270).

Sites of memory can have multiple meanings. In the Indonesia of the New Order certain meanings were preferred over others, and the government wanted to ensure that these meanings manifested themselves as official “truth”. In *Language and Power*, Benedict

⁵⁵ Lubang Buaya (literally “crocodile pit”) is the site of the murder of seven army officers during the 1 October coup attempt of the 30 September Movement. It is located on the outskirts of Jakarta near the Halim Perdanakusumah Air Force Base. The 30 September movement will be revisited during the analysis of the play *Mwathirika* by Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

Anderson notes that monuments “face two ways in time” as they “commemorate events or experiences in the past” but are also intended “in their all-weather durability, for posterity. Most are expected to outlive their constructors, and so partly take on the aspect of a bequest or testament” (174). Thus, they are a way of mediating between particular types of pasts and futures. In Indonesia’s case, these monuments manifest a constructed truth: a form of indoctrination, similar to the state education system. School children were taught the state ideology Pancasila in special classes, always with a focus on the necessity of being loyal to this ideology or risk being branded as an “enemy of the state”: most dissenters were labelled “Communists”.

Although Suharto’s presidency ended in May 1998, New Order mechanisms are, arguably, still strongly in place and affect society in many ways, often leaving citizens with a residual sense of disconnectedness from their present environment. Agus Nur Amal, one of the artists discussed in this chapter, says of Indonesians that:

[...] people lock up this [the traumatic experience] in themselves. They want to forget about the past. That’s why this nation does not have any imagination about its past. The youth doesn’t have imagination about the past. Kids are not able to imagine their past. [...] So we haven’t solved the problems of our past, yet we have to deal with more problems in the present (personal communication, 1 Dec. 2010).⁵⁶

This point is reiterated by Nora who recognizes that “those brutal historical shocks, which struck every country and contemporary society, especially during the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the accelerated transformations they brought in their wake, completely shattered the links these countries and societies had with their past” (‘Introduction’ vii).

In this chapter, I argue that performances can serve as alternative sites of memory. They can act as a means to reconnect with past traumatic experiences and possibly overcome them, by contradicting the official memories of the state and creating a space where other voices can be heard. The post-Suharto period triggered a new openness towards coming to terms with

⁵⁶ [...] Jorang terus menerus menandam itu di dalam diri mereka. Maka mereka ingin melupakan masa lalu. Maka bangsa ini gak punya imajinasi tentang masa lalu. Karena anak muda tidak punya imajinasi tentang masa lalu. Anak-anak tidak punya imajinasi tentang masa lalu. [...] Nah, jadi persoalan pertama menurutku itu persoalan imajinasi.

the past, although this was often limited and partial (Hatley ‘Recalling and Re-Presenting’ 2), as will be discussed later in relation the events of 1965/6 and the conflict in Aceh.

Mary Zurbuchen states that the post-Suharto era is characterized by a “surge of reflexive discourse on the New Order [that] enlivened mass media and publishing, public policy debate, arts and culture, popular mobilization, and political activism” (‘Historical Memory’ 49). Activist groups and victims’ associations issued calls to uncover events that had formerly been highly controversial or suppressed altogether, most significantly the record of legal and human rights abuses that occurred under the New Order state and security apparatus (49). According to Robert W. Goodfellow, this process was initiated in August 1997 by Nyi Mardiyem, a former “comfort woman” or *jugun ianfu*,⁵⁷ who gave a speech at the opening for a campaign against violence towards women, and publicly raising awareness of the case of comfort women, one of many “unresolved historical problems” (2). As shown in Chapter 1, modern Indonesian theatre was already highly politicized in 1997. For example, the 1997 performance *Carousel* by Teater Garasi dealt with the PETRUS killings⁵⁸ and violence in general, which, according to Goodfellow, showed that a “fresh wind” had begun “slowly” to blow in dealing with historical trauma in Indonesia (255). Alternative versions of national history began to be told at academic conferences, through exhibitions, and on stage. Barbara

⁵⁷ The term *jugun ianfu* refers to so-called Asian “comfort women” who were forced to serve Japanese soldiers as sex slaves during the Japanese occupation (although this had also occurred since 1932 in China). The occupation of Indonesia lasted from 1942 to 1945. An article in *The Jakarta Post* states that the fate of these women was hardly discussed in public until a group of Korean survivors started telling their stories in the early 1990s, demanding apologies and acknowledgment from the Japanese government. Their actions were then followed by women from other Asian countries, including some from Indonesia. In August 1995, the Japanese government and then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama offered a carefully worded apology but refused legal responsibility. Instead, the government set up a private fund (AWF, Asian Women’s Fund) which handed out 1.3 billion Yen in compensation over the course of 12 years. In Indonesia, the government refused to distribute the money offered by the AWF (ca. 380 million Yen). The reason given by Social Affairs Minister Inten Soeweno was that it would be difficult to prove whether someone had really been a comfort woman. Even if it were proven, she said, it would only bring the woman shame. The money, some 380 million Yen, was then used by the Social Affairs ministry to build old people’s homes. In recent years, the Japanese government has also become more reluctant in acknowledging this sexual slavery. In 2007, then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe denied that the Japanese military had forced women into sexual slavery, stating there was no proof of coercion. This followed a decision of the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on the Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment to pass a resolution on “Protecting the Human Right of Comfort Women” (see Sidarto, comfort-women.org, and ianfuindonesia.org).

⁵⁸ The so-called PETRUS killings were a series of state-controlled murders of suspected petty criminals in Indonesia between the years 1983 and 1985. The abbreviation PETRUS is from *penembakan misterius* (mysterious shootings). Dead bodies of alleged criminals were found by citizens in public places. Geoffrey Robinson writes that “the killings had left some five thousand people dead in Java. Though government and military authorities had initially denied any involvement in the PETRUS killings, it eventually emerged that they had been initiated by the regime itself and carried out by a specially trained unit of the Special Forces” (227) as part of an anti-crime programme.

Hatley, in a 2006 paper about representing and re-calling the anti-Communist violence following the 1965/6 events, exemplifies this trend in her analysis of two *ketoprak* performances in Yogyakarta in 2005.⁵⁹ Another example is the exhibition *Jugun Ianfu* (Comfort Women) which I was able to visit in September 2010. The exhibition was a joint initiative between journalist Hilde Janssen and photographer Jan Banning, which was shown at Erasmus Huis in Jakarta from 12 August to 23 September 2010. The exhibition displays portraits of 50 women who were forced to serve as “comfort women” under the Japanese occupation, an experience that traumatically affected their lives. The images are accompanied by short texts that give a brief account of the women’s history, how they survived their years as *jugun ianfu* and how they dealt with their past in the years that followed. Hilde Janssen writes in her introductory notes to the exhibition catalogue that “the taboo is persistent, even sixty-five years onwards” (7). The exhibition was accompanied by a series of related discussions organised by Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women, Komnas) and received a positive response in the national media.⁶⁰ In December 2010, the exhibition was taken to Surabaya and exhibited at the French Cultural Centre (Centre Culturel et de Cooperation Linguistique).

An article by Yudono published in the newspaper *Kompas* on 19 October 2010 quotes Budi Santoso, the director of the independent Legal Aid Institute in Yogyakarta, as saying that the Indonesian government had not as yet expressed any form of support towards former *jugun ianfu*, although a number of parties had undertaken effort to push the issue forward. He furthermore suggests that the government was trying to cover up the issue because it is considered as a disgrace to the nation (par. 5-6). Janssen relates this disinterest of the Indonesian government to economic reasons: “Indonesia is not interested in disturbing its good relationship with Japan and risk the loss of trade and the steady stream of development funds and investments” (13). The fact that the exhibition was only shown at Indonesian

⁵⁹ Barbara Hatley gives an account of a reunion event where women victims of the 1965/6 violence gathered in Yogyakarta (‘Recalling and Re-Presenting’ 7ff). The “peak of the programme,” according to Hatley, was a short *ketoprak* performance directed by Kadariyah, the “legendary prima donna of the Communist-linked *ketoprak* group Krido Mardi,” telling the story of woman whose young daughter has been made pregnant by a rich, elderly, polygamous official, which commented on sexual violence endured by alleged Communist women prisoners. Another performance Hatley writes about is *Bang-bang Sumirat*, playing out in allegorical form the events of September 1965 and its aftermath. The performance was part of a celebratory event for the anniversary of the founding of the regency in Bantul and later was also broadcasted on Yogya state television (7ff).

⁶⁰ A variety of articles published in *Tempo*, *The Jakarta Globe*, *Kompas* and *The Jakarta Post* evidence this. ‘Indonesia’s Comfort Women’; ‘Comfort Women break silence’; Sidarto ‘Living to tell’; Nurhayati ‘Pemerintah Indonesia’; Nurhayati ‘Wajah-wajah mendobrak’; Nugroho ‘50 Foto Budak Seks’

venues owned by international institutions and abroad suggests the Indonesian government's indifference towards dealing with the case. Nonetheless, the fact that the issue can finally be debated in public, "giving voice" to ordinary Indonesians' experiences of the past, indicates a "powerful shift in the way agency and authority are generally articulated" after Suharto, as Mary Zurbuchen notes ('Historical Memory' 16).

In *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia* Heryanto states that "coming to terms with the violent past, especially with 1965, and with its traumatic legacy in subsequent decades, is a prerequisite for any attempt to rebuild the nation beyond the New Order" (4). Public life in Indonesia, wrote Clifford Geertz in a reflection on his experiences of the Sukarno period, is characterized by a "play of disjunctive discourses, separated registers of political expression" (Geertz 'Soekarno daze' 12). On the one hand are "emphatic doings by emphatic personalities playing grandly to grand audiences," while at the same time "furtive, allusive exchanges" take place behind the scenes; "[i]t was as though the country was caught between grandiloquence and equivocation, stranded between speech styles without a practicable system of civic discourse" (12). The establishment of such a practicable system of civic discourse is arguably one of the central roles taken on by theatre practitioners in the post-Suharto years.

In this chapter, I want to focus on two particular traumatic historical events that had a huge impact on the Indonesian nation and which have recently been addressed on stage by theatre practitioners. These are 1) the events that evolved around the *Gerakan 30 September* (30 September Movement) in 1965/6 and 2) the Acehnese struggle for independence. The chapter focuses on the work of two Indonesian theatre companies: Papermoon Puppet Theatre, brainchild of Maria Tri Sulistyani and Iwan Effendi, a contemporary puppet company based in Yogyakarta, and Aceh-born soloist Agus Nur Amal, who works under the stage name Agus PM Toh in Jakarta and Aceh.

I chose to focus on the performances of these two companies because they reflect different styles of social engagement. Papermoon Puppet Theatre was first established with a humanitarian aim, to help and entertain children affected by the earthquake that ravaged Yogyakarta in May 2006. Since 2008, the group has performed for an adult audience, but they retain their social focus. Most of their performances since 2008 deal critically with the topics of history and memory.

PM Toh performs for various purposes, but often has a socio-political agenda. In an unpublished statement about the socio-political background of his work, he notes the strong influence of his teacher Teungku Adnan PM Toh⁶¹ on his work:

From Adnan I drew a lot of life experience. How an artist has to function in social and civic life. An artist [Adnan] is also a trusted person who is asked to give advice to neighbours and about community issues. An artist is someone who from time to time is asked by his ill neighbours to give medication. An artist can be a guardian for neighbours who want to marry, even wed them. An artist is the driving force and inspiration for residents [in a community]. But an artist is also a trustworthy keeper of secrets.⁶²

This understanding of an artist's role goes far beyond what is generally assumed in Western society. It includes a social perspective more closely associated with being a healer than an artist; I am intrigued by how this might translate into Agus PM Toh's work. Whereas the two selected plays by Papermoon Puppet Theatre, *Mwathirika* (meaning "victim" in Swahili) and *Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona* (A man's stain on Mona's chest), are concerned with the idea of coming to terms with the past (the 30 September Movement, in particular), Agus PM Toh reconstructs memories of violence and conflict in Aceh with his TV Eng Ong⁶³ project using a form of forum theatre and thus, arguably, provides tools for re-thinking the future. Thus, the respective works of Agus Nur Amal and Papermoon Puppet Theatre can serve as 'sites of memory' by counter-acting established patterns of historical memory and, in doing so, engage their audience in a "practical system of civic discourse" as outlined by Geertz ('Soekarno Daze' 12). This idea shall be further investigated in terms of how these performances are embedded in a larger dialogue of truth and reconciliation seeking that began with the end of the New Order.

⁶¹ Teungku Adnan PM Toh was born in 1931 in Meukek, South Aceh, and died in 2006. He was a well-known story-teller and *dangedria* artist, a form of story-telling (originates from Aceh), accompanied by music and the use of props. He also taught Agus Nur Amal in the art of *dangedria*.

⁶² *Dari Adnan saya banyak menimba pengalaman hidup. Bagaimana seorang seniman harus berfungsi dalam kehidupan social dan bermasyarakat. Seorang seniman (Adnan) juga seorang yang dipercayai sebagai tempat untuk bertanya dan memberi nasehat bagi tetangga dan persoalan komunitasnya. Seorang seniman adalah orang yang sewaktu-waktu dapat menjadi penolong bagi tetangganya yang sedang sakit untuk memberikan obat. Seorang seniman dapat menjadi wali bagi tetangga yang hendak menikah, bahkan menikahkan. Seorang seniman adalah penggerak dan pemberi inspirasi bagi warganya. Namun seorang seniman juga seorang penyimpan rahasia yang dipercaya.*

⁶³ Eng Ong is a game of sounds/voices played by Acehnese children, primarily to deliver a sense of curiosity (Azhari Aiyub email communication 25 May 2012).

Papermoon Puppet Theatre: 30 September Movement - Coming to terms with the past

For us, it is not about who killed who. It is about the history of loss (and the loss of history) in our life. Is it not true that if we know about what happened in the past, we can understand why we stand here today and where we want to go in the future? (program notes 'Mwathirika' 3)

During the night, between 30 September and 1 October 1965, a group of six generals, the “self-styled Council of Generals,” who had allegedly plotted against President Sukarno (Anderson and McVey 134), were captured, assassinated and thrown down an unused well in Lubang Buaya within the area of Halim Air Base in Jakarta. What happened at Lubang Buaya was carried out by the *Gerakan 30 September* (30 September Movement), a battalion of the palace guard commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, Sukarno’s personal bodyguard, and helped by other branches of the army, as well as civilians from the PKI’s Pemuda Rakyat (Ricklefs 338). In the early morning of 1 October 1965, Untung broadcast a statement over the radio, declaring that “a number of Generals have been arrested and important communications media and other vital installations have been placed under the control of the 30 September Movement, while President Sukarno is safe under its protection” (Anderson and MacVey 134). Within a day, General Suharto took control of the army and in Jakarta the coup was declared a failure. Meanwhile, troops from the Diponegoro Division in Central Java took control of five of the seven divisions in the name of the 30 September Movement. The mayor of Solo issued a statement in support of the movement. Rebel troops in Yogyakarta kidnapped and assassinated two senior army officers (Ricklefs 339). However, once news of the movement’s failure in Jakarta became known, most of its followers in Central Java gave themselves up. The whole affair only lasted four days in total. In the aftermath, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), at that time the largest non-ruling left-wing party in the world, was said to be behind the events. Robert Cribb writes that as a consequence of this *coup d’état* that brought General Suharto to power:

members of the [PKI] party, left-wing supporters, and those suspected of leftist sympathies became victims of unrestrained violence and of killing squads. The subsequent massacres, lasting some six months, eliminated the Communist Party and leftist political power. Although the exact number of victims remains unknown, estimates of people who lost their lives range from 150,000 to 500,000. The army used mass organizations such as Ansor, the militant youth arm of the Muslim party Nahdatul Ulama, to carry out the killings ('The Mass Killings' 347).

Until today, the real events and the people involved in the coup remain mostly obscure, although new research paints a more varied picture (see Roosa, for example). Ricklefs points out that “the intricacies of the political scene, the contacts, friendships and hatreds that linked most of the major participants to one another, and the suspect nature of much of the evidence, make it unlikely that the full truth will ever be known” (338). In the years following the events of 1965/66, public perceptions of what had happened was guided by a propaganda machine that, according to John Roosa, “incessantly drilled the event into the minds of the populace by every method of state propaganda,” indeed “the Suharto regime justified its existence by placing the movement at the center of its historical narrative and depicting the PKI as ineffably evil” (7). The New Order presented the events as the climax of the PKI’s efforts to turn the state and the nation towards communism (Budiawan 37). Bimo Nugroho supports this argument, arguing that historical writing in Indonesia “is rooted in a ‘courtly’ paradigm (*istana*), the paradigm of power and the powerful. In fact, courtly histories are usually far removed from the actualities of past events” (207). He goes on to describe how his own generation, those born after the political turmoil of 1965:

have had such a monumentalizing historical consciousness drilled into us. [...] Court manuscripts, beginning with the *Pararaton* through to the government’s white book on the G30/PKI, have been administered to students as the standard criterion for a perspective on the past” (207).

This perspective on the past was omnipresent: in textbooks for school, novels, films,⁶⁴ and folk stories. *Mwathirika*, as it shows history from below, acts to counteract “the paradigm of power and the powerful” and articulates a different perspective on this history.

***Mwathirika* – Staging history**

More than 45 years after the events of 1965/66 and in a different political climate this dark chapter of Indonesian history has become the topic of Papermoon Puppet Theatre’s play

⁶⁴ One example for this is Arifin C. Noer’s film *Pengkhianatan G 30S/PKI* (The Betrayal of G30S/PKI, 1984), a propaganda movie that depicts Communists as evil. An article in *kompas.com* from July 2012 by Aditjya Revianur suggests that both the movie and the Lubang Buaya Pancasila Sakti monument in Jakarta are “lies” and “a form of propaganda that distort the facts behind the human tragedy of the 1965.” According to an investigation by Komnas HAM they fall into the category of serious Human Rights violations (Revianur).

Mwathirika.⁶⁵ Maria Tri Sulistyani (Ria), who studied communication at Universitas Gadjah Madah, and her husband Iwan Effendi, a visual artist, founded the puppet company in April 2006, shortly after the earthquake in Yogyakarta. At first, the group intended to provide art and theatre facilities for children in the affected area. However, inspired by a workshop with the German Figurentheater “Wilde & Vogel” and watching their Shakespeare adaptations *Midsummer Night’s Dream: Reorganized* and *Exit: A Hamlet Fantasy* presented for an adult audience at the Jakarta International Puppetry Festival in November 2006, they soon began to develop their own artistic pieces for a wider, adult audience, fascinated by the possibilities of puppet theatre. They also did workshops with the Australian giant puppet company Snuff Puppets, where they learned how to build and handle giant puppets. Ria and Iwan are part of a new generation of Indonesian artists who are aware of opportunities for travel and networking, and their work is influenced by international puppetry forms. Neither Ria nor Iwan have any classical theatre training and in their performances they experiment freely with different forms of puppetry and object theatre, such as masks, *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow theatre), marionettes, glove puppets, and muppet-style puppets, the two latter puppetry forms alien to an Indonesian audience. They are also part of a global network of artists, who frequently travel and receive guests in their house in Yogyakarta for intercultural dialogue with artists in residence and for performance collaborations.

Prior to *Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona* and *Mwathirika*, they had staged a variety of other performances, sometimes in collaboration with other puppeteers. The 2008 performance *Dalam Sebuah Perjalanan* (On a journey), for instance, that premiered at Indonesia’s first *Pesta Boneka* (Puppet Festival) tells the story of a group of people all travelling together. Each person has their own story to share, but the journey will change them. On International Women’s Day in 2009 they performed *Having Sex with Magazine* which reminds women to keep sex in the wider perspective and challenging glossy magazines that display tips on how to perform in bed. During Ria’s 2009 residency in South Korea’s Hooyong Performing Arts

⁶⁵At the time of my research *Mwathirika* was the company’s most recent performance. Since then the company has engaged with critical reflection on history in different ways. Iwan Effendi’s installation *Illuminate my story* and Papermoon Puppet Theatre’s performance *Secangkir Kopi dari Playa* (A cup of coffee from Playa) are two examples. *Illuminate my story* “is based on a true story of a young man who w[as] exiled for 40 years by the new order government, from his own country, Indonesia, just because he was sent by the first President of Indonesia to learn [Metallurgy] in the [Soviet Union]. [...]Until now, he's still there. Always keep his promise, to love his country, and to keep his promise to his long lost lover. He is still there. Starring at his lovely hometown from far, with his 75 years old eyes” (Papermoon Puppet Theatre *Illuminate my story*). The performance *Secangkir Kopi dari Playa* is based on the same story and was also part of the Empowering Women Artists programme set up by Yayasan Kelola.

Centre she developed *Ria's Gift from Korea* which tells the story of her travels. It was performed at the Open House of the IVAA (Indonesian Visual Arts Archive) in July 2009. In November of the same year, Ria and Iwan left for a 6-month residency in New York, funded by the Asian Arts Council. In 2011, the couple accepted an invitation from Ishara Puppet Theatre to New Delhi to perform *Mau apa: Indian version* (What do you want: Indian version) at the 9th International Puppet Theatre Festival. Further, since their foundation in 2006 they have held a variety of puppetry workshops in Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Raja Ampat (Papua), Padang Panjang (Sumatra), Blora, Cilacap, Sukoharjo, Malang, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. Since 2008, they also organize the biennial *Pesta Boneka* (Puppet Festival) where Indonesian and international artists gather in a relaxed atmosphere for workshops and performances.

Mwathirika was written and developed while Ria was working with a 2-year grant (2010/2011) from the Yayasan Kelola programme "Empowering Women Artists". The programme was initiated in 2007 after a survey by Kelola found out that only 25% of art grantees in Indonesia are female. The programme aims towards "increasing the individual enthusiasm of the female artists that are supported by Kelola to work and create better, more productively and more consistently" ('Kesempatan Segar').⁶⁶ *Mwathirika* was the first performance produced after Ria and Iwan's return from their 6-month residency in New York. According to the artists, the creative thinking process for the play began in 2005 when Iwan became interested in the events of 1965/6. At that time he was taking part in the *September Something* exhibition, organized by Agung Kurniawan, the owner of Kedai Kebun, an independent arts forum based in the south of Yogyakarta. Artists born in the early 1970s "in the 'golden age' of the new order" (Kedai Kebun) were invited to create art work in a form that represented their perspective on 1965.

How does this generation refer to the trauma of 65? What do they know about this incident apart from having watched Arifin C. Noer's film *Pengkhianatan G 30S/PKI* and some rumours they heard? How can we track down this significant incident that has already disappeared from our memory? How can we explain an affair to a

⁶⁶ Apart from Ria, the grantees for the period 2010/2011 were the two theatre directors Della Nasution and Naomi Srikandi, and the two choreographers Fitri Setyaningsih and Retno Sulistyorini. For the first grant period from 2007-2009 only three female artists were supported, but each was funded for a longer period of three years. Hartati, a grantee from the first Empowering Women programme became choreographer for Riri Riza's musical adaptation of *Laskar Pelangi*, which was a huge financial success in 2011.

generation that doesn't know what once happened was important or, in other words, how can we oppose this mass amnesia?⁶⁷

Taking the theme of 1965 is not new to Papermoon Puppet Theatre; their first performance for an adult audience, *Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona*, which was written by Joned Suryatmoko and premiered in 2008, is partly set in the historical background of 1965/6. The play broaches the issue of how incidents that happened in the past can haunt people's lives in the present. In the preface to the performance text, the play's content is described as moving "from the massacre in 1966 and the spark of love in 2008, to the stains of sperm that should be cleaned and the sins of history that are not completely removed" (Suryatmoko 1).⁶⁸ Whereas *Mwathirika* does not mention any narrative details of the 1965/66 events and thus brings the play to a universal level, *Noda lelaki di dada Mona* gives an account of a mass murder that happened in the past and was executed by the fictional character of Eyang Dipo, who raises the young girl Mona as a daughter. The narrative of the incident is played out by staging parts of Eyang Dipo's memories that are noted in his diary:

[...] Paranggupito, 26 March 1966

During the day we went to Wonogiri again. [...] There were 25 people. Kartono shot five, Diman shot seven. I shot ten. Tejo shot the rest. The falling bodies didn't make a sound; maybe they were directly swept away, taken by the sea (Suryatmoko 21).⁶⁹

As scholar Michael Nijhawan describes this narrativization—the voice of Eyo Dipo speaking from his memory and giving an autobiographical account of his past—represents the voice of a witness who was at the same time an offender. He speaks to the audience, retrieving its shared past.

⁶⁷ *Bagaimana generasi ini melihat trauma 65? Apa yang mereka ketahui tentang peristiwa itu selain menonton film dari Arifin C. Noor (pengkhianatan G.30. S. PKI), dan gosip?*

Bagaimana kita bisa melacak sebuah peristiwa penting yang telah dihilangkan dari ingatan? Bagaimana menjelaskan sebuah peristiwa kepada sebuah generasi yang tidak tahu bahwa telah terjadi sebuah peristiwa penting, atau dengan kata lain bagaimana caranya melawan amnesia massal itu?

⁶⁸ *Hari pembantaian di tahun 1966, dan letupan cinta di tahun 2008, tentang noda sperma yang harus dibersihkan, dan dosa sejarah yang tak tuntas dilenyapkan.*

⁶⁹ *Paranggupito, 26 Maret 1966*

Siang ini kami kembali ke Wonogiri. [...] Ada dua puluh lima orang. Kartono menembak lima, Diman menembak tujuh. Aku menembak sepuluh. Tejo menembak sisanya. Mayat itu jatuh tak bersuara, mungkin langsung tersapu air terbawa ke laut.

These questions of guilt and memory were still of importance for Iwan and Ria during the creation of *Mwathirika*. “Studying the relationship between social experience and narrating the past, one has to take caution not only to highlight the constructed character of memory and remembering, but also the way in which (his)stories have been forgotten or erased from memory through conscious efforts” (Nijhawan 146). How does the generation of the 1980s and 90s, having grown up under the New Order, perceive an historic event that shaped Indonesian politics in crucial ways, but which even today remains a grey area? Since 2000, there has been a rise in the number of books and articles published that discuss this dark chapter of Indonesian history from various angles.⁷⁰ Although some of these books are still viewed as a threat to the Indonesian government; John Roosa’s *Pretext for Mass Murder*, for instance, was perceived to be differing too much to the official state history, and was consequently put on the censorship index by the Indonesian Attorney-General Hendarman Supandji in 2009 (see Kuswandini; Keller ‘Wie sah die Welt’). The Asian Human Rights Commission notes in a report that according to the Attorney-General, the book could “erode public confidence in the government, cause moral decadence or disturb the national ideology, economy, culture and security” (‘Indonesia: Censorship’). This action further demonstrates how sensitive and controversial this historical subject remains.

In her study on military ideology and the construction of Indonesia’s past, Katherine McGregor maintains that the New Order regime “was determined to instil anti-communism into the young generations in Indonesia” (102) particularly via education. For instance, Communist cruelty and the alleged torture of the six generals killed on September 30 (the catalyst for the following genocide) was often luridly depicted in school books. As has been pointed out before, the monumentalization of history, not only in solid monuments but also in written words (here textbooks), can be considered as constructed *lieux de memoire*, a crystallization of the memory created by the powerful. Textbooks “represent a core of cultural knowledge which future generations are expected both to assimilate and support” (Foster and Crawford 2). They “are the means by which nation-states naturalize their power over populations and territories and thus, once internalized, they become repositories of ‘truth’ and taken-for-granted assumptions about reality” (Tewari Jassal and Ben-Ari 30). Thus, the education system had a huge impact on the generation that grew up reading this constructed official national “truth”. Niels Mulder calls this generation the “New Order

⁷⁰ See recent works by Robert Cribb (2001), John Roosa (2006), Helen-Louise Hunter (2007), Hendro Subroto (2008), to name a few.

Babies, students grown up during these times, whose minds are blank, who have not learned to think about history and society, who are uncritical and socially inattentive; they are career and consumer culture oriented at best” (87).

Ria and Iwan are aware of these issues, themselves belonging to this generation. They note how “now people have these memories from the 80s and 90s that are still branded by the New Order thinking [...]” (Sulistyani personal communication 24 Jan. 2011).⁷¹ One of their reasons for staging the play was to make the audience aware of the historical facts, and also to show its massive impact on individual lives. Astrid Reza, an audience member and journalist who blogged about the performance, maintains that “[*Mwathrikia*] shows the flaw of our lives as a part of history—a nation’s history—creating a better understanding in what makes us human.” There were also more personal reasons to stage this play, as Iwan’s grandfather, a *dalang* (wayang puppeteer), was imprisoned for 13 years in the aftermath of the September 1965 incident (Sulistyani personal communication 24 Jan. 2011). Certain scenes in the play—for instance, the frog hunting scene—are inspired by real historic events. In an interview for *The Jakarta Post* on 18 December 2010, Ria states that “the scene of Moyo hunting for frogs to feed his sister, for instance, is the real experience of an uncle who had to earn money to support his family when he was still a teenager following the arrest of his father” (Wahyuni).

In contrast to *Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona*, *Mwathirika* appears more like a fairytale, a story that can “basically happen anywhere” (Sulistyani personal communication 24 Jan. 2011), and shows the personal human tragedy of loss. It is the story of Moyo, Tupu and their father Baba, who is picked up by two soldiers one day and never returns home. It is also the story of their neighbours, the wheelchair-bound girl Lacuna and her father Haki. Their peaceful neighbourhood suddenly undergoes a huge change, stemming from a conflict between the powerful. The change in their lives starts with a triangle painted on their door and a small red whistle. All of the characters except Haki will have disappeared by the end of the play, victims of circumstances over which they have no control. It is a very emotional and personal story, looking at a particular time in Indonesian history from the perspective of its smallest and most vulnerable citizens, the nation’s children. This was important for Ria, who said that the politics were not such a huge point of interest for her, but that the “emotional perspective”

⁷¹ *Sekarang orang ada ingatan yang itu, yang 80an dan 90an masih dicap orde baru itu.*

was crucial. Ria said she and her husband Iwan felt that “many countries, and Indonesia also, begin their history with things like this. With violence, with loss”⁷² (Sulistyani personal communication 24 Jan. 2011).

The performance of *Mwathirika* premiered on 1 December 2010 at the French Cultural Centre (Lembaga Institut Perancis, LIP) in Yogyakarta. On 18 January 2011, the play was performed again at Goethe Institut Jakarta, as part of an international conference titled “Indonesia & The World 1959-1969: a Critical Decade”. Unfortunately, I was unable to watch the premiere in Jakarta, but I saw a dress rehearsal for journalists and friends on 17 January at the same venue. At that time I was unaware about the anti-Communist protests and strong reactions that would occur on the day of the premiere and I did not experience the immediate audience reaction in the room that day. My discussion of *Mwathirika* is thus based on observations from the rehearsal, as well as a DVD recording of the performance and two interviews with Ria (one done on the day of the rehearsal and the other a few days later in Yogyakarta on 24 January 2011).



Fig. 1 Before the show starts the puppets of Baba and Haki sit on the stage. Photo by Tamara Aberle

Before discussing *Mwathirika* in relation to the issues of truth and memory, I want to give a more detailed description of the performance. The play begins by briefly introducing the political setting of the story. A crowd of human puppeteers is celebrating the inauguration of a new leader, who is shown (as a puppet) giving a speech in a video projected at the back of

⁷² *Kami merasa bahwa banyak negara yang awali sejarah negaranya atau Indonesia juga seperti itu, dengan hal-hal seperti itu, dengan kekerasan. Dengan kendaraan, dengan kehilangan.*

the stage. The crowd is cheering and waving red balloons. After a black-out, the Baba and Haki puppets are introduced.

Baba holds a red balloon. This suggests that he probably attended the inauguration celebrations, and the sequence thus connects the political world with the world of Baba's family from the very beginning. After assembling the houses of the Baba and Haki families on stage, the daily lives of the families are introduced. First, the brother-sister relationship between Tupu and Moyo is established. Tupu is playing outside the house with her little hobby horse. When she is attacked by a large dog her brother Moyo comes to her rescue, which shows his position as elder brother and guardian when Baba is not around; it also shows how well Moyo and Tupu get along. After the dog attack, Tupu's hobby horse is broken but Moyo does not manage to fix it. Tupu is very sad and Moyo tries to cheer her up. When Baba arrives home and the children show him the broken hobby horse Tupu is happy about the red balloon Baba has brought for her.



Fig. 2 Circus in front of Haki's house. The left-hand side of the image shows puppeteers with the puppets of Tupu and Moyo. Photo by Tamara Aberle.

When Haki comes home he brings a small music box for his wheelchair-bound daughter Lakuna; Tupu is also fascinated with the music box. Private and political realities come together in a few poignant scenes. For instance, there is a sequence showing a travelling circus where the artist is asking for money for the "red cause," gesturing and waving the flag in front of Baba, making it clear that the "Reds" have to be supported.

Another scene has a video playing at the back of the stage, showing animated figures in white loincloths. A large hand comes down on them and marks some of them, apparently randomly,

with a red cross, and then they are taken away by an unseen force represented by the hand. On stage, masked human actors are fearfully running around, reflecting the climate of anxiety represented in the video. This is supported by a fast electronic beat, reminiscent of circus music, but anxious and scary rather than cheerful and happy, due to its speed. In the course of this mayhem, one actor draws a red triangle on Baba's window, probably provoked by the red balloon in front of Baba's house. Suddenly the veil behind the stage is lit up and a patrolling soldier with a rifle is shown behind the sheer veil. In the morning, when Haki is sweeping his front yard, he sees the triangle. Retreating fearfully, he meets Baba, who also sees the triangle. Haki tries to brush the triangle away but it does not work, so he sets off to repair Tupu's hobby horse. Two soldiers appear. After seeing the red triangle on Baba's window they want to take him away. He asks for a few minutes with Tupu and Moyo, who have just come home. After repairing the hobby-horse, he is taken away by the soldiers. The next scenes show Tupu and Moyo trying to master their daily lives alone at home: when Tupu is hungry and Moyo is looking for food, for example. The passing of time is represented by a video on the back of the stage which counts four dashes and one crossed through for five passed days. After a long time has passed, Moyo looks for Baba. When he asks a group of roaming soldiers for Baba's whereabouts, they see Moyo's red whistle around his neck and take him away for sympathising with the wrong party. This is followed by a brief sequence in which the audience sees Baba behind the veil, where he has to step on the red flag and is then severely beaten. Meanwhile Tupu is sitting in front of her house blowing the whistle. Lakuna wants to cheer her up with the music box, but her father Haki calls her back into the house. The stage behind the sheer veil is lit up again and the audience sees Baba in prison, but he is taken away, probably to be killed. His fate remains unknown, but the following scenes give evidence of the killing machinery in more general terms.

On the main stage, a killing machine is built up. Three small faceless puppets are put on a wooden plank by masked human actors/soldiers, a shot sounds, the plank drops, and the faceless figures fall into a metal can placed underneath the plank; the bodies are taken away. Later, in a different scene, three soldiers are sitting in front of a wooden board. One takes faceless figures from a box, one puts a red hat on their heads, the last one puts them in the back of a toy rack-body truck, most likely referring to the disposal of their dead bodies. This activity takes place in the rhythm of assembly-line work, making an allusion, perhaps, to mass killings as mindless mass production. After the props are taken away, a wooden construction is brought on stage. Two human soldiers play with two not-yet stigmatized

puppets on small wooden platforms. They bring them together with two other puppets who wear red hats. The two figures, a stigmatized and a not-yet stigmatized, hug and kiss, and then the soldiers put red hats on not-yet stigmatized heads as well, referring to the stigma affecting prisoners' family members and loved-ones. The performance ends with Lakuna appearing on stage again. Only Tupu's hat and the red whistle remain in front of the family homes. When Lakuna is blowing the red whistle, a cry for Tupu, the audience sees soldiers patrolling. The last image is of a fallen wheelchair with one wheel still moving. Papermoon Puppet Theatre experimented with different endings to the performance. After some consideration, they decided on this emotive ending: the last scene shows the fallen wheelchair with its still-moving wheel, and Haki appearing on stage, seeing the wheelchair and realizing that his beloved little daughter is gone.

For this performance, Papermoon Puppet Theatre used puppetry as the main medium, which they mixed with video art and human actors. The puppetry style is influenced by both Japanese *kuruma ningyo* (rolling stool puppets) and *bunraku*. The performers sit on small wooden carriages on wheels and hold the puppets in front of them, animating arms, feet and head. By grasping pegs under the puppet's feet with their toes it becomes possible for single puppeteer to manipulate one whole puppet, which is different to the *bunraku* style where the head, arms and feet of each puppet are operated by three different puppeteers. This was a technical innovation Iwan and Ria encountered during their 6-month visit to the US and added to their stock of techniques of puppet performance.⁷³ The hands-on contact of a visible puppeteer on stage, who manipulates different parts of the puppet using their own limbs as an extension of the puppet's limbs, offers a more intimate puppetry experience than marionettes, for instance. Papermoon Puppet Theatre was looking specifically for this feeling of "intimacy" in order to enhance the emotional side of the storyline and to humanize the puppets as much as possible.

The play happens on three different, intertwined levels. The first level is the story of the common people: Tupu, Moyo, Baba, Lacuna and Haki. The names used in the performance have symbolic meaning when translated from Swahili (*Moyo* means "heart", *Tupu* means

⁷³ Nancy Staub notes that from the early 1960s onwards "*bunraku* and other forms of Japanese puppetry [...] have inspired American puppeteers to abandon their diminutive prosceniums and move freely in their performance spaces" (4). Touring *bunraku* groups and movies released in the US, such as *Sayonara* from 1957 starring Marlon Brando or *bunraku* documentaries distributed by the Japanese embassy, were a major influence on American puppeteers. However, a lack of understanding of the poetic narrative of *bunraku* resulted in adoption of only the puppetry elements (5).

“empty”, *Baba* means “father”, *Haki* means “right”, *Lacuna* is an old English term for “sadness”) and suit the puppets’ characters but, according to Ria, they were mainly chosen for the sound of otherness or strangeness in order “not to block the audience’s imagination” by using a language with which they can connect (Wahyuni). The stage shows the houses of the *Baba* and *Haiku* families in the foreground where the main action takes place. The political events are the second level. The stage is divided into front and back areas, with a translucent white curtain or veil dividing the two worlds. Everything that happens behind the veil is happening in the outside world, where politics is made, over which the common people have no influence.

Ki Tristuti Rachmadi, a shadow puppeteer imprisoned under Suharto recounts his memories from those years. He writes that he “lived from one prison to another [...] I asked myself: What did I do wrong? What is my sin? It appears there is no other answer: I was a victim of Indonesia’s political upheaval. It has always been true that whenever there’s an uproar, the little people become the hapless victims” (39). By recalling his memory in such a way he expresses similar sentiments to those shown in the play as he sees the country’s citizens as the victims of political unrest. This point also highlights the voicelessness of certain groups of people, depending on who is actually writing the (hi)story, as noted previously in the discussion of elitist history-writing in Indonesia.

In *Mwathirika*, history is told from below, juxtaposing the two world views and, in this case, clearly siding with the “little” people or citizens. There are only two scenes where we see main characters appear behind the veil. The first shows *Baba* in prison, guarded by a soldier. The second shows *Moyo* searching for *Baba*. He shows a picture of *Baba* to a patrolling soldier. However, as *Moyo* wears a red whistle around his neck, which unbeknownst to *Moyo* is a symbol for sympathising with the wrong side of this conflict, the soldier immediately takes him away. Sri Wahyuni writes in *The Jakarta Post* on 18 December 2010 that this stage setting creates “two different perspectives of the main characters’ small world and that of the larger society, of the micro and the macro, of the grass roots and the elite.” These two levels are connected by the soldiers, who are able to step from behind the veil directly into the village and also are able to take people away from the village into the outside world. The distance between power and the grassroots, and the latter’s helplessness and powerlessness, is emphasized on stage by the diminutive size of the puppets, which stands in sharp contrast to the military, performed by human actors wearing beak-shaped masks.



Fig. 3 The image shows the character of Baba who is taken away by soldiers. Photo by Fanny Octavianus from antarafoto.com.

This choice of presentation also plays with ideas of humanity, as when the puppets—who appear almost super-human in their display of emotion and their readiness to trigger emotions in the audience—perform with the human actors on stage who, in contrast, seem more puppet-like, showing no empathy and being disguised beyond recognition by masks. Yet in their role as soldiers they act like puppet-masters, controlling the lives of the humanised puppet-characters. The third level is a symbolic world that strengthens the understanding of what is happening in the outside world by using simple, clear, but abstract images both through video footage and performed elements on stage. Although the story is universal, symbols such as the red triangle painted on Baba’s window, a symbol used to stigmatise members of the PKI, and the knowledge that the story is “dedicated to recall the tragedy of post-September 65” (which the audience can read on the screen before the performance begins), bring the play back to the historical reality of the national stage. The play uses almost no spoken words with the exception of naming: the characters address each other by name. This non-verbal style also makes the play more accessible to people who would otherwise face difficulties in understanding it.⁷⁴ For instance, on 3 December 2010, the play

⁷⁴ *Kemarin penonton banyak sekali, ada banyak yang gak bisa masuk, sekitar berapa ratus orang gak bisa masuk. Karena ruang pertunjukan kecil, kita perform 5 kali dan yang satu kali pertunjukan kita undang deaf, sekitar 50 anak kita invite untuk nonton pementasan kita. Karena teater boneka its all movement dan mereka really appreciate. Menarik juga. Dan ada diskusi habis itu. Karena begitu kita merasa rata-rata dengan teater boneka kita bisa bicara dengan lebih banyak orang untuk bicara lebih banyak hal [Yesterday we had really a*

was performed for a group of deaf children to commemorate and celebrate the International Day of People with Disabilities, an international observance promoted by the United Nations since 1992. In August and September 2012, the play toured the USA as part of Center Stage, an initiative of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This non-verbal theatre is an advantage with an international audience. Ria states that *Mwathirika* tells a story which could happen anywhere in the world and thus can be told everywhere; in many ways it affirms the transnational positioning of Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

Looking at the performance from a solely Indonesian perspective, *Mwathirika* can be seen as one small part of a larger socio-political process of coming to terms with the events of 1965/6, which was initiated by the end of the Suharto era. Overall, according to Budiawan, the post-Suharto years have prompted a more "open and enthusiastic discussion of the historic truth of the official history" (38),⁷⁵ but this is not a straightforward process and anti-Communist elements remain a strong force in Indonesia's civil society and government. In an article for *Inside Indonesia*, Sulistiyanto notes that reconciliation (*rekonsiliasi*) has become a buzzword among political elites, intellectuals, religious leaders, human rights activists, lawyers, and students in post-Suharto Indonesia, though "there is no consensus about what it means, how it can be achieved or who will initiate it." For example, by the end of March 1999 President Habibie had pardoned and released a number of political prisoners, including the remaining ten associated with the 1965 affair. Only three weeks later, on 15 April 1999, a group of *eks-tapol* (ex-political prisoners), including famous writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, founded the *Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965-1966* (YPKP, Foundation for the Research of the 1965-1966 Massacre). During her work towards an open dialogue the foundation's chairwoman Ibu Sulami Djoyoprawiro⁷⁶ received a series of threats. In May 2000, a group of people from the Anti-Communist Command came to the YPKP office

lot of audience members, many couldn't even enter the performance space, about 100 people couldn't enter. Due to the size of the performance space we performed 5 times and one time we invited about 50 deaf children to watch our show. Puppet theatre *its all movement* and they *really appreciate* [it]. That was interesting. And afterwards we had a discussion. Because of this we feel that usually with puppet theatre we can talk to more people about more things].

⁷⁵ Just a couple of months after the end of the New Order, *Tempo* published an article on the New Order version of events and alternative versions of events, titled *Menguji G30s Versi Orde Lama* (Verify G30s Version of the Old Order).

⁷⁶ Ibu Sulami, former leader of Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia), also published an autobiography in 1999: *Perempuan - Kebenaran dan Penjara* (Woman – Truth and Prison). She was a political prisoner under Suharto from 1967 to 1987 and died in 2002.

(which was also Ibu Sulami's home), claiming that they were ready to kill anyone who sought to remove the anti-Communist laws in Indonesia and that Ibu Sulami was one such person. In September 2000, unknown persons set fire to Ibu Sulami's office in the middle of the night (Wirantaprawira). As Ariel Heryanto maintains, "socialist and Communist-phobic rhetoric outlived the Cold War which had created the original circumstances that brought it into existence and it also outlived the New Order which had been its main author and custodian" (*State Terrorism* 24).

This handling of the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Indonesia also demonstrates the incoherence and instability that has characterized the nation's struggle to come to terms with its traumatic past. On 7 September 2004, the Indonesian national parliament enacted a new law to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Komisi Kebenaran dan Rekonsiliasi, KKR). Sulistiyanto writes that the idea of establishing a KKR emerged during a meeting between the Indonesian Human Rights Commission and then-president BJ Habibie in 1998. When Abdurrahman Wahid (President of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001) visited South Africa in April 2000 to meet with members of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Office, the idea of KKR had a further boost. Nonetheless, it would take another four years to actually enact the law, despite support from human rights activists, as well as a number of bureaucrats and academics. However, little has been achieved since then. After the enactment of the 2004 law, human rights organizations and victims' representatives raised concerns about a clause in the legislation which allowed amnesty for perpetrators of serious crimes, and required victims to forgive perpetrators in order to qualify for reparations. In response, in 2006 the Constitutional Court annulled the entire law, effectively halting the TRC process. This decision has also delayed the establishment of local truth commissions in Papua and Aceh. At the time of writing, the International Center for Transitional Justice reports that the Indonesian government is in the process of drafting a new TRC law.

Reactions to the play

As previously mentioned, *Mwathirika* was performed at Goethe Institut Jakarta on 18 January 2011, as part of an international conference about "Indonesia & The World 1959-1969: a Critical Decade". There were some strong reactions to this event at the Goethe Institut, and a demonstration was held outside the building on the first day of the conference. Two

religiously motivated youth groups, the Gerakan Pembela Islam (GPI, Islamic Youth Movement) and the Laskar Empati Pembela Bangsa (Warriors of Empathy, Defenders of the Nation) protested against the event. According to political scientist Robert Tanter, the demonstrators were carrying banners proclaiming “*Setan Komunis Telah Mati* [The Communist devil is already dead]” and “*PKI Adalah Pelaku dan Dalang Tragedi 1965 Bukan Sebagai Korban* [PKI is the perpetrator and puppeteer of the 1965 tragedy – Not a victim]” (1). The demonstrators claimed the event was neo-Communist propaganda and accused the puppeteers and other participants of propagandizing this political stance (Triyono).

Since the start of *reformasi*, anti-Communist protests have been on the rise. Ariel Heryanto notes that “anti-communism, and the mass violence that was significantly a part of [...] anti-Communist outrage, outlived the New Order; indeed, in several instances these have in fact become stronger in the first decade of the twenty-first century than in the decade that preceded it” (*State Terrorism* 3). Of course, the aforementioned attack on the work of Ibu Sulami at the Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965-1966 is just one example. According to Vanessa Hearman, anti-Communist forces have become even more prominent since 2005. As Hearman notes, the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (Kontras) dedicated one part of its 2006 human rights report to anti-Communist discourse and activities, consisting of 19 separate incidents, including statements and activities by the police and military. In 2007, the Attorney-General’s department banned 14 history textbooks solely for “not mentioning PKI involvement in the 1948 and 1965 coup attempts” based on the revised curriculum of 2004 (Hearman). In March 2008, anti-Communist organisations such as CICS (Indonesian Centre for Community Studies) in East Java and the Anti-Communist Front protested against the National Human Rights Commission’s decision to set up a working group to investigate the 1965/6 mass killing of leftists (Hearman). A variety of anti-Communist groups, including the Anti-Communist Front (FAKI), Indonesian Islamic Students (PII), the Association of Islamic Students (HMI), the 66 Generation (Angkatan ’66), the Crush Communism and Liberalism Action Committee (KAGKL), the Lamongan Islamic Community Forum (FUI), the Madura Social Forum (FMM), the Bandung Anti-Communist Front (FAKI Bandung), the East Java Anti-Communist Front (FAKI Jatim) and the East Java Indonesian Ulemas Council (MUI Jatim) remain strong in the new Indonesian democracy and frequently stage protests against allegedly left-wing activities or against investigation of the 1965/6 massacres (Maslan).

The protests against the conference, and the performance of *Mwathirika* included therein, have to be seen in the light of both a general growth of anti-Communist sentiments within Indonesia and the unresolved issues of the past. In a video about the making of *Mwathirika* posted on YouTube on 24 April 2011, the artists of Papermoon Puppet Theatre mention that a couple of friends had stepped back from the creative process out of “fear” as the topic of 1965 was still perceived as “sensitive” 45 years after the event. The issue remains controversial and still appears to haunt Indonesian society.

In a discussion about Ayu Utami’s novel *Larung*, Laurie J. Sears argues that “ideas of trauma and archive serve as a starting point for understanding the Indonesian nation’s ghosts, but the work of integrating them into national histories is just beginning” (39). As this first part of the chapter has shown, a process of reconciliation has begun to address the human rights atrocities and falsified official narrations of national history perpetuated by the New Order. Artistic works such as Papermoon Puppet Theatre’s *Mwathirika* can help connect the past with the present and break through long-established patterns of institutionalized memory among their audience members. It is also a way of counteracting political amnesia, which has long been apparent in Indonesia’s daily politics, as the play offers a counter-narrative to official state history. The performance of *Mwathirika* does not shed new light on the political narrative of 1965/6 as such; its importance lies in the alternative perspective offered through the performance. It is not the political perspective that is crucial, but rather the humanization of the tragedy that gives a different quality to the show. It is not history-writing “with a golden pen” (Nugroho 216), but history writing from below. This human narrative moved many of the audience members to tears, even in the small auditorium I was part of, and some viewers developed an interest in finding out more about the historical events of 1965. According to blog articles (see Reza, Raharjo, Elga Ayudi), the performance encouraged audience members to start an open dialogue which, on a small scale, is already happening in areas such as literature, film and dance.⁷⁷ Although this can only happen amongst audience members, the publicity that surrounded the performance, through newspaper and blog articles, as well as a DVD of the performance and international interest, helped to transmit an alternative history towards a wider public. The performance can thus be seen as an alternative

⁷⁷ See, for example, the movie *Tumbuh dalam badai* (Growing under the storm, 2008) by IGP Wiranegara, which discusses the problem of Indonesians who were stigmatised as children after 1965/66 because their parents were (alleged) members of the PKI, Ayu Utami’s novel *Larung* (published by Float, 2001), or the dance performance *Tjap merah* (Red stamp, 2010), choreographed by Vincentius Yosep Prihantoro Sadsuitubun, a performance which “explored the different facets of the actual and fantasised accounts of Gerwani, the PKI-aligned women’s organization banned after the coup” (Tanter 6).

“site of memory” which subverts New Order rhetoric. Joseph Roach has argued that performances can embody memories of particular times and places (26), but they are at the same time able to reinvent official truth. In this sense, *Mwathirika* is part of a larger process of coming to terms with the past, a civic discourse that challenges what happened during the New Order, and which may help to shape post-Suharto Indonesia.

PM Toh – Reconstructing memory, constructing the future

Although his theatre background and style of working are quite different to Papermoon Puppet Theatre’s, Agus Nur Amal also offers a counter-narrative to an established, official position in order to overcome trauma and seek social reconciliation for his audience. His long-term project TV Eng Ong was developed at the beginning of 2005—shortly after a devastating tsunami struck the Aceh region on 26 December 2004—and was later used to deliver a range of messages, such as the Acehnese peace-building process, gender issues or the healing of trauma, to audiences in different contexts. For the purpose of discussing Indonesian performances in the context of truth and reconciliation seeking, I focus on how TV Eng Ong was used after the tsunami and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Helsinki on 15 August 2005 (discussed below, see TV Eng Ong: “Aiming for a brighter future”), as a vehicle for seeking social reconciliation. Unlike my analysis of *Mwathirika*, which was based on having watched the live performance, I have not seen any of the TV Eng Ong performances live in Aceh. I watched a video of TV Eng Ong together with the artist in his Jakarta studio after my interview with him on 1 December 2010. The recording was brief and not of very good quality, but my discussions with Agus Nur Amal and reading about his performances showed how relevant this project is to my thesis. In addition to this viewing, I have seen many stills of different TV Eng Ong performances and have read performance descriptions by various observers (including members of the NGO Tikar Pandan). As such, my observations are not based on the live event, which is a shortcoming in the relation to a performance such as TV Eng Ong because, as forum theatre, it is specifically created to encourage audience interaction. My analysis may therefore omit certain aspects of immediate audience reaction that could only have been observed during a live performance.

To begin, I want to briefly introduce performer Agus Nur Amal, who is better known under his stage-name PM Toh. The artist was born and grew up in Sabang on Pulau Weh, a small

island just off the Northern tip of Sumatra, close to Banda Aceh. He came to Jakarta to study theatre at Jakarta's Art Institute (IKJ, Institut Kesenian Jakarta), from which he graduated in 1990. Only one year later, in 1991, he moved to the village of Trienggadeng in the Pidie Regency of Aceh to learn *dangedria*, a rare, local form of story-telling which originates in the southwest of Aceh. Margarete Kartomi writes that *dangedria* is “usually performed by a single storyteller who narrates, in verse or prose or song, a local legend [...] all night for several nights at weddings and other celebrations. He accompanies himself on a range of instruments (for example, flute, jews harp, frame drum) and illustrates his stories with realistic properties” (‘Dangedria Theatre’). These realistic properties might include the use of a “particular head covering if playing the part of a king and change to a different head covering when he plays the part of a princess, and other for the role of pirate, etc” (‘Dangedria Theatre’).

As noted at the start of this chapter, Agus's teacher was the late Teungku Adnan PM Toh,⁷⁸ a well-known Acehese storyteller, whom Agus first saw performing in 1978. Agus spent about a year travelling with him in Aceh to observe and study the techniques of this traditional art form. During this time he invented a canon of his own tales that were not directly connected to Acehese history. He states that he “didn't want to present performances in the traditional manner” because his “desire was to perform in the capital” and so he decided to combine the acting techniques he had learned during his studies with traditional story-telling techniques (personal communication 1 Dec. 2010). This combination of elements is also more likely to appeal to an urban audience made up of different ethnic groups, who may not feel an immediate connection to the specifically Acehese background of *dangedria*. However, his performances still retain some traditional elements. For instance, he always begins his story by singing a traditional Acehese song as this is the exposition to the subsequent performance and is common practice for Acehese storytellers. With the song, the storyteller proposes the story he is going to present to the audience. Traditionally, the song also addresses Allah, asking for forgiveness for the sins of the community (field notes

⁷⁸ After the death of Teungku Adnan PM Toh, Agus took on the stage name PM Toh from his teacher. This name came up around the same time that a new bus company that operated between Banda Aceh and Medan—the PMTOH (Perusahaan Motor Transport Onderneming Hasan)—was established in the region. The bus's horn had a very recognizable sound and often, when Teungku Adnan squeezed his clown's nose during performances, he imitated the sound of this bus horn. Thus, people started to address him as PM Toh (Suriaji et al.).

2011).⁷⁹ This traditional theatre background is one element that distinguishes Agus's work considerably from that of Papermoon Puppet Theatre, which might use traditional performances such as *wayang* as an inspiration for their work, but which is not informed by a traditional theatre education.

After finishing his studies with Teungku Adnan PM Toh, Agus Nur Amal began his professional career in 1992. Melanius P.K. writes that the socio-cultural dynamics and politics of both Aceh and Jakarta are “equally strong forming the background of his works” (32). Many of his shows from the early 1990s onwards are inspired by conflict, violence and disaster from his home region, such as Aceh's struggle for independence and the conflict between Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM, Free Aceh Movement) and the Indonesian army (TNI) which started with the Acehnese proclamation of independence through GAM in 1976. Another theme of interest was the changing political climate in Indonesia in the 1990s, which is expressed, for instance, in his monologues *Hikayat Polisi dan Bandit* (The story of the policeman and the bandit, 1993) and *Hikayat Puyeh Jendral [sic] Bintang Tojoeh* (The story of the Seven Star General's powder, 1994), both tales about the tense political environment during New Order, which he performed until 1998. Using objects rather than verbal statements as a way of addressing political problems often left space for the creative imagination of the audience. Common household items such as a water-scoop, a plastic bag or an umbrella were transformed during the performance and given a different, often political, meaning. The performer explains that during his New Order era performances:

For example, I used an army helmet. An army helmet together with army shoes; at that time this was already a quite strong symbol. I took the army helmet [...] and then I hit the head with the army shoes. So the audience imagined all kind of things. [...] A yellow umbrella, this is the symbol of GOLKAR. [...] I began using this umbrella from 1992 onwards. Around its tip I placed long strings that symbolized long roots” (Amal personal communication 1 Dec 2010).

His performance language is highly symbolic. Until 1998, many performers used physical movements rather than words as a medium to convey their socio-political criticism of the Suharto regime. Barbara Hatley reports that this era saw “the production of plays with minimal dialogue that used the physical movements of the actors' bodies to convey commentary on the violence and alienation of late New Order society. Such theatre, because

⁷⁹ In May 2011, I attended a puppetry workshop at Nottingham University where Agus was invited as a guest speaker. During a presentation he spoke about the traditional use of songs for *dangedria*.

of its abstract nature, was largely able to avoid being censored by state authorities”
(‘Indonesian Theatre Ten Years After Reformasi’ 56).

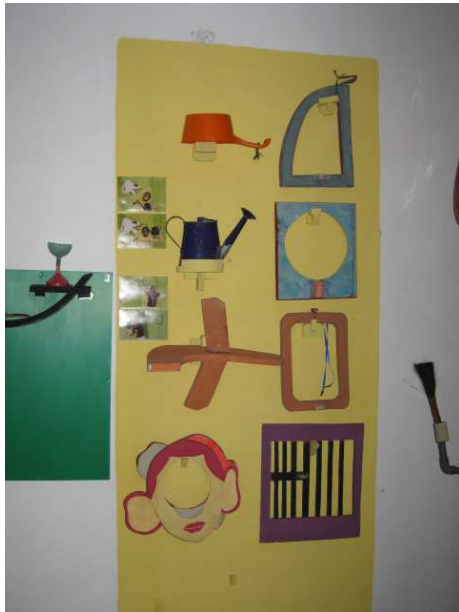


Fig. 4 The image shows some of the objects used in Agus Nur Amal’s performances which are on display on the walls of his old studio in Jalan Rawasari. Photo by Tamara Aberle

Agus claims that after 1998 he felt that voicing political concerns no longer made sense as “there was no meaningful change on the political stage. It was the all the same *wayang* as before” (personal communication 1 Dec. 2010). However, when looking at most of his more recent works from 2005 onwards up to 2011, they still seem to reveal a strong interest in socio-political issues. One example is a solo performance (using the familiar TV frame as stage setting)⁸⁰ from May 2011, where the artist commented publicly on the corruption investigation of Muhammad Nazaruddin on the Indonesian TV channel tvOne.⁸¹ Invited by the TV channel to perform as part of a political show, Agus uses his well-known *dangedria* method of storytelling to discuss the Nazaruddin case. In personal communication, Agus often mentioned his dependence on “being called” or commissioned by paying customers (*panggilan*), which, arguably, means that he is required to be able to adjust to a certain frame

⁸⁰ According to Azhari Aiyub, the idea of the TV setting derives from Agus’s use of a paper window on stage, which he also often uses as a frame to let his different characters peek through in his monologues (email communication 12 May 2012).

⁸¹ In May 2011, one day before he was due to receive a travel ban for alleged corruption, Nazarrudin fled to Singapore. Nazarrudin is the former treasurer of the governing Indonesian Democratic Party and accused of accepting bribes worth almost \$3m (£1.8m). He was dismissed by the party, and Indonesia’s anti-corruption agency announced that it would be questioning him about the allegations (see bbc.co.uk).

of values for each specific occasion, depending on the audience. The above mentioned performance is one such example. The tone of the performance is still critical but aligned to the political opinion of the respective customer.

From *reformasi* onwards Agus was involved in various others projects, most of which had a socio-political objective. Just for example, from 1999 to 2002 the artist initiated a project that tried to resolve a series of violent acts amongst school children in Jakarta. After the fatal tsunami of December 2004, Agus began running a series of theatre workshops—in cooperation with Japanese artists and theatre education specialists Setsu Hanasaki and Kota Suzuki and funded by the Japanese embassy—to offer children affected by the tsunami the possibility of post-traumatic healing through theatre. At the same time, he also started to develop his well-known interactive and participatory TV Eng Ong performances, a concept which he now uses in a variety of contexts.

Agus is also interested in Islam. He frequently accepts invitations to perform stories from the Quran in schools for Islamic studies (*pasantren*) or in mosques. In 2006, a documentary about his work was released and then censored in Indonesia (Aquadini). In making *Promised Paradise*, Dutch film-maker Leonard Retel Helmrich had followed Agus on a tour through Java and Bali in 2004-5,⁸² documenting his thought-provoking quest to discover why Islamic fundamentalists claimed they could reach paradise by killing people in religiously motivated suicide bombings. On this quest he “creates various performative interventions around themes of Islam, violence, and difference” (Cohen ‘Media Review’400). From 2006 onwards, Agus has also started to conduct international workshops about his theatrical style and has performed his monologues in Berlin, Zurich, New York, Prague and Nottingham. As such, the two main pillars of his work are his social projects and the various monologues that he performs in a wide range of contexts.

⁸² Leonard Retel Helmrich started following Agus Nur Amal’s work in the 1990s, but the documentary focuses solely on his works between 2004-5.

TV Eng Ong: “Aiming for a brighter future”

If we are serious about re-weaving the fabric of communities in the aftermath of large-scale violence, if we wish to achieve recovery, reconciliation and reconstruction, we have to start with the victims themselves (Farid 270).

In the final section of this chapter I want to focus on Agus Nur Amal’s TV Eng Ong project in the context of the 2004 tsunami and the peace-building process in Aceh, events that have both caused massive trauma for Acehnese people. I will start with a brief historical outline of the conflict in Aceh. This is by no means a comprehensive account as the background of the conflict is complex and has been discussed in detail by scholars such as Elisabeth F. Drexler and Matthew N. Davies, but it can serve as a basis for understanding TV Eng Ong’s thematic background.

Not long after the devastating tsunami that struck the coast of Aceh on 26 December 2004 and killed an estimated 230,000 people across Southeast Asia, the conflict in Aceh came to a long-awaited end. Unofficial peace talks between the Indonesian government (Government of Indonesia, GoI) and rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) had already been initiated during the first governing period of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (beginning in September 2004) but, as Paul Zeccola argues, the tsunami “was the catalyst, urging a peaceful resolution of the conflict” (308). Following peace talks in Helsinki GoI and GAM finally signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 15 August 2005. By this point, the conflict in Aceh had been active for nearly three decades. In the early 1970s, large oil and gas deposits were found in North Aceh, close to Lhokseumawe and Lhoksukon. “Exploration was followed by the construction of the biggest refinery in the world at the time, financed as a joint venture between the Indonesian state-owned Pertamina company and Exxon Mobil,” as Waizenegger and Hyndmann note, though “the people of Aceh were largely left out of the royalties” (789).⁸³ Poverty and general dissatisfaction with the Indonesian government remained huge problems. In 1976, Hasan di Tiro founded GAM as a counter-movement against Javanese domination and re-declared Acehnese independence. This was the first stage of the conflict, which ended in 1979 when, after clashes between GAM and the Indonesian army (TNI), Hasan di Tiro left Aceh and went into exile in Sweden.

⁸³ For a detailed discussion of Aceh’s oil and gas resources, see Davies (2005).

The conflict continued, however, and went on through two more important stages, with peaks in the late 1980s (1989-1991) and the early 2000s (1999-2004). In the late 1980s, young GAM fighters returned to Aceh from Libya,⁸⁴ where they had undergone intensive military training, and began a new rebellion in their homeland. In 1990, GoI declared Aceh a Military Operations Area (Daerah Operasi Militer, DOM) and by early 1992 had largely suppressed GAM. Aceh kept its DOM status until 1998. During these years, the Indonesian military, police and, to a smaller extent, GAM fighters carried out gross human rights violations against civilians. Between 1990 and 1998 an estimated total of between 5,000 and 12,000 people died. Matthew N. Davies notes that “the guerrilla war’s savagery produced many scandals of civilian trauma from war crime and crime against humanity” (1). As with the aftermath of the events of 1965/6, truth and reconciliation for these human rights violations is still being sought, and the communal trauma still needs to be addressed. The TV Eng Ong project should be viewed against this background.

In 2007, the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) conducted a survey in former high-conflict communities across 14 of 19 districts of Aceh, with the support of Syiah Kuala University and the Indonesian Health Department. The survey was funded by the World Bank, the Decentralization Support Facility, Harvard University and IOM (2007). It found that 35 per cent of Acehnese citizens ranked high on symptoms for depression, 10 per cent for post-traumatic stress disorder and 39 per cent for anxiety (IOM ‘Annual Report’). After the tsunami, both international and local support flooded into the region. Performance was considered a positive way to deal with the trauma. However, Kimberly S. Twarog from the Department of Women’s Studies of the University of California criticizes the way in which international NGOs ignored the trauma inflicted by the violent conflict in Aceh in comparison with the trauma of the tsunami. She claims that these programmes may have “caused participants to feel that they were supposed to suddenly forget about the conflict, [...] and move on with their lives” (144). TV Eng Ong attempts to give equal weight to both issues. After the tsunami, many NGOs wanted to get their messages across to the people, but they favoured mainly didactic methods, using leaflets, brochures and posters as well as expensive and complicated, but not necessarily effective, media campaigns (Aiyub email communication 25 May 2012).

⁸⁴ Hasan di Tiro recruited 300 youths to be trained in military skills in Libya between 1986-9 (Sulaiman 138).

According to Agus, the TV Eng Ong project stemmed from his disapproval of the way TV programmes in the days after the tsunami displayed only death and suffering, instead of showing the survival of the human spirit (Amal email communication 12 May 2011). It also followed up ideas from a pre-tsunami workshop project Agus Nur Amal had developed together with the local NGO Tikar Pandan, called *PMTOH modern*. During this workshop, Tikar Pandan trained a group of 20 students to become storytellers by using the “PMTOH method”. In 2003, the groups staged some of their stories in Banda Aceh, all referring to the conflict in Aceh, their hopes for peace, and the hardships of the citizens dealing with war on a daily basis. After the tsunami, Tikar Pandan approached Agus and wanted to re-enliven the ideas of the storytelling workshop, but felt that a form of forum theatre, such as TV Eng Ong, would be more effective as it is “mobile,” more “aggressive” and more “fun” for the audience (Aiyub email communication 25 May 2012).

The concept of TV Eng Ong is relatively simple. The team uses a 1.5 x 1.5 plywood television set with the word *episentrum* (“epicentre”) written on its front as stage (Bintang). The idea of using a TV frame was initially derived from Agus’s use of a cardboard window frame as a central prop during earlier performances.⁸⁵ This TV setting soon became a characteristic of Agus’s performances and was used across a range of different contexts. The use of TV as a setting creates a very familiar frame for the Acehnese audiences, as many people watch TV on a daily basis and use it as a source of relaxation, entertainment or information. Also, by giving individual audience members the opportunity to step behind the screen and become part of the show, a democratizing process was initiated in which the individual audience member felt a sense of empowerment by making their voice heard through such a strong medium (although, of course, it was a fake TV frame). The TV is transported on a truck-bed, which can be converted into a temporary stage during performances (see Fig. 5 below). Due to the minimal stage props and the simple setting of the performance it was possible to tour through remote areas in the Acehnese countryside. During the show, Agus PM Toh and his fellow artists M. Yusuf Bombang and Udin Pelor acted as TV hosts. Audience members were invited to climb into the frame and tell their story. In January 2005, a few weeks after the tsunami, TV Eng Ong began touring through

⁸⁵ The concept of a live TV on stage has been used by other artists in different contexts. The Hungary-based *Vakuum TV*, for example, uses a TV frame that separates audience and stage. The “TV programme” can only be watched when the frame is set up and thus imitates the TV watching experience for the audience (Richardson 204). *Living newspapers*, *Terror as Usual*, and *Giant Small Works* also use similar concepts in some of their works.

Aceh, first privately funded, by the end of 2005 the project received money from CARE International and still worked together with Tikar Pandan. They toured through tsunami-affected areas and refugee camps in Saree, Lampuuk, Mata Ie, Lhoknga the greater Aceh district (Bintang). As this first internationally-funded tour was mainly intended to “entertain” tsunami survivors and refugees, the NGO avoided calling this “trauma-healing” (Aiyub email communication 25 May 2012).



Fig. 5. The image shows the plywood TV on the bed of a small truck during an afternoon rehearsal in Aceh. Agus Nur Amal is seated on stage. Udin Pelor holds the microphone. Photo by Agus Nur Amal.

However, as Michael Nijwahan notes of the Punjabi performative tradition of *dhabi*, which is characterized as translating contexts of violence and suffering into narrative form, the same could be said of TV Eng Ong. In many ways Agus Nur Amal’s way of story-telling—where the voices of victims are made heard through their own narrative—can be a very powerful way to deal with personal trauma. This idea resonates with Joseph Roach’s argument that “genealogies of performance also attend to “counter-memories,” or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences” (26). In TV Eng Ong the bodies of audience members are theatricalized, although the audience members pose as themselves on stage. But they are “fictional” because they are displayed in the TV frame and made part of the narrative maintained by Agus et al, who act as TV hosts. These theatricalized bodies, as they are seen on stage, also bear the marks of previous historical events that caused them trauma. These traumatic experiences are inscribed in their bodies, and they therefore stand symbolically as alternative sites of memory that enact events from the past: offering a counter-narrative to official histories as they, like *Mwathirkia*, tell stories from below. Klaus Schreiner notes that

“at the collective level as well, sites of memory are one form of symbolic narration where trauma can be reactivated and thus put to rest” (272). In the case of TV Eng Ong, this reactivation happens through the public re-telling of individual memories. This is watched by others, a collective community, who share similar memories; the public display may help them put some of their anxieties and fears to rest. It also, as Bintang notes, was a great relief for tsunami survivors to hear people joke and tell funny stories in the face of disaster.

After the peace agreement between GoI and GAM on 15 August 2005, Agus claims that the show also provided a “theatre forum”—a term borrowed from Augusto Boal’s “Theatre of the Oppressed”—“to reconstruct the memory of violent conflict and to construct the image of a future life in peace” (Amal email interview 12 May 2011), and to “emphasize the benefits of the on-going peace process” (Anto and Pardede 28). Within this context, the show can be considered to be a small part of a “peace industry” within which “donors, NGOs, foundations, grant-giving bodies, research circles, study centres, [...] and dialogue groups are active in preparing the ground” (Tewari Jassal and Ben-Ari 35). In 2006, for ten days and funded by the European Commission and the International Organization for Migration, TV Eng Ong travelled through 40 conflict-affected villages in eight different districts all over Aceh (Pidie, Bireuen, North Aceh, East Aceh, Nagan Raya, Aceh West, Aceh Jaya and Aceh Besar, including Banda Aceh), staging the show in another place every night. To make the message more relevant for the villagers, the artists integrated local elements, first and foremost the well-known practice of *dangedria* story telling (Bintang; Anto and Pardede 28). As such, Sumit K. Mandal calls PM Toh “a notable example of an art worker who has explored to its full potential traditional Acehnese performance tradition that in turn embodies [...] the commitment to see the restoration of peace in the province” (‘Creativity in Protest’ 207).

Whereas the TV Eng Ong show departs from the original idea of forum theatre, which intended to give a voice to the oppressed, it does use some of its techniques. For instance, it changes the traditional performer-spectator relationship by giving the audience the opportunity to become part of the show, add their own stories and present them in front of a larger audience. Agus recalls one incident when a woman told her life story to her fellow villagers, using the plywood TV as a medium. The audience member spoke about her husband, a member of GAM, who was killed by the TNI. Three months afterwards, the house in which she lived with her son was destroyed by the tsunami. While the woman was talking

on stage, her son tried to drag her from behind the TV because he could not bear his mother's public testimony (Amal personal communication 1 Dec. 2010). Although the process is painful, it could potentially help the son in re-imagining the past as it is told by his mother and therefore enables him to move on himself. However, this example highlights one of the problems inherent in this form of theatre.



Fig. 6. A fake cameraman and Agus Nur Amal as a reporter broadcasting from Aceh amidst a crowd of onlookers. Photo courtesy of Agus Nur Amal

In a paper on “transgressive storytelling” Julie Salverson, a researcher and video-maker, discussed a project with refugees in Canada, asking whether “uses of personal narrative in community arts projects [are] overly romanticized” (‘Transgressive Storytelling’). She uses the example of dramatic realism to explain that:

[W]hen people encounter stories which involve violence and loss, the engagement is complicated by the impact of trauma on either the storyteller, the listener, or both. Encounters with what Deborah Britzman (1998) calls the "difficult knowledge" of trauma have the potential to set in motion dynamics of identification and defense that play out the uneasy negotiation between one's own experience of loss and the other's account. The tendency of dramatic realism in theatre to encourage a standing in for another proves more disturbing when the question is asked, what does the event being testified to mean to the potential witness? (‘Transgressive Storytelling’).

In the TV Eng Ong case described above, where the son tried to drag his mother from behind the screen because he could not bear her public testimony, the mother's and son's respective experiences of loss and violence were understood divergently. Whereas the mother used the

stage to engage with her trauma and possibly overcome it, her son was not yet ready to do so. At the same time, by reconstructing memories publicly, TV Eng Ong functions as a starting point for audience members to both come to terms with the past and perhaps slowly move on into the future. Twarog also suggests that Agus Nur Amal's appearance on TV and the availability of DVDs of some his performances, which also dealt with the conflict and its aftermath (e.g. the stories of Hamzah Fansyuri)⁸⁶, has a long-term value for trauma healing as it is possible to revisit them anytime. They also can be considered to be alternative sites of memory as they are material elements of the memorial heritage of a community.



Fig. 7. Audience members in the TV set together with a member of the TV Eng Ong team. Photo courtesy of Agus Nur Amal.

Further reflection

The chapter discussed an on-going civic discourse—on stage and beyond—on the issues of memory and trauma in post-New Order Indonesia, using the example of Papermoon Puppet Theatre's *Mwathirika* and PM Toh's TV Eng Ong project. It argued that some performances in the post-Suharto era can be viewed as alternative sites of memory, where trauma can be laid to rest through the (re)telling of counter-narratives to official state histories. As has been argued, this state history is often so far removed from the narrative of its citizens that people often feel disassociated from the (distorted) Indonesian past and unable to move forward

⁸⁶ The story of Hamzah Fansyuri tells episodes about the conflict in Aceh. Agus Nur Amal created *Hikayat Hamzah Fansyuri Anak Dunia* (The Story of Hamzah Fansyuri - Child of the World) in 2000 and *Hikayat Hamzah Fansyuri Menjala Ikan Salam* (The story of Hamzah Fansyuri who is fishing with a net) in 2002.

from their personal traumas. All the works discussed in this chapter (re)tell history from below, which means that they are a contrast to the long-established official political narratives maintained by the government; they offer audience members the chance to imagine an Indonesian past that resonates more closely with their own realities.

In the case of *Mwathirika*, this reality is the voice of the people and their experiences during the political turmoil of 1965/66. In the case of TV Eng Ong it is the voice of all those affected by the civil war and the tsunami in Aceh. Joseph Roach argued that performances also attend to counter-memories, or the incongruity between history as it is told and memory as it is publicly enacted on stage. This is especially important for TV Eng Ong, where audience members enact their own traumatic experiences on stage. In this way, the performances can serve as sites of memory, as when audience members of TV Eng Ong acknowledge their trauma and transform their individual memories into communal knowledge, or when audience members access history to fill gaps in their own knowledge about the events of 1965/6 after watching *Mwathirika*. These theatre works are also embedded in a larger political dialogue focused on coming to terms with the past, which has been a long and difficult process since the Indonesian government has not been clear in taking responsibility in the truth and reconciliation process. Both the theatre companies discussed in this chapter position victims at the centre of their narration and can thus generate a civic discourse about topics that have not been discussed publicly for a long time.

I am in no position to say what kind of long-term effects, if any, these performances might have on audience members, as this was not the focus of my research. In fact, I have only spoken to members of Tikar Pandan who were affected by the tsunami and the civil war in Aceh and could tell me about their experiences.⁸⁷ However, as Hilmar Farid has argued, only if “we pay very close attention to the experiences of the victims, as narrated by the victims themselves,” is it possible to obtain a clearer overall picture of the violence and go on to “re-weave the fabrics of community” (270). This is a crucial role that both companies have taken on. This is what makes them part of “socially-engaged” theatre, and part of a civil society that constantly reinvents, questions and challenges what is happening in its surroundings. In Indonesia, historical trauma as discussed in this chapter is often also related to past or current violations of human rights which remain very much part of the public consciousness. Apart

⁸⁷ This is a gap in my research, I am aware of. However, it was not possible for me to travel to Aceh to speak to audience members during the time of research.

from the traumatic events of 1965/6, the most widespread of these violations have occurred during struggles for independence in East Timor, Aceh and Papua.

Chapter 3: Human rights, violence and theatre

The contentious issue of human rights and their violation in the post-Suharto period has often been addressed through modern theatre. As Helen Nicholson argues: “[...] the language of human rights has filled the vacuum left by the demise of grand political narratives after the Cold War. [...] idealistic young theatre workers are far more likely to be interested in human rights issues than in starting revolutions” (130). In Indonesia, due to censorship and other governmental restrictions, this was not openly possible during the New Order but, since *reformasi*, it seems that human rights have become of more importance for artists in general.

Some scholars claim that what happened in East Timor⁸⁸ brought Indonesian human rights violations into international public awareness for the first time as the state-inflicted violence in East Timor made global headlines (see Robinson *If you leave us here*, Brown). Other human rights violations that occurred during the New Order—the PETRUS murders, for instance—were not reported in detail, even in Indonesia, and there was little international lobbying to bring the perpetrators to justice. As an Amnesty International Report from 1994 notes, during the New Order, Indonesia “[...] consistently enjoyed support and succour from the world’s most powerful nations and the prime movers of the international community. Only human rights violations in East Timor [...] have touched the international conscience” (Amnesty International ‘Indonesia: Power and Impunity’). The same article notes that Indonesia began publicly asserting a commitment to human rights from 1989 onwards, when *keterbukaan* (openness) was the new buzzword of the era. In 1991, Indonesia also became a member of the UN Human Rights Commission. However, the report further notes that “the government has since adopted a cynical stance on human rights” (‘Indonesia: Power and Impunity’). In response to criticism at home and abroad it took a number of steps to demonstrate its commitment to protecting human rights: it held human rights seminars, established a National Human Rights Commission, and even punished a small number of soldiers responsible for human rights violations. At the same time, the government continued

⁸⁸ East Timor, officially the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste, was granted nationhood in 2002. It is the eastern part of the island Timor Leste. It was colonized by the Portuguese in the 16th century. In 1975, the Portuguese declared East Timor’s independence but shortly after, and despite international protest, it was annexed by Indonesia. This led to a long and intensive armed struggle, and numerous crimes were committed by the Indonesian army and pro-Indonesia militia. On 20 May 2002, through UN support, East Timor was again declared independent. The political situation remains unstable and the human rights atrocities have not yet been legally addressed.

to brand human rights activists “subversives” and “enemies of the state” (‘Indonesia: Power and Impunity’). Human rights violations had been institutionalized by the state.

As Samsu Riyal Panggabean notes, during the New Order, participants in demonstrations and social protests in Indonesia were often labelled “criminal, uneducated, immoral, extreme left, extreme right or the enemies of God” (218). This labelling suggests a form of dehumanization and thus offers an “effective mechanism that enables the security apparatus to repress protesters without feelings of guilt [...]” (218). There were times when government officials labelled students or NGO activists as Communists, “stating that it was therefore permissible (*halal*) to shed their blood” (220). They used the Communist stigma that had been kept alive after 1965 as a means of guiding the public consciousness (see chapter 3). Most political activity during the New Order, as is argued by Elizabeth Drexler, was said:

not to represent the political aspirations of Indonesian citizens, but to have been organized by ‘masterminds’ or ‘puppet masters’. If there were no logical scapegoats, mass political action was said to be the result of unidentifiable, but still sinister, provocations. Provokator emerged as a term to sharpen the meaning of provocation as a way to talk about elite and military manipulations of violence (170).

This line of argument also implies that Indonesian citizens in general were not capable of thinking and acting politically and were thus not yet ready to participate in democracy—an idea which, of course, would have been maintained by an oppressive regime.

The application of human rights in Southeast Asia, in general, has not been consistently upheld. The ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)⁸⁹ was inaugurated in 2009.⁹⁰ Many of its members have been responsible for some of the worst human rights atrocities in world history, and some still continue to be human rights violators today. Hay Duy Phan notes that “the establishment of AICHR is not only an important step forward in terms of promoting universal human rights and creating a human rights system in Southeast Asia, it is also a

⁸⁹ The ASEAN member states are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. See aseansec.org for details.

⁹⁰ Hay Duy Phan notes that “at the Thirteenth ASEAN Summit (Nov.2007 in Singapore) ASEAN leaders agreed to include in its charter a provision on establishing a human rights body” and on “July 20, 2009, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting decided to adopt the “Terms of Reference” for the ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)” (3f).

significant development in ASEAN history with many implications for regional politics” (4). He argues that the creation of AICHR within the framework of ASEAN suggests that human rights can no longer be considered “a solely domestic affair, but rather a transnational issue that needs to be promoted and protected by an institutionalized regional body, in addition to different mechanisms available at the national level” (4). An AICHR meeting was held from 3 to 6 June 2012 in the Burmese capital, Rangoon, to demonstrate AICHR’s support of Burma’s recent democratic reforms. However, as a recent article in the *Asian Tribune* suggests, critics argue that AICHR’s performance thus far “has been disappointing and wanting, epitomized by the lack of transparency, failure to consult with civil society organizations and no demonstrable progress in protecting and promoting human rights” (‘Total Reform is Needed’). According to Phan, this is because many nations in the region are still evaluated as major human rights violators, and regional collaboration and cooperation in protecting and promoting human rights is still limited. Also, the regionally specific “ASEAN way” and the tradition of non-intervention remain deep-rooted, as reflected in the ASEAN charter. As this region is also very diverse in terms of regime type, economic development, legal system, cultural heritage, societal awareness, and national and political will, it is difficult to establish a transnational human rights body which is independent, strong and effective (4).

On 23 May 2012, an Indonesian delegation comprising government officials, including the foreign minister Marty Natagelawa, and representatives of a number of rights groups presented a report on the condition of the country’s human rights at the UNHRC headquarters in Geneva. In the weeks prior to this visit the national media, including *The Jakarta Post* and *Kompas*, expressed grave concerns that the report would not reflect the true state of human rights in Indonesia, but would instead deliver a fanciful version to show the country’s democratic development in a positive light, especially given threats to religious freedom that were occurring at that time. An excerpt of an editorial published by *The Jakarta Post* on 23 May 2012 reports that:

The country’s laws and regulations mean nothing when it comes to protecting freedom of religion. They did not protect the Ahmadis scattered across the country from being attacked and even killed by radical groups who dislike their presence. They failed to protect the followers of the GKI Yasmin Christian Church in Bogor or the Filadelfia HKBP Church in Bekasi from attacks even when the courts clearly ruled in their favour (‘Editorial: Lying for the Country’).

The article suggests further that the Indonesian government is “clearly unable or unwilling to clamp down against radical groups that have been tormenting, harassing and killing others.” The writer complains that in cases where freedom of expression and freedom of gathering were violated, the state did not “lift a finger to protect the people.” For example, in February 2011 members of the Ahmadiyya sect in Banten (which is still banned from practising its beliefs in many provinces), were attacked by a mob of approximately 1,500 people. Three Ahmadiyya followers were killed while they were guarding the house of Ahmadiyya cleric Ismail Suparman. The incident was widely reported in the Indonesian media and some of the attackers were given prison sentences, though these were relatively short as they were not convicted of manslaughter, despite the fact that the attack had been filmed and the murderers were clearly identified. This incident was followed by other cases of violence against members of this religious community. Already in September 2010, Indonesia’s then Minister of Religion, Suryadharma Ali, had called for the Ahmadiyya to be banned. Several provinces across Indonesia also brought in local regulations restricting the group’s activities. Amnesty International denounces these cases as gross violations against freedom of expression and freedom of religion, which have become more common in post-Suharto Indonesia. More recently, attacks against Shiites in Madura worried the moderate Muslim majority. As yet the state has not taken a clear stance on these inter-religious conflicts and grave human rights violations.

As Panggabean points out, over and above the state, civil society also can promote peaceful conflict resolution. This not only refers to major conflict resolution, as following civil war, but also to human rights violations on a grassroots level. Both before and after *reformasi*, civil society in Indonesia has been involved in many activities to strengthen the role of autonomous organisations in solving social problems and facilitating peaceful social transformation. Groups, individuals and non-governmental organisations have been working on diverse issues such as civic education, human rights, workers’ rights, religious issues, media, environment, security, conflict resolution, women’s issues and drugs. The international NGOs play an important role in helping these organisations through technical and financial assistance: “[T]he nascent but vibrant development of civil society organisations in Indonesia is part of the emergence of global civil society” (Panggabean 225) and theatre is often one part of this process.

Professor Helen Nicholson maintains that:

there is a move towards a new political language in socially committed theatre-making in which idealism is tempered by an understanding of the material circumstances of participants and the local and regional conditions in which the work takes place ... the balance between abstract idealism and more local expressions of justice appears to be satisfied by recourse to the vocabulary of human rights, taking us beyond the polarisation between universalists and relativists and into more transcultural ideas of morality and humane standards of living (130).

In *Theatre and Human Rights*, Singapore-based theatre scholar Paul Rae identifies a range of cases when theatre and human rights come together. The most common of these is probably the thematic occurrence of human rights issues in stage plays. There tend to be activist and participatory performances with explicit human rights agendas, but there are also other performances that take human rights issues as their topic but are not attached to an obvious activist programme. Sometimes theatre-makers have a concurrent advocacy role as public intellectuals and civil society actors. Cultural activists Ratna Sarumpaet and Seno Gumira Adjidarma⁹¹ are prominent Indonesian examples of public voices for human rights. They are advocates in the sense that they “feel responsibility to exhort and appeal on behalf of another or another’s cause with the hope that still others will gain the ability to respond” to their advocacy (Madison 11). Other relationships between theatre and human rights might be found in performances that challenge human rights standards, or the ways in which theatre aesthetics are “reverberating the formal legal and political contexts within which human rights law is enacted and challenged,” the borders that theatre performances dealing with human rights issues might encounter, the legal framework they have to follow, and the “theatricality queasily inherent in some of the most iconic and widely publicised human rights violations of recent years” (Rae 2). Performances during the New Order were also under threat of punishment and human rights abuses, when many plays were censored for their allegedly political content (see Bodden ‘Teater Koma’s Suksesi’; *Resistance on the*

⁹¹ In his novels and short stories, Seno Gumira Adjidarma often comments on human rights issues; for instance, *Jazz, Perfume and the Incident* centres on human rights violations in East Timor. Seno, together with FX Rudy Gunawan, Nezar Patria, Arahmaini and Sita Aripurnami, is also one of the co-founders of Perkumpulan Seni Indonesia (Indonesian Art Gathering - PSI) which was established in 2001. PSI supports the idea of a cultural movement “for the education, awareness and community empowerment process in the enforcement of rights, justice, and truth” with a specific focus on Human Rights.

Plays such as *Matinya Seorang Pejuang: A tribute to Munir* (Death of a warrior: A tribute to Munir) which was produced in 2004 and 2005 written by FX. Rudy Gunawan, directed by Landung Simatupang and illustrated with music by Tony Prabowo, explicitly expresses the institution’s interest in human rights issues as it centred on the case of murdered human rights worker and lawyer Munir. The performance was supported by KASUM (Komite Aski Solidaritas Untuk Munir – Action Committee Solidarity for Munir), Voice of Human Rights, YSIK, Elsam, KontraS, Hivos, TIFA Foundation and Kerkinactie and thus was able to tour Yogyakarta, Malang, Surabaya, Denpasar, Lombok, Jakarta, Medan, Bengkulu and Batu (Eastern Java).

National Stage). As mentioned in my introductory chapter, Ratna Sarumpaet's monologue *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah accuses)⁹² was censored in 1997 when it was touring through numerous cities (Bandung, Surabaya, Jakarta, Padang, Bandar Lampung,⁹³ Solo, Malang) in Java and Sumatra. Ratna states that her performance met fierce resistance from the Indonesian military (see also Bodden *Resistance on the National Stage* 306-307). The artist claims that "it was just like 1000 troops with weaponry, they blocked the theater and sent the people home" (Ratna Sarumpaet personal communication 15 Feb 2011). According to a report by ISAI (Institut Studi Arus Informasi - Institute on the Studies of Free Flow of Information) the performance scheduled for 6 December 1997 at the Centre Culturel Français (CCF) in Bandung (now Institut Français Indonesia) was banned by the authorities. "More than a hundred police were deployed with a number of large trucks, as well as one tank," the report notes. Jean-Michel Phéline, the director of CFF and the French consul in Bandung at that time, demanded that the police withdraw the ban. He argued that "since the CFF building is also the French consulate, their actions were considered to be a violation of diplomatic norms," and informed them that the French Ambassador would make a formal protest about the incident to the Indonesian Foreign Office (see ifex.org).

Theatre practitioners such as Lena Simanjuntak, who worked with sex workers in Surabaya between 2000 and 2006, facilitate a form of socially-engaged theatre that is rooted in the culture in which the work takes place. According to Helen Nicholson, "theatre which aims to promote human rights needs to be rooted in the cultures in which the work takes place, rather than rely on abstract universalism or more individualism for its efficacy" (139). Lena Simanjuntak's work is efficacious in promoting human rights because of its relation with its subjects. It is staged with the aim of provoking change for the participants of the performance (the sex workers). Lena frequently travelled to Surabaya and lived in the sex workers' compound for many weeks to get closer to experiencing their lives. In a personal interview

⁹² *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah Accuses) is the prequel of *Marsinah: Nyanyian dari Bawah tanah* (Marsinah: Song from the Underworld) (1994) which tells the true story of the unsolved murder of worker Marsinah who was also raped and tortured after being outspoken about workers' rights.

⁹³ Iswadi Pratama, director of Teater Satu in Bandar Lampung gives an account of his experience of the staging of *Marsinah* when Ratna arrived in Bandar Lampung. He notes that "we also helped Ratna Sarumpaet when *Marsinah* was performed in Lampung and the Arts Council Lampung had agreed to cooperate. But suddenly there was an act of banning the show by the police so that the Arts Council was unable to give back-up." But through help of friends of Teater Satu it was finally possible to perform at the Taman Budaya. [*Juga kita misalnya membantu Ratna Sarumpaet ketika Marsinah, itu ketika dia dipentaskan di sini, oleh Dewan Kesenian Lampung sudah bersepakat, kerja sama. Tapi tiba-tiba ada pelarangan dari Polda di sini, sehingga Dewan Kesenian Lampung tidak bisa mem-back up*]. (Pratama, personal communication, 30 Dec. 2010).

she notes that victims of injustice and violence have a “wound” which needs healing; those wounded have to move from a position as victim to a new position as activist by the use of theatre as a form of therapy. The sex workers played their own lives and the work centres on their own experiences. According to Lena, the initiatives already have helped some of the sex workers to escape the circle of poverty and violence. One sex worker feels that her awareness has grown since she began doing theatre. She now is “brave enough to express her feelings in front of an audience, feelings she has suppressed and not spoken about until now” (personal interview, 13 June 2011). Another woman started to learn reading and writing in the course of the theatre work and felt empowered to express her own wishes more clearly (Simanjuntak² 2005:46f.). This is not theatre that dwells on the legal bindings of human rights but works on a grass roots level to teach respect for one’s own rights and demands. This has to be looked at carefully as according to Nicholson, socially-engaged theatre also has to be aware of “how practice might mediate the gap between local and global discourses in relation to human rights advocacy” (19). This is often rather ambiguous. In practice it means for instance that while violence against women is generally seen as negative, it might sometimes be impossible to ignore local constructions of duty and honour, complex and powerful emotions that influence a woman’s decision to stay with a violent husband (19f). If brought on stage in an efficacious way, all this has to be considered. In *Catatan Pinggir* Goenawan Mohamad writes that:

to differ is what human rights are about. The paradox of human rights is that their starting point is something universal – whereas the universal can be interrogated by the particular, which is not necessarily the same as what is assumed by that universality. If there is anything that constantly teases us, it is the matter of ‘*differing*’ and its meaning in life (4).

This ‘differing’ is a crucial factor when analysing human rights in Indonesia and the theatre practitioners work should be mindful of this as well in order to produce meaningful work in the context of human rights.

Violence has taken many and varied forms in Indonesia. Since colonial times, the archipelago has been plagued by widespread and deeply entrenched ethnic, religious and political conflicts (see Coppel et al., Wilson). The birth of the New Order and the events of 1965/6 demonstrate the role violence has played in establishing and maintaining power, and has continued to play since the fall of Suharto in 1998. The separatist conflicts in Papua, Aceh or

East Timor made international headlines, and Petra Stockmann reports that, in terms of human rights violations, the “worst atrocities” since the 1965/6 affair happened during the independence struggles of these three Indonesian provinces (35). Non-state violence, such as the religiously motivated conflict in the Moluccas, or subversive movements such as the anti-government riots in 1998, are in return met with vicious state violence. This results in gross violations of human rights on both sides.

Much of the violence that took place during the New Order was, arguably, state controlled, whereas violent civil conflicts since *reformasi* have been more “open” and unchecked. Shortly after 1998, the religious violence between Muslims and Catholics on the Moluccas mounted, resulting in the deaths of many hundreds of people and over half a million more displaced between 1999 and 2002. Throughout Suharto’s rule, diversity, both ethnic and religious, was subsumed by the goals of nation-building and development. Panggabean argues that in Indonesia conflict is “regarded as evil because it challenges stability and disrupts social harmony. This perspective featured strongly under the Suharto regime, as it put stability and economic growth above all other national concerns” (217). Conflict was eliminated by violence, over which the state held a monopoly; and citizens were subject to violent outbursts by the state in the name of restoring peace and harmony.

Panggabean gives an account of conflict management in Indonesia during the New Order, a model that still, to a lesser extent, influences the handling of violent conflicts, especially separatist conflicts since *reformasi*. He argues that by focusing only on the actions and behaviours of conflict, the government could ultimately ignore the conflict situation and the attitudes of the people involved: the central government was only concerned with “repressing the provinces militarily whilst ignoring the incompatibilities, misperceptions and anger that pervade relations between these provinces and the central government” (218). Using repression to deal with conflict perceived as aggression was the centrepiece of Suharto’s approach to conflict management. Protests, “even grievances,” as Panggabean notes, were considered to be “aggression” (218). Troops were sent to manage industrial disputes involving workers and management, to scatter student demonstrations or to control peasant protests. Apart from the 1965/6 affair that resulted in the death of approximately 1 million alleged Communists, separatist conflicts were ruthlessly suppressed, human rights violations common. However, this violence was rarely represented in the media and the state steadfastly argued that “harmony” was a central pillar of society.

In her thesis on post-*reformasi* theatre in Indonesia, Lauren Bain argues that the “un-representedness,” as she calls it, or the absence of representation of violence during the New Order has been challenged by theatre practitioners since *reformasi*. She states that performances staged by theatre groups leading up to and since 1998 have “challenged the invisibility and deniability of New Order state violence by making state violence visible and perhaps less ‘abstract’” (99). This is apparent when looking at the representation of violence in the media. As open and honest news coverage faced censorship and other punishment during the New Order era, the Indonesian press is not very experienced in or well-equipped for the reporting of conflicts involving issues of ethnicity (*suku*), religion (*agama*), race (*ras*) and intergroup conflict (*antargolongan*) – SARA (Stanley 200). The press had been prohibited from reporting on all matters relating to SARA, which was problematic for society as there is “a thorough political education to be gained from a survey of the events surrounding a particular case of violence” (Nugroho 2006). However, the representation of violence on stage common at the beginning of *reformasi* (as discussed by Lauren Bain) has arguably shifted to more concrete and pointed performances addressing the theme of human rights violations.⁹⁴ Reconciliation is a topic for many. Funding schemes are available for practitioners who engage with human rights issues, often in collaboration with NGOs. International financial backing and many recent performances seem to be concerned with the empowerment and education of citizens, often in relation to human rights issues such as violence against women, human trafficking or emancipation of the gay community. Thus, arguably, in Indonesia one important parameter for engaging with contemporary performances is their relation to politics and activism, as noted in my introduction.

As Schlossmann notes, debate offers “a model of the relationship of performance and politics as an exchange between people working in different but overlapping social environments” (1). Egbert Wits, the Dutch facilitator of Yayasan Kelola’s Theatre for Development (TDE) programme, has explored possible directions for modern theatre in the future. He argues that Indonesian theatre artists often fail to factor in their target audience, plays thus often do not present “reality” and are too abstract to actually have an impact on society. TDE has worked

⁹⁴ Performances such as *Holocaust Rising* by Yogyakarta-based Saturday Acting Club still broach the issue of violence in rather general terms and try “to challenge modern humanity in the midst of violent images surrounding us, especially from the mass media” (Salihara 2009). I was able to watch this performance as part of Teater Salihara’s 2009 festival. In an interview with skAnA Rossa Rossadi, the director of Saturday Acting Club, stated that the idea for the play was derived from the violence which surrounded him, privately and on TV and the feeling that people become more and more hungry for even crueller violence as they are so used to watching violent acts all the time (Rini ‘Bincang-bincang’).

together with theatre communities such as Teater Satu di Lampung, Iman Soleh's CCL in Bandung and teaterStudio Indonesia in Serang, who are all working according to the philosophy of TDE. However, although their processes may concur with this philosophy, this may not be clear from their concrete output, which raises the important issue of the performances' efficacy and how this might be measured. As Baz Kershaw points out, "if we wish to understand their potential meanings in that context (or any other) we will need to investigate how specific audiences might 'read' their performances" (*The Politics of Performance* 5). The hope for Yayasan Kelola's TDE programme is to develop theatre that has a stronger impact on and contribution towards society. Theatre artists are invited to attend workshops in which they are provided with basic tools about how to most effectively deliver a message to their audience. One focus which has apparently resulted in some success is domestic violence against women and children. Women who, at the beginning of a workshop conducted in collaboration with an NGO working on women's rights, were not aware of the fact that violence inflicted by a member of the household is not something that must be quietly endured but is actually a violation of their rights and could even be brought to court (field notes and personal communication with members of Kelola, 16 Feb. 2011). A press announcement by Yayasan Kelola states that the TDE programme always takes on current social problems in Indonesia. Performances sponsored or organized by TDE mirror current living conditions in Indonesia and function as a dialogue for exploring particular problems. TDE always aims to make the public aware of their potential in becoming agents for change. They work at a grassroots level and use intimate and relevant symbolic language. According to Kelola, the programme proves that theatre plays an important role in continuous development for different social strata (Billem).⁹⁵

Lauren Bain, on the other hand, claims that NGO theatre in general is often "deemed to be worthy but didactic, well-intentioned but artistically dubious" ('NGO Theatre'). She argues "an NGO's desire to communicate a clear message to the general public, for example, might not be compatible with an artist's desire to explore abstract ideas and experiment with

⁹⁵ *Siaran pers dari Yayasan Kelola yang diterima di Jakarta, hari ini menyebutkan, program teater Untuk pemberdayaan selalu mengangkat masalah sosial yang aktual di Indonesia. Karenanya, pertunjukkan program teater Untuk pemberdayaan mencerminkan kondisi kehidupan saat ini dan berfungsi sebagai dialog yang mengupas permasalahan. Mereka juga ingin menyadarkan masyarakat yang berpotensi menjadi agen perubahan dalam permasalahan sosial. Selain itu, program teater untuk pemberdayaan bekerja di tataran akar rumput dan menggunakan bahasa dan simbol yang dekat, relevan, dan akrab. Program tersebut juga membuktikan bahwa seni teater berperan penting dalam pembangunan berkelanjutan dan berdampak langsung pada berbagai lapisan masyarakat.*

disjointed narratives and aesthetics” (‘NGO Theatre’) Therefore, “with its focus on process rather than the final product, ‘NGO theatre’ is often purposely more interesting for participants than it is for the audience” (‘NGO Theatre’). This assessment is supported by van Erven, who notes that Theatre of Liberation differs fundamentally from most Western political theatre practice, as it is process-oriented and does not focus on the performance as the sole purpose of theatre (xiii). One example that illustrates this point was a performance by the ambitious and committed Red District Project, which I observed in summer 2009 in Yogyakarta’s Pasar Kembang in the Sosrowijayan red light district (see reddistrictproject.org). Painter and performance artist Lashita Situmorang initiated the project, which invited female sex workers to participate in creative workshops for them to learn skills such as performing, creating jewellery out of recycled materials, making batik or learning photography in order to widen their horizons for the future. The project also aimed to “bridge the gap between marginalized communities” (in this case, between the sex workers and the wider public) through art (reddistrictproject.org). Part of the project was a dance/theatre performance by some of the sex workers which was the result of a workshop led by American performer Emilia Javanica. The rehearsal process was very difficult as the sex workers felt embarrassed about performing and had difficulty in committing to the structure of rehearsals. In the end there were only three women performing a short dance wearing half-masks and using red umbrellas to symbolize the red light district where they worked. For the women, the performance was arguably a major personal achievement, but as a piece of theatre it was very simple and basic. There was no stage setting or lighting in any form and the whole performance, which lasted only 15 minutes, had little flair.

Another issue that can be considered problematic is the issue of funding in this context, which, to some extent, informs the choice of themes displayed in socially-engaged theatre, which is often supported by international donors. *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* by Ratna Sarumpaet – one of the two plays discussed in this chapter - was commissioned by UNICEF, who approached Ratna on the topic and not only funded six months of research but also performances in five major cities all over Indonesia. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. While the creative writing process was done by Ratna herself, she would not have started working on this play without UNICEF’s commission. As Ratna states in her notes to the play, she did not even agree to this project from the start as she was not sure whether she would be able to write a play which was “an order [*pesanan*]” and not born out

of her “own anxiety and anger about a particular case.”⁹⁶ Another example is support given to survivors of the tsunami of 26 December 2004. As pointed out in Chapter 2, after this natural disaster international support flooded into Aceh. Kimberley S. Twarog discusses the telling examples of two large international NGOs [INGOs] (UNESCO and AMURTEL [Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team Ladies]⁹⁷) both of which facilitated traditional dance performances/practices with tsunami survivors. But the sole focus on the tsunami aftermath completely disregarded other potential traumatic issues in the lives of Acehnese, such as the conflict between GAM and the Indonesian government. This was highly criticized. Twarog notes for instance that “because the programs were often designed to teach performance activities for several months, or to result in a final performance, many of the participants would not be able to continue their performance activities in the absence of these INGOs” (‘Performance and Trauma Recovery in Aceh’ 143). In this context, Syed Jamil Ahmed, Professor of theatre and music at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh, argues for a world without theatre for development and raises questions about the relationship between globalisation and human rights. Aid agencies that support theatre for development often follow a human rights agenda that is “driven by the economic imperatives of capitalist donors of the West, and this means that the work is inevitably allied to globalisation” (Ahmed qtd. in Nicholson 133), he argues and observes: “[I]n Bangladesh issues explored in theatre for development are not chosen by the local people themselves but by NGOs in collaboration with those in positions in power,” and goes on to list the various topics represented in theatre for development, including social injustice, gender discrimination, illiteracy, or degradation of the environment and its consequences, all of which easily attract foreign donations (133).

Theatre that addresses human rights issues, violence, or the problems faced by marginalised communities has been quite common after Suharto. There are different ways of approaching these topics. Some artists choose to stage their own performances after they become intrigued by an issue; others choose to work with victims of human rights violations, creating verbatim theatre, often staged by the victims themselves in the tradition of the workers’ theatre of the 1980s. All of them are advocates of rights but their work ethics differ profoundly. I have

⁹⁶ *Saya tidak langsung mengiyakan karena saya merasa tidak yakin saya bisa menulis sebuah karya pesanan. Tujuh naskah yang saya tulis, lahir dari kegelisahan dan kemarahan saya atas kasus tertentu.*

⁹⁷ *Amurtel* alleviates suffering, provides immediate and long term relief to women and children in need, improving their overall quality of life (www.amurtel.org).

selected the work of two female theatre workers through which to explore how the relationship between theatre and human rights has been expressed in the post-Suharto period. The examples I am going to discuss are Bernadeta Verry Handayani's *Sum: Cerita dari rantau* (Sum: Stories from overseas) from 2008/2009, which deals with the issue of migrant workers, and Teater Satu Merah Panggung's *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* (The prostitute and the president) from 2006. I have chosen these works in particular, as Bernadeta Verry Handayani talks about a pressing social issue in contemporary Indonesia, the exploitation of housemaids, a theme that resonates also in national and international media. The work is financially backed by NGOs interested in women rights, which considerably increases the outreach of her performances. Ratna Sarumpaet is a well-known cultural figure who sees her own theatre work as part of being a human rights activist and I am intrigued with how her personal motivations are echoed on stage. Furthermore, both works are connected to the wider contexts of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The issue of migrant workers: B. Verry Handayani's *Sum - Cerita dari rantau*

Sum: Cerita dari rantau was conceived and performed by Teater Garasi⁹⁸ actress Bernadeta Verry Handayani. Verry has been active with Teater Garasi since the group's foundation in 1993. I got to know her through my research interest in Teater Garasi but was initially unaware of the socially-engaged focus of her own projects. The performance *Sum* is one outcome of Teater Garasi's series of solo projects, a work-in-progress that was initiated by the Garasi theatre community in 2006 to give individual actors the opportunity to express their own theatrical concepts and ideas. Cited in an article in *The Jakarta Post*, Verry claims that being in the audience of a dramatic monologue on the topic of the abuse of migrant workers inspired her to start addressing the same issue: "[T]hat performance I saw was really inspiring. At first, I was only intending to perform as well as that, [...] but as I got deeper into the issue [of migrant workers], it became more than just a performance" (Febrina 'A tribute to migrant workers'). Thematically, *Sum* was followed in April 2013 by a performance called *Jangkar babu – Sangkar madu* (Anchor female worker - Honey cage) which again dealt with

⁹⁸ Teater Garasi was founded in 1993 as a student theatre group at University of Gadjah Madah by Yudi Ahmad Tajudin, Y. Bayu Aji Kusworo, and Puthut. Since 2002, it has received funding from HIVOS and has come to be recognized as one of the most important Indonesian avant-garde theatre groups. Performances include *Waktu Batu 1-3*, *je.ja.l.an*, and *Tubuh Ketiga (Pada Perayaan yang berada di Antara)*. The work of Teater Garasi will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

the topic of TKI (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia –Indonesian [Overseas] Workers) or TKW (Tenaga Kerja Wanita – Female Indonesian Workers).

The departure of young girls to work in urban areas or overseas to support their families at home has a long history in Indonesia, as have the problems raised by this kind of work. Although working as a housemaid has been common since pre-colonial times, Nuryana notes that since the 1970s, with the vast economic development and the rise of a strong and wealthy Indonesian middle-class, large Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Bandung or Surabaya have seen huge growth in demand for housemaids (PRT – *Pembantu Rumah Tanggah*). Many PRTs come from poorer rural regions in Java, a fact which is reflected in the play (Sum, one of the characters, is from Indramayu which also has a reputation in Indonesia for being a major source of prostitutes). They are often recruited informally without contract, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. The employers of a PRT just pay the so-called distributors (intermediaries, but often also relatives or local residents) a moderate sum to arrange recruitment and the workers have no legal rights. They often have financial and moral obligations towards their families at home. Many of these housemaids are under-age; they receive little or no wages, often have no access to education and are sometimes also physically exploited or abused by their employers (Ally and Finberg 16ff).

Nuryana notes that the 1980s showed a boom in the numbers of TKI moving to the Middle East, mainly Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Qatar. According to Nuryana, some Indonesian women view this as an “easy” step as the two regions share one religion – Islam. In many cases, these domestic workers were effectively trafficked as they either paid a considerable sum to an intermediary to find work for them or were sold by their families to work for their new employers without the protection of any contract or law and, thus, abuse is common (3-4). Also, as Rosenberg notes,

migration and trafficking are often distinguished from one another by the notion that migration is characterized by choice and trafficking by coercion, deception or force. However, in today’s global economy, migration and trafficking exist along a continuum. Indeed, women and children may start out migrating for the promise of well-paid jobs and end up being coerced to work under exploitative conditions such as in sweatshops, on plantations, in domestic work, or in sex work. Given the large number of Indonesian women and children who migrate for work, this peculiar vulnerability of migrant workers to trafficking is significant (37).

In recent years, many cases of abuse have been reported in the media and stronger advocacy for the rights of TKI has started to be implemented. In November 2010, the case of Sumiati from West Nusa Tenggara made global headlines. The UK tabloid *Daily Mail* called the young woman “Indonesia’s poster child for migrant abuse” (‘Shocking Photos’). The 23-year-old was working in a Saudi Arabian household where she was abused and tortured by her female employer, who was later sentenced to three years in jail by a Saudi Arabian court. In Indonesia the case gained massive media interest and pushed forward discussion of the protection of the rights of migrant workers abroad. However, an Amnesty International Human Rights Report on Indonesia from 2012 states that although the Indonesian president “expressed support for the new ILO No. 189 Domestic Workers Convention [...] for a second successive year parliament failed to debate and enact legislation providing legal protection for domestic workers” (‘Annual Report’). It also reported that “this left an estimated 2.6 million domestic workers—the vast majority of them women and girls—at continued risk of economic exploitation and physical, psychological and sexual violence” (‘Annual Report’). The national Indonesian media, such as *Tempo* magazine, regularly report the violence endured by TKW working abroad.

The script for *Sum*⁹⁹ was written by Andri Nur Latif¹⁰⁰ but is as yet unpublished. Joned Suryatmoko, the director of Teater Gardanalla, supported the creative process as an acting coach. The play premiered in 2008 and was performed again in 2009 in various villages and cities that are known to send migrant workers abroad. It has toured in Yogyakarta, Wonosobo, Jombang, Trenggalek, Tulungagung, Indramayu, Cirebon, Semarang, Jakarta, and also in some parts of Eastern Indonesian: Gili Meringkik, Tambolaka, Sumba Barat Daya, Kupang and Maumere (see video documentation of road show *Sum*). The whole research process for *Sum* took about a year (B. Verry Handayani personal communication 21 Jan. 2011) and was done on the back of group research for the Teater Garasi performance *Tubuh Ketiga* (see Chapter 5). Verry’s way of working is based on research, interviews and

⁹⁹ My observations of *Sum* rely on video documentation of *Sum* being performed at Teater Garasi’s studio in 2008 and video documentation of the tour in 2009. Unfortunately, I was not able to watch it live and some analysis may be limited by this fact, especially in the case of the road show, which featured elements of forum theatre. Not being able to experience the audience reaction on-site is a disadvantage that I tried to compensate by reading blogs and Facebook messages about the immediate audience reactions. Conversely, being able to watch the performance repeatedly at home allows a more detailed view of certain elements. The DVD was created as part of an archive of Teater Garasi’s performances but is also sold at Teater Garasi’s premises.

¹⁰⁰ Andri Nur Latif is also co-author of *Waktu batu* (Stone time), a long-term project by Teater Garasi, which resulted in the *Waktu Batu* trilogy.

documentation of TKI cases and it soon became clear to her how complex and complicated the issue was. She worked with and interviewed activists and also spent time at Terminal 3 at Soekarno Banda-Hatta Airport in Jakarta, designated for the arrival and departure of Indonesia's *pahlawan devisen* ('foreign exchange heroes'). This combined research resulted in Verry's monologue.



Fig. 8 B. Verry Handayani in her role as Supi, throwing money into the air. Photo from sastradiaspora.blogspot.co.uk.

The story centres on the experiences of Sum, Par, Aning, and Supi as migrant workers abroad. The audience learns that Sum worked in Saudi Arabia, where her employer tried to abuse her sexually but that she is now back in her homeland. Par was jailed in Malaysia for holding a fake work permit; she is angry with Malaysians who frequently called her “Indon,” a derogatory term for Indonesians—in her opinion, Malaysians have no right to be proud as they were given freedom by the British and rather than fighting for it like Indonesians did.¹⁰¹ Aning worked without rest and little payment in Singapore. Only Supi had some success in South Korea: “[S]he received 8 million [rupiah] per month, had a free day on Sunday, mass, cheerful friends and could send a couple of millions to her dad’s bank account every

¹⁰¹ *Lantas saya bilang pada orang malaysia itu: Hei kamu orang malaysia! Kamu itu enak ya, kamu merdeka karena dikasih kemerdekaan sama inggris, kita ini orang indonesia harus perang dulu sama belanda dan jepang. Kita berjuang mengangkat senjata tidak diam kaya kamu.* [This is what I tell these Malaysians: Hey, you Malay! You have a nice life, oh yes, you are independent because you were given independence by the British. We Indonesians had to fight a war first with the Dutch and Japanese. We took up arms and were not silent like you.]

month,”¹⁰² (Latif ‘Sum’ 3) but when she returns to Indonesia everybody wants money from her. She talks about her experience in the wartel (*warung telpon* – telephone kiosk): “Oh yes! I didn’t know whether the phone in the wartel had already been adjusted ... but a friend of mine finished 150,000 [rupiah] in just one minute. Just to say hello already costs 7,000 [rupiah]. How is that?”¹⁰³ (Latif ‘Sum’ 5). According to Verry, these stories stand as exemplars for the fate of thousands of women who leave the country every year to make money abroad.

The performance is in a monologue format, switching between the representations of the character “Verry the activist” who tells the audience the life stories of the four migrant workers, and impersonations of the four characters: Sum, Par, Aning and Supi. Therefore, the performance is both a spoken account of Verry’s experiences and emotions as an activist and researcher on TKI cases and a representation of the fates of the four women who stand as exemplars for TKI in general. The performance opens with Verry entering the stage as the character Sum, a yellow scarf loosely draped around her head. Sum’s and her family’s respective aspirations and feelings of regret before her departure are outlined thus:

After the harvest season I was ready to go to Saudi Arabia. My dad sold some of our cattle to take care of my departure. Min and Rubi helped by accompanying me everywhere, looking for the necessary requirements, taking care of the passport, making this certificate, that certificate. My heart is excitedly looking forward to the day of my departure. My feelings are mixed, both happy and sad. I am happy because finally I will be able to work although I only become a housemaid in Saudi Arabia. I will get enough money to buy the cattle back my dad had to sell; I can send money back home, and I am certain that I will be able to buy a paddy field with cattle when I’m returning from Saudi. But I am also sad because I will leave them behind for a long time. I cannot joke any longer with Rubi, cook with my mother, look for weeds with my father or walk around with Min (Latif ‘Sum’ 1).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *Ia mendapatkan 8 juta sebulan, libur hari minggu, mess, teman-teman yang meriah dan mengirim beberapa juta per bulan ke rekening ayahnya.*

¹⁰³ *Oh ya! Gak tau apakah telpon di wartelnya sudah disetel ya...tapi teman saya itu habis 150 ribu selama satu menit saja. Baru bilang halo sudah 7 ribu, gimana?*

¹⁰⁴ *Sehabis musim panen waktu itu, aku jadi pergi ke Saudi. Bapak menjual beberapa ternak kami untuk mengurus kepergiannya. Kang Min dan Mbak Rubi yang membantu mengantarku kesana-kemari untuk mencari syarat-syarat, mengurus paspor, membuat surat keterangan ini, surat keterangan itu. Hatiku deg-degan menantikan hari itu tiba. Perasaanku bercampur gembira sekaligus sedih. Gembira karena akhirnya aku akan bisa bekerja meskipun cuma jadi pembantu di Saudi. Aku akan mendapatkan uang yang cukup untuk mengganti ternak bapak yang telah dijual, mengirim uang ke rumah dan aku yakin, aku juga bisa membeli sawah barang sepetak sekembalinya aku dari Saudi. Tapi perasaanku waktu itu juga sedih karena aku akan meninggalkan mereka untuk waktu yang lama. Tidak bisa bercanda dengan mbak Rubi, memasak bersama emak, pergi mencari rumput sama bapak atau jalan-jalan dengan Kang Min.*

The stage setting consists of a wooden bench with a small table on one side, holding a cassette player, which Sum switches on to play Indonesian pop music, and a framed picture of Sum's mother. Behind the bench are two window-frame-like props with a few clothes scattered around. When Verry changes into the character "Verry, the activist" another part of the stage is lit up, which has a desk with a chair, a laptop and a few images of young women and newspaper reports about migrant workers pinned on the wall in the background; this area is at times used as the prison setting for the character Par. In the course of the play, the performer Verry frequently moves between these two locations.

The strongest and most intense scenes of the performance are arguably those when Verry performs in the characters of the four housemaids, as their stories feel more real in character than when Verry in her role as "Verry the activist" gives an account of their lives. The audience often responded with laughter and tears to these scenes, as noted by some observers in the video of the road show.

The performance fits very well in the wider debate about workers issues, which was one of Verry's main concerns when crafting the performance.¹⁰⁵ The performance of *Sum* is part of "Komnas Perempuan's and Teater Garasi's lengthy campaign" (Qomariyah 'Sum') to push the Indonesian government to finally ratify the International Convention on Migrant Workers and their Families, which would give migrant workers legal protection. In 2009, the play was performed in the Komnas HAM headquarters in Jakarta's Menteng District and also went on tour through various Indonesian villages. During the road show Teater Garasi was working together with local NGOs, such as Advokasi Buruh Migran Indonesia (Advocacy for Indonesian Migrant Workers), Koalisi Perlindungan Hak Asasi Manusia (Coalition for the Protection of Human Rights), Children Fund Indonesia, Komisi Nasional Perempuan

¹⁰⁵ The problem of domestic workers had also been picked up by other theatre practitioners and art workers. The performance *Bunga di Comberan* (A Flower in the Gutter) from October 2011 directed by Tya Setiawati supported by Yayasan Kelolas's programme *Teater untuk Pemberdayaan* showed the fate of three domestic workers, Kasiyem, Sulastri and Mariyani, during colonial times until 1930, the 1980s and now. The play was performed at TIM's Teater Kecil in Jakarta, at Gedung Societet Yogyakarta and Gedung Sunan Ambu in Bandung in collaboration with the Dutch Embassy and *Jaringan Nasional Advokasi Pekerja Rumah Tangga* (JALA PRT) as well as *Konfederasi Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia* (KSBI) (Billem 'Yayasan Kelola'). The process of writing the play was preceded by research and interviews with some domestic workers and aspired to generate a dialogue about the issue of migrant workers and its related problems (Mardiyadi 'Flower in the Gutter') in a similar fashion to Verry's piece. Also in 2011, two former housemaids, Nessa Kartika and Karina Maulana, have published a compilation of short stories—*Karenina Singa Bauhinia*—which recount stories of housemaids in Hong Kong and Singapore. Nessa runs her own blog titled *Babu juga bisa menulis* (A housemaid can also write) to break the stereotype of housemaids being 'dumb' (Winarti 'Breaking Stereotypes').

(National Commission for Women), and Rumah Perempuan Kupang (Womens' House Kupang).

During the road show, a type of forum theatre was used to promote local residents' engagement with the issue of TKI. Rae argues that in forum theatre "spect-actors' intervene in the staging of a contentious everyday scenario—to enable disadvantaged people to understand the structural reasons for their oppression and to empower them to change their situation ... [focusing on] the systems, rather than discrete instances of abuse" (17). After the monologue, the *Sum* team invited audience members onto the stage to take on the roles of the characters to reflect on issues raised in the performance. They might, for instance, perform an imagined dialogue between a parent and a prospective migrant worker. They note that a show that "entertains, informs, and is interactive"¹⁰⁶ at the same time can have a greater impact on the audience. Tikar Pandan, the NGO that Agus Nur Amal worked with in Aceh, made the same point with regard to TV Eng Ong. However, in the video documentation of the *Sum* road show different problems become apparent. One was the mismanagement of one local NGO. For instance, in Maumere, Flores a performance was planned for 7pm and not one single audience member had arrived by 9pm, and the show was therefore cancelled. Ratri Kartika Sari, a Teater Garasi member responsible for management, notes that they were informed by the local NGO that everything was ready when it was not. Thus, the Teater Garasi team felt the issue was "not taken seriously" (video documentation 'Road Show *Sum*'). Also, the use of Indonesian rather than the various local languages would have had a negative impact in some places, as the show may not have been viewed as "approachable" (video documentation 'Road Show *Sum*').

Audience responses have been very mixed. Desi Puspitasari, who watched the performance in 2008, once in Berbah Village close to Yogyakarta and once in Teater Garasi's studio, blogged about the different atmospheres she observed in the audiences in these two locations. Whereas the audience in the village seemed to be a bit "tired" during the first 15 minutes when Verry appeared as a storyteller, they became very "enthusiastic" during Verry's performance of the different characters and the short slapstick moments, at which point they started commenting on what they were observing on stage. The audience at Garasi was, according to Puspitasari, "much more serious," which raises the question of who activist

¹⁰⁶ *Menghibur, informatif dan interaktif.*

theatre is intended for and what any given audience can gain from watching shows that reflect on social problems. Audience comments reflect this. One viewer mentioned that he could read about this [the issue of migrant workers] every day in the newspaper and so Verry “is not telling [me] anything I don’t know.” Another audience member felt that although she could read about the topic in magazines and newspapers it is “still different” to hear the story told “live” (Puspitasari ‘Masih Ada Sedikit’).

Galuh Asti Wulandari, the former programme manager of Teater Garasi, observed the performance in the village of Plampang in Sumbawa and wrote about it. According to the Institut Hak Asasi Perempuan (Institute for Women’s Rights), there are some women in Plampang who left the village to work as TKI. Galuh writes that *Sum* was the first *teater* performance that ever came to the village. Usually, the villagers only watch more traditional performances of *ketoprak*, *wayang*, and *jathilan*, and so, as Galuh notes, there was a certain curiosity in the village. “They wanted to know how this *teater* would be” and after the performance a small discussion began. One woman in the audience had previously worked in Malaysia and could relate to the issues shown on stage (‘Ini Pentas Teater’).

Sum is activist theatre, which thematically addresses a specific human rights issue—the problems of migrant workers abroad. Verry works together with different NGOs and makes their case hers. She is also playing an advocacy role as a civil society actor doing grassroots outreach work. D. Soyini Madison notes that:

being an advocate has a different intent than speaking in the manner of a ventriloquist, in the sense of muting Other voices to only amplify one’s own. Being an advocate is to actively *assist* in the struggle of others; or (and) it is learning the tactics, symbols, and everyday forms of resistance which the sub-altern *enact* but of which they “do not speak” in order that they may provide platforms from which their struggles can be known and heard. As advocates we aim for a cycle of responses that will set loose a stream of response-abilities that will lead to something more, something of larger philosophical and material effects” (11).

In this sense, Verry provides a public platform from which she offers perspectives on housemaids’ lives—which they endure but do not speak of—and thus makes their voices known and heard. In my opinion, the performance as a road show is an activist theatre contribution in its own right, although—as observers filmed in the video documentation pointed out—many things went wrong during the tour, often due to organisational failures but

also because the *teater* medium is not commonly known in more isolated rural communities. For an audience which is more exposed to national media, the performance might not work at all, as they already know about worker's issues through the news and feel that they won't gain new information from watching "NGO theatre" such as *Sum*. This is a general problem encountered by activist theatre, as previously noted. This will also become clearer in the discussion of *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden*.

The next part of this chapter looks at the work of Ratna Sarumpaet, who also addresses the issues of empowerment and human trafficking in her work. Ratna Sarumpaet, who lives and works in Jakarta, is an artist, and an activist and advocate for human rights issues, especially women's rights. She was awarded the Female Human Rights Special Award by the Tokyo-based Asia Foundation for Human Rights in 1998. All of her recent works for the stage, and also her film *Jamila dan Sang Presiden* (Jamila and the President, 2009), deal with female/human rights issues. The sub-section focuses on Ratna's Satu Merah Panggung theatre group's play *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* from 2005/6, which was later adapted for the screen and re-titled *Jamila dan Sang Presiden*. I was only able to view a video recording of this performance as I was not based in Indonesia when it was performed live. However, I was able to meet Ratna in Jakarta during my fieldwork in February 2011 for a lengthy interview about her work.

Human trafficking: Ratna Sarumpaet's *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden*

Ratna Sarumpaet is arguably the most renowned female theatre director of realist plays in Indonesia. She is also a well-known cultural figure, who wanted to run for the presidency in 2009 as an independent candidate to make a statement against corruption and elitism in national politics. However, the Constitutional Court ruled that independent candidates would not be allowed to run, so she had to terminate her campaign. Her artistic career started in the early 1970s. In the late 1960s, she began to study architecture but did not finish her degree, rather she decided to pursue a career in theatre to do something "more meaningful" (personal communication 26 Feb. 2011). In 1969, she joined Bengkel Teater Rendra for about ten months but felt the system was "too feudalistic"¹⁰⁷ and she could not "make sense" of many of the exercises she had to do, such as "crawling in mud" (personal communication 26 Feb.

¹⁰⁷ She referred to the director-centred system, which was very hierarchical in its organisation.

2011). In 1974, she founded her theatre group Satu Merah Panggung (One Red Stage) but gained wider publicity by bringing the case of murdered worker and labour activist Marsinah to the stage in 1993. Marsinah's alleged murderers were brought to trial but eventually charged not guilty by the Supreme Court.

An article in Tempo notes that "there are strong indications that the case involved members of the military during the New Order dictatorship of former President Suharto, although until this day, the case has never been fully resolved" (Akhmad). With her two plays, *Marsinah: Nyanyian dari bawah tanah* (Marsinah: Song from beneath the earth)¹⁰⁸ and *Marsinah menggugat* (Marsinah accuses), a monologue based on the play, she became famous as an artist-activist. At this time, worker's theatre was a hot topic for theatre practitioners.

However, Bodden notes that, for Ratna Sarumpaet, worker's theatre was "limited by the worker's narrow education, [...] that NGOs often dictated which issues the workers should present and that the effectiveness of worker's theatre in communicating with other workers was doubtful" (*Resistance on the National Stage* 244). Ratna is furthermore cited as saying that "this kind of theatre only wore out workers and exposed them to being fired. In her view, artists could contribute more effectively to the workers' cause" (*Resistance on the National Stage* 244). In all her performances, the dramatic text is written by Ratna and performed by members of Satu Merah Panggung. Her plays *ALIA, Luka Serambi Mekah* (Alia, Wound on the doorstep to Mecca, 2000) and *Anak-Anak Kegelapan* (Children of darkness, 2003) both tackle humanitarian issues. *ALIA* is concerned with the Aceh conflict and centres on the fictitious character of Alia, who is raped by security forces in Aceh. *Anak-Anak Kegelapan* centres on stories of children whose parents were alleged Communists during 1965/6 and the stigma they still face. Both plays have a focus on social injustice.

Apart from her artistic work, Ratna also established the Ratna Sarumpaet Crisis Center in Jakarta, which helps people who have been victims of violence, corruption, or poverty. She is known for her public statements about controversial issues, such as the poor performance of the government during the Lapindo scandal that started in 2006¹⁰⁹ or the anti-pornography

¹⁰⁸ At first the title of the performance was *Nyanyian Marsinah: Dari bawah tanah* (Marsinah's song: From beneath the earth) which was later changed to *Marsinah: Nyanyian dari bawah tanah* (Marsinah: Song from beneath the earth) (Bodden *Resistance on the National Stage* 244).

¹⁰⁹ The Lapindo scandal was caused by the PT Lapindo Brantas company who created a crack in a natural gas well they had drilled in Sidoarjo close to Surabaya. Since 2006 large amounts of hot mud and gas are constantly flowing out of this world's biggest mud volcano. In August 2012 geologist finally stated that the accident was definitely caused by Lapindo Brantas and not by a distant earthquake or some other natural

law (Sarumpaet personal communication 26 Feb. 2011). Winet writes that Ratna Sarumpaet also “nationalizes and globalizes the forgotten crime,” especially through her initiative JEJAK (Trace), which is intended as an “independent institution for fostering reconciliation by opening up selected human rights cases ignored under the Suharto regime” (*Postcolonial Theatre* 194). Although the characters in her plays are mainly female victims of male dominance in Indonesia she does not want to be understood as a feminist, but as a human rights activist who is concerned with the fate of humanity in general which was the main reason for me to pick her work as an example in this thesis. The play *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden*¹¹⁰ was initially commissioned by UNICEF as part of a campaign against human trafficking in Indonesia, while Ratna was still working as Head of the Jakarta Arts Council (*Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, DKJ*). As Ratna states in her notes to the play, she did not agree from the start as she was not sure whether she would be able to write a play which was “an order [*pesanan*]” and not born out of her “own anxiety and anger about a particular case.”¹¹¹

She asked UNICEF for the opportunity to research the issues and UNICEF thus paid for six-month’s fieldwork to explore the topic. As Ratna was employed at DKJ at that time, she could only do the research during the weekends and therefore needed more time. During those six months, she travelled to Kalimantan, Indramayu, Jakarta, Surabaya, Batam, and Medan to look into the problem of child trafficking and she also wanted to do a stage adaptation of the written text as for her “a play is not yet a play without being performed.” Also, she feels that if the “facts are correct,” and correctly researched, the fantasy can go anywhere”¹¹² (Sarumpaet *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden 2*). After the second month of research, during which she was interviewing people involved with the sex trade, she informed UNICEF

influence. A statement from 2010 notes that “the mud has been devouring land and homes in East Java's Sidoarjo district since May 2006, endangering as many as 100,000 people and causing US\$4.9 billion (S\$6.86 billion) worth of damage, an Australian expert estimates. It has buried 12 villages, killed 13 people, displaced more than 42,000 and wiped out 800 hectares (1,977 acres) of densely populated farming and industrial land” (‘Sidoarjo mud volcano’).

¹¹⁰ The play was also adapted into the movie *Jamilah dan Sang Presiden* with Ratna’s daughter Atiqah Hasiholan again in the leading role as Jamila, but this time with Christine Hakim as Bu Ria. Significantly, most of the newspaper coverage relates to the movie rather than the live performance which arguably hints at the different impact and interest both media generate in Indonesia.

¹¹¹ *Saya tidak langsung mengiyakan karena saya merasa tidak yakin saya bisa menulis sebuah karya pesanan. Tujuh naskah yang saya tulis, lahir dari kegelisahan dan kemarahan saya atas kasus tertentu.*

¹¹² *Salah satu kebutuhan mutlak dalam proses penulisan saya adalah proses penelitian. Tidak satu naskahpun yang lahir dari tangan saya tanpa lebih dulu melakukan penelitian. Saya membutuhkannya karena naskah-naskah saya memang berangkat dari realita dan, Dengan data-data akurat saya punya peluang berfantasi dengan bebas.*

of her decision to write the play. UNICEF then paid for a tour of the play in five major Indonesian cities: Jakarta, Surabaya, Palembang, Medan, and Bandung (Sarumpaet personal communication 26 Feb. 2011).



Fig. 9 The image shows the poster for the movie *Jamila dan Sang Presiden*. Atiqah Hasiholan (Ratna Sarumpaet’s daughter) played the part of Jamila and Christine Hakim played prison warden Bu Ria Photo from movieposterdb.com.

Mu’man Nuryana and Togiartua Nainggolan identify trafficking as one of the most important current social problems in Indonesia and one which has become much more prominent since the early 2000s, mainly due to a more globalized state (1). The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women defines the problem as “all acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of women within and across national borders for work or services by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion” (‘FAQ: Understanding Trafficking in Persons’). The phenomenon is not new in Indonesia, and was apparent even in pre-colonial times, during years of VOC¹¹³ control and the Japanese occupation (as in the case of *jugun ianfu*). UNICEF notes that “each year, thousands of women and children fall victim to trafficking, including being forced or lured into the commercial sex trade” (‘At a glance’). Sarumpaet argues that more than 30% of all Indonesian sex workers are below the age of 18, sometimes as young as 10 years old. One of the major problems in Indonesia is the fact that

¹¹³ VOC stands for Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Dutch or Dutch East India Company (1602-1800).

about 60% of all children, especially in rural and poor areas, do not have a birth certificate, which makes them more prone to exploitation (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 4). According to Ford, Lyons and van Schendel “anti-trafficking initiatives grew exponentially since the United Nations passed the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children” [UN Trafficking Protocol] (1). Southeast Asia is one of the world’s trafficking hotspots and many NGOs engage with the issue.

In the preceding notes to the drama’s text Ratna Sarumpaet notes that the *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* neither wants to patronise nor give clues about how to deal with the themes displayed in the play. It rather reflects on those issues to “open the eyes of all of us to the fact that both prostitution and trafficking of children is immoral and related to poverty, stupidity and a weak faith” (4).¹¹⁴ In *Jakarta Post* article, Ratna is cited as saying that “people of all ages have to understand the problem [of trafficking]” as “such practice [...] is found in all regions [...] due to extreme poverty and a lack of education” (Dursin and Alia). The character of Jamila, in the play, also comments on “the world full of greed and hypocrisy” which makes people “dirty” (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 12).¹¹⁵

The performance I watched on DVD was originally staged at Gedung Kesenian Jakarta from 25 to 28 July 2006. It then went on tour to Surabaya (4 to 5 August 2006), Medan (11 to 12 August 2006), Bandung (21 to 22 August 2006), and Palembang (25 to 26 August 2006). Although the play’s title is *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden*, it premiered under the title *Jamila dan Sang Presiden* (the same title as the movie). In the performance, Jamila is played by Ratna’s daughter Atiqah Hasiholan and Peggy Melati Sukma plays the prison warden Bu Ria; these are the two main characters in the play. Different areas on the stage are dedicated to different parts of the story. The characters known as “Jamila 1” and “Jamila 2” play scenes from Jamila’s past (Jamila 1) and her present (Jamila 2) life in prison, respectively. The first of which are performed in the arena and the latter in the prison cell. Two storylines are told in parallel. The play opens with a scene where the character of Bu Darno, the woman who brought Jamila into prostitution, and some of her helpers, push a group of underage girls they

¹¹⁴ *Pentas “Jamila & Sang Presiden” tidak akan memberi petunjuk-petunjuk tentang jalan keluar, apalagi menggurui. Sebagai penulis dan sutradara, saya hanya ingin menawarkan refleksi untuk membuka mata kita semua, bahwa Pelacuran dan Perdagangan seks anak-anak dibawah umur adalah kasus amoral yang datang dari kemiskinan dan kebodohan dan lemahnya iman.*

¹¹⁵ *Dunia yang tamak dan penuh dengan kemunafikan, dapat dengan mudah mengotori dan menjerumuskan mereka ...*

have captured across the stage. At the same time, a news report is read out loud, informing the audience that Nurdin Hidayat was found dead in a 5-star hotel room, that his death was reported to the police by his murderer, prostitute named Jamila, and that other parliament members considered this death as signifying a failure of the president, who is not able to select cabinet members of moral fibre (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 5). Then Jamila 2 is shown in prison; in the background the audience can also see Jamila1 reading verses in the Qu'ran. When the story unfolds, the audience gets to know that Jamilah was sexually exploited from an early age by the father and son Wadirman, members of a family she was given to by her own parents and whom she later kills as well. She tells Bu Ria, the prison warden that “this is the most bitter experience in my life Bu Ria. I was given away to this family to be safe and grow up healthy. And every night the two men in this respectable family were befouling my body, grabbing my purity...”¹¹⁶ (10). She is later tricked into prostitution and because she is very beautiful many men are interested in her body. In prison she claims the right to a final wish. She wants to be allowed to meet a *kiyai*, a Muslim religious leader as well as the president of Indonesia, her country “for the religious leaders are the ones with responsibility for maintaining morality in society, while politicians should eliminate corruption and build strong, accessible state institutions. In her own case, and that of millions of exploited women and children like her, both state and religious leaders had failed” (Hatley ‘Hearing Voices’ par.26). However, she only gets to see a *kiyai* in the end, who tries to convince her to pray with him for Allah’s forgiveness for her sins. Jamila, on the other hand, asks him where he has been all these years while her fate worsened, and why he did not prevent what was happening to her. “How in the name of politics, you already polluted what was your responsibility.[...] I am human, Father Kiyai, the most perfect creation of Allah, the same as you. But I am a prostitute [...] Since I was still in the womb of my mother I was already a prostitute and I was not strong enough to resist” (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 53).¹¹⁷ Ratna explains that, for her:

the attitude and the policies [of the state] are not serious and distract the organizers from improving the quality of education; the weak efforts in eliminating corruption, deforestation, colonial economic mechanisms etc make this nation fall behind even

¹¹⁶ *Itu pengalaman terpahit sepanjang hidupku Bu Ria. Aku dititipkan di tengah keluarga itu agar aku aman dan tumbuh sehat. Dan dua lelaki di keluarga terhormat itu, setiap malam menggerangi tubuhku, merenggut kesucianku*

¹¹⁷ *Betapa atas nama politik, kalian telah mengotori apa yang menjadi tanggung jawab kalian. [...] Aku manusia Pak Kiyai – ciptaan Allah paling sempurna sama seperti Pak Kiyai. Tapi aku pelacur ... Sejak masih di rahim Ibuku aku sudah jadi pelacur, dan aku tidak berdaya menolaknya.*

more. For me this is far more immoral; the same counts for Muslim leaders /churchmen who are those who are the most responsible for keeping up the morality of the people.¹¹⁸

According to Ratna, the main motive of the play is raising awareness, and the political and the religious critiques Ratna expresses in this foreword are articulated in the play (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 2f). She states that “[F]or me the sex industry is a tragedy; I find it particularly painful because Indonesia is a religious nation” (Dursin and Alia). In 2006, as they play was being staged, Indonesia was in the middle of legally ratifying an anti-pornography law. Ratna openly opposed this law and felt that the performance contained strong criticism of this ratification process, especially in the light of the superficiality of the religious establishment, who speak of Allah and accuse people of not following the religious law but fail to do so themselves, as well as the rise of religious conservative forces in Indonesia. A first version of the anti-pornography law (*Rancangan Undang-Undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi*, Bill against Pornography and Porno-Action) was announced in 2006, but widespread protests forced legislators to amend the controversial bill, which then finally came into force in October 2008. The law, which has wide support among conservative Islamic parties, is seen by others as a threat to Indonesia’s pluralistic society. They argued that traditional customs such as the wearing of a penis gourd by some ethnic groups in Papua could come under threat or that nightclubs in Bali would be closed. Others see the law as a first step towards introducing sharia law for the whole country. Mathias Hariyadi writes that “the fear is that the proposed law could spread a climate of “anarchy,” because it does not define precisely what can be maintained as “contrary to morality,” and above all what are the “criteria” to be adopted in order to establish whether “a behavior or an artistic/cultural expression” should be censored” (Hariyadi).

Pelacur dan Sang Presiden engages directly with social and political problems in contemporary Indonesia and its “indictment of religious and political authorities for their hypocrisy in issues of sexual morality comes through loud and clear” (Hatley ‘Hearing Voices’). In one scene, a policemen reads from the newspaper that the “Forum Pembela Iman

¹¹⁸ Jadi, jadi bagi saya sikap dan kebijakan-kebijakan tidak serius dan menyimpang para penyelenggara dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia, serta masih lemahnya upaya-upaya pemberantasan korupsi, penebangan hutan, kolonialisme ekonomi, dst, yang membuat bangsa ini semakin terpuruk, bagi saya jauh lebih tidak bermoral, begitu juga para ulama / rohaniawan, yang notabene adalah orang-orang yang paling bertanggung jawab dalam menjaga moral masyarakat.

Bangsa [Forum of the Defenders of the National Faith] or FPI ... B, tomorrow will deploy thousands of its members to the court building to ensure that Jamila receives the death sentence”¹¹⁹ (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 13), thus commenting implicitly on the increasing radicalization of Islam in Indonesia and the rise of groups such as *Gerakan Pembela Islam* [GPI - Islamic Youth Movement], and *Laskar Empati Pembela Bangsa* [Warriors of Empathy, Defenders of the Nation] as a visible force of self-proclaimed morality in contemporary Indonesia (see Chapter 3, reactions to Papermoon Puppet Theatre’s performance). Jamila 2 notes that they are “*milisi moralis munafik*,” a militia of hypocritical moralists (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 13). Later, when different characters from her past come to visit her in prison—such as Bu Darno, who tricked Jamila into prostitution, and her friend Zaelani, who was a housemaid with the Wadirman family—voices from off-stage indicate that a massive protest against Jamila’s possible reduced sentence is being held outside— death being the only possible form of punishment in the eyes of the protestors. That religion has no answer to Jamila’s dilemma is shown by the character of Bapak Kiyai, who comes into Jamila’s cell shortly before the execution and only answers Jamila’s life story, her questions and accusations with religious verbiage. The president is a voiceless figure, who appears in the last two minutes of the play, but doesn’t speak to Jamila. Hatley suggests that the play resonates with the role of women activists in the “current struggle between liberal and conservative forces in Indonesian society and [...] the rise of conservative, repressive Islam” (‘Hearing Voices’). Bu Ria often mentions the fact that, apart from the audible crowd of conservative protesters outside the prison, Jamila also has “millions of supporters” who understand her fate— these supporters could be interpreted as the liberal forces in society.

Unlike the performance *Sum: Cerita dari Rantau*, *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* is not verbatim theatre. Although it is based on solid research, the performance is, as Hatley notes, “perhaps exaggeratedly dramatic” and, although it recounts the fate of a young trafficked woman, it can be assumed that for a real woman from a rural area who had been forced into prostitution it would be rather difficult to identify with the character of Jamilah. Arguably, had this play been toured through rural villages in East Java such as those visited by *Sum*, for instance, its impact would have been far smaller because the play is quite alien, both aesthetically and in terms of content, to the daily realities of a rural theatre audience. But on the other hand the story *Jamila dan Sang Presiden* powerfully displays current social and political trends using

¹¹⁹ *Forum Pembela Iman Bangsa atau FPI B besok akan mengerahkan ribuan massanya ke depan Kantor Pengadilan, memastikan sidang Pengadilan menjatuhi Jamila hukuman mati.*

the theme of trafficking and prostitution as a motif; it is also of importance for a variety of other reasons. Jamila stands as an exemplar for all trafficked sex workers and her voice is their voice. In one scene she notes that she is not only a sex worker but a researcher (*Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* 39).¹²⁰ She puts a mirror to the faces of those who have created her, the people she met on her way, the religious leaders who did not help, the government (in its absence), and the president who does not fulfil her wish for a meeting. In this sense, Jamila is an example for all other prostitutes, though she is clearly a dramatic exception, given the killings, the media attention and the power of her voice. Lisa Law notes that it is more common that sex workers are spoken for, than for them to have their own voices heard (1-2). Not only are their bodies victimised by their customers and politicised by the government, but they also experience extreme discrimination from large parts of society. Gaby Mischkowski from Medica Mondiale criticises double moral standards in Indonesia, noting how prostitution is tolerated on the one hand because male promiscuity is accepted, while on the other hand the sex workers themselves are criminalised and socially excluded (Deutsche Welle ‘Hurentheater’). In *Jamila dan Sang Presiden* they are given a voice.

Further reflection

This chapter dealt with human rights and violence, with a specific focus on two female theatre workers who are concerned with women’s rights and ideas of morality as well as humane standards of living. In the introduction to this chapter it was noted that the application of human rights in the Southeast Asian region, and in Indonesia in particular, remains problematic and uneven. Rae notes that there are activist and participatory performances with explicit human rights agendas, such as *Sum*, but also other performances that have human rights themes but might not have an obvious activist agenda, such as *Jamila dan Sang Presiden*. Yet, Ratna Sarumpaet is an important advocate and civil society actor for the causes she takes on. It can be argued that she feels “responsibility to exhort and appeal on behalf of another or another’s cause with the hope that still others will gain the ability to respond” (Madison 11). By working with UNICEF, she has also engaged on an international level but, as Helen Nicholson has made clear, socially-committed theatre-making has to respond to local and regional conditions and needs to be rooted in the cultures in which the work takes place. This can be achieved by a director who is based in the culture s/he is

¹²⁰ *Aku tidak murni seorang PSK. Aku pekerja seks peneliti.*

talking about— as is the case with both Ratna and Verry. Both artists see their role as activists and advocates following Madison’s definition. They “actively assist in the struggle of others,” they “aim for a cycle of responses that will set loose a stream of response-abilities that will lead to something more, something of larger philosophical and material effects” (11). Like the works of PM Toh and Papermoon Puppet Theatre, these performances tell alternative narratives and grapple with wider contemporary socio-political concerns.

Chapter 4: Environmentalism on Stage

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing notes that Indonesia's New Order regime came to power by "silencing one kind of voice and promoting another. The nationalist populism that had been increasingly identified with the Indonesian Communist Party was shattered in gunfire and buried in prison camps. The new state encouraged instead the voice of modernization and development" (Lowenhaupt Tsing *Friction* 205). To finance development (*pembangunan*), Indonesia made extensive use of its natural resources, yet relatively little consideration was given to the environmental consequences or the ecological sustainability of development (Hardjono 2). On the contrary, Resosudarmo notes that Suharto, after realising large-scale resource extraction could be performed only with the involvement of foreign companies, enacted three laws¹²¹ in the first years of his presidency which effectively made all of the country's natural resources available for extraction by large-scale operations with a foreign investment component (2).¹²² As Lowenhaupt Tsing notes, "the state expanded and flourished by claiming the lands and resources of rural communities in the name of 'national development'. Forests and minerals were sacrificed to global capital accumulation; the residents who depended on these lands were displaced" (*Adat/Indigenous*' 44).

This problem of land tenure has also become the topic of some contemporary theatre performances. Julia Arnscheidt writes that during the first years of *pembangunan* "nature was [...] conceptualised as a supplier of resources. It was reduced to a means to finance development" (386). This freedom of access to Indonesia's natural resources came at a high cost. One example is the Grasberg mine, which was acquired by Freeport McMoRan in 1967 and is now the world's largest gold and third largest copper mine. While in 2009 the financial value of the mine represented an estimated 2% of Indonesia's gross domestic product, the environmental problems it has caused in the region since its opening have been very

¹²¹ These were Law 1/1967 on foreign investment, which provided clear procedures for foreign operations in Indonesia along with generous tax concessions for foreign companies; Law 5/1967 on forestry, which put all forests under the control of the state; and Law 11/1967 on mining, inferring that all lands within the Republic of Indonesia could be used for mining.

¹²² By tradition, nature as a precious resource was not given much protection in Java. This is reflected, for instance, in the *babat alas* system. Anthony J. Whitten and R. S. Soeriaatmadja point out that "forests do not have a high cultural value in Java and it is doubtful that its re-creation around peoples' houses would be encouraged. This is because forests are considered dangerous places where wild animals and evil spirits roam, and clearing forests for a settlement, *babat alas*, is considered to be a noble deed" (675). The idea of triumphing over nature was central within this concept.

extensive.¹²³ Oil and gas production has also led to on-going environmental problems. In May 2006, for instance, the Lapindo mud “volcano”, almost certainly caused by drilling activities at a natural gas well in East Java, made global headlines and its environmental impact will have consequences for generations to come.

The first modern theatre practitioner to comment on development and conservation under the New Order regime was arguably W.S. Rendra,¹²⁴ with his play *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* (The struggle of the Naga tribe) from 1975. *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* explores Indonesia’s dependence on and exploitation by international firms, a situation which, according to the play, can be counteracted by being grounded in a simple, rural lifestyle. In the 1960s, just a few years before the play was written, “the economies of the developing world were dominated by the flawed idea that if the Western model of industrialization and expansion were simply transposed to the African, Asian and Latin American context, market growth—and therefore development—would automatically follow” (van Erven xiii). With this reading, the play echoes the “Theatre of Liberation”, but it could also be interpreted as a criticism of the perceived Western orientation of the political climate of Indonesia at that time.¹²⁵ Lowenhaupt Tsing also notes that during the New Order, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, *adat*¹²⁶ was revived as an activist concept “to oppose the New Order’s non-recognition of the rights of rural citizens. Activist campaigns for *adat* rights addressed these policies; the state, they said, should stop operating as a resource thief. *Adat* campaigns thus articulated concerns for democracy and the rule of law” (*Adat/Indigenous*’44). Rendra’s play also links

¹²³ The fish population in the Aikwa River, for instance, has dropped close to extinction since the mine opened and the water of both the river and the Arafura Sea is contaminated with acidic residue. John Wootliff writes that “[environmentalists] contest that the soot-coloured acidic waste, comprising an acidic runoff, poses a serious threat to the biodiversity of this environmentally sensitive area” (Wootliff). Large parts of dead rainforest which was home to Papuans before is another result of the mining. Also, the Komoro clan living in the area around the Grasberg was forcibly relocated on more than one occasion in order to give way for further mining activities.

¹²⁴ There were a couple of contemporary *wayang* performances that could also be considered to be “environmental” in theme, but they will not be discussed in depth in this thesis.

¹²⁵ The play often jokes about the fashion of politicians, the government of Astinam. In 1970s Indonesia Western fashion such as Jeans, make-up and dark sunglasses were symbols of modernity and prosperity. The first time the character of the Astinamese queen appears the *dalang* comments as follows:

DALANG: [...]Those dark glasses are always worn; they are the symbol of all progress. Nine out of eleven Hollywood film stars wear such glasses [...] Now it’s the face’s turn... first foundation is put on – then mascara... powder...lipstick... all foreign made, that’s progress” (24).

¹²⁶ *Adat*, meaning custom or tradition, refers to the unwritten, common law which often exists parallel to the state law and religious norms. *Adat* influences and regulates all aspects of daily and ceremonial life such as rituals, land tenure, or inheritances

to this discussion, as the *adat* community of the Naga is exemplified as an ideal for living close to and with nature.

In the mid-1970s, the idea that the environment was a resource that had to be protected became increasingly important around the world. Indonesian theatre practitioners reacted to and drew on ideas raised in the global debate on environmental issues. Arifin C. Noer's play *Ozone atawa Orkes Madun Nomor 4* (Madun Orchestra 4: Ozone) from 1989 is a reaction to news of the impact of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) on the earth's ozone layer, a connection that had first been made in the early 1970s.¹²⁷ In 1985, after a large hole was detected over Antarctica, the Vienna Convention on the Protection of Ozone Layer was ratified; two years later, in 1987, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was signed by 196 nations. Noer's play *Ozone* is embedded in this global discourse. An exchange from the play between two of the characters, Ranggong and Borok, reads as follows:

RANGGONG: We are humans out of order. Because we are arrogant. ... Because we already robbed oxygen from another fallen creature in another era.

BOROK: But we have already regretted this enough, right?

RANGGONG: Our sins may have become too many. ... That's why nature may still punish us (Noer 12).¹²⁸

A few years earlier, in 1978, the theatre practitioner Ikranegara had directed *Rimba Triwikrama* (The great anger of the forest), a play that criticised forest exploitation and proposed ways to live in a more eco-friendly way. Ikranegara's primary concern at that time, however, was to try out his new theatrical language, not to make a statement about the environment, though as the performance was funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) the message had to be environmental. According to Ikranegara, the point that forest degradation would result in flooding and other problems was already common knowledge in Indonesia, so

¹²⁷ In 1974, Mario Molina and Sherwood discovered the relation between CFC and the depletion of the ozone layer (see Anderson and Madhava Sarma).

¹²⁸ RANGGONG

Kita ini manusia-manusia macet. Karena sombong. ... Karena kita telah merampas oksigen jatuh mahluk lain di zaman lain.

BOROK

Tapi kita sudah cukup menyesal, bukan?

RANGGONG

Dosa ... kita boleh jadi terlalu banyak. Dosa kita menyangkut sistem. Karena itu boleh jadi alam masih menghukum kita.

the play's plot would be easy for audiences to understand (Ikranegara email communication 23 Sept. 2012). The play was created to coincide with the 8th World Forestry Conference hosted at Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta and was partially sponsored by the WWF although, as Kathy Foley notes, the WWF was not entirely happy with its outcome as they felt the final play's content and message was too radical (73). In an interview, Ikranegara notes that, in his opinion, it was the government rather than the WWF which did not like the radical message of the performance (email communication 23 Sept. 2012).

Against this backdrop of *pembangunan* and the growing awareness of environmental problems, the 1970s saw the emergence of a more politicised Indonesian environmental movement.¹²⁹ In September 1977, the weekly *Tempo* magazine published a comprehensive cover story about the pollution of the Brantas River; this was “the first cover story that *Tempo* ever did on environmental issues” (Lucas and Djati 3). Environmental concerns were institutionalised with the establishment of the State Ministry for the Environment in 1978, and “brought within the province of public policy concern” (Kusumaatmadja 205). Emil Salim was appointed to the post of Minister of Environmental Affairs. Kusumaatmadja further notes that this ministry was “the brainchild of a small group of intellectuals and enlightened bureaucrats” who were influenced by a growing worldwide environmental awareness and activism, such as the formation of “Green” political parties, Greenpeace, and the “findings and recommendations of the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Environment and Development and the resulting Bruntland Report” (Kusumaatmadja 205). Lowenhaupt Tsing supports this statement, noting that “environmental activism [in Indonesia] flourished only through the instigation and support of a global movement” (*Friction* 2). According to Hardjono, the heightening in public awareness of the speed at which changes were taking place had also been stimulated by environmental consciousness in other parts of the world, as well as societal changes in Indonesia: “its supporters are now more numerous, more articulate, and certainly much more vocal is one of the consequences of higher levels of educational attainment, which are leading greater numbers of Indonesians to ask themselves

¹²⁹ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing notes that in 1971 the poet and activist Taufiq Ismail is said to have inaugurated the Indonesian environmental movement in a public reading of *Aku Ingin Menulis Puisi Jang* [I want to write poetry that] (*Friction* 28), a poem which comments on the plundering of the forests and the mischief of foreign investors: “I want to write a poem that resists the probability that Japanese traders will plunder the wood of the forests of Kalimantan, that prohibits the oil drillers and foreign investors from feeding spiritually weak officials, and forbids bribes to customs officers and judges” (Ismail cited in Lowenhaupt Tsing *Friction* 28).

what kind of physical environment they will bequeath to their children and their grandchildren” (2).¹³⁰

During the 1980s the environment was one of the few topics open for discussion in a time of state censorship and repression; this activism cleared the way for other social movements “blossoming into human rights and labour concerns, as these became possible” in the 1990s (Lowenhaupt Tsing *Friction* 216). At the same time, several important environmental NGOs were founded, many of them setting up their headquarters in Jakarta. WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia – Indonesian Forum for the Environment) was established in 1980 and was a product of the first national environment congress. It functioned as a network of non-governmental organisations and community-based associations and was a member of Friends of the Earth International. Two years later, in 1982, SKEPHHI (Sekretariat Kerjasama Pelestarian Hutan Indonesia – Indonesian Collaborative Secretariat for Forest Conservation) was founded. Sinau claims that the Indonesian government had started to take environmental issues more seriously, “in part due to growing pressure from international aid agencies to include environmental assessments as a prerequisite for funding” (‘Coming of age’).¹³¹

However, it was not only the exploitation of natural resources that caused intensified environmental problems in Indonesia. Deforestation and degradation as well as the pollution of coastal areas—problems often found in rural areas of Indonesia—went hand in hand with increasing pollution of air and water¹³² in urban areas, caused by over-population, rapid

¹³⁰ “*Eco-pesantren*” were established to teach conservation of the environment to its pupils.

¹³¹ Sometimes NGOs, both local and international, worked together with local activists and artists to disseminate their message, as shown in the case of Ikranegara’s *Rimba Triwikrama*. Ikranegara was not personally affiliated with the WWF; he just happened to know a few members of WWF Indonesia who suggested his participation in the event at Hotel Indonesia (Ikranegara email communication 21 Sept. 2012).

¹³² Nugroho’s documentary *Air dan Romi* (Water and Romi) from 1991 comments on the problem of polluted water in Jakarta. The film was funded by the Goethe Institut in Jakarta as part of an environmental seminar on water and the environment in the same year. The film is a social documentary and reports on the life of three workers in Jakarta, at least two of the leading figures are migrants from rural areas in Java, whose daily business is centred on the polluted water of the rivers in Indonesia’s capital. In an interview with Ishizaka Kenji, Garin Nugroho speaks about the implicit criticism of the Indonesian government that lies in the film, which at the same time comments on the absurdity of environmental problems in Indonesia’s capital as it does not matter how much garbage Romi is going to collect, it will always increase. Nugroho says that the government appears to be giving Romi a job, but “the job is absurd because the garbage will always be in the river, and this worker will most probably die prematurely from exposure to a score of diseases”. For Nugroho, Romi, powerless in his

urbanization¹³³ and a lack of environmental education or consciousness in large parts of society.

The distance of urban citizens from nature, in contrast to a romanticized primitivism, became the topic of Sardono W. Kusumo's *Meta-Ekologi* (Meta-ecology). In 1979, Sardono staged the 14-hour performance event at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta, which lasted from early morning until nightfall.¹³⁴ The performance was preceded in 1978 by research trip to Tanjungmanis in East Kalimantan. Initially, Sardono and a group of dance students from *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* were doing fieldwork about the dance of the Tauw Kenyah but after getting acquainted with the lifestyle and the problems faced by the Dayak people, the dancers also began to help them to work the fields. According to Sal Murgiyanto, Sardono's interest in ecology was aroused as he learned "how peacefully they [the Tauw Kenyah] lived with nature and how well they preserved their environment. The Tauw Kenyah understood the ecosystem through practice and feeling" (Murgiyanto 319). Compared to later environmentally-themed works of Sardono, *Hutan Plastik* (Plastic forest)¹³⁵ from 1983 and *Hutan yang Merintih* (The groaning forest)¹³⁶ from 1987, which together with *Meta-Ekologi* are often referred to as a trilogy, the environmental criticism in *Meta-Ekologi* seems very subtle. The performance deals with the environment in a rather aestheticised way without making direct criticisms. It is much more a reflection on the human relationship to nature, the

position, "represents the futility, the whole chaos and confusion of environmental problems in Indonesia" (Kenji 'Interview').

¹³³ Deden Rukmana states that "the population in the periphery Jakarta has tripled from 4.4 million in 1980 to 12.6 million in 2000, while Jakarta's population increased by [...] 30 percent" ('Growth of Jakarta').

¹³⁴ The performance was filmed by Gotot Prakosa, today Indonesia's leading experimental short film maker, and cut into a 15 minute black-and-white experimental documentary. At the beginning of the documentary images of a water pipe made from bamboo are shown. Through this pipe water is led into an earthy field to create the muddy pond in which the performance will happen at a later stage. Sardono brought about 16 truckloads of earth to Taman Ismail Marzuki to create the artificial rice field (Kalim 'Film Pinggiran Gotot'). In between, the film shows close-ups of Sardono in white clothes smoking a pipe and also the installation of barbed wire around the performance area. The film shows images of performers slowly wading into the mud they had created earlier; they drop themselves in the pond and crawl around in the mud in a slow, collective movement, almost as if trying to immerse themselves and become one with the mud. The soundtrack of the short documentary, created by Hartanto, consists of the voices of birds and rustling wind (*Between Three Worlds*).

¹³⁵ *Hutan Plastik* was performed at Taman Ismail Marzuki from 13 to 17 April 1983. The performance was also inspired by a trip to East Kalimantan and aimed to criticise the way timber industries were destroying the Kalimantan rain forest. For them, the forest was not an ecosystem but "plastic," a material that can be treated the way one likes, for trade (Murgiyanto 401).

¹³⁶ *Hutan yang Merintih* was part of a nine-day performance event at Jakarta's Taman Ismail Marzuki from November 24 to December 2 entitled *Kerundung Asap di Kalimantan* (A veil of smoke over Kalimantan) in 1987.

“distance towards nature in our daily lives,” especially for the urbanites, as Sal Murgiyanto points out. Sardono criticised the superficiality of the understanding of ecology shown by his city audiences. According to the artist, urban Indonesians learned ecology from books but distanced themselves from nature in their daily lives. At the same time he gives a romanticised picture of “going primitive” by immersing oneself in mud and thus finding a way to connect directly to earth as the source of life. For Wirdayanto, the performance made the audience feel “how body and mud are seen as a concept of an ancient energy which continues buzzing our conscious memory which also always remembers there will be the work of farmers in the fields as long as the sun rises over their land which supports themselves and the people around them”¹³⁷ (413).

This theme of human distance from nature is taken up again in contemporary theatre performances after Sardono. The Serang-based theatre collective *teaterStudio Indonesia* in their 2009 performance *Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah* takes up the theme by focusing on the process of producing and destroying earthenware created from clay. In this particular work, the notion that humans are disconnected from the soil as they “no longer treat it directly with their hands” is very strong (Nandang Aradea personal communication 9 Feb. 2011). Nandang notes that “we have forgotten its smell and even its image ... we are stuck in an industrial and social routine.” Therefore, “perhaps only by producing symbols of cultural aesthetic rituals such as this [earthenware] we can criticize this kind of attitude towards and treatment of land” (Nandang Aradea personal communication 9 Feb. 2011; programme notes *Perempuan Gerabah*).¹³⁸ This interpretation revisits Sardono’s work of 30 years earlier. In 2004, the Bandung-based theatre community *Teater Payung Hitam* released a rehearsal video of *Relief Air Mata*, using images very similar to Sardono’s performance of *Meta-Ekologi*, on YouTube. The video shows some of *Payung Hitam*’s members wading and crawling, sinking and floating in a muddy pond. Rachman Sabur, director of *Teater Payung Hitam*, notes that while the group rehearsed in Raencekek Ciwidey for the performance, members of the local community were watching the work, asking questions and sometimes

¹³⁷ *Terasa sekali bagaimana tubuh dan lumpur terasa konsep tentang tanah sebagai energi abadi terus terngiang dalam memori kesadaran kita, yang terus selalu ingat akan kerja petani di sawah sepanjang matahari terbit di atas tanah yang menghidupi dirinya dan orang-orang di sekitarnya.*

¹³⁸ *...tak kita rasakan lagi baunya, sudah lupa rasa cipratanya...kita sudah diterjebak dalam rutinitas mesin industri dan social...barangkali saja, dengan memproduksi simbol-simbol budaya ritual estetik semacam ini dapat mengkritisi sikap perlakuan kita pada tanah.*

joining in the rehearsal process¹³⁹ (Rachman Sabur personal communication 17 Feb. 2011). These public rehearsal processes are a very common feature in Indonesian modern theatre, beginning with Rendra's Bengkel Teater, and are an important concern for contemporary artists because modern theatre is often perceived as elitist, and an opening up of rehearsal and performance space is seen as a way to engage with local communities and have more direct impact. As a child, Rendra participated in local *kejawen ascetic* (Javanese mysticism) events that included, for instance, over-night immersion in a river, or night-long single meditation to "become one with nature" (Novianto).¹⁴⁰ Novianto notes that these kinds of techniques were also used as training methods for members of Bengkel Teater. Baz Kershaw writes that:

immersive performance events which are articulated directly to what is left of the natural world, unlike performances in theatres, may have the capacity [...] to link human nature with nature's nature. They might achieve this in ways that will not reverse the 'first decisive act' that led to civilization, but which could lead us to a fuller appreciation of how we are a wholly integral part of nature. In such small ways might performance contribute to a new ecological sanity (*Theatre Ecology* 318).

In this sense, a performance of Teater Payung Hitam's *Relief Air Mata* could impact on local ideas relating to water scarcity.

Whereas during the New Order years modern theatre and the arts in general were focused on opposing the government (see Bodden *Resistance on the National Stage*, Hatley *Javanese Performance*), the post-Suharto years have seen a much more varied approach to tackling socio-political issues, including environmentalism. To establish a framework for the following analysis, I traced the emergence of the environmental movement in Indonesia and noted how formative modern theatre performances during the New Order responded to environmental issues. In the next section, I will discuss selected contemporary (post-Suharto)

¹³⁹ *Relief Air Mata*, itu pertunjukkan di outdoor di tempat satu masyarakat berkumpul. Lalu ada Ritus Pohatci yang juga dilakukan di tempat berkumpulnya masyarakat untuk sekedar ngobrol atau berdiskusi. Di dalam relief air mata, prosesnya ada di Rancaekek, Ciwidey, ada kolam, lumpur, ada masyarakat setempat yang menonton. Mereka tanya ini kita jelasin. Bahkan ada sebagian masyarakat yang kemudian ikut bermain. [*Relief Air Mata*, is an outdoor performance at a place where the community meets. Then there is the *pohatci* ritual at the community meeting space for chatting and discussion. The [rehearsal] process for *Relief Air Mata* was at Rancaekek, Ciwidey. There is a pond, mud, community members as an audience. They ask something; we explain it. Some people later even join in the performance.]

¹⁴⁰ *Semua itu dilakukan untuk memberinya bekal melatih kepekaan dengan menyatukan dirinya dengan alam.* [

performances by Teater Payung Hitam (Black Umbrella Theatre) and teaterStudio Indonesia, reflecting on their responses to or engagement with environmentalism.

These two groups were selected because they are both idealistic and, according to their respective mission statements, the hope for change is cited as their inspiration for creating theatre. Yayasan Kelola notes that: “Payung Hitam is always moving and flowing. They always read what is currently happening in these times and they talk about it. The world as well as problems of society is where they find creative stimulation. Payung Hitam wants to stand in line with idealism, voicing what is supposed to be good for human progress.”¹⁴¹ Since 2008, Teater Payung Hitam has been organising festivals with environmental themes, and their performance *Air Mata Air* (Water springs) will be analysed in detail. teaterStudio Indonesia works with bamboo and recognizes the craftsman as an important mediator in establishing a good relationship with our environment. The aims and objectives of teaterStudio Indonesia, as pointed out in a vision and mission statement, include: “To create new stage works that are more able to appreciate its era ... To heighten the position of Indonesian modern theater culture in the world, [and to create] ... [t]heater that functions as a liberation, education and enlightenment toward a more civilized society” (Artsnetwork Asia ‘teaterStudio Indonesia’). These objectives will be discussed in the context of their performance *Perempuan Gerabah Atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah*.

Teater Payung Hitam: Take me to the source

Teater Payung Hitam is a theatre company based in Bandung. Founded in 1982, they are best known for their intense, politically focused, physical performances such as *Kaspar* (1994) or *Merah Oblong Putih Bolong Hitam* (Red has a hole white torn black, 1997). Their work has been discussed in detail by Michael Bodden (*Resistance on the National Stage* 188ff), who states that Teater Payung Hitam’s “most memorable performances attempted to problematize the verbal language of Indonesian state and society, presenting it as an instrument of power and a trap for would-be-reformers” (189). Their performance *Kaspar*, from September 1994, addressed:

¹⁴¹ *Payung Hitam selalu bergerak dan mengalir. Senantiasa membaca zaman dan bicara tentang zamannya. Dunia serta problem manusia dan masyarakat adalah medan rangsangan kreativitas. Payung Hitam ingin berdiri di garis idealisme, menyuarakan apa yang semestinya baik bagi kemajuan manusia.*

how the Indonesian language formed particular kinds of Indonesian subjects. In so doing, it also yoked the notion of national language to the government's recent censorship and attempts to control public discourse. It thereby signalled that the nation itself was in crisis (189).

Many of Teater Payung Hitam's performances have been conceived as physical theatre; the group's avoidance of the Indonesian language is rooted in a deep scepticism about the manipulation of language by the New Order regime: "At that time [the mid-1980s] we were already very nauseated and words had lost their meaning. That's why we tried out non-verbal theatre forms. And from our 28 years of existence, around 20 performances were shown in a non-verbal form. With body language and the help of visuals,"¹⁴² notes Rachman Sabur, Teater Payung Hitam's artistic director (personal communication 15 Feb. 2011). Moreover, Teater Payung Hitam performances often avoided censorship during times of *keterbukaan* (openness), perhaps because "by saying the 'unsayable' without using words it [Teater Payung Hitam] ... positioned itself outside the parameters of perceived threats to New Order hegemony and thereby subverted it" (Bain 'Confused?'). Rachman Sabur concurs with this line of thought, noting that "because the title [*Kaspar*] didn't have any connotations regarding our political situation" the play was "quite safe" at that time (personal communication 15 Feb. 2011). The death of the spoken word has been a central theme in most of Teater Payung Hitams's work since 1982. The 1998 show *Katakitamati* (Our words are dead) explicitly addresses this point. As Sabur notes in a *Jakarta Post* article: "Many people were very good at making speeches, arguing, bragging and talking without any action. The air was packed with so many words that the words became dead and meaningless" ('Teater Payung Hitam paints black picture').

However, although performances by Teater Payung Hitam since *reformasi* retain this physical theatre style, there has been a shift away from national politics in the themes they address. Many of the performances since 2000 explore intimacy with nature.¹⁴³ *Relief Air Mata* (Relief of tears), *Air Mata Air*, *Perahu Noah* (Noah's Ark), *Ci* (Water, in Sundanese) or

¹⁴² Karena pada saat itu kita sudah sangat muak dan kata-kata sudah kehilangan makna. Maka kita coba dengan bentuk-bentuk teater yang non verbal. Dan sepertinya dari 28 tahun berdiri, ada sekitar 20-an pertunjukkan yang ditampilkan dalam bentuk teater non verbal. Dengan bahasa tubuh dan bantuan visual.

¹⁴³ Not exclusively however, as *Puisi Tubuh yang Runtuh* (The poetry of a collapsed body), a very personal play about Rachman Sabur's own experiences after he suffered a stroke, shows.

Biografi Bunga (The biography of a flower)¹⁴⁴ are examples of such environmentally-themed performances. For Sabur, environment is linked to “the real”, to what is actually happening in the present. “If we associate this with natural phenomena, returning to the environment, we are not talking about a prophecy or the metaphysical, but we are talking about something real” (personal communication 15 Feb. 2011).¹⁴⁵ This notion of the real is also important when encouraging audiences to connect with the events played out on stage, as the themes are intended to have a direct link to their own lives. Sabur recounts how the group’s interest in environmental issues arose during the late *reformasi* era, while they were seeking a “worthwhile theme” to stage. According to Sabur, environmentalism is not embraced with enough enthusiasm by the Indonesian government, even though it is one of the most important issues in contemporary global society (personal communication 15 Feb. 2011).¹⁴⁶ While their more political work reflected on discourse, the idea of “the real” is clearer in the later environmentally-themed works, which attempt to come to terms with “another kind of trauma, that of environmental destruction and its potential consequences for human beings” (Bodden ‘Languages of Trauma’ 145).

From 1999 onwards, the Indonesian government’s decentralisation policy gave more power to the leaders of regencies (*kabupaten*) and districts. This was problematic for environmental governance due to differing positions among stakeholders and allegations that sectoral government departments “only thought of their own interests rather those of the ‘public’” (Arnscheidt 388). In 1999, the Ministry of Environment had organised a coordination meeting—involving members of NGOs, universities, regional environmental impact management agencies, the Ministry and the national environmental impact management agency and sectoral departments—to discuss these issues, though the outcome was vague.

¹⁴⁴ Both *Ci* and *Biografi Bunga* were performed at the Sunan Ambu Festival 2010.

¹⁴⁵ *Dan jika kita mengaitkan dengan fenomena alam, kembali lagi ke lingkungan, kita tidak berbicara tentang ramalan atau metafisik, tapi bicara sesuatu yang riil.*

¹⁴⁶ The work *Air* (Water) by the theatre community CCL with its artistic director Iman Soleh, are also notable in this context. CCL (Celah Celah Langit (Gaps in the Sky) or Cultural Centre Ledeng) formally established on 22 May 1998, at the same time as Suharto’s fall from power, is based in Lembang, a small community on the outskirts of Bandung. The name Celah Celah Langit derives from the name of Iman Soleh’s house-yard, which has a stage where CCL rehearsals and performances are held (Hurit). As Yeri Vlorida notes, many of CCL’s performances, similarly to Teater Payung Hitam’s work, imply an intimacy with nature and a concern with the environment. See, for instance, *Passage*, *Water Carrier*, *Nenek Moyang*, *Bedol Desa* (1-4), *Air Burung*, or *Ozone*. In a personal conversation with Egbert Wits, the coordinator for TDE (Theatre for Development and Education), Wits mentioned his hopes of developing a theatre that has a stronger impact on society. Interested theatre artists such as Iman Soleh are provided with workshops in which they are supposed to gain basic tools for delivering their ideas on stage which is a similar approach to the Theatre of Liberation movement in the 1970s and 80s.

Nearly all the participants agreed on the need for more attention to be paid to the environment and that the Ministry of Environment should be given greater authority (Arnscheidt 388). Peter Dauvergne notes, however, that environmental management did not appear to improve much after 1998, although various regional strategies had been put in place (Dauvergne 96f). A 2009 report from the World Bank suggests that “[...] decentralization has resulted in obstacles to good environmental management, including: inadequate standards and enforcement; problems with incentives, empowerment and insufficient capacity” (14).

Air Mata Air

Air Mata Air was performed at the International Water Festival in 2008. It explores in detail the importance of water to all life on earth. Water quality and sanitation was the first environmental concern in the 1970s that made national news, and it has remained a key issue in the post-Suharto era. The Indonesian Clean River Programme (Prokasih – Program Kali Bersih) was established in 1989, with some success (see Lucas and Djati for more details). Hamong Santono, the coordinator of the People’s Coalition for the Right to Water wrote in the *Jakarta Post* that “according to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report 2007, published by the National Development Planning Board, piped water is accessible to 30.8 percent of households in the country's cities and 9 percent in its villages.” Also, whereas the government “currently provides Rp 500 billion” in clean water funding, Indonesia would need “Rp 43 trillion (US\$4.6 billion)” to achieve healthy levels. Indonesian rivers are badly polluted, which is a particular problem for the urban poor as the slums (in Jakarta and other major cities) are often built close to the river and its residents use the water on a daily basis for cooking and other household needs. Moreover, water sources often dry up due to increased industrial use of water and scarce water recycling facilities. These examples are only a few of the water-related environmental problems faced in Indonesia and addressed in *Air Mata Air*.

The overall tone of *Air Mata Air* is aesthetic-metaphorical rather than overtly critical of the habits that cause environmental water problems. Michael Bodden has described Teater Payung Hitam’s work during the New Order as “highly metaphoric representation of the harsh, stony environment of national life” (*Resistance* 220). He notes that:

Payung Hitam's ... works of the 1990s ... mediated between radical avant-garde techniques and a modern theater tradition that most often pitched the tenor and themes of its works to the educated middle class in a less fragmented form that conveyed relatively clear issues, through leaving room for multiple interpretations in its choice of formal devices and its layering of themes (220).

Arguably, *Air Mata Air* works in a similar way. It leaves room for multiple interpretations as the images created by the actors on stage are often multi-layered and metaphorical. My discussion of the performance is based on a DVD recording from the performance at the festival in 2008 and information gathered through two interviews with Rachman Sabur in February 2011.

Air Mata Air is an almost nonverbal performance; the physical movement is supported by projected sounds such as running water or stormy waves, and other sounds produced by the performers when they use water-filled earthenware bowls as percussion instruments, for instance. There are also a few scenes where songs are used to accompany the scene's content, although again the songs use almost no words. Video clips of running water or waves projected on a large screen behind the performers are another stylistic medium supporting the performance's message. The performance has a slow, almost meditative, pace and there is little narrative storyline. In the course of the performance, the theme of water is taken up in many different forms, commenting on drought and the universal need for water for survival. The stage setting and the use of props is simple. Four large earthenware bowls filled with water are placed at the front of the stage, three on the right and one on the left-hand side.

The performance opens with a woman—her body wrapped in and surrounded by root-like strings that dangle from the ceiling of the stage—appearing on stage. While she moves over the stage, the roots move with her, dragged along by her slow, dance-like movements. The sound of flowing water fills the performance space; this is enhanced by a video projected on the back of the stage which shows stones in a river bed with water flowing over them. Three men, wearing only loincloths and balancing water carriers made from bamboo on their heads, move slowly in the background. The air is filled with the sound of running water and the voice of a singing woman. The only audible words are “*Airnya ada di mana?*” – Where is the water? When the three male characters draw closer to the female dancer, she appears to ask them to find water for her dry roots, though no words are audible. Humans in search of water become the main theme of the performance. The opening scene closes with the three male

performers beginning their quest. This theme of drought reflects an increasingly pervasive problem in Indonesia. As the length of the seasons become more unpredictable due to a general climate change, drought is becoming more common. The National Disaster Mitigation Agency indicates that up to 77% of the communities in Java have had a water deficit for up to eight months each year since 2003. The performance generalises from this problem by placing it in an imaginative, almost mythical space, displaying different images related to drought. In one scene, the performers resemble plants or animals that do not have enough water to survive. In another scene, the performers crawl on the floor like fish on dry land. Indonesia also has become a pollution hotspot as a result of its rapid urbanisation and economic development. Expanding waste streams are evident across the industrial, domestic, and agriculture sectors. Extractive industries account for much of the development, and waste from industrial and commercial processes is increasingly making its way into both surface water and groundwater supplies (Petros Water ‘Water Challenges’).

Moreover, *Air Mata Air* alludes to the destructive power of water through floods or storms. One scene, for instance, shows a person being carried away by a wave. This could possibly refer to the tsunami that struck Aceh on 26 December 2004, although the devastation and death it caused is not at all tangible in the performance, neither is it made clear that it is actually the tsunami which is portrayed here. The wave is simply depicted by performers carrying a large piece of white plastic foil on their heads as they move beneath it, again enhanced by a video projection on the back of the stage featuring stormy water.



Fig. 10 The performer at the front will soon be “carried away” by the wave. Photo from internationalwaterfest.com.

The performance ends with a woman finally arriving at the source of water, but in the background are dry roots in which corpse-like plastic babies dangle; water scarcity has found its victims. This scene could also allude to those Indonesians who do not have access to clean water and must therefore use polluted sources, especially in urban areas. This can lead to illness and death.

Although an informed audience may view the performance in the context of current water issues in Indonesia, *Air Mata Air* is by no means a work created to generate grassroots change. It is perhaps too aestheticised and figurative in its approach, and its implicit environmental criticism is very subtle. The images created cater for an educated audience, possibly middle class, in the context of the International Water Festival. The performance is an allegorical exploration of water as the source of life. Whereas *Relief Air Mata*, an earlier work by Teater Payung Hitam with a similar topic, reached out to the wider community by rehearsing in a mud pool located outside of the conventional stage, and thus brought the performance very directly to the audience, *Air Mata Air* is brought back into a traditional stage setting. Its aesthetic requires technology such as video projection to support the performance. Although, on the one hand, a few beautiful and intense scenes in *Air Mata Air* are a powerful reminder of what water means to humans, on the other hand, there are no activist elements in this performance. Criticism can only be fully understood by a pre-informed audience, already open to the issues discussed as shown by their attendance at the festival.

An early form of this type of activism-oriented, but largely symbolic, festival in Indonesia was organised by Sardono W. Kusumo in 1987. The event ran for nine days at Jakarta's Taman Ismail Marzuki from 24 November to 2 December under the title *Kerudung Asap di Kalimantan* (A veil of smoke over Kalimantan). The event centred on a massive forest fire which had destroyed large parts of the Kenyah Dayak homeland in September 1987 and was established in order to raise public awareness of environmental problems in the rainforests of Kalimantan. The event included poetry readings by Taufiq Ismail, Sutardji Calzoum Bachry, Abdul Hadi W.M., Leon Agusta, a photo exhibition by Gotot Prakosa, as well as a range of discussions and performances. Sardono had also invited a group of nine Dayak dancers to Jakarta to perform at the event (Dartanto).

Environmental Festivals

Since 2004, *Teater Payung Hitam* has organised the Sunan Ambu¹⁴⁷ festivals and the International Water Festival in Bandung, to raise awareness of the environmental issues facing Indonesia. Alexandra Crosby has identified an “innovative trend of activism which culminates in local [arts] festivals” (‘Festival Mata Air’). Crosby reports on the struggle of the community in Kalitaman whose natural water sources are gradually drying up. In 2007, for the second time, this community collaborated on festival planning with members of TUK, a group of local art workers who, according to Crosby, emerged in the Salatiga area in 2005. They organised the *Festival Mata Air* (Festival of Water Springs), together with national and international organisations, to celebrate “sustainability through creative production” and to push forward “real grassroots change” (‘Festival Mata Air’). Artists and activists collaborated with local residents to draw attention to water problems in their village. “During the 12 months preceding the festival, TUK organised a number of programs to clean up the site, raise awareness about waste and pollution, and create a dialogue between the government, industry and the community. All this work culminated in a three-day art and music festival,” writes Crosby. Other festivals—such as the 2005 Forest Art Festival in the Randublatung forest in Blora, or the 2008 Bedog Arts Festival in Yogyakarta (the latter curated by Martinus Miroto), which included a tree planting session and the release of fish into the Bedog river, as well as a workshop and seminar on arts, community performances, and an environmentally-focused visual arts exhibition—worked in a similar way (Miroto ‘Re-environmental’). They engaged local residents in activities linked to an environmental problem experienced in their own neighbourhoods. These festivals not only bring traditional artists together with the community and contemporary art practices, they are also a method of achieving wider outreach and publicity about pressing ecological issues, which can in turn inspire grassroots activism. Downing Cless, in an article about eco-theatre in the USA, writes about grassroots performances that emerged in the 1990s, which:

have a firm basis in community, either a particular place or groupings of people to whom the performance is oriented. ... they often are rooted in the environmental problems of an immediate locale ... they usually have an element of audience participation and always have characters or incidents directly drawn from community input (79f).

¹⁴⁷ Sunan Ambu is a female character, the “Goddess Mother” from Sundanese myths. In Sundanese mythology Sunan Ambu ensures that water and land are honoured by humans. Since 2004 the Sunan Ambu Festival has been organised four times: in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010.

Cless's article helps to put the Indonesian festivals detailed above in perspective. As they all engaged local residents and focused on a particular environmental issue of the "immediate locale" they were strongly rooted in the community. To have this immediate interaction with what is close and important to the community - e.g. the problems caused by Yogyakarta's heavily polluted Bedog river - also has arguably more immanent urgency to trigger action on a universal topic which oftentimes is difficult to relate to. Furthermore, it can serve as a form of education also for bystanders and visitors and a means to raise awareness about an issue that is important for a particular community but also has wider resonance in the region. Journalist Wisnu Kisawa wrote in *Suara Merdeka* that the Forest Art Festival in Blora for instance drew visitors from as far as Semarang, Solo, Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya ('Tak Ubahnya Perkawinan Seni dan Lingkungan')¹⁴⁸ and there was also some local political interest, which would be a first step in order to change circumstances also on a legal scale rather than just raising awareness.

However, environmentally-themed festivals in Indonesia are not restricted to activism-related art events. Many traditional festivals such as the Nadranan fishing festival of the Cirebon region traditionally celebrate the environment. Nurhayati writes that Nadranan "in the pre-Islamic fishermen community [...] is an offering to the 'ruler of the sea' driven by human fears towards supernaturals within the sea" ('*Nadranan*' 192). It is still held annually and it "not only belongs to the fishermen community, but it also belongs to the agricultural community. Both ways of living are united in the ritual" ('*Nadranan*' 192). In 2012 (27 to 29 October) artist Suprpto Suryodamo, supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, organised the Gelar Budaya Nusantara (Celebration of Nusantara Cultures) festival at the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah¹⁴⁹ in Jakarta, which featured the staging of food crop rituals by various communities from all over Indonesia and also invited artists from other countries, such as Mexico and the Philippines, to stage such rituals in a performative context. These two festivals have different intentions, none of them related to activism, but they are examples of the variety of environmentally-themed work taking place in Indonesia, and they show the

¹⁴⁸ Bukan hanya datang dari wilayah Blora dan sekitarnya, namun juga dari berbagai kota lain mulai dari Semarang, Solo, Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya bahkan juga Australia.

¹⁴⁹ Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park) is a recreational park in East Jakarta that celebrates the culture of Indonesia's different provinces. The brainchild of Suharto's wife, it opened in 1975.

importance of nature from an Indonesian perspective, as a resource from which people can make a living.

Activism-oriented festivals as a means of transporting a message to wide and diverse audiences are frequently used in areas such as gender equality or human rights. They are not a particularly Indonesian development, and have a long-standing tradition in other parts of the world. The Australian Two Fires Festival that “celebrate[s] the legacy of Judith Wright as a poet/writer, environmentalist and activist for Indigenous rights” (see twofiresfestival.org) is one example. Pro-women conferences, also called Ladyfests,¹⁵⁰ are another international model for activism-oriented festivals. Red Chidgey describes Ladyfests as “DIY festivals organised by women to showcase female talents, speak out against sexism, racism and homophobia, and to encourage women and girls to become active creators of their own culture, entertainment and politics.” They feature a variety of workshops, discussions, art, films and also often offer panel discussions about a variety of locally topical issues.

The festivals organised by Teater Payung Hitam, although environmentally-themed, were of more symbolic character, possibly similar to the style of Ladyfests. Unlike the Blora and Kalitaman festivals, both the Sunan Ambu festivals and the International Water Festival organised by Rachman Sabur and Teater Payung Hitam were not embedded in local community participation. They were events created by artists for the community. Also, unlike the event in Kalitaman, there was no actual cause related to the events. Instead, they were a general acknowledgement of the necessity of water for human life, expressed in artistic ways. Teater Payung Hitam does not want their theatre works to be seen as didactic or patronising, nor do they see theatre as an educational medium; rather they want to “share thoughts, emotions, and feelings”:

Actually, I do not want to patronize the public, but at least I would like to raise awareness of the public not to be asleep for too long. So they can realize there is a problem or issue which they have to see, to feel, to anticipate. Theatre is not to teach or patronize but in theatre we can share thoughts, emotions, and feelings (Rachman Sabur personal communication 17 Feb. 2011).¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ These festivals emerged from the Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s and the first Ladyfest was organised in August 2000 in Washington D.C. One Ladyfest, called Festival April 2003 was held in Indonesia. It was organised by Institut Ungu and coincided with the Kartini Day in Indonesia (see institutungu.blogspot).

¹⁵¹ *Saya sebenarnya tidak mau menggurui masyarakat, paling tidak ada kesadaran kepada masyarakat agar tidak terlalu lama terlelap. Sehingga mereka bisa sadar bahwa ada masalah atau peristiwa yang harus dilihat,*

The International Water Festival was held for the first time in 2008 from 16 – 19 May and took place at Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia in Bandung to commemorate World Water Day on 22 March. The event was primarily supported by the Dutch embassy. Local and international artists presented work on the theme of water. It included a video screening by Mark Salvatus and Takoer from the Philippines and a dance performance by Miroto titled *Tari Air* (Water dance). Teater Payung Hitam also presented two performances: *Perahu Noah* on the opening night and *Air Mata Air* on the closing day. Both were directed by Rachman Sabur (see Maulana). A second Water Festival, with a much wider outreach, was planned for 2010. The expected impact of this festival was described as follows:

The [emergence] of [a] cultural discourse which discusses social themes and water/environment glorification, particularly through media coverage and features both in printed and electronic media.

High school students can get information about water glorification–environment destruction as additional materials to curriculum. The dissemination of information to the audience by distributing information kits about problems of water glorification/environment destruction. Follow-up activities which will be discussed later by organizing organisations and their networks, particularly those who work in issues of environment and socio-culture in general (internationalwaterfest.webs.com).

But although this festival seems to have been planned in detail the event did not manifest, possibly due to financial problems.

teaterStudio Indonesia: Problems of land

Having discussed artistic works that deal with issues of water, this section centres on the work of a theatre collective which, in most of their works, focuses on issues of land: both land conflicts/land tenure and the urban alienation from land. The work of Serang-based teaterStudio Indonesia and its artistic director Nandang Aradea¹⁵² may not immediately appear to be environmentally-conscious or socially-engaged. However, their work is included in this chapter because, according to their vision and mission statement, they want to create

dirasakan, dan diantisipasi. Teater bukan untuk jadi guru atau menggurui, tapi di teater kita bisa saling berbagi pemikiran, emosi, dan rasa.

¹⁵² Nandang Aradea sadly passed away in October 2013 during time of revision.

theatre “that functions as a liberation, education and enlightenment toward [sic] a more civilized society” (Asianetwork ‘teaterStudio Indonesia’). Moreover, the narratives behind their work all relate to the environment, for instance within humans distance to nature or the craftsman that works hand in hand with natural resources. They also use sustainable bamboo as the main source for building the stage. How this environmentalism is revealed on stage is intriguing for my research.

Compared to Teater Payung Hitam, teaterStudio Indonesia is a young theatre company. The group was founded by Nandang Aradea, the late Wan Anwar and Bagus Bageni in 2006. It aims to be a “laboratory for creative concepts and innovative theatre creations ... [a] professional theatre, independent from political, social or economic control. It functions as an educational medium of freedom and humanity for both the theatre workers and their audience” (Nandang Aradea personal communication 9 Feb. 2011). Unlike Teater Payung Hitam, they are not part of the anti-government political movement of the late 1990s, and they created their focus and style in a new political era. Serang is not traditionally a site of modern theatre, but the group chose their base with purpose. The theatre director and the main creative brain behind teaterStudio Indonesia, Nandang Aradea, who had studied at IKIP Bandung, moved to Serang in 1998 to work as a theatre lecturer at Untirta (Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa). Together with Wawan Sofwan, he is also one of the co-founders of mainteater Bandung. He studied directing at the Russian Academy of Theatre Art in Moscow for four years from 2001 onwards, but moved back to Serang in 2005 without finishing his studies, mainly for financial reasons. On his return, he continued to work at Untirta while establishing his theatre company.

At the beginning of 2011 when I met Nandang Aradea in Serang, teaterStudio Indonesia had developed four plays: *Perahu* (The boat, 2006); *Bicaralah Tanah* (Speak, soil, 2007); *Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah* (Earthenware woman or the ritual of marrying the land, 2008); and *Bebegig* (Scarecrow, 2010), three of which share the underlying theme of land.¹⁵³ In an article for *Fajar Banten*, Wan Anwar writes that “although

¹⁵³ *Perahu* premiered in 2006 at the Untirta campus and, out of the four performances listed here, is the only one which has sea rather than land as its theme. The setting, a large boat, weighing two tons and completely built from bamboo, was at the centre of the performance. Underneath the boat a water-filled pool was erected. Arip Sejaya writes in the *Radar Banten* on 7 July 2007 that the bamboo sticks, all connected to each other, made the audience feel “every rocking and rolling” of the boat, a fact that was intensified by the chromatic “squeaking” sound effect of the moving bamboo construction. According to the late Wan Anwar *Perahu* “is theatre which makes use of the collective power of people on the boat (fishing)”. In a personal conversation, the director noted

he [Nandang Aradea] has lived in Moscow for a long time [...] as an artist he would definitely like to be known as a director dealing with issues from the rural world (earth/soil) that gave birth to him” (Anwar).¹⁵⁴ Nandang Aradea’s intentions in staging these plays have a biography and history in Banten’s reality.” Aradea has two approaches to thinking about land. One is the fear that humans get increasingly disconnected from nature; the second approach is the idea that land generates conflict, land acquisition disputes, evictions, not only in Banten or Indonesia but also on a global scale (programme notes *Perempuan Gerabah*). The performance *Bicaralah Tanah*, for which the group worked together with the local NGO Yayasan Konsorsium Pembaharu Banten, an NGO interested in general well-being of the community, portrays a peasant revolt in Banten at the end of the 19th century. Inspired by Sartono Kartodirjo’s account of the revolt, the theatre community staged an interpretation of the struggle of Kiyai Haji Wasid and the farmers involved in the revolt. According to Nandang Aradea, this case can serve as “one example of how farmers culturally and politically fight against their oppressors”¹⁵⁵ (programme notes *Bicaralah Tanah*). Kartodirjo writes that “this revolt was only one of a series of risings which took place in Banten¹⁵⁶ during the 19th century and it was also an instance of the social convulsions which were sweeping across Java” (1). He notes that “the recurrent peasant riots and uprisings, which became a social epidemic in the historical scene of 19th century Java, bear witness of the historical role played by the peasantry” (5).

Thus, conflicts over land and problems of landlessness and land grabbing have a long history in Indonesia and continue to be widespread. They are an important issue that is highly controversial and politicized. In 2007, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono gave a speech proclaiming that the government was to pursue agrarian reform. But Henry Saragih, the chairman of the Indonesian Peasant Union, is quoted as saying that there has been “no implementation of the program whatsoever until now” (qtd. in Pei Wu ‘Farmers March’).

that the performance was developed to point out the importance of the sea and related products such as fish, something that has been “long forgotten in our current society” (Nandang Aradea personal communication 9 Feb. 2011).

¹⁵⁴ *Meski ia pernah lama tinggal di Moskow[...] sebagai seniman pastilah ia akan suka dikenal sebagai sutradara dengan tema/tema dan persoalan dunia kampung (tanah) yang melahirkannya.*

¹⁵⁵ *...sebuah contoh bagaimana petani melakukan perlawanan kultural dan politik terhadap penindasnya.*

¹⁵⁶ The region of Banten has a history that dates back to 1520 when colonists of the Javanese kingdom of Demak founded the Banten sultanate. It has long been an important region for pepper trade and has a predominantly agrarian economy. Kartodirdjo remarks that “the average villager was a peasant and a rice cultivator, either as a landowner or as a share-cropper” (32).

Instead the government is mainly focused on the type of market-led agrarian reform recommended by the World Bank from 1999 to 2004. In 2010, Diana Pei Wu claimed that 26.6 million farmers only own an average of 0.4 hectares of land each.¹⁵⁷ Land issues are a major and longstanding focus in activist and conservationist circles, often with reference to the revitalisation of the term *adat*. Urano Mariko argues that since colonial times there have been “particular state policies that contributed to the emergence of the discourse of *adat* as a hegemonic concept in public debates over peasant landholdings in Indonesia”. Cornelis van Vollenhoven, for instance, established *adat* law studies to defend the land rights of native citizens (35). Mariko furthermore notes that “eventually *adat* became the unifying symbol for the national land law, BAL of 1960” (35). In *Words in Motion*, Lowenhaupt Tsing writes about how Brazilian rubber tappers and indigenous leaders joined forces in the 1980s with activists (international conservationists and progressive Brazilians, respectively) to protect the Amazon. She also notes that:

the expanded transnational force that emerged propelled indigenous rights into international forums in the late 1980s and 1990s. In this enriched transnational form, the indigenous-rights cause came to Indonesia to add legitimacy and resource to the struggle against state and corporate rip-offs of rural people under Indonesia’s New Order regime—and beyond (43).¹⁵⁸

Around the same time as the premiere of *Bicaralah Tanah*, Wan Anwar published an article about the importance of land and farming, with reference to teaterStudio Indonesia’s work, particularly *Speak, soil*. He wrote that the performance invited the audience to “muse over our changing attitude, opinion, steps, and government policy regarding the world of agriculture in this country”¹⁵⁹ and also the farmers’ ability to resist environmental degradation (Anwar). The stage setting of *Speak, soil* is dominated by piles of loose soil and farming implements such as a mattock, short machetes, crowbars, shovels, forks, and bamboo

¹⁵⁷ The website of Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (kpa.or.id) gives a few insights into these matters.

¹⁵⁸ CCL’s project *Tanah* (Land) was partly funded by Yayasan Kelola as part of their Theatre for Development and Education programme (Sabarini personal communication April 2011). In April and May 2011 Iman Soleh performed *Tanah: ode kampung kami* (Land: ode to our kampung) in Jakarta, Bandung, Lembang, and Jatiwangi. The play addresses the problems of land tenure and the pressure put on the local residents by selling their land. In 2010, Iman Soleh had conducted a writing workshop with citizens of Lembang to express and determine their opinion on land issue in the area. The 25 texts that came out of this workshop were then discussed and adapted as a play.

¹⁵⁹ *Pertunjukan... akan mengajak kita untuk merenungkan kembali sikap, pandangan, tindakan, dan kebijakan (pemerintah) kita terhadap dunia pertanian di negeri ini.*

(Anwar),¹⁶⁰ which symbolise both the farmers' physical and spiritual connection to the land. Despite high aspirations, the show received rather reserved reviews. Seno Joko Suyono writes in *Tempo* magazine on 3 September 2007 that "the show was tiresomely long and tended to portray history in relation to the present-day land and farmer problems". He also states that "some scenes ... appeared rather comical," which was not an impression intended by the director. Also, because the performance was staged at the Russian Cultural Centre in Jakarta, the audience was restricted to a select few.

Nandang Aradea and teaterStudio Indonesia's second major concern, apart from the political conflicts centering on land, is the notion that humans are disconnected from the soil as they "no longer treat it directly with their hands," a theme that had already been seen in Sardono's work *Meta-Ekologi*. The director notes that "we have forgotten its smell and even its image ... [w]e are stuck in an industrial and social routine ... [Therefore] perhaps only by producing symbols of cultural aesthetic rituals such as this [earthenware] we can criticize this kind of attitude towards and treatment of land" (programme notes *Perempuan Gerabah*).¹⁶¹ This idea features strongly in the performance *Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah*, which will be discussed below.

Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah

Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawin Tanah was part of the *naskah hibah inovatif* (innovative publication grant) series organised by Yayasan Kelola; it premiered in Serang at the Kafe Kebun Oregano on 25 August 2008.¹⁶² Although the content of the performance is not explicitly environmental, in the wider context of teaterStudio Indonesia's long-standing interest in land issues and their stage settings using sustainable bamboo, I became interested in the environmental side of this work. My discussion of *Perempuan Gerabah* is based on my viewing of DVD recording of a 90 minute performance at the plaza in front of Taman Ismail Marzuki on 8 February 2009, which is also partially available to view on YouTube (Fadhila).

¹⁶⁰ Setting *panggung yang didominasi gundukan tanah gembur dan property yang khas dunia tani (cangkuk, parang, linggis, singkup, garpu, bambo)*.

¹⁶¹ *Tak kita rasakan lagi baunya, sudah lupa rasa cipranya. Kita sudah terjebak dalam rutinitas mesin industri dan social yang ketat*

¹⁶² The play was also performed at Lampung, Jambi, and Palembang on 25, 28, and 31 May 2009 and at the Melbourne Fringe Festival in November 2009, at the International Theatre Festival in Gdansk in summer 2010, and at the IX International Chekov Festival in Moscow in 2011.

Being an immersive performance, with the audience positioned as close to the action as possible, a recording cannot sufficiently display the intentions and impact of the group, but it does give a basic idea of the performance.

Perempuan Gerabah has no storyline. It centres on the processes of creating, destroying, and recreating earthenware—*gerabah*—a substance or artefact that is perceived as a symbol for cultural tradition in Java. In the course of the performance, the performers first use the large earthenware vessels as instruments; they carry them around and play with them. Then they destroy them while Rasmi binti Makad, an elderly earthenware maker, is creating new small earthenware vessels at one side. At the end of the performance, Rasmi takes the stage and sets up her potter's wheel, on which she creates small vessels that she gives out to the audience. In this way destruction is followed by the creation of something new, a cycle also reflected in the continuous movement of the potter's wheel. The idea of creating and destroying in this context can be seen as an antagonism to our modern, fast-paced throw-away society; everything is changing rapidly; we build new things made from plastic and other unsustainable sources, whilst rubbish is mounting and nature is oft far removed from the normal course of living. On the other hand the image created by teaterStudio in this performance is highly romanticized as the performance does not give any solutions to the problem and the concept of building and destroying is not displayed in a narrative but an abstract, ritual-like metaphor which for the audience is open to interpretation.



Fig. 11 The stage at the premiere with the performers drumming on the earthenware vessels. Photo from rumahdunia.com

For Nandang Aradea, earthenware symbolises “the art of the poor,” and this can be taken literally. Earthenware makers in the Banten region are indeed very poor. Although their pottery is sold to buyers in other parts of Indonesia as souvenirs for tourists, they cannot sustain a livelihood from the creation of earthenware alone so most earthenware makers also work as farmers. Darmawan suggests that many of the children of earthenware makers have to drop out of elementary school for financial reasons and sometimes their parents do not even make enough money for their daily rice (Darmawan). The members of teaterStudio undertook research and workshops in Ciruas, a village in the Banten area, which resulted in a remarkable exchange between earthenware makers and theatre practitioners. After giving a three-month workshop to the members of the theatre group, one earthenware maker, Rasmi binti Makad, joined the performance and went on tour with teaterStudio Indonesia. With the exception of Surabaya, she accompanied the group to every performance, even to Gdansk in Poland, where the company participated in a theatre festival (Nandang Aradea personal communication 9 Feb. 2011). On a small scale, this collaboration is already a form of social engagement. Rasmi’s participation in the performance is important as, through her joining with the theatre community, both Rasmi and the members of teaterStudio Indonesia came some way towards experiencing and participating in each other’s livelihoods.

During the course of the performance no spoken language is used. As with Teater Payung Hitam’s work, Nandang feels a disappointment with language, and wants to create a solely “visual impact” for the audience. He claims that he wants to build a “new way of communicating with the audience, also with a new language. ... [t]o understand this we need new conventions or agreements. Let the audience combine the story from the narrative images they see with what they feel”¹⁶³ (teaterStudio Indonesia programme notes *Perempuan Gerabah*). In the first half of the performance, a constant level of sound is produced through the performers’ steps on the wooden surface and percussion played on large earthenware vessels, a technique also used in the traditional Javanese trance-dance, *sintren*. In fact, the performance has a trance-ritual quality as the performers move to the beat produced on the earthenware vessels. The stage setting is a large, movable, wooden circle that resembles the kind of turntable on which the clay is worked to produce earthenware. Around this turntable a nest-like construction of large bamboo sticks is erected; it is about 10 metres high and 8

¹⁶³ *Saya inging membangun sebuah komunikasi baru dengan penonton, dengan bahasa yang baru pula.... Untuk memahaminya, kita membutuhkan konvensi-konvensi atau kesepakatan-kesepakatan yang baru pula. Biarkanlah penonton merangkai kisah dari narasi gambar yang dilihat, yang dirasakannya.*

metres wide. The stage setting is designed to seat the audience in two circular pedestals within the bamboo construction, so that they become participants of the ritual, and are intimate with the actors, the mud and the earthenware used in the performance. The group's rethinking of space is driven by their idea of *konsep outdoor* ('outdoors concept'): to bring the performance to the audience and to move away from conventional, existing stage structures. This issue of space and mobility has become of increasing importance for many *teater* groups in Indonesia.



Fig. 12 The construction of the bamboo stage described above. Photo from metrowawai.blogspot

The group's interest in bamboo is firstly practical, as bamboo is easily available, cheap, and robust. Robert Wessing notes that in Asia "bamboo serves as a building material, in crafts and household utensils, and as irrigation pipes, leading water into households and fields" ('Bamboo' 47). It is a sustainable resource and is therefore resonant with the environmental message conveyed in the performances. But bamboo also has a spiritual aspect: "Bamboo is seen as embodying the forces of growth and fertility and is closely linked with water and rice" (Wessing 'Bamboo' 51). In my interview with Nandang and Agus, much of the

conversation focused on bamboo as the soul and spirit of the performance, and indeed of all of teaterStudio's performances to date. However, during their Gdansk show, they had to use metal bars to build the stage setting as it would have been too expensive to ship the bamboo construction to Poland. The performers noted that the show had a rather different feel to it (Nandang Aradea, personal communication, 9 Feb. 2011)¹⁶⁴ but because they performed outdoors in a place surrounded by trees the closeness to nature remained, just with a different material, wood rather than bamboo.

The environmental message and social engagement implicit in *Perempuan Gerabah* are not immediately apparent. There is little action on stage but the audience members' attention is held by the repetitive sound of the drumming on the earthenware vessels, the strong energy of the performers, and their physical dialogue with the mud and the earthenware. Like Payung Hitam's *Air Mata Air*, this work deals with environmental issues in a rather aestheticised way, without pointing out direct criticisms. The ritualised styling of the performance conveys the idea of an immersion in natural materials and can therefore be seen as a reflection on the human relationship with nature. It is a rather romanticized image which seems at odds with the engaged mission statement. By using organic materials such as clay and bamboo, and displaying them on stage, audience members can experience closeness to nature which may have been lost in their daily lives. This audience experience is enhanced by being seated in a "nest" of bamboo as close as possible to the stage. The performance also recognises the skills of the craftsman, here the earthenware maker, whose work and self are displayed on stage. Although the life-story of Ibu Rasmi is not told, the performance gives space to her and therefore offers an opportunity for the audience to engage with her craft— which was once a thriving business, but is now no longer able to sustain its makers' living. *Perempuan Gerabah* thus comments in a wider sense on a society that often no longer takes time to learn and appreciate the slowness of creating something by hand; bringing this feeling back to the audience members is a crucial aspect of the performance.

Further reflection

The introduction to this chapter traced the development of the environmental movement in Indonesia, and the emergence of protests against the extensive and destructive use of natural

¹⁶⁴ *Ketika di Polandia, dikasih besi. Tidak mungkin membawa konstruksi dari sini, biayanya lebih tinggi. Saya dikasih metal. Suasana beda.*

resources that took place under the New Order regime. Theatre, since the 1970s, has responded to this new environmental awareness and, while it has not produced a cohesive movement, this work appears to be growing stronger since *reformasi*. The works of the two theatre groups discussed in this chapter only serve as examples, but they reflect on some crucial developments relating to theatre and environment. The first of these is the emergence of environmentally-themed festivals that are often located in and can communicate directly with local communities. Festivals, such as the International Water Festival organised by Teater Payung Hitam, also connect community members (citizens) with other pressing social concerns and can therefore function as an important motor within (civil) society. The environmentally-themed works presented by Teater Payung Hitam are presented as “another kind of trauma ... that of environmental destruction and its potential consequences for human beings” (Bodden ‘Language of Trauma’ 145), following and perhaps replacing the political trauma of the New Order. Rachman Sabur, the director of Teater Payung Hitam, is primarily concerned with “the real” and producing theatre that resonates with the daily lives of his audiences. Conversely, teaterStudio was established after the fall of the New Order and has a different history and vision that focuses neither on the real nor on trauma. Baz Kershaw has noted that “immersive performance events which are articulated directly to what is left of the natural world, unlike performances in theatres, may have the capacity ... to link human nature with nature’s nature” (318). They might in such small ways contribute to a new ecological sanity.

Beyond these two case-studies, there are other works of art which contribute to a greater understanding of the environment. Bandung-based Gerakan Pawai Hitam Indonesia offers a space for art activists, environmental activists, and other individuals to campaign on environmental issues, such as plastic waste, through popular art. Teater Tanah Air performed Putu Wijaya’s “Zero”, with its strong focus on environmentalism, at the Mimbar Teater in Solo in 2010. The Solo Performing Arts Festival (SIPA), which was held from 28 to 30 September 2012, was themed “Save my Solo. Save our World” and featured a variety of performances, e.g. from Uly Sigar Rusady, who distributed 10,000 sengon tree seedlings to members of her audience.¹⁶⁵ In the visual arts, exhibitions such as “E(art)H Project: Sin City” from 2011 at the Galleri Nasional Jakarta feature works that comment on humans’ negative impact on the environment. Events such as these all point to active role and interest of not

¹⁶⁵ Other shows included *Luwasa Inahan* (Save our Mother Earth) by the Philippine group Teatro Bol-anon and *The Dream Engine* by Heliosphere.

only theatre artists in supporting the development of a new awareness of the importance of protecting the natural environment and creating sustainable livelihoods in Indonesian society.

Chapter 5: Modern theatre and transition

These last chapters examined the responses of modern Indonesian theatre to some concrete aspects of social transition, namely human rights, memory and historical trauma, and environmentalism. Chapter 5 instead centres on the work of one theatre troupe, Teater Garasi, whose performances comment on social and cultural transition in much broader terms. They are concerned with globalisation, the transformation of traditional living spaces, political transition, identity, and the hybrid body/identity.

Transition, in multifarious forms, is a recurrent theme in the work of contemporary theatre practitioners in Indonesia. In 1998, the political transition from New Order to *reformasi* and beyond flavoured the turn of the millennium, not only for theatre practitioners, but for all Indonesians. There was a move towards political decentralisation and freedom of expression that came hand in hand with the right to free protest (there is still censorship in post-Suharto Indonesia, albeit in less overt and coercive forms), which opened up new opportunities for theatre and the arts in general. Decentralisation facilitated the emergence of a variety of groups and cultural organisations outside of the urban centres which in turn led to a more diverse modern theatre scene. At the same time, changes in the political, legal, cultural and social systems have also influenced artists' lives and works.

Clifford Geertz writes about the ups and downs of the first steps of *reformasi*, noting that:

the press has been freed and reenergized [...] militant Islam, NGO environmentalism, populist xenophobia, neoliberal utopianism, Christian apologetics, and human rights activism have all grown markedly in volume, visibility, and the capacity to bring on mass rallies, mobs, and marching in the streets. Factional party politics have returned with a vehemence and complexity not seen since the early Sixties ('Starting Over').

Reforms to the military, judicial and governance systems happened simultaneously with the transition from autocracy to democracy and the transition from a highly centralised state to a decentralised one (Beitinger-Lee 2). Bunte and Ufen note that “only one and a half years after the collapse of the authoritarian regime, Indonesia had become an electoral democracy” (3). However, the transition period was marked by “difficult, multi-layered and often contradictory results” (3). As Verena Beitinger-Lee points out:

more negative perceptions speak of a “negative transition from order to disorder” ... taking into account several deficiencies that impede the reform process, such as money politics, corruption, opportunism, the lack of a strong civil society, and the government’s failure to restore the ailing economy. Civil wars, riots, secessionist movements, state violence, ethnic and religious violence, as well as criminality point at a weak state and political destabilization. (2).

These difficulties have also been expressed in some of the modern theatre performances that deal with the handling of violence, riots and the development of a democratic culture in Indonesia. That a staging of such themes has become possible in post-Suharto Indonesia hints at the freedom of expression available in the new democracy. However, censorship is still imposed when the state or other forces within society feel threatened, and self-censorship remains quite rife.

Religious censorship is particularly apparent in relation to issues of morality. Well-known examples include the cancellation of concerts such as Lady Gaga’s in June 2013 in Jakarta. The permit to perform was refused “after Islamic hardliners, lawmakers and religious clerics spoke out against the pop star’s daring clothes and dance moves. Indonesian critics have said that the nature of the show could undermine the country’s moral fibre,” as Alice Purkiss on Index on Censorship notes. Islam has long been the dominant religion in Indonesia, where more than 90% of the population are Muslims, but the idea of *warna-warni* (“all kinds of colours”) is strongly represented in the state principle of *Pancasila*. However, the notion of *warna-warni* within Islam is rejected by many. This is a complex issue that cannot be given full justice here, but it is important to note that there are several different Islamic streams in Indonesia. M. Syafi’i Anwar gives the example of the Indonesia Mujahedeen Council (Majelis Mujahideen Indonesia, MMI) that pressed charges against the Liberal Muslim Network (Jaringan Liberal Islam, JLI) over the advertising of *Islam Warna-Warni* on TV. The message of the advertisement was “a call for the necessity to respect religious plurality on the basis of mutual admiration” (375). Anwar explains that the MMI “judged that such an advertisement was totally wrong and dangerous” to the Muslim community as “there was only one interpretation of Islam, and that plurality existed only within the *ummah* [Muslim community] and was not linked to Islam itself as a religion” (375). They also put strong pressure on the TV channels that broadcast this advert, with threats of demonstrations. Both TV channels withdrew the advert (375). As Van Klinken notes, the end of the New Order was marked by an increasing number of violent incidents occurring between Muslims and

Christians (130). Previously, violence between Muslims and Christians had been quite rare in Indonesian history and “[W]hen it did occur, it was usually a side-effect of anger against (often Christian) Chinese shopkeepers” (130). But there has been a slow but steady radicalisation of Islam in Indonesia since 1998, as illustrated by social changes, from the spread of Muslim fashion stores to stricter views on morality and the introduction of the anti-pornography law in 2008. There is also an increasing interest among some religious activists in introducing shari’ah law to parts of the country, despite the secular constitution of the state. In some conflicts, religion might only be instrumentalised and the central conflict lies elsewhere, but the distinction is often vague and difficult to pinpoint. Anwar argues that these developments anger the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, but that there seems to be a tendency for “ideological transmission from the radical movements in the Middle East to Indonesia” (‘Political Islam’ 350), as a side-effect of globalisation.

Much of Asia has been undergoing political transition in recent years. Many Asian politicians and scholars have rejected the concept of liberal democracy as “inappropriate”. Western ideas of democracy with its emphasis on human rights are rejected as social obligations and the rights of the community play a greater role (Bünthe and Ufen 4-5). However, Malaysia, Singapore and Burma have all faced strong challenges to their authoritarian governments post-2000, and are to different extents embarking on a journey towards political change. One recent example is the Bersih 3.0 protest in Malaysia which lobbied for free and fair elections in 2013 and aligned itself with the so-called “Arab Spring” in countries such as Egypt or Syria. Yet, as Sinpeng and Walker suggest, they are still some way from full democratic reform. For the purpose of an article published in *New Mandala* magazine, Sinpeng and Walker invited young Southeast Asian scholars to give their opinions on democracy in their respective home countries. Precipitated by an essay by Larry Diamond in which the author argues that East Asia (including China) will become democratic within a generation—due to higher incomes, economic progress and better education in the region—the Asian scholars were not so certain. Instead, Sinpeng and Walker conclude that:

the biggest impetus for political change in Southeast Asia may neither be the economic crisis nor a future wave of democratisation hinged upon modernisation. Rather the inevitable passing or secession of the region’s “strongmen,” be they Lee Kuan Yew, King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, Hun Sen, Mahathir, or the SPDC’s¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ SPDC is the State Peace and Development Council. It was the official name for the military regime in Burma. The council was officially dissolved on 30 March 2011.

conservative vanguards, will leave a significant power vacuum among ruling elites, and set in motion monumental change from within.

Whether such change will lead to greater democratisation also depends on factors such as the existence of a viable opposition and a pro-democratic civil society. In this context, O'Donnell and Schmitter argue that "transition from certain authoritarian rule does not lead directly to democracy, but rather to an uncertain 'something else'" (3). Clifford Geertz recognised this situation for Indonesia at the beginning of *reformasi*, when he wrote that:

[i]t is a mixed and unsettled, fluctuating picture, without center and without edge, resistant to summary, hard to hold in place. As virtually everything has happened, it seems that virtually anything might; and it is impossible to tell whether all this stir and agitation of what the Indonesians, with their usual gift for verbal camouflage, have come to call *reformasi* is the end of something or the beginning of something ('Starting Over').

This political transition in Indonesia was also reflected on the contemporary theatre stage, where theatre practitioners displayed their emerging understandings of democracy. The play *BAN-POL. Banyolan politik (Keroncong demokrasi dua)* (BAN-POL. A political joke. Keroncong of democracy Part 2), written in 1999 by Yusuf Muldiana, stands out in its boldness at the beginning of *reformasi*. Under Suharto it would not have been possible to stage a play so full of allusions to and critique of national politics; it would certainly have been censored. This applies to most of the pieces that were created in the euphoria of the first few months after the change of regime. The issues brought up in *BAN-POL* are criticisms of the residual old values of the New Order, the Indonesian government apparatus, the uncertain political landscape, corruption, the half-hearted freedom of expression and press, the right to vote, taking responsibility in a democratic state and the political education of the population. At the end of the play, however, all the characters sing a song together that hints at a more hopeful future for the united Indonesia:

Our homeland
still belongs to us
We'll never let it be
Cracked and broken
Then divided into numbers
Like a can of water
That falls
On the hard surface of stones

We'll never let it be sad
We'll never let it be upset
We'll never let it vanish
We'll never let the sun
Hide its shine
Over the blue sky
The green of this country
Our homeland will still belong to us (Muldiyana 19)

The performance was one of the six winners of a drama competition initiated by the Goethe Institut Bandung. Volker Wolf, at that time director of the Goethe Institut, noted that:

it is quite obvious, that all the script writers felt totally uninhibited and free to express their strong criticism of the political culture in Indonesia in general and of the specific political situation in particular, but they also show a deep love for their country and heartfelt hopes for a better life in the future (ix).

This tendency is still perceptible in contemporary performances although it is not so much the political culture per se that is scrutinised on stage, as it was at the very beginning of *reformasi*. Rather, artists tend to focus on specific problems, such as corruption, the violent past or environmental problems, as discussed in previous chapter.

Much has been written about transition from a theoretical perspective, and about how transition can influence the individual's state of being. Sociologists Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman, and cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, are key scholarly voices. Whereas Giddens and Bauman are concerned with modernity, Turner focuses on rites of passage. In their writing it becomes evident that transition is a constant process experienced by all nation states and all individuals. It is a movement or passage from one position, state or concept to another and also refers to a period during which such change takes place. The liminoid, as Turner calls it, is an indeterminate and indefinite state.

As detailed above, transitional states take many forms. For the remainder of this chapter, however, I will focus on what "transition" ultimately means for the human being in a modern society, as this is a major theme of interest for Teater Garasi, a theatre group whose work is influenced by the fluidity of the political reality surrounding them. Bauman describes this state as "liquid modernity". He suggests that contemporary humans live in a world where everything is fluid and the individual feels increasing levels of uncertainty and that there is

nothing to hold on. Bauman asserts that “the remoteness and unreachability of systemic structure, coupled with the unstructured, fluid state of the immediate setting of life-politics, change that condition in a radical way and call for a rethinking of old concepts that used to frame its narratives” (*Liquid Modernity* 8). Furthermore, in the past, individuals could conform to “patterns, codes and rules which one could select as stable orientation points and by which one could subsequently let oneself be guided,” though he concludes that these are “nowadays in increasingly short supply” (7). These patterns, codes and rules are “no longer ‘given’, let alone ‘self-evident’; there are just too many of them, clashing with one another and contradicting one another’s commandments” (7). For Bauman, all this results in a “individualized, privatized version of modernity, with the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual’s shoulders” (8). A related point is made by Giddens, who is looking at the transition of cultures from—in his words—pre-modern (traditional) to modern (post-traditional) in our present day world (“late” modernity). In regard to the individual, he argues that “the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities” (*Modernity and Self-identity* 3). The transition that leads to this post-traditional world order affects the individual who has to answer and interpret the question ‘How shall I live?’ “in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat—and many other things— [...] within the temporal unfolding of self-identity” (14).

Teater Garasi takes this vagueness and uncertainty of modern daily life, and the fear and doubt that often accompany it, as a major theme in the works that will be analysed in this chapter: *Waktu Batu 1-3* (2001-2004), *je.ja.l.an* (throng, or Crowded street, 2008) and *Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara* (The third body: On celebrating the in-between, 2010). Whereas the *Waktu Batu* trilogy addresses an Indonesian identity formed by tensions between traditional values and the modernity brought to Indonesia through colonialism, *je.ja.l.an* brings Indonesian “life-politics”—the hybrid chaos and contesting forces—on stage. The last in the series, *Tubuh Ketiga*, looks at the cultural implications of this life-politics, zooming-in its focus on *tarling dangdut*, a musical genre from the Indramayu region of West Java. In this performance, Teater Garasi explores the position of in-betweenness—a reference to Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space” (see Rutherford)—and to processes of cultural hybridity, identity and self-definition. In response to this, writer and activist Afrizal Malna argues that “modern theatre is important for

Indonesians because the majority are creole persons, but no effort is made to understand this mixture [of different influences]. ...When a person enters the theatre they are confronted with their own body” (Afrizal Malna personal communication 25 Jan. 2011).¹⁶⁷ Some artists engage with this concept of “creole” identity, as Malna calls it, by looking at processes of transition in various ways, as will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

All these transitional states, diverse as they are, have a profound influence on theatre-making. Indonesian artists try to explain phenomena of transition and the effects they might have on society and identity. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues that “cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions” that she describes as “‘friction’: the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (*Friction* 4). The exhibition “Indonesian Eye – Fantasies and Realities”, for instance, featured, among others, the works of Nindityo Adipurnomo, an artist who often works with the metaphor of the *konde*, a traditional Javanese hairstyle for women. Amanda Rath notes that the *konde* is a metonym for the ideal of the “right place” for women and an erotic sensuality as defined by Javanese men (‘Beyond the Modesty’). In an email interview from 2006, Adipurnomo states that he is not viewing the *konde* “as an exotic particular Javanese tradition, but I am part of those who make this whole tradition even more alive. ... I wanted to use the daily icons that help me to bridge the living metaphor in Java.” By doing so, he seeks to criticise the parochialism inherent in this symbolic representation of a traditional hair bun in a society that is constantly transforming. The tension in all his work is focussed on the struggle between individuality, identity and certain ritualised signs that symbolise affiliation to a specific community. In the catalogue to Indonesian Eye he notes that he is interested in how a culture “is created and develops through different influences. I look at Indonesia as a constantly shifting socio-cultural history. Through a process of interrogation, I start from a specific object that I turn through my art into an idiom that comments on societal issues such as power, tradition, values, gender, and religion” (14).

Transition in some form is also a theme of many contemporary theatre performances in Indonesia between 2005 and 2011. The present chapter focuses on the work of Teater Garasi, recognised in 2013 by a prestigious laureate from the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and

¹⁶⁷ *Teater penting untuk orang Indonesia karena sebagian besar masyarakat Indonesia tubuh kreol, tapi buat campuran itu seperti tidak perusaha dimengerti ... Ketika seorang masuk pada teater ada perhadapan pada tubuh sendiri.*

Development. Of all the theatre groups discussed in this thesis, I have studied Teater Garasi's work most closely, and have been in touch with the group and their work since 2005. In their vision and mission statement from December 2008, which is outlined in their blog, Teater Garasi outline the three main goals they wish to achieve:

- a) The creation of theater piece[s] which generate a critical dialectic with the social, political and cultural environment and the establishment of a theater field [that] sustains a creative growth, as ... part of efforts to build a more open and mature civil society.
- b) Articulating social problems and concerns ... through the creation of theater which is innovative, aesthetic and thematically maintains a critical dialectic with [its] surroundings.
- c) Maintaining works that will empower the field of contemporary theater for the capacity building and the improvement of socio-political sensibility of theater workers in their dialectic with the socio-political field in Indonesia ('Visi dan Misi').

Thus, according to the group's self-definition, their work can be considered to be socially-engaged theatre. This chapter, by focusing on Teater Garasi's performances *Waktu Batu, je.ja.l.an*, and *Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan Yang Berada di Antara*, examines how their work deals with the concepts of transition and fluid/hybrid culture.¹⁶⁸

Teater Garasi

Before I begin the analysis detailed above, I will provide a brief summary of the group's history in order to set their work in a wider perspective. The artist collective Teater Garasi is one of the best-known contemporary theatre communities in Java. I met them for the first time in mid-2005 while I was in Indonesia to do initial research for my Master's dissertation. At that time, the group was planning a performance of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* in collaboration with the Goethe Institut Jakarta, and I was invited along as an observer/intern. However, although the rehearsal process had already begun, after a few weeks it became clear that due to funding problems no performance of *Hamletmachine* would transpire in the near future. Instead, I observed the rehearsal process for *Repertoar Hujan* (Rain Repertoire), which gave me some insights into the organisation and work ethic of the group.

¹⁶⁸ While I was making the final revisions of this thesis, a publication about theatre and performance in the Asia-Pacific was published, which discusses Teater Garasi's work in one of its chapters ('Staging Indonesian Modernity after Suharto'). The book is relevant for this research, analyses the work *Tubuh Ketiga* and parallels some of the ideas discussed here, but at the time of writing there has not been sufficient time to include this material in the thesis (see Varney, Denise et.al. *Theatre and Performance in the Asia-Pacific*)

Teater Garasi is based in Yogyakarta, the cultural heart of Java, and their work often reflects on the hybrid identities shaped by the dominant Javanese culture, Western-influenced pop culture, and the members' own backgrounds (Javanese, Balinese, Timorese, Sumatran). Teater Garasi has a different structure and organisation than older theatre groups, such as Bengkel Teater Rendra, Teater Mandiri or Teater Koma, which were among the most important names on the contemporary theatre map of Indonesia during the New Order. In these longer-established troupes, one strong and powerful leader is often at the centre of the theatre community's life and work. Ratna Sarumpaet, for instance, who was part of Bengkel Teater in the 1970s, describes Rendra's idea of hierarchy as "feudalistic" (personal communication 15 February 2011) and, in regard to Teater Koma, Evan Darvin Winet argues that although "Putu [Wijaya] and Nano [Riantiarno] have advocated for an iconoclastic collective of individual artists independent from social values, ... their troupes would seem to model a fairly conservative family structure, headed by an inevitably autocratic father" (*Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre* 108).¹⁶⁹

Teater Garasi differs from this way of working by having an ensemble of collaborative artists, most of them running their own projects apart from the group's collective activities, such as the works of B. Verry Handayani or Naomi Srikandi.¹⁷⁰ These satellite works are often supported by Teater Garasi the brand (Garasi Enterprise), which offers management and advertising support as well as an affiliation with the well-known name of Teater Garasi. Also, the group has more than one director. Most notably Gunawan "Cindhil" Maryanto, for instance, worked together with Yudi Ahmad Tajudin on Garasi's performance *Gandamayū*, which premiered in September 2012, and is an adaptation of Putu Fajar Arcana's novel of the same name. For the directing process of *The Third Body*, Yudi also noted that he sees his role as a director as a "*teman diskusi*", a discussion partner who structures the work (Teater Garasi *Tubuh Ketiga*). This type of directorial collaboration and dialogue distinguishes Teater

¹⁶⁹ For Teater Koma, Nano Riantiarno is the leader, but his wife Ratna does the management and takes on an equally strong position in this area, whereas Nano is the creative director.

¹⁷⁰ Naomi Srikandi was part of Yayasan Kelola's Empowering Women Artists programme of 2010/11. Her latest work at the time of writing is *Medea Media*. She is also a writer, and she co-created and hosted the Kosmo talk show with Rizky Summerbee, which was broadcast at TVRI Jogja from March 2011 but has since been withdrawn.

Garasi's process from the almost patriarchal organisational structure of earlier Indonesian theatre groups such as Bengkel Teater, Teater Kecil, or Teater Mandiri.

Teater Garasi was founded in 1993 by Yudi Ahmad Tajudin, Y. Bayu Aji Kusworo and Puthut Yulianto, who at that time were all studying at Gadjah Madah University in Yogyakarta. At the time of writing Yudi remains Garasi's main artistic director and Aji its executive director. A certain socio-political vision informed the beginning and early years of Teater Garasi: many things could not be expressed during daily life under the New Order and thus had to be transferred onto the stage. This vision was part of the zeitgeist and positioned Teater Garasi in the context of politically aware student theatre groups (see Chapter 1).

The group performed their first play—*Atau Siapa Saja* (Or Who Else), an adaptation of Albert Camus' *Caligula*¹⁷¹—in 1995, followed by Arifin C. Noer's *Kapai-Kapai* (Moths) in 1997. During 1997/98, the focus of the themes tightened and became more personal. As Yudi notes, “[T]he private was political in those years” (personal communication 21 Jan. 2011). In the midst of the political turmoil of 1998, the group performed a series of short scripts—*Three Pieces of Love Stories: Sunny Morning, Silver Wedding, The Resting Place*—focusing on the themes of friendship, love, and the relationship between men and women: “But at that time this was actually quite subversive ... because at that time Indonesian theater was really dominated by performances that dealt with ‘big themes’ and big ideas, concepts and concerns” (Teater Garasi ‘Coming to terms’ 125). In a later interview, Yudi explains that Teater's Garasi's works were also subversive in the sense that their choices contrasted so starkly with those of the dominant physical theatre groups of these years—Teater Kubur and Teater Sae—by staging realistic performances (Tajudin personal communication 21 Jan. 2011). In 1999, the group staged *Sri*¹⁷² and *Sementara Menunggu Godot* (Waiting for Godot), followed by *Les Screens, Sketsa-Sketsa Negeri Terbakar* (The Screens, Sketches of a Burned Land), which centred on the military conflict in Aceh and involved young Acehnese living in

¹⁷¹ The original play was written in 1938 and first performed in 1945. Thus, the link to the political situation in Europe at that time is obvious. Caligula is a cruel and brutal Roman Emperor torn by the death of his sister and lover Drusilla and thus manipulating his own assassination. Parallels to the situation in Indonesia under Suharto come to mind. Winet notes that attraction of Indonesian theatre artists to Camus' *Caligula* is: “evident in clumps of productions and adaptations around two significant moments of postcolonial history: the mid-1960s around the anti-Communist massacres, the fall of Soekarno and Suharto's rise to power, and the early mid-1990s as tensions mounted between a Suharto regime that had effectively dismantled civil society and re-emerged culture of criticism expressed in the arts through a return to political content and radical uses of postmodernist aesthetics” (*Indonesian Postcolonial Theatre* 157).

¹⁷² *Sri* is an adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's play *Yerma* transferred to Javanese culture and intends to show problems for women within a patriarchal state.

Yogyakarta. In 2001, the group staged *Percakapan di Ruang Kosong* (Conversation in an Empty Room) and the first version of *Repertoar Hujan* (Rain Repertoire), of which I saw a restaged version in 2005. *Repertoar Hujan* is a rather intimate work with many Javanese allusions and only three actors. Two sentences of an unfinished poem by Gunawan Maryanto form the basis for this work: “*Seorang Lelaki Melintas di Tengah Hujan ...*” (A man hastens through the rain) and “*Seorang Perempuan Menyiram Pot Bunganya Setiap Sore ...*” (A woman waters her flower pot every afternoon). The accompanying text for the performance reads as follows: “The rain and the memories generated by rain became the theme and structured the background for the performance. A small and personal theme we probably hardly touched” (programme notes *Repertoar Hujan*). Rain and the rain-born memories are therefore a central part of the project, but it also alludes to the Sundanese myths of *Dayang Sumbi* and *Sangkuriang*.¹⁷³ The director, Gunawan Maryanto, explains that the body is the ‘textual basis’ of the work and in the production the two parameters of movement and stillness are “forced to tell the story”. The body develops a language completely different from verbal speech (Arcana).¹⁷⁴ The actors use everyday movements, but also acrobatic movement patterns based on traditional dance forms—like the Javanese *jatilan*, a mask dance from the Indramayu region in East Java (without the trance elements), the martial art *Bangau Putih*¹⁷⁵ and some basic movements from Japanese *Butoh* (Arcana).

In 2000, Bain noted that “perhaps Teater Garasi’s approach exemplifies a more general shift away from a deliberately political theatre culture” (‘Confused?’) because, apart from *Sketsa-*

¹⁷³ *Dayang Sumbi* or *Dayang Sumbing and Sangkuriang* is a Sundanese folktale that tells the story of “a king who urinated while hunting in a forest. A hog licked up the liquid and became pregnant. Nine months later, the king discovered his baby in the wood and named her *dayang* (girl) *sumbi* (the wood for a loom). One day, Dayang Sumbi was weaving when the wood fell out of the loom. Too tired to pick it up, she said she would marry the boy who retrieved it. Her dog picked it up and made love to Dayang Sumbi while she slept, impregnating her.

The king was furious when he learned Dayang Sumbi was pregnant and banished her from his palace. She gave birth to Sangkuriang, who at the age of 11 killed the dog because it refused to kill a boar: the same boar that gave birth to Dayang Sumbi.

Dayang Sumbing was distraught that Sangkuriang had unknowingly killed his own father, the dog. She struck his head and told him to leave. Sangkuriang returned to his hometown when he became a man. He fell in love with an older woman, and asked her to marry. One afternoon before the wedding, the woman offered to pluck lice from his hair. While doing so, she found a mark on his head. It was the scar from her blow when she found out that he had killed his father. Dayang Sumbing committed suicide rather than marry her own son” (Torchia 203).

¹⁷⁴ *Tubuh punya bahasa sendiri yang berbeda dengan bahasa verbal.*

¹⁷⁵ This is a more contemporary form of Kung Fu, also called Indonesian Kung Fu or White Crane. The grandmaster Subur Rahardja was born in 1925 in Bogor and created the martial art *Bangau Putih* (White Crane) by combining different styles of martial art.

Sketsa Negeri Terbakar, none of their plays commented on politics in an obvious way, although the works are, in a more subtle way, very much embedded in contemporary cultural, social and political debates. This observation is supported by SW and Abe, who note that Teater Garasi “try to present more subtle and complex perspectives than the confrontation with the state that characterised activist Indonesian theatre in the past”. One motivating factor for Garasi has been its long-standing international funding. This funding has come mainly from HIVOS, which, since the beginning of 2003, has been the group’s main partner organisation. The 10-year contract with HIVOS has enabled Teater Garasi to extend its internal capacity building, focus on management, and implement outreach and infrastructure programmes. The HIVOS funding ends in 2013, though it is hoped that the recently established JogjaBroadway can become one major source of income in the future (Yudi Ahmad Tajudin personal communication 21 January 2011). The group was also recognized by the Prince Claus Award in 2013. The group defines itself as a “cultural laboratory” and its website states that the “Garasi Performance Laboratory is the core program of Teater Garasi which becomes a space for Teater Garasi’s artists to translate their creative ideas and concerns in fresh and authentic performances” (teatergarasi.org).¹⁷⁶ This model encourages group members to research and initiate new projects.

From *Waktu Batu* onwards, the group would no longer use existing drama texts, but would instead create a performance by choosing an issue that was relevant to Teater Garasi members and researching it in detail. Research—including investigation of already existing cultural traditions, literature and philosophical concepts—is an essential part of the work and informs the production process. This research both precedes and parallels the rehearsals, and is a work-in-progress until the performance is staged or beyond, in the case of *Tubuh Ketiga*. In reference to the preparation for *Kapai-Kapai* by Arifin C. Noer in 1997, Dewi Ria Utari notes that “they discussed intensely and even entered Karl Marx’s ideas about the worker, work division and so on. That’s how they try to see the whole context” (‘Kenangan, Hujan’).¹⁷⁷ Later performances, beginning with the *Waktu Batu* trilogy, would show an even deeper pre-engagement with the subject of their performances, often accompanied by very detailed, eloquent, academic notes and essays about the research process, queries which came

¹⁷⁶ *Garasi Performance Laboratory adalah program utama (core program) Teater Garasi, yang menjadi ruang bagi seniman-seniman Teater Garasi untuk menerjemahkan ide dan kegelisahan kreatif ke dalam bentuk-bentuk pengucapan seni pertunjukan (performing arts) yang segar dan otentik.*

¹⁷⁷ *Mereka intens mendiskusikan, bahkan sampai memasuki gagasan-gagasan Karl Marx tentang buruh, pembagian kerja, dan sebagainya. Dengan cara itu, mereka mencoba melihat konteks secara keseluruhan.*

up during the process, and its results. One example of this is the blog that accompanied the *Tubuh Ketiga* process (tubuhketiga.wordpress.com), which is still accessible. It contains, for instance, texts about the development of the performance, images taken during the research in Indramayu, and statements that explain the concept of the “third space” and cultural hybridity. In the blog the group suggests that Indonesian culture:

is a culture that is located between two spaces: between the traditional and the modern, the original and the alien, the inside and the outside, the highbrow and the low brow. It never makes the complete transition from one cultural space to another, instead building on a mix (and excess) of cultures — its “body” consisting of many different cultural layers (tubuhketiga.blogspot.com).

This writing is informed by Bhabha who, in *The Location of Culture*, famously puts forward the idea of the third space, an in-between, interstitial, inter-space between cultures that carries “the burden of the meaning of culture [...] an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (38). Identity which is formed within and informed by this multi-layered body of culture is of interest for the group’s first performance process *Waktu Batu 1-3*. Since then, the concept of transition has remained an important theme for the group. Papastergiadis writes about art works that are “hybrid in the way they examine the complex psychic responses to political structures and the diverse layers that are enfolded within historical symbols” (‘Hybridity and Ambivalence’ 41). In *Waktu Batu* this unfolds in a complex and abstract reflexive reflection on Javanese culture. Whereas *Waktu Batu* was looking at a hybrid, fluid Indonesian identity with a specific focus on Javanese culture, *je.ja.l.an* made the contradictions of contemporary Indonesian life, for instance the gap between poor and rich, and different political forces that compete with each other its topic, and *Tubuh Ketiga* explored the notion of a “third space” formed by hybrid cultural flows.

Before discussing the more recent works *je.ja.l.an* and *Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara*, I will give a brief overview of the *Waktu Batu* trilogy, as all of Teater Garasi’s post-2001 works are thematically linked.

Waktu Batu

The work on *Waktu Batu* stretched over a four-year period from 2001 to 2004. The trilogy explores notions of Javanese mythology in relation to contemporary Indonesian identity. The group deliberately called the work a “project” rather than a production as they were prepared from the outset for a long and on-going process. In September 2004, the group was cited in *The Jakarta Post* as saying that “by doing this process we weren’t, and we are not, just preparing a stage performance but, most importantly, are carrying out research intended to trace the problem of Indonesian (cultural) identity” (“Teater Garasi takes Tjut Nyak to summit”). This identity is considered problematic because it was formed by tensions between traditional values and the modernity brought to Indonesia through colonialism. Many of Teater Garasi’s members are not Javanese, and Yudi, the group’s creative director, although ethnically Javanese (and born in Indramayu), grew up in Jakarta. As Hatley surmises in her analysis of the project, “that Yudi and the group should be directing their theatrical energies so intently, and over such a long period, to Javanese myth and history, was surprising and noteworthy” (‘Male and Female’ 94). Hatley also argues that in Yogyakarta “celebration of regional culture as a focus of identity was more problematic, for ‘Javanese culture’, meaning the court-derived culture of Central Java, had long been identified with the politically dominant centre of the nation” (*Javanese Performances* 199) and this system, developed in colonial times, continued after Independence.

The idea for the project emerged in 2000. In the programme notes for the first performance Yudi notes that “[at that time] I felt that things around me were in a constant state of flux. And the direction and purpose of the transition was unclear. It was threatening, dangerous, always at a crisis point” (Tajudin qtd. in Bain *Performances of the Post-New Order* 74). Here, the transition refers to the pervasive political uncertainty of the time. This uncertainty resulted in discussions about Javanese identity with artist and musician Slamet Gundono, after which Yudi became interested in the Javanese rituals of *sukerta* and *ruwatan* (cleansing rituals). “*Waktu Batu*, therefore, was conceived as a kind of *ruwatan*, which would restore the group’s—and its members’—equilibrium and sense of direction in the rapidly changing and deeply confusing environment of post-New Order Indonesia” (Bain *Performances of the Post-New Order* 75). Together with Slamet and Gunawan Maryanto, he chose the three Javanese myths *Watugunung*, *Murwakala*, and *Sudamala* as background and base for the performance texts.

The project resulted in three performances: *Waktu Batu #1. Kisah-kisah yang bertemu di Ruang Tunggu* (Stone Time #1. Stories that meet in the Waiting Room) was performed in July 2002; *Waktu Batu #2. Ritus Seratus Kecemasan dan Wajah Siapa yang Terbelah* (Stone Time #2. Rite of a Hundred Anxieties and whose Face is Split in Two)¹⁷⁸ was performed in July 2003; and *Waktu Batu #3. Deus Ex Machina dan Perasaan-perasaanku Padamu* (Stone Time #3. Deus Ex Machina and My Feelings for You) was performed for the first time in 2004 at the Jakarta Arts Summit and was invited later in the same year to Singapore, in 2005 to Berlin, and in 2006 to Japan. I watched *Waktu Batu 2* and *3* as a DVD recording at Teater Garasi's studio in Yogyakarta in September 2005 and another viewing in 2009. They have a small library with a TV set. The viewing process was sometimes interrupted by questions from members of the group asking for my opinion of the performances, so I often had to stop the disc, rewind and start again. At first, I found the performances rather inaccessible. While the scenes are aesthetically beautiful and acted out with strong physicality, the culturally-specific Javanese background needed some explanation. After reading the script of *Waktu Batu 2*, which was published in 2004, and gaining some insight into the research and the myths that form the base for the project, I became a more informed observer. However, at that time I wondered whether my inability to grasp what was going on was related to my non-Javanese background or whether other audience members felt the same.

The performances of *Waktu Batu*, especially 1 and 2, received mixed reviews as their style and approach were something new on the contemporary Indonesian stage. In a *Tempo* magazine article following the performance of *Waktu Batu 3*, Utari notes that the performance made the audience question the conventions of theatre. Goenawan Mohamad, in the same article, describes the performance as an experiment that has “the capacity to produce contrast, irony, even surprise; but he also notes that the actors do not take on the silence, and the text used is not more than a melodramatic speaking style, untrained in its diction” (‘Mereka Yang’). Perhaps due to the history of modern theatre in Indonesia, the reviews tend to focus more on the aesthetics of the performance rather than the content. Theatre from the mid-1940s onwards was mostly concerned with text and delivering lines. Teater Garasi's visual theatre was something new and avant-garde in Indonesia. According to

¹⁷⁸ The performance text for *Waktu Batu #2* written by Andri Nur Latif, Ugoran Prasad and Gunawan Maryanto was published in 2004 by Magelang-based publishing house Indonesiatara. Parts of the text are also used for *Waktu Batu #3*. Barbara Hatley notes that the choice to publish *Waktu Batu #2* is related to the text being the most “representative” for the project, according to Garasi members (‘Male and Female’ 94).

Yudi, the text in *Waktu Batu* centres more on the sound than the meaning. Moreover, although the performance is anti-linear, it is multi-focused and has a rapid stream of events happening, which reflects life in the contemporary environment ('Mereka Yang').

In their performance notes to the show in Berlin, Teater Garasi explain that their understanding of the tensions inherent in the identity politics of Indonesia is linked to the experience of being brought up in a very pluralistic country. They feel that these tensions are also evident in contemporary theatre, which is still considered to be a world of otherness, of other ideas and as a form of artistic expression that is not part of "genuine" Indonesian culture. Identity is unstable, uncertain and full of tension resulting from these processes. For them, this becomes evident in the on-going attempt to move away from the East-West dichotomy, both in discussions about identity and in the new creative orientations of contemporary theatrical activities in Indonesia (Haus der Kulturen der Welt '*Waktu Batu*').

In the *Waktu Batu* trilogy, transition, identity and time are the three main motifs (see Hatley *Javanese Performances*; Bain *Performances of the Post-New Order*; Latif *Waktu Batu*). Inspired by Javanese mythology and history, and their juxtaposition with various social transitions and the problem of "identity" in Indonesia, the performances are multi-layered, abstract and poetic collages of movement, lyrical text, trance and pop music, light and video projections. They display a thoughtful dialogue between the cultural legacy of Java and global pop culture. This is a hybrid performance in many ways, commenting on a nation in motion (Haus der Kulturen der Welt '*Waktu Batu*'). The three major motifs are interpreted using the well-known Javanese myths *Watugunung*, *Murwakala*, and *Sudamala*. *Watugunung* tells the story of the origin of the old Hindu Pawukon calendar that was used in both Bali and Java. This calendar is at the root of many of the ritual processes on both islands and it supports human awareness of time, nature and the divine. In this sense, the myth communicates the fundamentals of a social system to the people. *Murwakala* tells of the birth of Batara Kala, a god of the underworld, who feasts on unfortunate humans. Vishnu himself frees the people from the threat of Batara Kala. The myth of *Murwakala* is important in *wayang kulit* performances, where it is used as part of a cleansing ritual (*Ruwatan Murwakala*). Finally, the *Sudamala* myth tells of how time (or periods of transition) can be a threat to Javanese thinking, or to Javanese culture more generally. In this myth, Uma betrays her husband Siva. As a punishment she is sent down to earth in the monstrous form of the goddess Durga; she lives in the forest Gandayamit Setra and rages as an evil queen for

thousand years. Over these years, enormous changes take place, shown in the myth as the evil deeds of Durga. These changes have a huge impact on humanity. In the end, Durga is transformed back into her original form by Prince Sadewa (or Sahadeva), the youngest of the Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata* (see Latif 'Waktu Batu'). The mythical characters featuring in all these narratives appear on stage but in a way that is newly interpreted by Teater Garasi, and seems strange, distorted, and alien to the audience.

Hatley argues that these “familiar images of traditional figures had been rendered strange, and it was their very strangeness and incongruous juxtaposition that provoked thought about Javanese identity” (*Javanese Performances* 209). The characters are hybrid, transitional bodies. Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo write about the embodiment of Asianness in Australian-Asian performances where Australian performers of Asian descent embody Asian technologies of representation and incorporate Asian expressive techniques through training, although their Asianness is overlaid by their Australianess and other identities. Gilbert and Lo speak about a “cosmopolitan approach to the ‘other’ within” (166). In a similar way, Teater Garasi embody Javanese-ness by embodying Javanese technologies of representation and incorporating Javanese expressive techniques, symbols, metaphors, although their Javanese-ness is overlaid by their Indonesianess and other, hybrid identities, which results in the “strangeness” the audience can observe on stage.

Apart from these three Javanese myths, the performance text is also based on historical textual materials from 14th and 15th century Java (Latif 7). This was a period of great social and cultural shifts across the archipelago. This was mainly due to the increasing influence of Islam, which usurped Hinduism in Java, the end of the Majapahit empire at the beginning of the 16th century, the transfer of power to the sultanate of Demak and the start of colonisation with the foundation of the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or Dutch East India Company) and the European interest in Indonesian wealth and resources. This period is considered by many scholars to mark the beginning of globalisation in Indonesia.

In the prologue to the performance, the following is voiced off-stage in Dutch:

Voice: Two very important facts influenced the status of the archipelago the most: the disappearance of the Hindu influence together with the encroachment of Islam, and

the destruction of the Eastern sea trade through the Westerners who are called the Portuguese (Latif 1).¹⁷⁹

The use of Dutch is, of course, an allusion to colonialism, despite the fact that the excerpt refers to the Portuguese, a rival colonial power. Yudi sets the beginning of modernity in Indonesia at the same time: “Colonialism brought with it what is often called ‘modernity’, and the modernity was something that broke the linear path of history and culture in Indonesia” (Teater Garasi 126).

The work on this trilogy laid the foundation for Teater Garasi’s subsequent performances. An interest in personal and collective identity is crucial at the beginning of a new political era. Teater Garasi engages in very subtle ways with the challenges of a changing world order, fast-developing modernity, traditional culture and all the spaces “in-between”.

je.ja.l.an

In February and March 2008 the group began experimenting and rehearsing for the performance *je.ja.l.an*, which premiered in May 2008 at Taman Budaya Yogyakarta. It was later performed in Jakarta, and in Japan at the Shizukoa Spring Arts Festival and the Atelier Space Osaka. The work was funded by Hivos, Hibah Cipta Dewan Kesenian Jakarta and Yayasan Kelola. The production is an abstract portrait of Indonesian society at a certain point in time, reflecting Indonesia at the time of production in 2008. The title of the performance *je.ja.l.an* is a wordplay, combining the Indonesian terms *jejal*, which means “crammed” and *jalan*, the Indonesian word for “street”; so the title amounts to “crowded street”. The group took an interdisciplinary dance-theatre (*teater tari*), which combined music, dance, video and movement to create a visual essay that attempts to depict life on Indonesia’s streets. In contrast to “the mythical, abstract space of the play *Waktu Batu*,” as Barbara Hatley points out, “*je.jal.an* is set in the immediate, here-and now environment of Indonesia’s streets ... and could well be taking place in Yogyakarta [home to Teater Garasi]” (‘Indonesian Theatre’ 58) or indeed any other street in an Indonesian city. SW and Abe note that *je.ja.l.an* “depicted the confusion and lack of shared direction of modern Indonesian life through colourful,

¹⁷⁹ *Suara: Twee zeer belangrijke feiten hebben de toestand van de archipel ten sterkste beïnvloed: het verdwijnen van de invloed van het Hindoeïsme in verband met het opdringen van de Islam, en de vernietiging van de Oosterse zeehandel door de Westeringen, met name de Portugezen.*

chaotic, conflict-ridden encounters between people on Indonesian streets.” Yudi suggested that politics is no longer a central concern for the group (personal communication 21 Jan. 2011), though the play does touch upon politics, at least in terms of politicised issues such as rising prices, poverty, or coming to terms with the past. However, the play “displays” these issues rather than actively criticising or questioning them.

As with the development of *Waktu Batu*, the group undertook a long and detailed research process in parallel with the rehearsals. Yudono, a journalist for the national newspaper *Kompas*, reported in detail on this programme of research and training (‘Je.ja.l.an Teater Garasi’). In autumn 2007 the performers Bahrul Ulum, Bernadeta Verry Handayani, Citra Pratiwi, Erythrina Baskorowati, Jamaluddin Latif, Sri Quadariatin and Theodorus Christianto underwent a physical training with a strong focus on yoga, *bangau putih* and the imitation of common, everyday movements. At about the same time, the group also began to research and discuss the topic of “street”. In November 2007, the ensemble travelled to Jakarta and Indramayu for a couple of days to do fieldwork in the streets; they also began detailed research into literature about the topic. In early 2008, February and March, all the artists involved in the project finally came together at Garasi’s rehearsal space to collate the results of their research and start rehearsing in earnest.

I watched rehearsals for this show live on stage at Teater Garasi’s studio, while my main source for the performance analysis is a DVD I received from the group. A video recording of a performance like *je.ja.l.an* which has so many events happening simultaneously, is very useful, as it is possible to repeatedly re-visit specific scenes. As a performance, *je.ja.l.an* is difficult to describe because, like *Waktu Batu*, it has no linear narrative or storyline. It is a “theatre of images” according to Yudono, an image of “contradictions and contestations along the streets of Indonesia, contradictions and contestations between the modern and the traditional, the cosmopolitan and the rural, the elites and the majority, the powerful and the peripheral, the noble and the cheap” (‘Je.ja.l.an Teater Garasi’). Characters transform constantly. Afrizal Malna describes the bodies as “creole” because of the changes and different layers they display (Malna 129). In an article for *Tempo* magazine, Sitok Srengenge describes how the stage looks no different to other parts of the room and that the whole event has the atmosphere of a marketplace, albeit without the merchants. In fact, when the audience enters the space there is no established stage, and seeing the people arrive at the venue gives the spectator the feeling that they are participating in a spontaneous, bustling, yet slightly

uncomfortable, street party; nobody seems to know what to do and the whole scene conveys a sense of confusion. The space/stage does not fulfil traditional theatrical requirements as it does not have the usual stage/audience divide, resulting in a feeling of uncertainty from the audience at the beginning of the show as they do not know where to stand or sit.

At the beginning of *je.ja.l.an*, with the entrance of the audience members, many different things start happening simultaneously. Some policemen-cum-actors are walking about the space. On one side there is a small area with chairs and tables (later announced as the V.I.P. area—the rest of the audience has to sit on the floor).¹⁸⁰ At the back, a small podium with a “*Harta & Surga*” (Wealth & Paradise) banner is set up. Two actresses are sitting on small chairs in front of the banner in their role as sex workers. Close to the V.I.P. area a short corrugated metal hut shelters a body lying rolled-up in a mattress. At the centre of the room a construction worker sits on a bench. People walk around and offer glasses of red wine and beer. A Muslim preacher (Jamaluddin Latif) in sarong and white shirt prays into a megaphone. A male *dangdut* singer (Bahrul Ulum) in sunglasses asks the audience for money. In all this chaos, a street lantern is put into the middle of the space. Suddenly, the sound of a marching band can be heard from afar, then entering the room. The audience gathers to watch and, where the band parades through, the space for the performance is established, widened a little by some policemen. Then, the Muslim preacher transforms into an MC and welcomes the audience by making a little introductory speech. He comments on class differences, pointing out the V.I.P. area and noting that “these differences are already common in our daily lives”.¹⁸¹ He also talks about the speed of life, “we see and feel that actually the world today is more and more in a hurry,” culminating in the question “Where do we want to go?”

The opening of *je.ja.l.an* is followed by 60 minutes of short scenes depicting Indonesian life on the streets. There is very little spoken dialogue. However, while some of the performers

¹⁸⁰ The performance plays with an issue that sometimes occurs when watching performances in Indonesia as a foreigner. Mostly in more rural areas, but also in Jakarta from time to time, it can happen that I, as the “foreign” audience member, upon entering the venue receive a similar level of attention to the actual performance on stage. This can be slightly discomfoting, although I have not felt this way at all while watching the performances of Teater Garasi. The performance *je.ja.l.an* plays with this issue by establishing a V.I.P. area on stage, where obvious foreigners sit on chairs and tables (whereas everybody else has to sit on the floor) and look slightly embarrassed at the prospect of being presented as V.I.P. by the MC at the beginning of the show, when he is talking about the divisions in society.

¹⁸¹ *Perbedaan-perbedaan ini, sudah lazim dalam hidup kita sehari-hari, kami melihat dan merasa sepertinya semakin hari dunia semakin begagas saja. Mau ke mana?*

are moving on stage texts— which are connected (sometimes) to the scenes—are read out on other parts of the stage. Historical references, such as the first phrases of the song *Genjer-genjer*,¹⁸² are played, along with excerpts from two of Sukarno’s speeches: one is from the



Fig. 13 The stage of *je.ja.lan* established after the introduction. Photo from Youtube.

Front Nasional in 1963, commenting on the prosperous, happy Indonesian society: “One society where each man feels happy; one society with no women crying because they cannot give milk to their children; one society where every person can become educated”¹⁸³ (Sukarno Front Nasional). The society that is shown in *je.ja.lan*, however, does not depict this ideal world Sukarno is imagining here. It shows a much more diverse Indonesia at the end of the first decade of the new millennium with different forces struggling with each other.

¹⁸² The melody for *Genjer-genjer* was created in the 1940s as a theme for angklung. A little later in 1942 M. Arief from the Banyuwangi wrote a poem in *bahasa Osing*, the local language of the region, which was then used as the text for *Genjer-genjer* and was intended as criticism of the Japanese occupation as *genjer* (edible riverine plant, from Javanese: Yellow Velvetleaf) in some areas is known as “poor people’s food”. After Independence the song became widely popular. It was famously interpreted by Lilis Suryani and Bing Slamet. Ayu Utami notes that there was “nothing political about this song. It tells the story of the growth of *genjer* which can be sold at the market, cut into small pieces and cooked as vegetables.” (Utami 174) However, the song was later associated with the PKI as during the period between 1959 and 1966 the song was used as a propaganda song during some of PKI’s events to illustrate the hardship of the poor people. During the New Order it was forbidden to play the song because, according to a popular myth, it was sung by Gerwani women during the massacre of the generals at Lubang Buaya.

¹⁸³ *Suatu masyarakat yang tiap-tiap manusia Indonesia merasa bahagia, Suatu masyarakat yang tiada seorang ibu menangis oleh karena tidak bisa memberi air susu pada anaknya. Suatu masyarakat yang tiap-tiap orang bisa cerdas.*

There is one scene where an account about a young girl experiencing violence in 1998 is read to the audience; she walks the street home from school and witnesses people violating a shop belonging to her Chinese friend, Simi. When she walks further on, she sees black smoke rising from Simi's house. However, when this text is read there is no violence shown on stage. Rather, two performers are slowly walking in the street, one carrying a vertical timber roll on his head, and the other a carpet— so they are unable to see.

Another scene features the story of Bagong, who was homeless and lived on the street but, after being approached by the police, decides to return to his parents' village. His parents give him a paddy field to work in the hope that he will be a good son, but he prefers his free and unfettered way of living and goes back to the street. He expresses his anger about the government; he believes they only take from the poor people.

The third text incorporated into the performance is the story of Slamet, a street vendor who committed suicide at the age of 48. The text was published as one of Goenawan Mohamad's *catatan pinggir* in *Tempo* magazine. Slamet had a little *angkringan* (street food stall) where he made a meagre living selling *gorengan* (fried food like bananas, tofu, vegetables, spring rolls and so on). But then the price of soybeans increased drastically and Slamet was not able to survive on the money he made from the stall. While this story is read, various things happen on stage. Short scenes evoke the flavours of Indonesian life: for instance, the sound of rain can be heard while a performer hastens through the street with two large plastic bags around her shoes and a newspaper over her head so she will not get wet— a common sight in Jakarta during the rainy season. There is a badminton match, but there are also violent encounters with the police, prostitutes, beggars sleeping on the street, workers wearing fabric wrapped around their heads because they do dirty work such as cleaning drains in the street, and young women waiting for their lovers. Often the scenes show chaos: not necessarily violence, but many different events overlaying each other like the cacophony of Indonesian street life. It is an abstract portrait of a multi-cultural society. Poverty and wealth are shown on stage, as is violence, history, chaos, Islam, sex, a traditional lifestyle versus a modern urban world. Actors change rapidly from one role into the next; they change costumes, and the props they use change their meanings. Afrizal Malna writes in his *Antologi Tubuh dan Kata* that the performance shows how different cultural codes combat each other on the street (129). He also notes that:

the street is a social, political, economic, and cultural speech which every day is happening in a big city as a market of transaction and transportation of a variety of interests. A real democracy is happening outside of parliament. Teater Garasi raised this issue through their performance as a semiotic *chaos* (128).¹⁸⁴

Ideally, *je.ja.l.an* is designed as a display of alternative realities that are all options for the future of post-Suharto Indonesia. This is not, however, always clear when watching the performance, which often feels fragmented. It is loud and chaotic and sometimes as a viewer I lost track of what was happening and instead just followed the dancers/performers moves. This chaos, as addressed by Malna, refers to the political transition of the post-Suharto years. It also refers to modernity, as it is experienced by the Teater Garasi actors, a modernity that is often confusing: “an unstructured, fluid state of the immediate setting of life-politics” (Bauman 8). Malna’s idea of real democracy is linked to the concept of civil society, as defined by Nils Mulder: “an arena in which citizens actively participate in public affairs” (2). The performance *je.ja.l.an* shows this arena with its differing and contesting forces, peoples and histories. It is an example—and an image—of public debate that gives space to all the voices within a society, without giving precedence to any.

Tubuh Ketiga (Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara)

Yudi states that *Tubuh Ketiga (Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara)*¹⁸⁵ was in effect a “zooming-in” on the issues raised in *je.ja.l.an*. He feels that—whereas *je.ja.l.an* presented a landscape, a scene with many different events happening at the same time—with *Tubuh Ketiga* the group were trying to get to the essence of one particular issue: the meeting of cultures. The cultural melting pot they chose as a research space was Indramayu. The choice of space was influenced by their prior knowledge of the area. For *je.ja.l.an* they had researched in the same area and Yudi’s family is from Indramayu. Indramayu is both the name of a district and its capital. It is located east of Jakarta, north east of Bandung and west

¹⁸⁴ *Jalanan adalah sebuah pidato sosial, politik, ekonomi dan kebudayaan yang setiap hari terjadi di kota besar, sebagai pasar transaksi dan transportasi berbagai kepentingannya, dari sebuah demokrasi yang sesungguhnya sedang terjadi di luar parlemen. Teater Garasi mengangkatnya sebagai chaos semiotika lewat pertunjukan mereka.*

¹⁸⁵ Teater Garasi translate this as “The Third Body: On Embracing the In-Between”. More literally, this translation means The Third Body: On Celebrating (*perayaan* means celebration) the In-Between. In an interview, Gunawan Maryanto notes that Teater Garasi wants to celebrate the creativity of *tarling dangdut*, which is not yet acknowledged as an art form (Gunawan Maryanto personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).

of Cirebon. With the idea of the meeting of cultures in mind, the questions of “Who are we?”, “Who am I?” and “Where do we go?” had become insignificant for the group at this point. According to Yudi, the main question was rather “What can we create? What can we make from all the elements in this situation?” (personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).¹⁸⁶ He also notes that from the 1990s onwards he had the feeling of being “fragmented, not intact,” as when he was working with Teater Gandrik, who used Javanese music and songs in their performance and, although Yudi knew this was his tradition, he felt “distant” from it. This gave him the feeling of being “paralysed,” as if “rootless”. Whether he wanted to sing a Javanese song or to perform in a realist style, he always had to study the methods, so he felt he was in an “in-between state”. He felt that many people from his generation shared these feelings. But, on the other hand, having various roots in different areas also gave him possibilities (personal communication 21 Jan. 2011). A similar feeling of alienation is expressed by Afrizal Malna, for instance, who notes that when he started working with Teater Sae and Budi S. Otong he felt he was without traditional roots (personal communication 25 Jan. 2011). Statements like these suggest conflicted identities within a society in transition.

Like the preceding Teater Garasi performances *Waktu Batu # 1-3* and *je.ja.l.an, Tubuh Ketiga* is not, strictly speaking, only a theatre production. It is a project which culminates in a performance. It was co-produced and partially funded by Komunitas Salihara, which had invited Teater Garasi to perform in Jakarta at Teater Salihara (Maryanto personal communication 21 Jan. 2011). According to both Yudi and Cindhil, *Tubuh Ketiga* marks a conceptual development upon the performance *je.ja.l.an*. As noted, the project centres on Bhabha’s idea of the ‘third space’:

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it,

¹⁸⁶ Analoginya itu zooming in dari *je.ja.l.an*. Karena di *Tubuh Ketiga* itu, pertanyaan dasarnya bukan ‘siapa kita? Siapa aku?’. Menurut kami, pertanyaan itu sekarang sudah insignifikan. Tapi pertanyaannya, ‘apa yang bisa kita ciptakan dengan ini semua, dengan situasi ini?’ Bukan berarti gak penting, pertanyaan ‘siapa aku siapa kita?’ Tapi yang lebih urgent adalah, apa yang bisa kita buat, apa yang bisa kita bikin? Jadi motivasinya memang zooming in, lebih focus, lebih ke substansi soal dari *je.ja.l.an* itu. [The analogy is like a zooming in from *je.ja.l.an*. Because in *Tubuh Ketiga* the question is not “Who are we? Who am I? In our opinion this question already is insignificant. But the question is: “What can we create with all this, within this situation?” This doesn’t mean the question: “Who are we? Who am I?” is not important. But it is more urgent to ask: “What can we create?” So the motivation is indeed a zooming in, more focused, more to the substance of the issues raised in *je.ja.l.an*.]

and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives (Bhabha qtd in Rutherford 211).

Bhabha developed these ideas in the 1980s, focusing on the role of minorities within dominant cultures, focusing on post-colonial societies. He maintains that the act of cultural translation “denies the essential of a prior given original or originary culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.” This third space for Bhabha “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (211).

The importance of hybridity, for Bhabha, lies in the fact that hybridity carries the traces of those feelings and practices that inform it—here, using the example of a translation—“so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new era of negotiation” (211). It is therefore not necessarily an influence from outside that creates something new, it can also be a coming-together of different cultural forms within one place, or one country— a process which would be relevant to Indonesia, as one of the world’s most ethnically diverse countries. Take, for example, *kroncong*, a musical form that brings together different elements of Western and Asian cultures,¹⁸⁷ but also integrates the use of languages that are in constant transition (not only the national language *bahasa Indonesia*, but also regional languages, such as *bahasa Indramayu*, which will be discussed later in this chapter). In *Tubuh Ketiga*, Teater Garasi discuss this idea of a space where different entities meet and something new will emerge. Bhabha noted that “the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that

¹⁸⁷ *Kerontjong* or *kroncong* is a form of Indonesian music. In the 16th century Portuguese sailors brought the guitar to Indonesia, and also their sentimental *fado*- and *saudade*-songs. By using the guitar it was made easier to have smaller and more flexible ensembles compared to the native *gamelan* orchestras. The *fado*-songs also offered the opportunity to structure songs and melodies. Judith Becker notes that:

The European vocal phrases and the simple chordal accompaniment, usually played on guitar, distinguish *kroncong* from indigenous forms of popular music. By now, *kroncong* has undergone the subtle process of naturalization – each area has stamped its special characteristics upon the *kroncong* played there – and it hardly makes sense to speak of it as a foreign music” (14).

In the 1950s and 60s *kroncong* developed into the so-called Indo-Rock. Vickers maintains that „by the late colonial era *kroncong* was thoroughly Indonesian; it had gone from being low-class entertainment to the form favoured by a broad segment of the urban population” (69).

is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation” (*The Location of Culture* 7). Such art “renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7). Cindhil said that since the work for *Tubuh Ketiga* began in 2010, the theme of the third body/the third space or reality and what lies in-between became of specific interest for the group. He calls it Teater Garasi’s latest “vision and mission” which, according to the artists, continuously develops. The third reality is seen as the reality of Indonesia at this point in time. It is a hybrid reality in a nation which is not yet entirely modern but is no longer traditional either. Teater Garasi chose the phenomenon of *tarling dangdut* in the Indramayu region (where they also researched for *je.ja.l.an*). The group considered *tarling dangdut* to be “in-between,” as it is not acknowledged as a traditional art form by many traditional artists because, for example, although the songs are still sung in *bahasa Indramayu*, an electronic keyboard is used. On the other hand, for modern musicians who play keyboard, bass or saxophone, the sound is not usual either as it is not modern but a hybrid form that meets in-between. As Maryanto noted, this form was “what we picked as one example of assumably many in Indonesia. Many cultural products are in-betweeners” (personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).¹⁸⁸

Research process

The performance *Tubuh Ketiga* is based on research about *tarling dangdut*, which was originally a form of popular musical entertainment, similar to operetta. Its popularity declined, according to Cohen, “in 1977 for a number of reasons: the increased popularity of other theatrical forms, including *masres* [a form of theatre specific to the region, *masres* is referring to fabric in different colours used in the performance] and shadow puppet theatre; the inroads made by television into rural society; and above all the emergence of *dangdut*, also known as *orkes Melayu* (Malay orchestra), in the Cirebon region and throughout Indonesia” (‘The Incarnation of Semar’ 144). Cohen further notes that *dangdut* music:

featuring energetic drumming, electric guitars, singing, and hip-swaying dancing, was in many ways in direct competition with *tarling*. *Dangdut* was more openly erotic—an important draw for young men—and it was national in its scope of popularity. It also had strong Islamic links through its lyrics (often connected to devotional subjects) and

¹⁸⁸ *Ini yang kemudian kita cermati sebagai salah satu contoh kasus yang mungkin banyak terjadi di Indonesia. Banyak sekali produk-produk kebudayaan yang berada di antara.*

musical style (inspired in part by popular Arabic music as well as Indian film music). Dangdut was perceived by audiences, simply put, as more "modern" than *tarling* (144).

In the 1980s and 90s *tarling* ensembles throughout the Cirebon region adjusted and adapted themselves to the new *dangdut*-dominated environment and most of them advertised themselves as *tarling dangdut* (144). Andrew N. Weintraub suggests that after the fall of Suharto a form of what he calls "ethnic *dangdut*" or "regional *dangdut*" (*dangdut daerah*) emerged, but that *tarling dangdut* precedes this. He argues that *dangdut* was "originally associated with Melayu and India in the 1970s, and then resignified as national in the 1980s and 1990s, [and] had evolved into something "ethnic" and "regional" in the 2000s" (Weintraub *Dangdut Stories* 201). *Dangdut* went local which "contrasted with the discourse about *dangdut* as Indonesia's national popular music par excellence" (201).

In March and April 2010, all Teater Garasi team members involved in the production process went to Indramayu for their initial research. Yudi claimed that the choice of Indramayu as a research site was "random" but, when they arrived, they encountered a "whole sub-culture generated from *tarling dangdut*" (Teater Garasi *Tubuh Ketiga* DVD, interview). Maryanto supports the idea of this random selection, explaining that Teater Garasi observed that the phenomenon of the third space was a widespread cultural phenomenon in Indonesia, and that a cultural product such as *tarling dangdut* can be found almost everywhere (Campur Sari, Keroncong...). However, since Yudi's family is originally from Indramayu, this may have influenced the choice.

The research process lasted for six months, starting from March 2010. Yudi states that they "observed, discussed, had a break, a workshop, did some improvisation discussed again, had a break"¹⁸⁹ and that's how the performance was developed (Tajudin personal communication 21 Jan. 2011). They video recorded the improvisation process. Yudi, after reviewing all the scenes, asked the actors to perform certain scenes again. The most "important scenes" were then chosen and arranged like a "composition," and this is how *Tubuh Ketiga* was created (Teater Garasi *Tubuh Ketiga* DVD, interview). The group also worked together with the traditionally-trained *topeng* performer and shadow puppeteer, Wangi Indriya, who featured in

¹⁸⁹ *Enam bulan. Itu dari april. Tapi tidak kontinyu. Jadi observasi, diskusi, break, workshop, improvisasi, diskusi, break.*

the performance alongside Sri Quadariatin, a Teater Garasi actress, who also performed in Robert Wilson's *I La Galigo*. During their stay in Indramayu, the group met *tarling dangdut* singers and musicians for interviews; they also spoke to traditional artists about *tarling dangdut*, and they also discussed the matter of censorship of *tarling dangdut* with government officials. The form is often censored because it is considered to be tacky and “low”; it is often not recognised as an art form at all. Cindhil explains that *dangdut* in general has a bad image, especially the clothes and the moves of *dangdut* in Pantura, a city between Cirebon and Semarang on the Pantura Road. Government officials according to Cindhil here feel very uncomfortable about this pleasant, sexy art. The government therefore registers all the *tarling dangdut* groups. Each district has cultural government officials. Groups that want to perform have to report to the department and pay for official permission. If they do perform, they also have to meet and pay the local government official directly. It is a very controlled business and a lot of money is circulated (Gunawan Maryanto personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).¹⁹⁰ Teater Garasi's second research visit took place during harvest season, according to Cindhil. Almost every night the artists could observe performances, sometimes more than one in a single village. “It's like a festival and at that time we were really amazed. It's incredible how they can celebrate life in the current social circumstances and this is what we appreciate and the audience was huge as well. We thought it was crazy. Almost every evening was a performance, not only *tarling dangdut*, also *sandiwara*, classic *tarling*— they all live” (Maryanto personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).¹⁹¹

Cindhil explains that Indramayu—both as a city and region—is culturally “in-between” West and East Java and the language is a mixture of Sundanese and Javanese. This interpretation, although sometimes stated to be the case, is not quite accurate. In an article in *Pikiran Rakyat*, Ajip Rosidi notes that the citizens of Indramayu wanted their language to be

¹⁹⁰ *Jadi sangat terkontrol sebenarnya dan sirkulasi uangnya sangat besar sekali. Yang dilakukan pemerintah di sana adalah mendata seluruh kelompok, di tiap daerah ada pamong-pamong kebudayaan. Kelompok yang mau tampil itu harus lapor, ijin, dan bayar juga. Mereka akan pentas di mana, mereka juga harus ketemu dan bayar pamong di tempat pementasan akan dilakukan.* [It is actually very controlled and the money circulation is huge. The government registers all the groups, in each district are cultural government officials. Groups that want to perform have to report, get a permit and also pay. If they want to perform somewhere, they also have to meet and pay the cultural official in the place the performance is going to happen.]

¹⁹¹ *Itu seperti festival dan kami kagum sekali ketika itu. Luar biasa bagaimana dalam situasi seperti sekarang mereka masih bisa merayakan hidupnya dengan caranya dan itu yang sangat kami hargai. Dan penontonnya juga banyak. Kita berpikir ini gila, hampir setiap malam ada pertunjukkan dan itu bukan hanya tarling dangdut. Ada juga sandiwara, tarling yang klasik— mereka hidup semua.*

officially accepted as a regional language, side by side with the Javanese, Sundanese, and the Betawi language used in Jakarta. He claims that “indeed the language used in Cirebon and Indramayu, although they belong to Javanese, are rather different to standard Javanese.”¹⁹²

However, as Michael Ewing—who has researched the regional languages around Cirebon from the mid-1990s onwards—maintains:

a recurrent theme in linguistic and cultural descriptions of Cirebon is the fact that it lies on the border between Javanese and Sundanese speaking areas, and there is a popular belief that the language of Cirebon is a mixture of Sundanese and Javanese. In fact, its lexicon and morphosyntactic system are clearly Javanese, albeit with some possible influences from Sundanese and Malay, as well as innovations of its own” (4).

Thus, the issue of regional languages is a difficult one. Their decline was of no major concern to the central government until 1998. Regional identity, during the New Order, was not strongly supported as the government encouraged the avoidance of any discussion relating to ethnicity and difference. However, the support for regional languages has become stronger in decentralised Indonesia (see Kaplan and Baldauf 95f). Teater Garasi also states that Indramayu is situated between the traditional cultural centres of Solo/Yogyakarta versus the modern urban megacities Bandung and Jakarta, and the lifestyle is both village and city (tubuhketiga.blogspot.com). Clearly, neither of these claims can be verified without doubt. From a geographical point of view, Indramayu is located more on the periphery, rather than being an “in-between” space. It could therefore be argued that Teater Garasi simplified and adapted the concept of the “in-between” to fit Indramayu’s *tarling dangdut* culture into their theory of the “third space”.

The performance

I watched the performance of *Tubuh Ketiga* live on 13 October 2010 at Teater Salihara in Jakarta. On arrival every audience member was greeted with a traditional handshake and a friendly “*Selamat Malam*” (Good Evening) by a committee of friends and group members wearing batik; it resembled the welcoming to a village wedding or similar event. When the audience entered, Cindhil also welcomed the incoming guests in his role as MC, informing them that there is a sound check happening and that they can enjoy the fried bananas and

¹⁹² *Memang bahasa Cirebon yang dipergunakan di Cirebon dengan di Indramayu itu meskipun termasuk bahasa Jawa, mempunyai perbedaan cukup besar dengan “bahasa Jawa baku”.*

peanuts, and seat themselves where they like. As with *je.ja.l.an*, the traditional division between stage and spectators is broken in *Tubuh Ketiga*. An interactive stage is used. The method is also very similar to *je.ja.l.an*, as, upon entering the performance space, the spectators become part of the spectacle. Watching the performance live was very enjoyable, as the performers recreated the festive atmosphere that surrounds large family celebrations in Java with food, drinks, music and jokes.

However, as this performance used an interactive stage, it was also very useful to watch it on a DVD format, in addition to the live-event. The DVD I received from Teater Garasi is of excellent quality and shows the stage from different perspectives; I would argue it is possible to see more of the events happening on stage via this recording than by being an actual audience member. While the bustling atmosphere is difficult to capture when watching the DVD, the storyline can be followed more easily as the cameras follow and create their own narratives while many different things happen simultaneously on stage. This arguably gives me, as a viewer/researcher, a more solid grounding on which I can make a judgement about the meaning of this performance. As a viewer of a DVD, I can observe both the audience and the performers and how they interact, which gives a different quality to the performance. I am also able to see the whole “marketplace” from above as well as “in the pit”: therefore the relation between observer and observed is not fixed. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White discuss this idea in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. They use the example of Sir Robert Southwell, who in 1665 advised his son to watch a spectacle (in this case the Bartholomew Fair) from “some high window to survey the whole pit at once” in order to “learn the rules of resemblance and differentiation” (118). Watching a performance on DVD is a modern way of “surveying the whole pit at once” in order to distinguish more clearly between different aspects of the spectacle.

When the guests arrive, the MC greets them and makes the crowd feel welcome. The walls of the room are draped with curtains on which scenes of a typical Javanese landscape are painted—mountains, fields, palm trees—but one wall also features a large factory building with rice fields in front, in a straightforward reference to transition. The performance, similar to *je.ja.l.an*, has no single storyline. There are two sides to this performance. It celebrates *tarling dangdut* but also the surrounding context of *hajatan* (community ritual celebrations, such as circumcisions, weddings, and so on). The first few lines of the performance, uttered

by performer Sri Quadariatin, in her role as a worker in the fields, paint a vivid picture of the celebratory atmosphere:

Midday is too hot for excitement. But people arrive all the time with rice on their back. On stage, singers present sad love songs with a happy rhythm. Small children are running around, looking for toys and their favourite snacks: lottery ... and ice that colours the tongue. Adults exchange coupons with food presented in the courtyard. Then they sit while enjoying the entertainment.¹⁹³



Fig. 14 Farmers at work at the beginning of *Tubuh Ketiga*. Photo from salihara.org

As in many places, the harvest season in Indramayu is traditionally the “festive season”.¹⁹⁴ During this time, members of the community have enough money to spend, and this sense of abundance is the topic of some of the stories told during the performance. One is the story of a woman, Tami, who is a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. She came to Indramayu to celebrate her eight-year old daughter’s *rasulan* ceremony. She states that she will go back to Saudi Arabia to work for another five years so she can also pay for her daughter’s wedding. Another story tells of the life of a *tarling dangdut* singer, who uses the money she earns from

¹⁹³ *Siang terlalu panas untuk sebuah kegembiraan. Tapi orang-orang terus berdatangan mengusung beras di punggung mereka. Di atas panggung para penyanyi menghadirkan lagu-lagu cinta yang sedih dengan irama gembira. ... Anak-anak kecil berlarian mencari mainan dan jajanan kesukaannya: lotere, ... juga es yang membuat lidah mereka berwarna-warni. Orang-orang dewasa menukar kupon dengan makanan tersaji di halaman.*

¹⁹⁴ This is in fact quite a universal seasonal theme and it is not made clear during the performance why Indramayu has been chosen as the setting.

making music to build a house. These stories are not acted out in detail. The most vivid and entertaining scenes of the performance are those that actually show *tarling dangdut*. Sometimes the audience becomes part of the *tarling dangdut* audience. In one scene, a kind of wagon is pushed through the gathered spectators by an oversized Teletubby (see image below), a scene which was actually experienced by Teater Garasi members while watching a *tarling dangdut* show in Indramayu (Gunawan Maryanto personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).



Fig. 15 One of the performers is pushed on the stage by an oversized teletubby. Photo from mediasastra.com

At other times, the audience falls back into their traditional role when a stage is established in one part of the room, shortly to be broken again by the entrance of a singer who walks to the crowd and entertains the guests there. The crowd is visibly enjoying themselves. The Indonesian audience can connect with most of the songs, which creates a happy and festive atmosphere in the performance venue as well. This feeling is supported by Kurniawan, who notes in an article for *Tempo* magazine that the audience enjoyed the show because of the inclusion of many cultural references and well-known songs, such as *Diobok-obok* by Papa T. Bob, *Kucing Garong* (Wild cat) by Usin Indra, or *Mujaer Mundur* by Mamat Surahmat ('Tarling Dangdut'). What is more difficult to access in this performance is the intellectual discourse about the "third space" (the *Tubuh Ketiga*) which is, as became clear in interviews, the central aspect of the performance for Teater Garasi. For Kurniawan, this discourse would be more meaningful as an academic discussion rather than a performance. The epilogue to the performance displays a theatricalised, recorded version of a conversation between Yudi and Ugoran Prasad, a writer who often works for Teater Garasi, about the state of culture in

contemporary Indonesia, a new and more modern *polemik kebudayaan* (Cultural Polemic). A table with two empty chairs is placed on the stage and the discussion is played as a voice-over, while the four main performers—Theodorus Christianto, Sri Quadariatin, Wangi Indriya and Hanny Herlina—move their bodies in a manner reminiscent of modern dance, doing stretching and movements that indicate being in a rehearsal process, while the recorded voices of Yudi and Ugoran Prasad discuss the intellectual issues raised in the play and inform the audience that they are talking about the potential of the arts in Indonesia. This display is arguably used to ensure that the audience understands Garasi's intention and position regarding *Tubuh Ketiga*. The theme of cultural hybridity is undeniably meaningful for the idea of Indonesia. Indonesia is so ethnically and culturally diverse, it is a post-colonial nation, and the transition between the pre- and post-traditional (as outlined by Giddens) is still relevant, as is globalisation. Teater Garasi is interested in these challenges and what they mean for culture and society. However, whereas this becomes clear when talking to the group and following their blog, the performance does not necessarily offer the same insights. A discussion of hybridity as theory, as one observer correctly noted, would perhaps be more appreciated in a seminar or workshop (Kurniawan). The conversation between Ugoran and Yudi, staged between empty chairs, somehow suggests that the group realises that most audience members will not be aware of Bhabha's work or be in a position to comprehend his complex theories. Most of the reviews of the show confirm this; they do not elaborate on the intellectual background, but instead write about the *dangdut* and the enjoyable atmosphere that was created (see for example Sabarini; Kurniawan).

Further reflection

This discussion of the works of Teater Garasi has shown that the group is concerned with identity, modernity, transition and the on-going influences that shape Indonesian culture and society, but it also indicates that their focus changed over the years. They started as a student group in 1993, but first appeared as an avant-garde phenomenon on the national stage with *Waktu Batu* in 2002, at the beginning of a new political era. In *Waktu Batu* their main concern was contested identity and alienation; they were also concerned with Indonesia's political transition, which Yudi experienced as "threatening, dangerous, always at a crisis point" (Tajudin qtd. in Bain *Performances of the Post-New Order* 74). He felt that things around him were in a constant state of flux. And the direction and purpose of the transition was unclear (74). This was a feeling shared by many artists at the start of *reformasi*, and

Teater Garasi's creative trajectory reflected how modern theatre practitioners came of age in the new political climate.

In *je.ja.l.an*, Teater Garasi again looked at Indonesia in transition. But it was no longer the identity of the individual that concerned the group. This performance didn't focus on concrete socio-political developments but rather showed a snapshot of Indonesian society as it was perceived by the group at that time. It was also an image of a civil society tense with various, competing forces— a semi-abstract sociological portrait that offers a glimpse into a country in transition. It offers its audience alternative perspectives on reality, but is not didactic theatre.

Tubuh Ketiga, the last of the works discussed here, centres on the idea of the “in-between” and how the convergence of different socio-cultural influences can create a new form. Whereas the research interest for *Waktu Batu* largely centred on the idea of identity, and how Indonesian identity is influenced by living in country which is historically, socially and politically in a transitional state, *Tubuh Ketiga* looks at what is happening culturally in this transitional nation, asking what can “we” as Indonesians can do with our multi-layered, hybrid heritage. The three performances thus move from the question of “who are we?” on to “where do we want to go from here?” on to “what can we create with who we are?” These questions would be equally applicable in the context of transnationalism. Steven Vertovec argues that:

transnationalism is often associated with a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices. These are often described in terms of syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity... The production of hybrid cultural phenomena manifesting ‘new ethnicities’ (Hall 1991) is especially to be found among transnational youth whose primary socialization has taken place with the cross-currents of differing cultural fields. Among such young people, facets of culture and identity are often self-consciously selected, syncretized and elaborated from more than one heritage. An increasingly significant channel for the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of identity is through global media and communications (7).

The practitioners of Teater Garasi are arguably a generation of such “transnational youths”. *Tubuh Ketiga* implies that Indonesian post-colonial and post-modern culture is created in the “third space”. Many Teater Garasi's artists experienced their socialisation “with the cross-currents of differing cultural fields” (Vertovec 7) and they self-consciously select their vocabulary from more than one heritage (as noted in *Waktu Batu*). Influences, on their work

and how they experience their own identity and the culture that surrounds them, vary from global media, social media networks such as Twitter or Facebook, but also differing traditional heritages that are syncretised into a “new cultural form.” The exploration of *tarling dangdut* in *Tubuh Ketiga* could have been exchanged for any other cultural phenomena to establish their ideas of the “third space”. Their argument that a new cultural polemic is needed to embrace Indonesia’s hybrid art forms and the inherent challenges and opportunities they offer is actually a universal one.

Compared to the other companies discussed in this thesis, Teater Garasi is probably the least socially-engaged in its works. Although their vision and mission statement asserts that they aim to generate a critical dialectic with the social, political and cultural environment as part of the effort to build a more open and mature civil society, to articulate social problems, and improve the socio-political sensibility of theatre workers, their performances are often quite difficult to access. All of Teater Garasi’s performances take a very intellectual approach, which is reflected in their intensive, almost academic, research processes made for each performance. Their base, Yogyakarta, despite its deep-rooted Javanism, is widely known as a city of intellectual debate, old and new culture, and cosmopolitan art; this setting no doubt influences the style of their work. So, while the group is concerned with their social, political and cultural environment, it is by no means activist theatre. Their performances place a finger on the pulse of what is happening in contemporary Indonesia and display, through the work of a new generation of theatre practitioners, an internationally-informed and professional approach to theatre.

Conclusion

The four core chapters of this thesis all share the common theme of transition, as the political transition period Indonesian *reformasi* triggered a shift in the themes expressed on the contemporary *teater* stage. The thesis primarily discusses works created in the transitional period between 2005 and 2011. The new freedom of expression encouraged artists to become more direct and outspoken, in ways that had not been possible under Suharto. In Indonesia, both rural and urban living spaces are in a constant state of flux, which influences not only peoples' ways of living, but also ways of creating, as pointed out at the beginning of this thesis. This flux can also be considered in terms of Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity," as discussed in Chapter 5. This is a modernity that "has no patterns, codes and rules which one could select as stable orientation points" (*Liquid Modernity* 7) and which impacts on both society and the individual. While Bauman's work refers mainly to a Western system, similar patterns of change can also be seen in Indonesia and elsewhere. As he notes, much of the power to act "that was previously power of the nation state now has become a diffuse power of the "politically uncontrolled global" although what needs action of course remains "local" (*Liquid Times* 2). The artists and works discussed in this thesis are part of such a world order and their performances respond to these uncertainties by framing the realities that surround them, on both "local" and "global" levels.

The themes taken up by contemporary performances of modern theatre in Indonesia after 2005, as this thesis has argued, have been driven by a "renewed sense of urgency" (Vourloumis 107) to contribute to a better understanding of a changing world order. The practitioners interviewed during this research feel actively committed to change. Their socially-engaged performances address key problems in the wider socio-political and cultural context in which they were created. Theatre practitioners see their role as eagerly contributing to and being part of emerging democratic processes and civil society structures in Indonesia. The narrative of Indonesian modern theatre traced in the early chapters of this thesis indicated that *teater*, throughout its history, has often had an "engaged" role; until 1998, it was mostly engaged with commenting on political developments. It was also, at times, used as a vehicle for transporting ideas of socio-political and cultural transformation; for instance, during the struggle for independence and during the 1960s, when some *teater* groups were affiliated with political organisations such as the left-wing LEKRA. Yet, after 1998, and even more so after 2005, *teater* was no longer solely focused on political narratives; it has become much

more diverse in form and content. Bodden compared this historical process to the way in which theatre practitioners have to “learn how to speak anew” as new circumstances and events require the use of a different theatrical language (‘Languages of Trauma’ 120), a broadening of the concerns that theatre practitioners take on and the adoption of different ways of engaging with the audience.

The vision and mission statements of all the practitioners discussed in this thesis expressed an interest in engaging with civil society, which led me to select their work for my research. At the beginning of a new political era in Indonesia, with the end of the New Order, this engagement with civil society may well be part of Lowenhaupt and Gluck’s thesis that political vocabulary has become increasingly global. They note that “[w]ords are in motion” and the term “civil society” has been very fashionable since the beginning of the new millennium, and not only in Indonesia. This said, the engagement also appears to spring from a genuine interest in the reality that surrounds the artists. One strand of thinking that repeatedly emerged in the interviews focussed on the idea of staging an alternate interpretation of reality for the audience, without necessarily focusing on change as a theme, but rather in order to facilitate multiple choices for the audience to consider. Some of the artists also noted that it would be very difficult to engage the audience without commenting on (their) reality. This idea follows Kershaw’s assertion that a performance should establish “a more or less transparent relationship between the fictionality ... the ‘possible worlds’ created by performances, and the ‘real world’ of the audience’s socio-political experience outside of theatre” (*Politics of Performance* 26). However, while in personal communications social engagement seemed to be a crucial aspect for all the performers, not all of the performances displayed the same commitment in this respect. The most problematic aspect in this respect is the rather marginalised status of modern theatre in Indonesia as a form of entertainment, and its consequently small audience numbers. Whereas performances such as *SUM* or the TV Eng Ong projects gather an audience because they are brought into local communities and because they are supported by NGOs that can draw audiences in, more typical theatre audiences—like Teater Garasi’s, for instance—are largely comprised of students, academics, journalists and people who are already interested in art. These theatre groups are funded by international donors and have international outreach, but if they perform in Indonesia they can only fill the theatre for two or three days, even in Jakarta, a megalopolis with more than 10 million citizens. This lacklustre turnout stands in stark

contrast to the popularity of musicals, for instance, as pointed out in the introduction.¹⁹⁵ In short, *teater*'s audience does not epitomise a representative cross-section of society. Therefore, *teater*'s goal of strengthening civil society (which should be a strengthening of all layers of society) is limited because the performances often only reach small numbers of educated citizens— there is often no connector to the local. The form and aesthetics of theatre often times cater for this kind of audience as well, as noted by Alia Swastika in an article published in *Kompas*: “*teater* continues to address and perpetuate the myth of being elite and is only accessible for people with a certain capital, whether social, cultural or symbolic capital.”¹⁹⁶ She furthermore notes that the primary problem is the fact that *teater*'s relationship with the public is “constructed” and abstract; it is neither intimate nor concrete. Arguably, this has consistently been the case, although the theatre practitioners I interviewed are aware of the problem and are trying to broaden their audiences by giving workshops, talks and related events or by using alternative performance spaces. This is a process that, according to Swastika, had already started in the 1990s (‘Penonton Urban’). The development towards a more diverse audience is slow, however. *Teater* competes with other entertainment forms, such as movies. Moreover, tickets are rarely affordable and it can sometimes be very difficult and tiresome just to reach the venue, especially in Jakarta where a journey to the theatre using public transport can take two hours or more, depending on location.

The scope of my arguments has been limited by a few logistical and methodological factors. First and foremost, it would have been preferable to speak to a larger number of audience members to find out directly how performances were received. My evaluations of outcomes are based on reviews and articles, discussions with members of the theatre groups, as well as occasional after-show conversations with a few audience members (when possible; I was not able to watch live shows of all of the performances discussed in the thesis). Another shortcoming is the fact that I almost exclusively studied theatre works in urban centres (due to my work commitments in Jakarta during the time of my main research and I did not have substantial enough funding to travel through wide parts of Indonesia) rather than at the peripheries, and I did not extend my focus to outside of Java, although decentralisation—one of the major political changes in post-Suharto Indonesia—has also had positive effect on the

¹⁹⁵ Riri Riza's *Laskar Pelangi* played three weeks in front of a sell-out audience.

¹⁹⁶ *Teater terus disikapi dan dilanggengkan mitosnya sebagai sesuatu yang elite dan hanya dapat dijangkau oleh orang-orang yang punya modal tertentu, entah modal sosial, modal budaya, maupun modal simbolik.*

development of modern theatre on other islands. Papua and Sulawesi are both prominent examples that offer ample scope for further research.

The Malaysia-based IFIMA (International Forum for InterMedia Art) demands that performances should go beyond “display (show), spectacle, and critique,” as only then can art play an effective role as a catalyst for change (Koh). Furthermore, art “needs to situate itself as part of a wider network of practices, and be willing to engage in dialogue with other practices, disciplines, publics and structures” (Koh). This position is supported by Mandal, who maintains that the impact of theatre or art works “is contingent on how [the artists] frame the artwork” (180). This framing can refer to collaboration with NGOs, for instance. The setting of a performance, then, is critical because the audience will already be more aware of the issues because the way in which the performance is framed. Mandal suggests that art workers should “establish ties and create dialogues with [other] art workers, human rights activists, environmental and women’s organizations ... to engage the state and society in empowering ways” (184). Some of the performances discussed in this thesis (Agus Nur Amal, Ratna Sarumpaet, B. Verry Handayani) try to achieve this by working with NGOs and other social institutions. Projects were all funded by either local or international organisations with an interest in the topics staged. Verry Handayani’s monologue *SUM* was supported by a variety of Women’s Rights Institutions; Agus Nur Amal works closely with the local NGO Tikar Pandan, and Ratna Sarumpaet received funding through UNICEF. Papermoon Puppet Theatre’s *Mwathirika* became part of an academic conference on the topic addressed in their performance, which allowed the group to engage in a dialogue with academics and a wider public. *Teater Payung Hitam*, with its International Water Festival, reached out to an international arts community with a shared concern for maintaining water resources. Each of the four discourses (historical memory and trauma, violence and human rights, environmentalism, and social transition) highlighted in this thesis form a critical aspect of the unique socio-political environment in which the performances were created, following Knowles’ argument that performance analysis should be rooted in specific and determinate social and cultural contexts (10). Each of these topics could have been developed into a singular thesis, but I chose instead to bring them together under the conceptual umbrella of socially-engaged work that aims to strengthen civil society, because I consider this goal to be a pressing concern for theatre practitioners.

In Chapter 2, I explored the theme of history, memory, and trauma via an analysis of the works Papermoon Puppet Theatre's *Mwathirika* and PM Toh's TV Eng Ong project. Coming to terms with the past, particularly the violence of the New Order period, is an important issue in contemporary Indonesia, where achieving conciliation with the past is proving a crucial factor in shaping a healthy, democratic environment. I argued that both these theatrical projects can be understood as alternative sites of memory, standing in contrast to the long established official political narratives and sites. They serve as a means to reconnect with past traumatic experiences, and possibly overcome them, by contradicting official state memories and making space for other voices to be heard. Both companies position victims at the centre of their narration and can thus help to generate a civic discourse about topics which have not been discussed publicly for a long time. They can be viewed as part of a larger and on-going process of truth and reconciliation seeking in the post-Suharto period.

Both performances also raise issues that were brought up in other chapters of this thesis. Violence, for instance, is a topic of both TV Eng Ong and *Mwathirika*. TV Eng Ong refers to the violence of the Indonesian military during the Acehnese struggle for independence and, by extension, comments on human rights violations and the search for reconciliation. *Mwathirika*, on the other hand, returns to the issue of violence and human rights in more general terms, through an exploration of the bloody events of 1965/66.

The works of B. Verry Handayani and Ratna Sarumpaet—discussed in Chapter 3—are both concerned with human trafficking and women's rights. The performances focus less on legal rights per se than they do on violations of human rights and the often cruel fate of women of marginalised groups—the domestic and sex workers—in difficult circumstances. Both artists see their role as activists and advocates, following Madison's definition: they “actively assist in the struggle of others,” and “aim for a cycle of responses that will set loose a stream of response-abilities that will lead to something more, something of larger philosophical and material effects” (11). The works of Ratna and Verry are also very deeply rooted in their Indonesian culture dealing with contemporary themes important for society at this point in time. As Nicholson argues, this identification is essential for successful applied theatre: “[T]heatre which aims to promote human rights needs to be rooted in the cultures in which the work takes place rather than rely on abstract universalism” (139). Verry's work in effect advocates for the rights of housemaids, as she offers new perspectives on housemaids' lives—which they endure but do not speak of—and thus provides a platform from which to

make their voices known and heard. Ratna's work, on the other hand, powerfully portrays how morality and religious affairs relate to human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and young women. Similarly to PM Toh's and Papermoon Puppet Theatre, her works offer alternative narratives that challenge what is commonly believed. Plays such as Ratna Sarumpaet's *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* also relate to many of the wider socio-political concerns of artists, commenting on the struggle between opposing forces in society, such as the liberal and religious right-wing, and questioning where society will go from here.

Chapter 4 deals with the environmentally-themed works of Teater Payung Hitam and teaterStudio Indonesia. The chapter opens with a discussion of the emergence of environmental festivals in Indonesia, particularly those that are situated in and can help raise issues directly with local communities. Bigger festivals, such as the International Water Festival organised by Teater Payung Hitam, also connect community members with issues and people in other sectors of society. These kinds of festivals can therefore function as an important motor within or for (civil) society. Bodden maintains that Teater Payung Hitam's environmentally-themed works represent "another kind of trauma," following the political trauma of the New Order, "that of environmental destruction and its potential consequences for human beings" (Bodden 'Languages of Trauma' 145). Teater Payung Hitam's director, Rachman Sabur, concurs with this view and claims the group's interest in environmental issues arose in the late *reformasi* era as the group was looking for a new driving force that could replace the "real political trauma of the New Order" (personal communication 15 Feb. 2011). He maintains that "the real" is central to their performances and that it is essential that audiences can relate events on stage to their own, lived, "real" experiences. In this sense, I can agree with Bodden's statement but, at the same time, the environmental issues raised also strike a chord within wider social movements and could therefore be a small factor in preventing further environmental trauma. For example, *Perempuan Gerabah* comments on the distance between humans and nature, and how contemporary Indonesian society no longer appreciates the value of slowly learning to create something by hand; bringing this feeling back to the audience members is a crucial aspect of the performance. The performance also reminds the audience that those who work the land should also, ideally, understand what it needs to survive.

Finally, in Chapter 5, these four thematic analyses come together in a discussion of "transition," primarily how the political transition of *reformasi* triggered a shift in the themes

displayed on the Indonesian stage. An examination of the work of Teater Garasi, and their *Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara* in particular, showed how this transition affected not only political life, but also individual lives. The chapter also examines how artists' thoughts and feelings about alienation, cultural hybridity and shifting identities influenced their work.

As pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, the starting point for this research was a pervasive desire, expressed by theatre practitioners, to help build a more mature civil society in Indonesia. Analysing the work of the selected companies/artists clarified that all of their works sprang from a deep interest in their contemporary surroundings and an urge to be socially-engaged, but that the companies'/artists' goals and aspirations did not always tally with the "real" outcomes. To elaborate on this point, I want to draw attention to two of the selected performances that I feel are most estranged from their initial goals, as set out in the vision and mission statements of the respective companies. These are teaterStudioIndonesia's *Perempuan Gerabah* and Teater Garasi's *Tubuh Ketiga*.

Perempuan Gerabah aims to create a sense of closeness with nature among the audience members, and questions the fast pace of our modernised world. The performance was also designed to show a concern for the living conditions of earthenware makers and the group worked closely with earthenware makers, including one who joined the cast in the performance. In their vision and mission statement, they maintained that they want to create theatre that functions as a liberating, educational and enlightenment tool for shaping a more civilised society. However, their work is rather heavily aestheticised and romanticises rather than criticises earthenware makers' poor living conditions, for instance, or the real problems that arise from living far removed from nature. Although their aims, as outlined in the programme notes, are valid and clear, the resulting performance does not directly address a vulnerable group and is unlikely to create a critical audience. As such, its potential for social impact is limited.

Similar problems arise in relation to Teater Garasi's *Tubuh Ketiga*. Their work springs from a deep, almost academic, research on Bhabha's concept of the "third space," using Indramayu's tradition of *tarling dangdut* as a backdrop. In a vision and mission statement from 2008 they note that the intended outcome of their work is to generate a critical dialectic with the social, political and cultural environment, and to articulate social problems and concerns through

innovative theatre performances. However, while wider process of researching and producing the performance displayed this kind of social and intellectual engagement, the resulting performance was appreciated mostly for its entertainment value. The philosophical concept of the “third space” was not recognised by most observers; such recognition would require a highly-educated and pre-informed audience. Moreover, the performance has arguably had very little social impact on the people living in Indramayu, nor has it considerably increased the recognition of *tarling dangdut* performers. To my knowledge, it has never been performed in Indramayu.

Other socially-engaged themes on stage

While this thesis examined performances that deal with issues of history and memory, environmental problems, problems of land use, coming to terms with the past, human trafficking, and a hybrid society in transition, several other, equally important and topical issues were omitted from the discussion due to logistical constraints of time, and so on. These include: the globalised world order, the condition of the arts scene in Indonesia (and of arts workers in particular), corruption, HIV, women’s rights, and the Papuan struggle for independence.

These issues are, however, addressed in contemporary *teater* performances. The consequences of globalisation are staged, for instance, by the Jakarta-based group, Teater Kubur, whose performances mostly centre on urbanity and citizens’ alienation from their roots caused by a society in transition and influences from “outside”. Bodden notes that Teater Kubur’s early works, such as *Sirkus Anjing* (Dog Circus, 1989-90), were “in part a reaction against consumer culture and the alienating new reality of urban life” (*Resistance* 45). In a re-staging of *Sirkus Anjing* in 2004 the relentless pace of globalisation is a major concern for the group:

In the midst of the dried-up forest of globalisation and millions of icons of modernisation that shatter every step, the homeless drifter is dragged on his feet while seeking his long lost dignity. ... The big city as a site for betting on his hopes and dreams is only a twisted rotten myth and nothing other than the writhing intercourse of wild beasts¹⁹⁷ (‘Program GKJ’).

¹⁹⁷ *Di tengah rimba globalisasi yang meranggas dan jutaan Ikon-ikon modernisasi yang menohok setiap langkah, gelandangan itu terseok-seok mencari harkat martabatnya yang telah lama hilang. ... Kota besar*

Teater Kubur's performance expresses fear and anxiety about the new and unknown, perceived as a threat to humanity.

Similar sentiments are expressed in their later work *On/Off (Rumah Bolong)* (On/Off: A Perforated House), which was first performed in Tokyo in 2008. I saw the show at Teater Salihara on 29 September 2010, its premiere in Indonesia. It is strong physical theatre, which evokes a sense of urgency through the fast-paced style of the performance and the vivid images it creates on stage.



Fig. 16 Performers using bamboo sticks. Photo by Rangga Riantiarno (salihara.org)

The programme notes for *On-Off (Rumah Bolong)* tell the audience that:

A house that has lost its doors and windows poses a threat, because at any time a stranger can come in and destroy all the order within and, finally, tear it apart. ... That is, one by one the family members are shattered by changes brought by strangers, who can so easily come and go in their house. Meanwhile the Grandmother as a symbol of the last holdout against the destruction of that order can only sing and hum poetic songs for her grandchild who is just growing up.

sebagai ajang pertarungan harapan dan impiannya, hanyalah dongengan kutu busuk dan geliat persetubuhan binatang -binatang buas semata.

The main characters are Salmin and his wife (the character is only called “istri Salmin”: Salmin’s wife), Salmon and his wife, as well as the grandmother (“nenek”). There is also a group of other actors who, arguably, symbolise the “evil” influences that try to come into the house and change the family’s life. The actors use bamboo sticks as props to generate a more powerful performance. Scenes where one actor from the main cast is circled and threatened by five or six “dancers” reflect this idea (see image above). The themes addressed in this performance range from the fear of identity loss through modernisation (especially in rural areas) and dreams of a better life in the city, to the onslaught of globalisation, but it also alludes to religious fundamental influences and environmental issues. The character of the grandmother stands for tradition, which hardly changes but nonetheless cannot hold back the changes occurring around it. Teater Salihara’s website claims that the performance “can be read as an allegory about the destruction and hopes of a nation,” because “almost everyone loses touch with their identities as a result of the onslaught of foreign culture and after that experiences their downfall” (‘On-Off’). Only a small group of people “still exists who try to resist, planting the seeds of hope for being saved, though no one knows when that will happen. And those hopes are realized through the arts” (‘On-Off’). This work, as such, also relates to transition, the topic of Chapter 5.

Another theme of interest amongst contemporary theatre practitioners is corruption. This theme was adopted in mainteater Bandung’s *Ladang Perminus* (2009), which is based on the novel of the same name by Ramadhan KH. The performance was a collaboration between mainteater Bandung, Perkumpulan Seni Indonesia, Indonesia Corruption Watch, Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia, and Perkumpulan Praxis. It was performed in Bandung from 6 to 8 August 2009 at Gedung Kesenian Rumentang Siang in Bandung, and in Jakarta on 12-13 August 2009 at Graha Bhakti Budaya, Taman Ismail Marzuki, where I witnessed the performance. The play looks at a corruption scandal at Perusahaan Minyak Nusantara (Perminus), an Indonesian oil and gas company. This fictional name bears some resemblance to the state-owned Indonesian oil and gas company PT Pertamina (Persero). The misuse of PT Pertamina’s company assets between 2004 and 2009 was investigated by prosecutors; *Ladang Perminus* focuses on a corruption scandal of “Perminus”.

HIV/Aids has also become the topic of *teater* performances, as shown in Jakarta-based group Teater Koma’s *Rumah Pasir* (House of Sand), which I watched in October 2010 at Teater Salihara. *Rumah Pasir*, a realist play with musical interludes, tells the story of sexually

promiscuous Leo Kastoebi and his lover Wieske Gerung, a secretary at Leo's office, who becomes pregnant with his child. When Leo finds out he is infected with HIV all sorts of problems arise, not only for himself but also for the people in his immediate surroundings. The centre of the story is the life of Wieske and Leo, the display of Wieske's fears and shattered dreams when she finds out she is also infected with HIV, and also the changes in Leo's personality and him seeing a doctor to help him.

Teater Koma's director, Nano Riantiarno, had been interested in HIV/Aids for some time. In 1994, the Indonesian TV channel TVRI broadcast three episodes of a mini-series (*Onah dan Impiannya*, Onah and her dreams) the script of which was written by Nano, with financial support from the Ford Foundation. In 1998, in another collaboration with the Ford Foundation, a 13 episode series by Nano entitled *Kupu-Kupu Ungu* (Purple Butterfly) was broadcast by RCTI. But *Rumah Pasir* was the first work for the stage to explore the theme of HIV. Before, during and after the performance, the toilets of the Salihara complex featured post-its and other notes informing customers that HIV/Aids cannot be transmitted by using the same toilet as someone who carries the virus, by shaking hands, and so on, in order to clarify some of the myths surrounding HIV/Aids.

Another HIV/Aids related project that was launched while I was doing my research was *Titik Koma* (Full Stop Comma), a collaboration between Teater Qi from Java and Komunitas Seni Teater Baru from Kalimantan (with the support of Netherlands-based organisation Theatre Embassy), which critically questioned the role of sex workers in the spread of the HIV/Aids virus. Lisa Law writes that in the 1980s, Asia was "designated the new epicentre of HIV/Aids" (1f). In the 1990s, "fetishized representations" of sex workers whose bodies become "conflated with nation, invaded by foreign powers and infected with a fatal virus" came to "permeate Aids education activities," while the voices of the sex workers themselves have been marginalized in the region. Law also notes how "the sex worker community debated among AIDS experts, bureaucrats and activists has more to do with anti-colonial and feminist politics than with the everyday experience of the sex workers" (1-2): as such, they are discussed, but their voices are rarely heard. Their bodies are not only victimised by their customers and politicised by the government, but they also experience extreme discrimination from large parts of society. Gaby Mischkowski from Medica Mondiale criticises the double moral standards in Indonesia, noting that, on the one hand, prostitution is tolerated as male promiscuity is accepted in principle while, on the other hand, the sex workers themselves are

criminalised and socially excluded (Deutsche Welle ‘Hurentheater’). *Titik Koma* went some way towards redressing this balance.

Art workers, such as Naomi Srikandi, look critically at the issue of gender and sexuality. The work of female theatre workers in general has gained prominence during the early 2000s. Initiatives such as Yayasan Kelola’s “Empowering Women Artists” programme actively encourage this development (Naomi was a recipient of their funding in 2010-11). Naomi’s work *Medea Media* which premiered in November 2010 is loosely inspired by Euripides’ tragedy *Medea* but is performed as a TV show. During my research, I also encountered Shinta Febriani Sjahrir, who works with Teater Kala and Sanggar Merah Putih in Makassar and around Sulawesi. Her works centre on gender and the relationship between men and women. Luna Vidya, originally from Papua but now resident of Makassar, is another example for a female art worker interested and active in community development. She specialises in monologues. In one of her performances, *Balada Sumarah* (Sumarah’s Ballad, 2008), she tells the story of a female domestic worker whose father was accused of being a PKI activist, touching on the themes raised in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

Another strand in contemporary socially-engaged performances reflects on the artists’ own living and working conditions, in very private terms. This theme was addressed in *Gegerungan* (2009) and *Gegirangan*¹⁹⁸ (2011), both by Kelompok Teater Kami. Both performances comment on the daily lives and hardships of two couples (Ribka and Harris; Piala and Roy: also the names of the actors in real life) who earn their livings in Indonesia as theatre workers (Nunuy Nurhayati ‘Gegirangan’; Harris Priadie Bah personal communication 11 January 2011). Whereas *Gegerungan* is rather pessimistic and bitter in its outlook, showing the tensions between a couple where the husband’s sole focus is on theatre and the wife is left with the economic struggle to support the family, *Gegirangan* has a more positive attitude and focuses on the ability to survive against all odds.

That there is space for these differing themes and the creative energy and interest in producing this work, shows that *teater* is ready to tackle the challenges of a post-Suharto Indonesia. The public discussion of contentious social issues was not always possible during

¹⁹⁸ The term *gegerungan* is a Betawi term that means “crying hard with a howling, moaning voice”. *Gegirangan* is the antithesis of *gegerungan*, and expresses a state of extreme happiness.

the New Order, when theatre practitioners focused on subtly opposing the government, but were restricted in their creativity by state censorship. During the *reformasi* period, theatre practitioners struggled with finding fresh and creative means of expression, but seem to have found a new self esteem. They are critical in the tradition of political theatre from the late 1980s onwards, but they also share a new sense of openness and connectedness to other issues, both local and global. Young artists who were not active under Suharto, but personally experienced the regime during their childhood and adolescence, have either taken over from the established theatre groups of the New Order (Bengkel Teater Rendra, Teater Gandrik, Teater Mandiri, and so on) or constitute the second generation of these groups and help to generate new styles and content.

This thesis was not intended to be a comprehensive survey of all the socially-engaged performances in contemporary Indonesian theatre, which, given the length and scope of this project, would not have been possible. I have selected, however, a range of works and themes that are part of the socially-engaged spectrum and which (aim to) contribute to a healthy and mature civil society by acting as catalysts for social change. For example, the discussion of theatre practitioners working in the areas of human rights, violence and historical trauma showed that they see their role as actively advocating and assisting in making struggles known and heard. They can provide a space for people to express their views, and can provide the means for personal transformations, as the examples of Agus Nur Amal's or B. Verry Handayani's work show. Kershaw suggests that an audience needs to feel a sense of discomfort or un-ease with the current situation in order to carry its significance outside of the theatre and into their lives (*Politics of Performance* 33). The extent of this kind of influence is unverifiable but if just one woman decides not to become a housemaid after watching *Sum*, for instance, the performance has had an effect that goes beyond the aesthetic display. The same applies for *Mwathirika*, where audience members felt challenged to start their own dialogue with history after watching the show.

While audiences are small, as has been pointed out, one must keep in mind that live theatre is rarely a medium for mass communication. The scale of people it can reach is limited by the size of the performance space and the duration of its run. Therefore its efficacy works on different levels. Ideas rehearsed in the performances discussed in this thesis inform sociocultural debates and also feed into more populist media as has been repeatedly pointed out in the course of this thesis. Thus, by means of different media working together, the

outreach of theatre can be far greater than audience sizes might indicate. One example is Ratna Sarumpaet's movie *Jamilah dan Sang Presiden* which came out of work on Ratna's play *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden*, Indonesia's submission to the 82nd Academy Awards for the category Best Foreign Language Film.

My research also produced other findings, which are less striking but also crucial. In *Communities of Imagination*, Catherine Diamond writes that "theatre [in Southeast Asia] continues to attract new practitioners and reflect[s] the changing aspirations and anxieties of societies in immediate and provocative ways, even as it is being marginalized by television, film, and the internet," which is certainly true for Indonesia. Theatre groups that formed after the crisis of 1998, such as teaterStudio Indonesia or Papermoon Puppet Theatre, are examples of such "new practitioners" and they have broken away from the old organisational structures of theatre in Indonesia. The brilliant and influential old men of the Indonesian modern theatre stage, such as WS Rendra, Putu Wijaya, Arifin C. Noer and Nano Riantiarno, all led groups that centred on them as the key artist/director/writer. This is no longer the typical organisational structure in Indonesian theatre; the new generation of groups pursue more democratic organisational processes, as the examples of Teater Garasi and Papermoon Puppet Theatre have shown.

As pointed out in the introduction, international funding schemes have allowed Indonesian theatre practitioners not only to travel and show their work internationally, but also to actively engage in dialogue and invite practitioners from other countries to Indonesia to produce collaborative works. The use of established performance spaces, such as TIM in Jakarta or the Taman Budaya apportioned to each province, is slowly opening up to contemporary *teater*. Theatre communities such as the Jatiwangi Art Factory or Teater Garasi have their own small stages, where audiences are invited to watch or community members are encouraged to co-create art works. Collaborations between different disciplines and transnational collaborations, especially within the Southeast Asian region, also influence and enrich many works. Common themes and shared interests are apparent across the region. Matthew Cohen and Laura Noszlopy explain that:

mutual borrowing, fluid transactions and transformations of performances and performers have a long and enduring history in Southeast Asia. The contemporary explosion of global communications and travel serve only to widen the scope and flavour the depth of mixed up performance forms and their expression. The fluidity of

performance forms and the porosity of their boundaries are related to Southeast Asia's political geography (2).

Since its earliest years, theatre practitioners in Indonesia have engaged with socio-political debates and discourses. Although for long parts of its history and for most of the population, modern theatre was only an elite urban phenomenon with aesthetics too alien to understand, a majority of theatre practitioners have tried to open up these rigid structures and find wider audiences. This thesis contributes to the on-going discussion in theatre studies regarding social engagement and the value of theatre in society. Taking Indonesian theatre as an example, this thesis argues for the importance of the artist as a social actor making an active contribution to democratic processes; as Mandal notes "art workers are central to their societies as a source of important alternative conceptualizations of political culture" (184). As this thesis has shown, this remit has expanded from a conceptualisation of political culture to include alternative conceptualisations of society a broader, more general and inclusive sense. As ASEF (Asia-Europe Foundation) has argued, the value and recognition of culture, its growing contribution to finding creative solutions for global challenges, and its value to sustainable development, environment, education, health and social cohesion, among other fields, should not be underestimated. In Indonesia, theatre has taken up this challenge.

Glossary

- Adat** The term *adat* means custom or tradition. It refers to the unwritten, common law that often exists in parallel with state law and religious norms. *Adat* influences and regulates all aspects of daily and ceremonial life, such as life-cycle rituals, land tenure, and inheritance.
- Afrizal Malna** Born 1957 in Jakarta. He is a poet, writer and activist affiliated with **Boedi S. Otong's Teater Sae** in the 1980s. His published works include *Arsitektur Hujan* (The architecture of rain, 1995), *Temam-Temanku dari Atap Bahasa* (My friends from the roof of language, 2008), which was chosen as the best literary work of 2009 by *Tempo* magazine, and *Perjalanan Teater Kedua. Antologi Tubuh dan Kata* (The second journey of theatre. An anthology of body and word, 2010).
- Agus Noor** Born 1968 in Tegal, Central Java. He is a writer and event organiser, currently based in Yogyakarta. His works include *Memorabilia* (Memorabilia, 1999), *Bapak Presiden yang Terhormat* (Dear Mr President, 2000), *Selingkuh Itu Indah* (Infidelity is beautiful, 2001), *Rendezvous (Kisah Cinta yang Tak Setia)* (Rendezvous (Disloyal love stories), 2004), and *Matinya Toekang Kritik* (The death of the critic, 2006). He is also active as a producer for Teater Gandrik.
- Agus Nur Amal** Born 1969 in Sabang, Pulau Weh. The artist and activist is better known under his stage name PM Toh. He works in Aceh and Jakarta and in recent years has established an international portfolio. His style is a mixture of object theatre and monologue performance. He is best-known for his *TV Eng Ong* projects which were created in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami in December 2004.
- Ahmadiyya** Ahmadiyya is an Islamic movement, a community of faith, founded in 1889 in India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Its motto is "Love for all, hate for none". The community uses the Qu'ran, Sunnah and Hadith as the three guidances for teaching. The Ahmadiyya have been banned from any activities in Indonesia since June 2008, as it is considered an *aliran sesat* (cult).
- AICHR** AICHR is the acronym for ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights. The main office is located in Hong Kong. AICHR, with its member states Brunei Darussalam,

Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, was established in 2009 to promote and protect human rights. It also works on regional campaigns to co-operate on human rights issues across borders.

Angkatan 45

Angkatan 45 means the “Generation of 45”, which refers to the year in which Indonesia proclaimed independence. The “generation” was a group of revolutionary writers, including Chairil Anwar and Mochtar Lubis, who were active in the struggle for independence and wrote revolutionary literature.

Angklung

Angklung is an Indonesian musical genre, most closely associated with West Java. An *angklung* consists of two to four bamboo tubes suspended in a bamboo frame, bound with rattan cords. Each *angklung* produces a single note or chord, so typically several players must collaborate in order to play melodies.

Arifin C. Noer

Born 1941 in Cirebon, died 1995 in Jakarta. Arifin was a playwright, filmmaker and theatre director. His works include *Mega-Mega* (Clouds, 1966), *Kapai-Kapai* (Moths, 1970), and the *Orkes Madun* series (Madun orchestra). His film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (The betrayal G30S/PKI, 1984) about the **Gerakan 30 September** was used as propaganda material during the **New Order** period. In 1968 he founded his theatre group Teater Kecil in Jakarta.

ASEAN

Established in 1967, ASEAN stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Its members are Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. Papua New Guinea and East Timor currently (at the time of writing) have observer status. The organisation aims to improve social, economic and political cooperation within the regions. The member states also work together in other areas, such as security, environmental protection and culture.

B. Verry Handayai

Born 1968 in Yogyakarta. Since 1993, Verry has been active as an actor with **Teater Garasi** in Yogyakarta. Her solo monologues include *Sum: Cerita dari Rantau* (Sum: Stories from abroad, 2008) and *Jangkar Babu, Sangkar Madu* (Anchor housemaid, honey cage, 2013).

Bahasa Indonesia

As part of the Constitution of Indonesia in 1945 *bahasa Indonesia*, or Indonesian, was declared to be the national

language. Many Indonesians learn it in school, but use their regional languages, such as Javanese or Balinese, at home.

Batavia

During the Dutch colonial period Batavia was the name for the capital of the Dutch East Indies on the island of Java. In 1619 Jan Pieterszoon Coen established Batavia on the ruins of Jayakarta. Batavia became the main place of business for the VOC (see **VOC**) in Asia. Today the city is Indonesia's capital Jakarta, as it was renamed during the time of the Japanese occupation.

Bengkel Teater Rendra

Established in 1967 in Yogyakarta, Bengkel Teater Rendra (Rendra's Workshop Theatre) is the name of W.S. Rendra's theatre group (see also **Rendra**). After returning from his studies at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, he introduced a new method of actor training to Indonesia. A group of actors centred on a teacher, living and working together in a commune. The work of Bengkel Teater Rendra opposed the realism taught at art schools in those years. It was process-oriented theatre work which remains an influential concept in modern theatre in Indonesia.

Boedi S. Otong

Born in 1957 in Bandung. In 1977 he played an important role in reforming Jakarta-based **Teater SAE** and won the Best Director and Best Artistic Design Awards at the Jakarta Youth Theatre Festival (1981-83). In the 1990s he moved to Switzerland.

Dalang

The *dalang* is the master puppeteer in *wayang* performances. It is usually a male profession, handed down from father to son, but there are also a few female *dalang*. An apprenticeship lasts several years. The *dalang* is not only a puppet performer, but is also traditionally considered important for the well-being of a society as he knows how to perform certain rituals.

Dangdut

Dangdut is an Indonesian music genre developed during the 1970s. One of its most popular figures is Rhoma Irama. Named onomatopoeically for the music's characteristic drum sounds "dang" and "dut", it is Indonesia's most popular music. It mixes Western style rock and roll with Middle Eastern and Indian sounds. Within the *dangdut* genre there are different styles such as *tarling dangdut*.

Dangedria

Dangedria is a form of storytelling accompanied by singing and sometimes musical instruments and stage props that can help the single story-teller to move between different characters. It

originates in Northern Sumatra, in the South-west of Aceh.

**Dewan Kesenian
Jakarta**

Dewan Kesenian Jakarta or Jakarta Arts Council was founded in 1969 by the Governor of Jakarta. Its role is to formulate policies to support cultural life in Jakarta. DKJ consists of 25 members and is divided into six committees: Film, Music, Literature, Fine Arts, Dance and Drama. The offices of Dewan Kesenian Jakarta are located in the premises of **Taman Ismail Marzuki**.

Dindon WS

Born 1959 in Jakarta. Dindon is the artistic director of **Teater Kubur**. He joined **Teater SAE** in 1980 and founded Teater Kubur in 1983. He won Best Director and Best Artistic Design Awards at the Jakarta Youth Theatre Festival in three consecutive years (1981-83).

DKJ

See **Dewan Kesenian Jakarta**

GAM

See **Gerakan Aceh Merdeka**

Garin Nugroho

Born 1961 in Yogyakarta. He is a critically acclaimed film director. His works include *Air dan Romi* (Water and Romi, 1991), *Daun di atas Bantal* (Leaf on a pillow, 1998), *Opera Jawa* (Java opera, 2006), and *Soegija* (2012).

Gerakan 30 September

Translates as 30 September Movement. During the night from 30 September to 1 October 1965 a group of six generals, the “self-styled Council of Generals” (Anderson and McVey 134), who allegedly had plotted against President Sukarno, were captured, assassinated and thrown down an unused well in Lubang Buaya within the area of Halim Air Base. What happened at Lubang Buaya was carried out by a battalion of the palace guard commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, Sukarno’s personal bodyguard, helped by other branches of the army, as well as civilians from PKI’s Pemuda Rakyat, the so-called Gerakan 30 September (Ricklefs 338). The whole affair only lasted four days in total. In the aftermath, the Indonesian Communist party PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, see **PKI**), at that time the largest non-ruling left-wing party in the world, was blamed as being the intelligence behind the affair, and members of the PKI were slaughtered in thousands.

**Gerakan Aceh
Merdeka**

Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement, also known as Aceh Sumatra National Liberation Front, ASNLF) was founded in 1976 by Hasan di Tiro as a counter-movement against Javanese domination. After years of fighting against the Government of Indonesia (see **GoI**), on 15 August 2005 GoI and

GAM signed the Memorandum of Understanding in Helsinki.

Goenawan Mohamad

Born 1941 in Batang, Central Java. He is a writer, poet and important cultural figure in Indonesia. Goenawan Mohamad was the founder and editor-in-chief of the independent weekly magazine *TEMPO*, which was closed in 1994 for being a mouthpiece of the opposition, but was reopened in 2004. He contributes the weekly Catatan Pinggir (Sidelines) column. He also wrote the libretti for three contemporary operas: *Kali* (in process: 1996-2003), *The King's Witch* (in process: 1997-2000), and *Tan Malaka* (2010) and for two theatre performances: *Surti dan Tiga Sawunggaling* (2010) and *Visa* (2009). Goenawan Mohamad is one of the founders of **Komunitas Salihara**.

GoI

Government of Indonesia.

Guided Democracy

Guided Democracy or *Demokrasi Terpimpin* was the political system in place during the so-called Old Order (in contrast to Suharto's **New Order**) under Sukarno in Indonesia from 1957 until its collapse in late 1965. It is a semi-authoritarian system based on the idea of a traditional hierarchical organisational structure in Indonesian villages as Sukarno considered the Western democratic system to be unfit for Indonesia. However, the system removed power from the elected cabinet and invested it in the president and a non-elected cabinet. Sukarno also strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and supported the Partai Komunis (see **PKI**) against the increasingly powerful Indonesian army which allied with the Islamic factions in parliament.

Gunawan Maryanto

Also known as Cindhil. Born 1976 in Yogyakarta. Cindhil is a poet, writer, actor and director. Currently affiliated with **Teater Garasi** he also publishes widely as a theatre critic for Kompas, Jawa Pos, Kedaulatan Rakyat etc. His poetry works include *Sejumlah Perkutut buat Bapak* (A small turtle dove for father, 2010) and *Perbuatan Serong* (Act of unfaithfulness, 2011). He is also the main organiser of the Indonesian Dramatic Reading Festival, which was first held in 2009.

Halim HD

Born 1952 in Serang, Banten. Halim HD is a cultural networker and activist based in Solo. He is the organiser of Mimbar Teater Indonesia.

Harris Priadie Bah

Born 1966 in Jakarta. He is a theatre director and also works for DKJ (see **Dewan Kesenian Jakarta**). In 1989 he established Teater Kami (Our Theatre). Performances include *Who* by Jack Hibberd (1994), Roestam Effendi's *Bebasari* (2001),

Gegerungan (2009) and *Gegirangan* (2011).

HIVOS

HIVOS, founded in 1968, is an international development organisation based in the Netherlands (head office in Den Haag). Working together with local NGOs, HIVOS's core values and guidelines are to enhance pluralism and democracy, responsible citizenship, responsible management of nature and natural resources and the social position of women in developing countries and world-wide.

IKJ

See **Institut Kesenian Jakarta**

Ikranegara

Born 1943 in Loloan Barat, Bali. Ikranegara is a poet, novelist, playwright, actor, and director in film and theatre. His works include the play *Topeng* (Mask, 1972). He acted amongst other movies in *Di Bawah Pohon* (Under the tree) and *Laskar Pelangi* (The rainbow troops), both from 2008, and *Sang Kyai* (2013).

Iman Soleh

Born 1966 in Bandung, West Java. Iman Soleh is trained as an actor and studied at STSI Bandung (Sekolah Teater Seni Indonesia - Indonesian School of Theatre and Art). He has performed with Studiklub Teater Bandung, Teater Payung Hitam and Teater Kejil and is the founder and the creative director behind Komunitas Celah-Celah Langit (CCL). CCL (Celah Celah Langit (Gaps in the sky) or Cultural Centre Ledeng) was formally established on 22 May 1998 and is based in Lembang, a small community on the outskirts of Bandung. The name Celah Celah Langit derives from the name of Iman Soleh's home yard which also includes a stage where rehearsals and performances of CCL are held. Performances include *Bedol Desa 1&2* (Immigration of an entire village 1&2 (1998 and every consecutive year), *Air* (Water, 2006), and *For The Good of The Game* (2007, 2009, 2010).

Institut Kesenian Jakarta

Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ), the Jakarta Arts Institute, was founded in 1976 by Suharto and serves the education of Indonesian artists. It was first known as Lembaga Pendidikan Kesenian Jakarta (LPKJ) and was renamed Institut Kesenian Jakarta in 1985. The three faculties are Visual Art, Performing Art, and Film and Television.

Inul Daratista

Born 1979 in Pasudura, East Java. Inul, born Ainur Rokhimah, is a *dangdut* singer who became famous in 2003. Her style and her sexy dance moves, also called *ngebora* (lit. drilling), brought her not only fame but also criticism and some conservative Muslim

organisations have called for the ban of her concerts.

- Jatiwangi Art Factory** Based in the Jatiwangi-Jatisura-Surawangi area near Cirebon in West Java the Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2005. They are interested in local discourses and organise cultural activities such as festivals, performances, visual art, music, video, ceramics, exhibitions, artist in residencies, monthly discussions, radio broadcast and education. JaF also has a biannual Residency Festival, Video Residency Festival and Ceramic Music Festival that invites artists from various disciplines and countries to live and engage with the rural Jatiwangi society and from this encounter to create art.
- Joned Suryatmoko** Born 1976 in Solo, Central Java. In 1997 he founded Teater Trotjoh which later became Teater Gardanalla. Works include *Toko Cerita* (Story shop, 2006), *Jam Sembilan Kita Bertemu* (At 9 o'clock we meet, 2007) and *Bertiga* (Threesome, 2009). He also works as a workshop facilitator for Yayasan Kelola.
- Jugun ianfu** The term *jugun ianfu* refers to so-called Asian “comfort women” who were forced to serve Japanese soldiers as sex slaves during the Japanese occupation (beginning 1932 in China). In Indonesia the period lasted from 1942 to 1945.
- Keterbukaan** *Keterbukaan* (lit. openness) refers to a time during Suharto’s **New Order** which hailed greater political openness. It lasted from the late 1980s until mid-1994 but it was never formally endorsed and repression and human rights abuse persisted.
- Ketoprak** *Ketoprak* is a form of popular theatre in operetta style where actors sing accompanied by music— often gamelan, but also other instruments. Unlike *wayang wong* or *wayang kulit* the stories are not taken from the Mahabharata or Ramayana but are usually popular Javanese stories of romance and history. *Ketoprak* was developed in the 1920s and 30s.
- Komunitas Salihara** Situated in South Jakarta, Komunitas Salihara opened its doors in 2008. The centre consists of three main buildings: Teater Salihara, Galeri Salihara, an office building and a guesthouse. Teater Salihara is the first black box theatre in Indonesia and can accommodate up to 252 people.
- LEKRA** The Institute of People’s Culture (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*) was established in 1950 and served as the cultural arm of the

Indonesian Communist Party (see **PKI**).

Lena Simanjuntak

Born 1957 in Bandung. Between 1975 and 1979 Lena studied directing at IKJ (see **Institut Kesenian Jakarta**). Since 1984 she has lived in Cologne, Germany, together with her husband Karl Mertes. Her theatre works have addressed the problems of marginalised groups, such as sex workers in Surabaya and farm workers in Papua; she is thus considered an activist.

Maria Tri Sulistiani

Born 1981 in Jakarta. Ria studied communication at Universitas Gadjah Madah and in 1999 got involved with Joned Suryatmoko's Teater Gardanalla (see **Jones Suryatmoko**). In 2006, together with her partner and now husband, the visual artist Iwan Effendi, she founded Papermoon Puppet Theatre, a contemporary puppetry company (see **Papermoon Puppet Theatre**). In 2010/11 Ria was the grantee of **Yayasan Kelola**'s "Empowering Women Artists" programme.

Nandang Aradea

Born 1971 in Ciamis, West Java, died 2013. Nandang Aradea first became involved with theatre in 1990 while studying at UPI (Universitas Pendidikan Bandung) in Bandung. Together with Wawan Sofwan he became one of the co-founders of mainteater Bandung in 1994 but in 1997-98 he moved to Serang to teach theatre at FKIP Untirta (Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa) in Banten. He also studied directing at the Russian Academy of Theatre Art in Moscow for four years from 2001 onwards, but moved back to Serang in 2005 without finishing his studies. Since then he has worked continuously at Untirta while establishing his theatre company **teaterStudio Indonesia**.

Nano Riantiaro

Born 1949 in Cirebon, West Java. Nano is the founder and artistic director of Teater Koma (see **Teater Koma**). He also is an actor, writer, and cultural commentator. In 1967, after finishing high school he studied at Akademi Teater Nasional Indonesia (National Theater Academy Indonesia, ATNI) in Jakarta. He also was affiliated with Teguh Karya's Teater Populer until he founded Teater Koma in 1977. Works include amongst others *Maaf, Maaf, Maaf* (Sorry, sorry, sorry, 1978), *Bom Waktu* (Time bomb, 1982), *Sampek Engtay* (1988, based on the Chinese legend of the Butterfly Lovers), *Opera Sembilit* (The constipation opera, 1998), and *Republik Bagong* (Bagong's republic, 2001).

New Order

The political period under Suharto (1965-1998) is dubbed the New Order, also *orde baru*, in contrast with Sukarno's Old Order

(*orde lama*).

- Pancasila** *Pancasila* is the name for the Indonesian state philosophy featuring the motto unity in diversity (*bhineka tunggal ika*). The five principles of *pancasila* are Nationalism, Internationalism, Democracy, Social Justice, and Belief in One God.
- Papermoon Puppet Theatre** Papermoon Puppet Theatre was founded on 2 April 2006 by Maria Tri Sulistyani (see **Maria Tri Sulistyani**) and her partner Iwan Effendi. They first wanted to create theatre for children but then also became interested in adult puppetry. They gave workshops on puppetry in Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, the Indonesian cities of Raja Ampat, Padang Panjang, Blora, Cilacap, Sukoharjo, and Malang, and the US cities of New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington D.C. Performances include *Noda Lelaki di Dada Mona* (A man's stain on Mona's chest, 2008), *Dalam Sebuah Perjalanan* (On a journey, 2008), a collaboration with artists from Indonesia, Mexico, France and Australia, *MAU APA-New York version* (What do you want – New York version, 2009), *Mwathirkia* (Victim [in Swahili], 2010), and *Secangkir Kopi dari Playa* (A cup of coffee from Playa, 2011).
- Pesantren** Traditional school for Islamic studies (usually boarding school)
- PETRUS** The acronym PETRUS refers to *penembakan misterius* (mysterious shootings). The so-called PETRUS killings were a series of state-controlled murders of suspected petty criminals in Indonesia between the years 1983 and 1985.
- PKI** PKI stands for Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party). After the Japanese capitulation in 1945 the party was established. Until 1966 and the 30 September Movement the party was the largest non-ruling Communist party outside of the Soviet Union and China.
- PM Toh** see **Agus Nur Amal**
- Pribumi** *Pribumi* means “native” or “of native stock” and not of immigrant blood. People referred to as *pribumi* are considered as natives of the country.
- Putu Wijaya** Born 1944 in Tabanan, Bali. He is a writer, actor and theatre director. Between 1967 and 69 he was a member of **Rendra's Bengkel Teater**. In 1971 he founded his own theatre group Teater Mandiri. Theatre works include *Anu* (1974), *Aduh* (1975),

Dag-Dig-Dug (1976), *Gerr* (1986), *Hum-Pim-Pah* (1992) and *Trollface vs Pak Jaya* (2012). His work was honoured at the Mimbar Teater Indonesia 2010 in Solo.

Rachman Sabur

Born 1957 in Bandung, West Java. Rachman Sabur studied acting at STSI Bandung and also holds a degree in dance from STSI Surakarta. He is an actor, director, writer, and lecturer. In 1982 he founded Teater Payung Hitam and has since been active as their artistic director as well as a lecturer at STSI Bandung.

Radhar Panca Dahana

Born 1965 in Jakarta. Radhar is a novelist, journalist and theatre director. He finished his Bachelors degree at the University of Indonesia in 1993 and studied for a Masters degree in sociology at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales in Paris. His theatre group Teater Aquila was established in 1981 and in 1984/85 changed the name to Teater Kosong. Radhar is also chairman of the Federasi Teater Indonesia (Indonesian Theatre Federation). Published works include: *Ideologi politik dan teater modern Indonesia* (Political ideology and modern Indonesian theatre, 2001), *Homo Theatricus* (2001), *Manusia Indonesia* (Indonesian society, 2006) and *Republik Reptil* (Reptile republic, 2010).

Ratna Sarumpaet

Born 1949 in Tarutung, North Sumatra. She is a human rights activist, screenwriter, actress and director. Since the performance of *Marsinah: Nyanyian dari Bawah Tanah* (Marsinah: Songs from the underworld) with her theatre group **Satu Merah Panggung** in 1994, all subsequent performances have had a clear focus on women's rights. Ratna was also the head of **DKJ** between 2003 and 2006. Other important works include *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah accuses, 1997), *ALIA*, *Luka Serambi Mekah* (ALIA, Wound on the doorstep to Mecca, 2000), *Anak-Anak Kegelapan* (Children of darkness, 2003) and *Pelacur dan Sang President* (The prostitute and the president, 2006).

Reformasi

Reform, or *reformasi*, is the term used for the political period after Suharto stepped back from power in 1998. A reform movement to bring changes to the old systems and install a democracy in Indonesia.

Rendra

Born 1935 in Solo, died 2009 in Jakarta. Rendra, born Willibrordus Surendra Rendra, was one of the most influential artists in modern Indonesia. He was a poet, director, actor, and playwright. After studying in the US he returned to Yogyakarta in 1967 and established his theatre group Bengkel Teater Rendra

(see **Bengkel Teater Rendra**). After he was banned from performing in Yogyakarta because of the revolutionary content of his play *Maston dan Burung Kondor* (The mastodon and the condors, 1973) he moved to Jakarta where he was also banned from performing between 1978 and 1986 following a protest poetry reading where two ammonia bombs exploded. His theatre works include *Bip-Bop* (1968), *Kisah Perjuangan Suku Naga* (The struggle of the Naga Tribe, 1975), *Sekda* (The secretary, 1977) and *Selamatan Anak Cucu Sulaiman* (The ritual of Sulaiman's grand children, 1988)

Riri Riza

Born 1970 in Makassar, Kalimantan. Riri Riza studied film directing at Jakarta's Arts Institute (see **IKJ**) and also holds an MA in Feature Screen Writing from Royal Holloway, University of London. His films include *Gie* and *Untuk Rena* (For Rena) (both 2005), and *Laskar Pelangi* (The rainbow troops, 2008).

Sandiwara

Sandiwara means drama or play.

Sardono W. Kusumo

Born 1945 in Solo, Central Java. He is a dancer, choreographer, filmmaker and lecturer at **IKJ**. He trained in classical Javanese dance with RT Kusumo Kesowo. In the late 1960s he founded Sardono Dance Theatre, an experimental dance theatre group. His works have won critical acclaim both at home and abroad. He is also active as a voice against the destruction of the rain forest. Important works include *Dongeng dari Dirah* (A fairytale from Dirah, 1974; as a film title: The Sorceress of Dirah, 1992), the environmentally-themed shows *Meta-Ekologi* (Meta ecology, 1979), *Hutan Plastik* (Plastic jungle, 1983) and *Hutan yang Merintih* (The groaning forest, 1987), and *Opera Diponegoro* (Diponegoro opera, 1995).

Satu Merah Panggung

Founded in 1974 in Jakarta by Ratna Sarumpaet. Important works include *Marsinah: Nyanyian dari Bawah Tanah* (Marsinah: Songs from the underworld, 1994), **Marsinah Menggugat** (Marsinah Accuses, 1997), *ALIA*, *Luka Serambi Mekah* (ALIA, Wound on the doorstep to Mecca, 2000), *Anak-Anak Kegelapan* (Children of darkness, 2003) and *Pelacur dan Sang President* (The prostitute and the president, 2006).

Saturday Acting Club

Founded in 2002 in Yogyakarta as Saturday Acting Class by Rukman (Rossa) Rossadi, a lecturer at ISI (Institut Kesenian Indonesia, Indonesian Arts Institute) the group was later renamed Saturday Acting Club (SAC). Works include *Desember Gift* (2008) and *Holocaust Rising* (2008).

Shari'a	Shari'a is Islamic religious law.
Suharto	Born 1921 Kemusuk, Java, died 2008 in Jakarta. Indonesia's second president from 1967-1998. Also spelled Soeharto. His full name is Haji Mohamed Suharto but he is usually referred to as Suharto. Before becoming President he was a general in the Indonesian army and from 1967 acting Head of State (officially inaugurated in 1968).
Sukarno	Born 1901 in Surabaya, died 1970 in Jakarta. Indonesia's first president from 1945-1967. Also known as Soekarno.
Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono	Born 1941 in Pacitan, East Java. Indonesian President since 2004.
Taman Budaya	During the New Order period Indonesia formed a General Directorate of Culture, and the first director general established a <i>Taman Budaya</i> (Cultural Centre) in each province. These are used for theatre and music performances, poetry readings and other cultural events.
Taman Ismail Marzuki	Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) is a centre for modern arts, opened in 1968 in Indonesia's capital Jakarta. It features a variety of stages (Teater Besar, Teater Kecil, Graha Bhakti Budaya). The area also houses the HB Yassin archive, a planetarium, and a cinema. It is situated next to IKJ. DKJ has its offices in the TIM premises.
Tarling dangdut	<i>Tarling dangdut</i> is a form of dangdut . <i>Tarling</i> was originally a form of popular entertainment, similar to operetta practiced in the north coast of western Java, including Cirebon and Indramayu. The popularity of <i>dangdut</i> made <i>tarling</i> ensembles adjust to the new musical environment. A new form of <i>dangdut</i> emerged.
TDE	Abbreviation for Theatre for Development and Education. TDE is a programme offered by Yayasan Kelola . Using theatre, the programme tries to bring social issues to the forefront of public discourse and educate citizens.
Teater Gandrik	Founded in 1983 in Yogyakarta by the late Heru Kesawa Murti, Susilo Nugroho, Alm Saptaria Handayaningsih and Jujuk Prabowo. Performances often satirise current political issues. Works include <i>Dhemit</i> (Tree spirit, 1985), <i>Orde Tabung</i> (Test-tube order, 1988), <i>Mas Tom</i> (2002), and <i>Keluarga Tot</i> (The Tot family, 2009).

Teater Garasi	Theatre group founded in 1993 by Yudi Ahmad Tajudin (see Yudi Ahmad Tajudin), Kusworo Bayu Aji and Puthut Yulianto. The group is based in Yogyakarta. Performances include: <i>Waktu Batu 1-3</i> (Stone time 1-3, 2001-2004), <i>je.ja.l.an</i> (2008), <i>Tubuh Ketiga: Pada Perayaan yang Berada di Antara</i> (The third body: Celebrating the in-between, 2010),
Teater Kecil	Founded in 1968 by Arifin C. Noer. Plays include <i>Kapai-Kapai</i> (Moths, 1970), <i>Tengul</i> (1973), <i>Umang-Umang</i> (Hermits, 1976), and <i>Sandek Pemuda Pekerja</i> (The young worker Sandek, 1979).
Teater Koma	Founded 1977 in Jakarta by Nano and Ratna Riantiarno and 12 other artists. Works include, amongst others, <i>Maaf, Maaf, Maaf</i> (Sorry, sorry, sorry, 1978), <i>Bom Waktu</i> (Time bomb, 1982), <i>Sampek Engtay</i> (1988, based on the Chinese legend Butterfly Lovers), <i>Opera Sembilit</i> (The constipation opera, 1998), <i>Republik Bagong</i> (Bagong's republic, 2001) and <i>Rumah Pasir</i> (House of sand, 2009).
Teater Kubur	Founded in 1983 by Dindon WS and named after the old graveyard that was often used as a rehearsal space. Performances include <i>Sirkus Anjing</i> (Dog circus, 1989-90), <i>Tombol 13 (Topeng Monyet Bola Plastik)</i> (Button 13 (Monkey mask plastic ball, 1994), <i>Trilogi Besi</i> (Iron trilogy, 2001), and <i>ON/OFF: Rumah Bolong</i> (ON/OFF: A perforated house, 2007).
Teater Mandiri	Founded in 1971 in Jakarta by Putu Wijaya. Works include: <i>Anu</i> (1974), <i>Aduh</i> (1975), <i>Dag-Dig-Dug</i> (1976), <i>Gerr</i> (1986), <i>Hum-Pim-Pah</i> (1992), and <i>Trollface vs Pak Jaya</i> (2012).
Teater Payung Hitam	Founded in 1982 in Bandung by Rachman Sabur. Works include <i>Kaspar</i> (1994), <i>Merah Oblong Putih Bolong Hitam</i> (Red has a hole white torn black, 1997), <i>Relief Air Mata</i> (Relief of tears, 2005), <i>Air Mata Air</i> (Water tears, 2008), <i>Perahu Noah</i> (Noah's ark, 2008), <i>Puisi Tubuh Yang Runtuh</i> (The poetry of a collapsed body, 2010).
Teater SAE	Founded in 1976 by Asril Joni in Jakarta, resurrected in 1978 by Boedi S. Otong. Boedi S. Otong worked together with Afrizal Malna for many of the performance texts. Works include <i>Pertumbuhan di Meja Makan</i> (Things growing on the dining table, 1991) and <i>Biografi Yanti Setelah 12 Menit</i> (Yanti's biography after 12 minutes, 1992).
Teater Satu	Founded in 1996 in Bandar Lampung by Iswadi Pratama and Imas Sobariah. Works include <i>Lysistrata</i> (1997), <i>Sementara</i>

Menunggu Godot (Waiting for Godot, 2002), *Nostalgia sebuah Kota* (Nostalgia of a town, 2003), *Perempuan di Titik Nol* (A woman at point zero, 2008), and *90 menit yang hilang darimu* (90 minutes lost from you, 2009).

- teaterStudio Indonesia** Founded in 2006 in Serang by the late Nandang Aradea, the late Wan Anwar and Bagus Bageni. Performances include *Perahu* (The boat, 2006), *Bicaralah Tanah* (Speak, soil, 2007), *Perempuan Gerabah atawa Ritus Kawinan Tanah* (Earthenware woman or the ritual of marrying the land, 2008), *Bebegig* (Scare crow, 2010), and *Emergency: Bionarasi Tubuh Terbelah* (Emergency: Bionaration of the torn body, 2012).
- Teguh Karya** Born 1937 in Pandeglang, West Java; died 2001 in Jakarta. Born Steve Liem Tjoan Hok, Teguh Karya was an Indonesian theatre and film director. Between 1954 and 1955 he studied at Akademi Seni Drama dan Film, between 1957 and 1961 he studied at Akademi Teater Nasional Indonesia. In 1968 he founded Teater Populer. Important films include *Wajah Seorang Laki-Laki* (The face of a man, 1971), *Badai Pasti Berlalu* (The storm will surely pass, 1977), and *November 1828* (1979). He also produced the soap opera *Pulang* (Going home) in 1987.
- Tentara Nasional Indonesia** National Indonesian Army, also referred to as TNI.
- Theatre of Liberation** The idea for Theatre of Liberation was developed in the 1960s and 70s in Latin America. Theatre of Liberation attempts to enable the audience to speak for itself, rather than to use theatre to speak to the audience in a patronizing way that mirrors centuries of colonial oppression.
- Wawan Sofwan** Born 1965 in Ciamis, West Java. He holds a degree in chemistry and is the founder of mainteater Bandung (1994). In 1988, he took an acting course and joined Studiklub Teater Bandung (STB) as an actor. He is also well-known for his monologue performances. Works often reflect on socio-political problems. His works as a director with mainteater Bandung include *Faust* (2001), *Discopigs* (2001), *Electronic City* (2008), *Sandekala* (2008), *Ladang Perminus* (2009), and *Under Ice* (2009).
- Wayang kulit** Shadow puppet theatre of Java and Bali. Other wayang forms are *wayang topeng* (masked performances), *wayang golek* (performances with rod puppets), and *wayang wong* (performances with unmasked dancers portraying the same

stories depicted in the *wayang kulit*). The oldest forms of this shadow puppet theatre go back to the first century ACE. There are distinct differences in style and performance between Javanese and Balinese *wayang*. Most common materials used are stories from the Mahabharata, although this theatre form currently undergoes huge experimentation.

Yayasan Kelola

Yayasan Kelola is an Indonesian NGO established in 1999. It promotes and strengthens Indonesian arts and works closely with art practitioners. It provides access to funding and learning opportunities such as workshops. It also promotes cultural exchange and works on nation-wide and international network-building.

Yudi Ahmad Tajudin

Born 1972 in Jakarta. He studied Philosophy and Politics (Fisipol) at Universitas Gadjah Madah where he also met Kusworo Bayu Aji and Puthut Yulianto. In 1993, the three of them founded Teater Garasi. Yudi is the artistic director of Teater Garasi and established the group as a professional theatre company.

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Appendix

Interview excerpts

NOTE FOR ALL INTERVIEWS: [text in square brackets, note by the author]

1. Agus Nur Amal a.k.a PM Toh

Agus Nur Amal a.k.a PM Toh is a performer and activist. This interview was held on 1 December 2010 in Agus Nur Amal's studio in Jalan Rawasari, Cempaka Putih, Jakarta. A complete version of this interview in English translation is forthcoming in *Asian Theatre Journal*, Spring/Summer 2014.

Original interview text in Indonesian (transcription by the author)

T: Anda menjadi aktif dan bergerak di dunia teater atau performance art kira-kira pada tahun 1992/93 dan waktu itu situasi politik di Indonesia sudah mulai sangat tegang. Saya mau tanya bagaimana anda memperlakukan situasi itu dalam performancenya.

PM Toh: Aku mulai berkarir 1992, ya. Tahun 1992 bulan Juni itu pentas pertama aku, bulan Juni.

[...]

Ceritaku pertama itu, ya cerita itu berasal dari hikayat, ya. Ceritaku pertama itu *Anak Emak Melawan Raksasa*. Itu adaptasi bebas dari cerita dari hikayat malam dewa di Aceh sana. Bagaimana Anak Emak yang kecil mencoba sukses lah, begitu, tapi untuk sukses harus dia melawan seorang raksasa. Nah, ketika aku main di Aceh, cerita itu tidak politis tapi begitu aku bawa ke Jakarta langsung aku harus beradaptasi dengan situasi-situasi politis yang sedang terpikirkan oleh masyarakat penonton. Nah, di situ aku memulai membahasakan, tapi kalau aku membahasakannya tidak secara verbal. Aku kurang suka membahasakan masalah politis secara verbal tapi aku membahasakannya melalui benda-benda. Misalnya, aku pakai helm tentara. Helm tentara sama sepatu tentara, yaitu sudah satu simbol yang cukup kuat pada waktu itu. Misalnya helm tentara dibawa lalu sepatu tentara dipukul ke kepalanya. Begitu penonton membayangkan macam-macam. Apa lagi simbol-simbolnya, ya? Payung berwarna kuning, payung kuning itu simbol GOLKAR. Itu aku sudah mulai gunain tahun 92.

Payung kuning berwarna kuning, ujung-ujung aku taro tali yang panjang jadi akar yang panjang. [...]

T: Anda dari Aceh, dari Pulau Weh dan di sana dari tahun 76 berlangsung konflik antara pemerintah dan GAM dan tahun 2004 ada tsunami dan tahun 2005 baru berhasil *peace contract* dengan GAM dan juga Islam sangat kuat di Aceh. Aceh adalah salah satu provinsi yang pakai syaria sebagai hak sendiri. Dan saya mau tanya apakah hal-hal itu juga mempengaruhi pementasan anda walaupun ada di sini, di Jakarta?

PM Toh: Kalau peristiwa Aceh memang cukup mempengaruhi certiaku, ya. Aku menciptakan beberapa cerita waktu itu. Salah satunya ada cerita *Hamzah Fansyuri Menjala Ikan Salam*. Itu ada beberapa versi dari Hamzah Fansyuri. Cerita itu sendiri, aku ingin mengatakan pada publik nasional. Publik nasional pada waktu itu menurutku salah menilai keberadaan gerakan militer GAM. Nah, aku coba mendudukan persoalannya. Kenapa munculnya GAM, begitu. Aku menceritakan di situ cerita bagaimana hubungan antara ibu yang ayahnya GAM kemudian juga anaknya GAM, begitu. Lalu, bagaimana keluarga ini dalam satu kampung, bagaimana sebetulnya antara anak, ibu dan orang kampung mendukung keberadaan si ayah yang menjadi militernya GAM, begitu. Bagaimana si ibu memasak nasi, lalu si anak pagi-pagi sebelum sekolah antar nasi ke gunung. Nah, aku ingin menggambarkan bahwa kita harus lihat persoalan Aceh secara objektif, jangan pakai pikiran-pikiran militaristik. Waktu itu persoalan Aceh didominasi pikiran militer. Aceh adalah separatis, harus dibunuh, begitu. Aku mulai itu tahun 94 aku sudah mulai cerita tentang Aceh walaupun masih diam-diam, ya. Aku sendiri baru paham masalah Aceh 1993 sebetulnya. [...] Aku sering main ke Pasar Minggu. Ada banyak orang Aceh di sana yang jualan, jadi saya cari informasi di Pasar Minggu. Setiap malam minggu aku ke sana. Setiap malam minggu mainnya ke sana. Dengan orang pacaran aku terus main ke sana. Jadi 94/95 mulai ceritaku. Itu caraku untuk cari informasi, ya.

[...]

T: Saya mau tanya kalau gaya anda di dalam pertunjukannya sebelum tahun 1998 dan setelah tahun 1998 berubah atau masih sama. [...] Setelah Suharto sudah tidak ada lagi. Ada perubahan? Bagaiman perasaan anda tentang situasi politik?

PM Toh: Sebetulnya, setelah tahun 1998 sampai 2000 lah, ya, aku sudah mulai memutuskan, ah, aku tidak mau menceritakan cerita-cerita politik. Karena aku lihat tidak ada perubahan yang berarti. Setelah turunan Suharto, kok, yang duduk orang-orang ini lagi. Loh, wayang-wayang ini lagi. Loh, begitu. Orang-orang yang bisa dipanggil penjahat-penjahat bisa buat politik lagi. Waktu itu harapan penjahat-penjahat mungkin menghilang dari panggung politik. Padahal pemilu 1999 penjahat-penjahat politik semua lagi ikut. Ya, saat itu aku berpikir aku tidak lagi mau main politik dalam teater. Begitu. Aku harus mencari siasat lain, begitu, untuk berteater, begitu. Lama juga aku berindung teater waktu itu sampai dua tahun, Tamara. Tahun 2000, 2001, 2002, begitu, untuk mencari apa ini, untuk publik Indonesia apa ini, bisa bicara politik lagi atau tidak mungkin. Situasinya sudah sangat terbuka, mau bicara apapun bisa, begitu. Maka, berbicara tentang politik sudah tidak menarik lagi, menurutku begitu. Dari tahun 2000 aku sudah tidak bicara lagi masalah-masalah politik. Ya, membahas masalah-masalah pohon, misalnya, masalah lingkungan... [...]

T: Dan itu sampai sekarang?

PM Toh: Ya, sampai sekarang, aku menghindari cerita-cerita politik.

[...]

Translation by the author

[...]

T: You began to be active as a performer in 1992 during a time when the political situation in Indonesia was quite tense. I would like to know how you dealt with politics in your performances.

PM Toh: I began my professional career in 1992. In June 1992 I performed for the first time. My first story derived from dangedria: Anak Emak [mother's child] versus the giant (*Anak Emak Melawan Raksasa*). This story is a free adaptation from an Acehese tale. It is the story about how little Anak Emak tries to be successful. However, to have success he needs to fight a giant first. Well, when I performed this piece in Aceh the story wasn't perceived as political at all. However, when I brought it to Jakarta, I had to adapt it to the political situation the audience was thinking about at that time. So I began to express these issues, but I didn't express them verbally but through the use of objects and symbols. For example, I used an

army helmet [of the Indonesian National Army]. An army helmet together with army shoes; at that time this already was a quite strong symbol. I took the army helmet, for instance, and then I hit the head with the army shoes. So the audience imagined all kind of things. What other symbols, ya? A yellow umbrella for instance. This is the symbol of GOLKAR [Suharto's party]. I began using this umbrella from 1992 onwards. Around its tip I placed long strings that symbolised long roots [of the banyan tree symbol].

T: But you are from Pulau Weh in Aceh, and in 1976 began the conflict between the Indonesian government and GAM. In 2004 the tsunami happened, in 2005 peace was established. Islam is a strong force in the region. I would like to know if these issues also influence your work, although you are living in Jakarta.

PM Toh: Yes, events in Aceh indeed have been influencing my stories to some extent. During the time of the conflict I created a few stories. One of them is the story of Hamzah Fansyuri who goes fishing with a net (*Hamzah Fansyuri Menjala Ikan*). There are different versions of this story, which I wanted to present to the national public. In my opinion the public was wrong in their way of evaluating the existence of the GAM military movement at that time, so I tried to put that matter into perspective. Why did GAM emerge? I told the story of a woman whose husband joins GAM, and then her child also becomes a member of GAM. How is the situation for this family in the village? How do the mother and the child and the other people of the village support the existence of the father, who became a fighter for GAM? I showed how the mother cooks rice and early in the morning before school the child takes the rice in the mountains where the father is staying. I wanted to depict that we have to see the problem in Aceh from an objective point of view and don't use militaristic judgement. At that time the problem of Aceh was dominated by militaristic thoughts: "Aceh is separatist; this has to be crushed, full stop." I began to tell stories about Aceh in 1994. Actually, I myself just began to fully understand the conflict in 1993.

T: I would like to know whether your performing style changed after 1998. Suharto stepped back from power in 1998 [following massive demonstrations]. How did you feel about this?

PM Toh: Actually, between 1998 and 2000, I had already decided that I didn't want to tell political stories any longer. Because I saw that there was no meaningful change. After Suharto stepped back there were still the same people around in politics, the same wayang as

before. The people who could be called criminals were still active in politics. At that time hope had disappeared from the political stage, I guess. Although there was the election in 1999, the same bad guys were again part of the political life. In that moment I thought that I didn't want to bring political themes on stage any longer. I had to look for another strategy for my theatre. For a long time I was looking for answers. In 2000, 2001 and 2002, I researched about the Indonesian public, whether they can speak about politics or not. The situation was quite open already; you could basically discuss everything you wanted. In my opinion talking about politics wasn't interesting anymore. From 2000 onwards I didn't discuss politics on stage any longer. I began discussing environmental problems for example.

T: So you feel like this until now.

PM Toh: Yes, until today I avoid political stories.

2. Ratna Sarumpaet

Ratna Sarumpaet is the artistic director of the theatre group Satu Merah Panggung. This interview was held in the front reception room of Ratna Sarumpaet's house in Tangerang, Jakarta on 26 February 2011.

[Translator's note: Ratna Sarumpaet uses lots of English expressions in this interview; they remain as they were stated during the interview and are italicised in both the original interview text and the translation.]

Original interview text in Indonesian (transcription by Nida)

T: Setelah Marsinah, semua naskah yang ditulis oleh Ratna ada hubungan dengan hak-hak kemanusiaan. Kalau begitu, prosesnya sebelum menulis ada semacam survey, betul?

R: Ya, jadi kayak Marsinah itu kan setelah kami sepakat di sini, setelah grup sepakat untuk membuat Marsinah *as a play*, saya bilang, yang kita butuhkan sekarang adalah survey. Jadi aku mengirim orang, saya sendiri berangkat ke Jawa Timur untuk wawancara keluarganya dan lain-lain. Teman-teman di sini juga saya pencari di pengadilan-pengadilan buruh, lalu ada juga yang pergi ke perpustakaan untuk melihat persoalan-persoalan buruh itu sejarahnya kayak apa. *I never make a play without survey.*

T: Saya membaca bahwa untuk yang *Sang Pelacur dan Presiden* atau yang dijadikan film *Jamilah dan Presiden*, performancenya didukung oleh UNICEF juga ya.

R: Itu malah bukan didukung; itu permintaan mereka. Ya mungkin kadang media salah mengerti. Sebenarnya saya sedang jadi Ketua DKJ waktu itu. UNICEF datang, mereka bilang mereka sudah mewawancarai beberapa sutradara. *They want to have a play as a campaign of trafficking.* Terus saya bilang, kenapa ke saya? “Ya kalau kami pelajari, kelihatannya hanya kamu yang sudah punya pengalaman bagaimana.” Saya bilang, “ok, tapi Sabtu ya. Saya ini tidak mendalami masalah trafficking. *I know we have a huge problem here, but I never really involve, and I don't know the details.*” Saya bilang saya harus survey, dan kalian harus membiayai dulu surveynya. Dan karena saya ini tidak biasa menerima pesanan; *I never write a play* pesanan, tidak berarti kalau kamu biayai survey saya, *it means I agree.* Belum tentu.

Itu sangat tergantung bagaimana saya melihat persoalannya. Mereka setuju. Jadi mereka membiayai 6 bulan survey, itu karena saya lagi kerja kan, jadi saya hanya bisa *weekend*. Saya juga terpaksa harus punya tim yang membantu saya. Karena saya kerja di DKJ, jadi saya hanya weekend. Aku ke Batam, aku ke Jawa Timur, aku ke Solo, aku ke Medan. Ada 5 kota besar saya datangi. Melihat kayak apa transaksinya, juga di Kalimantan, di perbatasan. Tapi sebenarnya saya baru bulan kedua I called UNICEF, bahwa saya setuju. Jadinya mereka seneng banget, dan ketemu lagi sama aku. Saya bilang, saya belum selesai dengan survey saya. Tapi saya bilang, saya tidak setuju dengan hanya menulis. Jadi kalau meminta saya menulis, mereka juga harus mensponsori pementasannya di beberapa kota. Karena buat saya, *play* itu bukan *play* kalau belum dipentaskan. Karena itu mereka mensponsori semuanya di 5 kota: Jakarta, Surabaya, Palembang, Medan, Bandung. [...] Jadi kita kan pentas 3 hari. Ada 2 hari yang kita harus pentas 2x. Jadi tidak hanya malam, tapi siang juga karena permintaannya tuh—tiketnya habis terus. Jadi akhirnya kita setuju untuk bikin pentas siang, untuk remaja. Jadi untuk anak SMA.

T: Itu untuk berapa lama persiapannya?

R: Saya kalau persiapan juga lama. Saya orang yang sangat cerewet, padahal saya sebenarnya sudah [...], *I don't direct the play myself only. So the concept, the main director* itu saya; konsepnya saya, tapi saya punya sutradara-sutradara lain yang menangani ini, menangani itu. *So daily*, mereka tugasnya ini, itu tugasnya bikin ini, bikin apa. *So weekend*, baru saya yang garap, “dikawinkan”. Sebenarnya kita secara sistem penyutradaraan sudah bagus banget. Tapi tetap orang menganggap. Kita tuh lama sekali prosesnya.

T: Kalau *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* juga dipentaskan oleh Satu Merah Panggung ya?

R: Ya, oleh Satu Merah Panggung.

T: Anggota masih sama dari awal atau sudah ganti-ganti?

R: Ganti-ganti. Kita tuh [...] mungkin saya agak traumatic dengan model grupnya Rendra ya. Aku ingin orang tidak fokus pada saya, tapi fokus pada projeknya, jadi ada kesadaran “aku perlu dukung ini.” Dan ada kesadaran untuk perlu meningkatkan dirinya, jadi bukan karena mereka orang yang *to obey* Ratna Sarumpaet, nggak. *I don't like that.*

T: Dulu sering terjadi seperti itu ya di teater, ada yang jadi seperti tokoh, bapak.

R: Ya, itu kecenderungan feodalistik Jawa. Dan saya menghindari itu, walaupun kecenderungan itu tetap ada. Karena susah sekali membuat regenerasi di Satu Merah Panggung juga. *We have a group in Kalimantan already*, dan ada Satu Merah Panggung in Batam. [...] saya selalu pakai Harris Priadie [Bah] sebagai sutradara juga, jadi *semi-assistant* atau *co-director*. Itu lebih bagus karena dia tidak dari awal di saya. Dia lahir dari grup lain, dan dia, *he's already a director when I hired him to help me*. Belakangan, pertunjukan-pertunjukan saya selalu ada Harris. Dan orang sudah tahu bahwa ini *team work*.

T: Dan grup Satu Merah Panggung itu seperti jalan terus, atau hanya kalau ada naskah baru, baru berlatih?

R: Tidak juga hanya naskah. Jadi begini. *Ratna Sarumpaet Crisis Center (RSCC) is actually Satu Merah Panggung; we have different activity*. Orang-orangnya tuh kurang-lebih sama. Tapi kalau daily administrasi atau apa, memang ada yang memegang khusus RSCC, ada yang khusus Satu Merah Panggung. Tapi waktu misalnya Aceh atau waktu banjir besar di Jakarta, itu orang Satu Merah Panggung juga, tapi kita bawa bendera RSCC.

T: RSCC sekarang aktif di dalam hal apa?

R: [...] Mungkin yang besar yang saya bantu terakhir itu Aceh. Sebenarnya saya tidak begitu—saya lebih tertarik menangani hal-hal yang—persoalan yang berseberangan dengan negara. Kalau di tsunami, saya menolong. Walaupun saya menolong signifikan satu wilayah yang ditelantarkan negara waktu itu, karena wilayah itu Aceh Barat, Lamno, baru sampai 2 minggu setelah tsunami pecah, kita orang pertama yang tiba di sana [...]. Satu karena jauh. Jadi orang-orang yang menolong itu cenderung di Banda Aceh dan Meulaboh karena dekat, karena pers ada di sana. Lalu tidak *searching*, tidak ada pencarian yang lebih jauh. Sampai saya akhirnya dapat kabar dari satu orang, 'Ratna, di sini mayat-mayat itu masih berserakan'. Sudah kering waktu saya datang. Dan saya kerahkan Satu Merah Panggung. Tadinya kita di Banda Aceh. [...]

Tapi, kita juga terjun di Porsea (Tapanuli Utara), misalnya. Di sana ada persoalan lingkungan yang berat yang meracuni masyarakat. Terus..banyaklah. sebenarnya RSCC ini lebih ke menolong rakyat; ada politiknya, tapi ada sosialnya. Kalau sekarang, daily, kita menolong

orang yang—jadi begini. RSCC itu hanya logonya saja masuk ke kantor polisi, misalnya kalau ada masalah TKI, labour; itu orang sudah takut. Polisi takut. Jadi kayak misalnya orang yang susah—tapi kita juga tidak mau dibohongi. Jadi ada orang yang susah betul hidupnya, ditelantarkan di rumah sakit (RS). Itu biasanya RS itu sudah tahu, bahwa harus minta tolong ke RSCC, dan RSCC akan tekan pemerintah di Departemen Kesehatan dan Departemen Sosial untuk melakukan tugas mereka. *We don't organise RSCC with money*. Saya tidak pernah dapat *funding* dari manapun. *People who help RSCC is Indonesian people* yang saya minta *monthly* menyumbang. Jadi mereka tuh ada yang nyumbang Rp 50.000, 100.000, ada yang menyumbang 1 juta, ada yang 10.000; pokoknya sesuka hati karena sebenarnya di RSCC itu saya ingin lebih menyadarkan masyarakat Indonesia, *help each other*. Tapi ke mereka kita juga bikin laporan.

[...]

Translation by the author

T: After *Marsinah* all the plays you wrote related to Human Rights. That's why the process before the actual writing always included a kind of survey, is that correct?

R: Yes, so like *Marsinah*, this was after we discussed here, after the group [*Satu Merah Panggung*] discussed to do *Marsinah as a play*, I said: "What we need now, is a survey." So I sent people [to different places]; I myself went to East Java to do an interview with her [Marsinah's] family and others. Friends here [in Jakarta] also dispersed into court sessions of workers' rights, then there were some going to the library to learn about the history of workers' issues. *I never make a play without survey*.

T: I read that *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* [The prostitute and the president] which was made into the movie *Jamilah dan Sang Presiden* [*Jamilah and the president*] was supported by UNICEF.

R: It was in fact not supported; it was their request. Yes, maybe sometimes the media understands things wrongly. Actually, at that time I was the chairwoman of DKJ [Dewan Kesenian Jakarta – Jakarta Arts Council]. UNICEF approached me, they said, they had already interviewed a few directors. *They want to have a play as a campaign of trafficking*. So I asked: "Why do you come to me?" "Well, as it seems only you have this kind of

experience.” I said: “Ok, but on Saturdays. I have no deep understanding of trafficking. *I know we have a huge problem here, but I never really involve, and I don’t know the details.*” I said, I have to do a survey/research first and initially you will have to pay for this survey. And because I am not used to receive a request or an order for a play, it doesn’t mean just because you pay for the survey *I agree*. It’s not for sure, yet. It depends mostly on how I see the issue. They agreed. So they paid for a 6-month survey. [The length of the survey] was related to the fact that I worked at DKJ [at the same time], so I could do [the research] only on the *weekend*. I went to Batam, I went to East Timor, I went to Solo, I went to Medan. I visited 5 large cities. I saw how the trafficking looked like, also in Kalimantan, on the border. But actually *I just called* UNICEF in the second month to tell them that I agreed. So they were very happy and came for another meeting. I told them that I hadn’t finished my survey, yet. But I also said that I didn’t agree with only writing the play. If they ask me to write the text, they also have to sponsor performances in a couple of cities. That’s why the sponsored performances in 5 cities: Jakarta, Surabaya, Palembang, Medan, Bandung. [...] We performed 3 days [in each city]. On two days we had to perform twice. Not only in the evening but also in the early afternoon because they asked us to do so – tickets were sold out every time. So finally we agreed to do a performance in the early afternoon, for teenagers – high school pupils.

T: How long was the rehearsal process?

R: I take a long time for the rehearsal process. I am very hard to please, although actually... *I don’t only direct the play myself. So the concept, the main director* is me, it’s my concept, but I have other directors who handle this, handle that. *So daily*, they have tasks, to do this, to do that. *So* [on the] *weekend*, I am working on “bringing the things together”. Actually, our system of directing is already very good. But people still consider [...] We rehearse for a very long time.

T: So *Pelacur dan Sang Presiden* was also performed by Satu Merah Panggung?

R: Yes, by Satu Merah Panggung.

T: Are the members still the ones from the beginning or have they changed over time?

R: They have changed. Maybe I am somewhat traumatized by Rendra's model of a theatre group. I don't want that people focus on me, but they should focus on the project, so there is an awareness that "I need to support this." And there is also an awareness to think for oneself, not because they are people who *obey* Ratna Sarumpaet. *I don't like that.*

T: Before [in older theatre groups] this often happened in theatre, that there was one person who acted like a "father figure".

R: Yes, this is a feudalistic tendency in Java. And I avoid that although this tendency still exists. It is also very difficult to have a regeneration process in Satu Merah Panggung. I always use Harris Priadie [Bah] as a director; he is my assistant or *co-director*. This is better because he didn't work for me from the beginning. He comes from another group [Kelompok Teater Kami] and *he's already a director when I hired him to help me*. In the background of my performances there is always Harris. And the people already know that this is team work.

T: So is Satu Merah Panggung always active or do you only start rehearsing when there is a new play?

R: Not only when we rehearse for a play. *Ratna Sarumpaet Crisis Center (RSCC) is actually Satu Merah Panggung; we have different activity*. The people [active in RSCC and Satu Merah Panggung] are more less the same. But for the daily administrative work or such like there are specific persons handling RSCC and Satu Merah Panggung. But when for example [the tsunami struck] in Aceh or when the great flood in Jakarta happened, people from Satu Merah Panggung were [helping] too but under the name of RSCC.

T: Where is RSCC active at the moment?

R: Possibly the latest and biggest problem I was helping at was Aceh. Actually, I'm more interested in handling issues that oppose the state. During the tsunami I helped. Although a significant part of my help was in one region which at that time was neglected by the state. This district in West Aceh, Lamno... 2 weeks after the tsunami stroke we were the first people to arrive there. One reason for this was that it was far [to get there]. So the people who received help tended to be from Banda Aceh and Meulaboh because that was close, and

because the press was there. So we didn't look further. Until finally I received a message from someone: "Ratna, here are corpses scattered around." They were already dry when I arrived. And I mobilized Satu Merah Panggung. Before that we were based in Banda Aceh. But we also, for instance, were active in Porsea (North Tapanuli [Toba Samosir]). A severe environmental problem poisoned the citizens. Actually, RSCC focuses more on helping people; there is politics but there is also the social [aspect]. At the moment, *daily*, we help people that ... - it's like this. If there is a problem with a TKI, an Indonesian labourer, the police get already scared when RSCC enters the police station. For example, if there is someone who has difficulties – but we also don't want to be lied at. So, if there is someone who has a really difficult life or is being neglected in hospital... Usually the hospital already knows that they have to ask RSCC for help and RSCC will put pressure on the Health and Social Departments to do their job. *We don't organise RSCC with money*. I never received funding from anywhere. *People who help RSCC is Indonesian people* that I ask for a monthly contribution. So there are some who contribute 50,000, 100,000 Rupiah, some contribute 1 million Rupiah, others just 10,000 [between ≈£0.50 to 52.00]. The main thing is that people take pleasure from it and do as they please as I would like to make the Indonesian society with RSCC more aware [that it is important to] *help each other*. But they [the donors] also receive a report stating what has already been done.

[...]

3. Nandang Aradea

Nandang Aradea is the artistic director of teaterStudio Indonesia and Agus Faisal Karim the producer and one of the founding members of teaterStudio Indonesia. This interview was held at Café Kebun in Serang, Banten on 9 February 2011. Nandang Aradea sadly passed away during time of revision in October 2013.

Original interview text (transcription by Nida)

T: Naskah pertunjukan ditulis oleh siapa?

N: Ditulis sendiri oleh saya, hasil diskusi. [...] —yang pertama kan *Perahu* ya. Katakanlah ini ada satu tematik ya. Perahu, Petani, Gerabah, dan sekarang Bebegig, sebenarnya masih satu *link*. Tentang problem yang ada di petani, di laut. Perahu itu kan bagaimana menginterupsi cara berpikir laut. Ketika kita sadar bahwa Indonesia adalah laut.

T: Untuk masalah lingkungan atau apa sebenarnya?

N: Selama ini kan cara berpikir kita selalu darat. Padahal, menurut saya, Indonesia itu harus berpikir dengan cara laut. Saya waktu itu terinspirasi oleh gizi buruk. Orang-orang bingung, kenapa sampai ada kasus seperti ini; kurang protein segala macam. Padahal ikan banyak. Artinya, tidak punya cara berpikir laut. Terus juga, kok dalam tentara, yang kuat itu Angkatan Darat. Angkatan Laut-nya amburadul. Nah ini karena cara berpikir pemerintah itu cara berpikir darat. Harusnya Angkatan Laut yang diperkuat, menurut saya. Jadi *Perahu* itu untuk mengembalikan cara berpikir kita ke laut.

T: Jadi naskah-naskah diinspirasi oleh lingkungan?

N: Ya. Lalu ke *Petani* ya. Saya membaca disertasinya Sartono itu sangat menarik, seperti membaca novel. Ada konflik; konflik kyai, petani. Di situ lah disertasi itu menginspirasi saya, saya transformasi menjadi naskah. Saya kira, naskah itu jadinya 17 kali revisi. Jadi naskah itu sebagai elemen ide saja. Artinya, proses yang akan membuat dramaturgi. Jadi pertemuan personal saya dengan petani di mana saja yang ada di Banten ini, itu yang akan membentuk. Pertemuan saya dengan aktor-aktor saya. Saya membaca banyak tentang Meyerhold misalnya, *biomechanism*; saya transformasi teori itu dengan cangkul atau apa. Bunyi itu,

musikal cangkul itu. Arit, parang. Maka efeknya mengerikan, kata teman-teman saya yang menonton, karena dibanting-banting cangkul dan lain-lain itu. Terkadang ada api dari gesekan besi-besi itu. Aktor saya ada yang luka, 1 orang, karena alatnya lepas. Waktu main di rasio, parangnya jatuh, kena kakinya. Malam kedua atau malam ketiga; langsung dibawa ke RS, dijahit.

Memang saya suka sekali naskah itu. Jadi saya buat sendiri; 17 kali direvisi. Tiap pertemuan, ganti lagi naskahnya. Nah karya ini masuk karya inovatif atas donasi Hivos. Untuk proyek itu; hanya saat itu saja, untuk memprosesnya [...]saya keliling juga kan. Ke Jogja, Semarang, Jakarta, Bandung. Di Bandung: Pusat Kebudayaan Perancis (CCF), Jakarta: Pusat Kebudayaan Rusia. Jadi direspon oleh beberapa pihak. Jadi Hivos memodali, kemudian banyak yang merespon juga untuk bisa jalan ke sana. Jadi saya kira polanya juga menarik. Ketika karya sudah ada, ada yang mengundang, ada yang mendanai.

Kemudian yang *Gerabah* juga sama. Kalau yang *Gerabah* itu mungkin menyusun naskahnya bareng dengan latihan. Karena tadinya saya kan sering ke Bumi Jaya, pusat pembuatan gerabah. Sekitar 5 km dari sini. Ada metaphor yang bagus ketika sedang membuat gerabah. Membangun, menghancurkan. Membangun, menghancurkan; membangun, menghancurkan. Saya bilang, ini jadi tema saya. Nah dari situ saya membuat naskah. Tadinya saya butuh *pot* untuk air. Melihat mereka bekerja, saya pikir bagus untuk teater. sebenarnya kan ini transformasi dari tempat membuat mereka. Kan tempat membuatnya bulat begini, mutar. Idenya dari situ [...]

T: Tapi tidak bisa mutar ini ya?

N: Bisa. Tapi sekarang tidak; tadinya bisa. [...] Dari ketidaksengajaan, sesungguhnya, tapi sangat teaterikal kalau dibuat pertunjukan. Lalu dikasih tema, dikasih ide. Idenya dari situ juga, si nenek itu. Akhirnya si nenek itu ikut me-*workshop* kita sampai 3 bulan. Karena teman-teman kurang begitu bagus membuatnya, dari hasil *workshop* itu. Akhirnya si nenek ikut main. Jadi si nenek ikut saya bawa ke mana-mana; Solo, dll. Kecuali ke Surabaya dia tidak ikut. Kalau ke Lampung-Palembang dia ikut. Dia jadi aktor juga akhirnya. Untung suami dan anak-anaknya mengizinkan.

T: Untuk produksi yang baru ini dia juga ikut?

N: Untuk yang ini nggak. Hanya untuk yang *Gerabah*. Karena dia kan bekerja di sana, bekerja sebagai petani juga. Petani, pembuat gerabah. Lama kita *workshop* di tempat dia, kemudian kadang dia ditarik ke tempat kita latihan.

[...]

Agus Faisal: Bambu itu sangat filosofis, Nandang memihak kepada bambu. Meskipun bambu bukan sebuah tema. Tapi bukan juga sekedar properti. [...] ada spirit dari bambu, dan itu menjadi bagian dari pementasan. Seperti, kita ingin membuktikan kuatnya bambu seperti apa; kokohnya bambu, kerasnya bambu. Ketika itu menjadi pertunjukan, seperti ketika yang pertama itu di tentang petani di Bicaralah Tanah, kita buat rig, dan itu menjadi—untuk orang lompat dari ketinggian dari 5-6 meter. Selalu saja bambu menjadi bagian penting dari teater Nandang. Dan itu unik. Nandang tidak mau melepaskan diri dari bambu. Seperti teater ini kehilangan ruhnya kalau tidak ada bambu. Dan bambu tidak sekedar alas atau pelengkap, tetapi menjadi bagian penting dari struktur pertunjukan. Mungkin ada juga yang memilih besi; besi menjadi bagian dari struktur pertunjukan. Kalau Nandang selalu memihak kepada bambu. Tidak ada pilihan lain; kayu pun tidak menjadi pilihan. Nah ini dari sisi lingkungan kan ketika bambu—bagaimana menjelaskannya ya?

N: Tidak merusak lingkungan, maksud saya.

Agus: Artinya, bambu cepat tumbuh. Jadi ketika menghabiskan 4.000 batang bambu, secara lingkungan *fair*, tidak merusak. [...] Kayu tidak boleh dipakai berlebihan. Kalau bambu, 4.000 bambu menjadi sederhana. Dan masyarakat pun yang seharusnya memilih bambu, itu jadi diingatkan. Jadi ‘oiya, ada bambu ternyata. Kita begini aja cukup dengan bambu’. Keinginan untuk membangun *stage* tidak mesti dituruti dengan kayu.

[...]

Translation by the author

T: Who writes the play texts [for teaterStudio Indonesia]?

N: I write them but they result from a discussion. The first [play] was *Perahu*. It can be said that they have all one theme: *Perahu* [Boat], *Petani* [Farmer], *Gerabah* [Earthenware], and at the moment *Bebegig*¹⁹⁹ are actually still linked. About the problems of farmers, the sea. *Perahu* is about how to change the way of how we think about the sea. So that we become aware of Indonesia having the sea.

T: Regarding environmental problems, or in what context exactly?

N: This is what I mean: All this time our way of thinking was always about land. Although in my opinion Indonesia should think about the sea. I was at that time inspired by malnutrition. People are confused. Why until now, although there is lots of fish, there are all these cases of lack of protein and other sorts of [malnutrition]. This means we don't think about the sea. Also for example in the army, the strong force is the army. The navy is in shambles. This is due to the government's way of thinking about the land. In my opinion, the Navy should be strengthened. The [play] *Perahu* is about how to restore our way of thinking towards the sea.

T: So are all your plays inspired by the environment?

N: Yes. Now about *Petani*. I read Sartono's very interesting dissertation,²⁰⁰ it's like reading a novel. He talks about conflict, the conflict of Islamic scholars, farmers. That's where I took my inspiration from; I transformed it into a play. I think I revised the play 17 times. So the idea of this play text is just like an element, this means the process that will create the dramaturgy. My personal meetings with farmers all over Banten will give the form. The meetings with my actors. I read a lot about Meyerhold, for instance, Biomechanics. I transformed this theory with the *cangkul* [mattock] or such like. [I produced] sound, musical sounds with the mattock. [The actors also used] sickles, short machetes. My friends who watched the performance said the effect was frightening because of [the sound made by] the rattling of the mattock and so on. Sometimes there were sparks from the rubbing metal. One of my actors got injured because the tool got loose. When we performed in Rasio, the machete fell down and cut his leg. It was on the second or third evening. We went straight to

¹⁹⁹ *Bebegig* literally means Scarecrow. It also refers to an art form in West Java using giant masked figures.

²⁰⁰ Kartodirdjo, Sartono. *The Peasant's Revolt of Banten in 1888. Its Conditions, Course and Sequel. A Case Study of Social Movements in Indonesia*. S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966. The Indonesian version was published under the title *Pemberontakan Petani Banten 1888: Kondisi, Jalan Peristiwa dan Kelanjutannya - Sebuah Studi Kasus mengenai Gerakan Sosial di Indonesia* in 1984 by Dunia Pustaka Jaya.

the hospital and they stitched him up. I really like this play. I wrote it myself, revised it 17 times. After every meeting I changed the text. This play was one of the “Innovative Plays” [series by Kelola] sponsored by Hivos. For this project, only for the process. [...] I also went on tour. To Yogya, Semarang, Jakarta, Bandung. In Bandung [we performed at the] French Cultural Center [CCF], in Jakarta at the Russian Cultural Centre. There was a response from a variety of parties. Hivos financed [the project], and there were a lot of people who responded [to a call for funding] so we could travel there. That’s why I think that this model is also interesting. When the play already existed there were some who invited us, some who funded it.

For *Gerabah* [*Perempuan Gerabah atau Ritus Kawinan Tanah*] it was the same. The play *Gerabah* was probably created during the rehearsal. Because before [rehearsals began], I often went to Bumi Jaya, the pottery making centre located just about 5km from here. There is a good metaphor when creating earthenware. To build, to destroy, to build, to destroy, to build, to destroy. I say that this became my theme and from this notion I began writing the play. [...] Seeing them [the earthenware makers] at work, I thought that would be great for theatre. Actually this²⁰¹ is a transformation from the potter’s wheel. [It] is round like this and turning. [I took] the idea from there.

T: But this one can’t spin, right?

N: It can. But not at the moment, in the past yes. [...] Actually, it wasn’t deliberate but very theatrical when made into a performance. So I got a theme, an idea. The idea also came from this old lady. She did a 3-month long workshop [in pottery making] for us. After the workshop my friends were not very good at pottery making, so finally the old lady joined the performance. She accompanied us everywhere, to Solo and other places. She didn’t travel with us to Surabaya, but to Lampung, Palembang she came. In the end she also became an actress. Fortunately, her husband and her children allowed it.

T: Did she also join in your latest production?

²⁰¹ Nandang here referred to the platform resembling a potter’s wheel, which was used in the performance of *Perempuan Gerabah* and is now used as a space to sit in Café Kebun. Here we sat during the interview.

N: Not in this one. Only in *Gerabah*. Because she is working [in Bumi Jaya], she is also working as a farmer. We did a long workshop at her place, hence sometimes we urged her to come to our rehearsal space.

[...]

Agus Faisal: Bamboo is very philosophical. Nandang is taking sides with bamboo. Although bamboo is not a theme it is also not just property. [...] The spirit of bamboo becomes part of the performance. We want to demonstrate the strength of bamboo, its sturdiness, its solidity. When this becomes a performance, for example in our performance *Bicaralah Tanah* [Speak, Soil] we made a rig and this was used by performers to leap 5-6 metres high. Bamboo always becomes an important part of Nandang's performances. This is unique. Nandang doesn't want to free himself from bamboo. It seems like this theatre loses its spirit if there is no bamboo [involved]. And bamboo is not just a base or a supplement but it is an important part of the performance's structure. Maybe there are some who would choose metal, metal that becomes a part of the performance structure. But Nandang always takes sides with bamboo. There is no other choice, wood is no choice. Well, this is from an environmental point of view as bamboo— how to explain it?

N: It doesn't damage the environment.

Agus: This means that bamboo is growing quickly. So if we use 4,000 pieces of bamboo, it is *fair* to the environment and doesn't damage it. [...] Wood should not be overused. If it is bamboo, 4,000 pieces of bamboo is economical. The society should also choose bamboo. So we remind them: "Oh yes, actually there is bamboo. We have enough just with bamboo." The wish to build a *stage* has not to be followed through by using wood.

[...]

4. Yudi Ahmad Tajudin

Yudi Ahmad Tajudin is the artistic director of Teater Garasi. This interview was held at Teater Garasi's studio in Yogyakarta's Jalan Bugisan on 26 January 2011.

Original interview text (transcription by Priska Siagian)

Yudi: [...] *Tubuh Ketiga* [...] analoginya itu *zooming in* dari *je.ja.l.an*. Jadi *je.ja.l.an* semacam lanskap. Jadi sebagaimana jalan, ada bentangan, lanskap, ada banyak peristiwa. *Tubuh Ketiga* itu dibikin memang dengan niatan untuk—dari bagian tertentu dari *je.ja.l.an*, kita coba *zoom in*. begitu kita *zoom in*, barangkali harus lebih focus, lebih menyempitkan pandangan, focus. Itu kemudian ada Indramayu di sana, yang terlihat sebagai satu daerah. Tapi sebenarnya, motivasinya, kenapa kemudian *zoom in* dan focus, itu memang sebenarnya mau mencari substansi soal lebih jauh—dari substansi isu dari *Je.ja.l.an*. [...] Ini coba dibaca, diteliti, dipelajari lebih jauh, esensi dari isu tertentu. Dalam hal ini soal pertemuan kebudayaan. Dan sikap macam apa yang berlangsung, yang diambil orang-orang ketika menghadapi pertemuan-pertemuan kebudayaan? Pertemuan masa lalu-masa depan-masa kini misalnya; apa yang dilakukan? dan apa yang kemudian menarik dari sana? Apa yang produktif? Kami kan melihat misalnya ada sikap yang reaksioner yang menolak pengaruh, menolak pertemuan itu, sehingga menjadi keras. Entah yang disebut sebagai politik identitas, ada mentalisme, bla bla bla. Tapi ada sikap lain yang dalam hal ini sebagai seniman, aku dan teman-teman lebih melihat sikap yang lain ini sebagai satu sikap yang lebih produktif, terbuka, kreatif. [...] kemudian pertanyaannya adalah, apa yang bisa kita buat dari pertemuan ini? Dari percampuran ini? Apa yang bisa kita buat? Karena di *Tubuh Ketiga* itu, pertanyaan dasarnya bukan 'siapa kita? Siapa aku'. Menurut kami, pertanyaan itu sekarang sudah insignifikan. Tapi pertanyaannya, 'apa yang bisa kita ciptakan dengan ini semua, dengan situasi ini?'. Bukan berarti gak penting, pertanyaan 'siapa aku siapa kita'. Tapi yang lebih urgent adalah, apa yang bisa kita buat, apa yang bisa kita bikin? [...]

T: Dan kalau untuk prosesnya, tim Teater Garasi yang nanti juga ikut prosesnya—ya pemain-pemain dan juga tim kreatif semua pindah ke Indramayu...

Y: Ya, kami observasi. Skemanya begitulah. Ada observasi, kemudian diskusi. Dari observasi-diskusi tadi nanti ada improvisasi. Dari improvisasi, didiskusikan lagi. Dari

serangkaian improvisasi itu kita bikin—kita registrasikan, kita kodefikasi; kita bikin kode-kode. Dari kode-kode itu kemudian baru disusun komposisi. Komposisi itulah yang kemudian disebut karya pertunjukan.

T: Prosesnya berapa lama?

Y: Enam bulan. Itu dari april. Tapi tidak kontinyu. Jadi observasi, diskusi, break, workshop, improvisasi, diskusi, break.

T: Dan kerjasama juga dengan seniman-seniman dari Indramayu?

Y: Ya, dua orang. Wangi Indria dan gitarisnya. Wangi Indria itu seniman tradisi, meskipun tradisi juga—invensi, sesungguhnya. Seniman tarling dangdutnya itu, yang seringkali direndahkan tapi kami justru melihat sikap kreatif yang asik, yang merayakan pertemuan, merayakan perubahan.

T: Itu temanya yang “di antaranya“ ya?

Y: Ya.

T: Itu juga suatu tema yang sudah lama ada di Teater Garasi, misalnya di *Waktu Batu*, itu juga suatu transisi...

Y: Transisi. Cuma beda angle ya, beda stressing. Kalau dulu kan lebih—apa sih transisi itu? Apa yang dimunculkan oleh transisi itu, dan lebih—lebih identitas, pertanyaannya kemudian, yang di *Waktu Batu*. Isu yang digeluti: identitas. Kalau di *Je.ja.l.an* kan lebih kenyataan-kenyataan hari ini. Atau pertemuan-pertemuan hari ini, situasi pertemuan hari ini. Di *Tubuh Ketiga*, suatu posisi yang oke adalah merayakan di sini, kekinian, pertemuan. Dirayakan dengan satu sikap kreatif. Jadi ya... isu lama dalam arti isu soal pertemuan kultural, perpindahan, transisi, tapi fokusnya, *anglanya* beda.

T: Boleh saya minta kamu untuk cerita sedikit tentang konsep di antaranya? Apa itu?

Y: Kamu sudah baca blog-nya?

T: Sudah, sedikit

Y: Nah di sana ada banyak tuh. Buat aku, kalau mau diceritakan secara ringkas / sederhana, di antara itu suatu situasi yang tercipta ketika bertemunya hal-hal. Bertemunya kebudayaan, bertemunya—katakanlah yang disebut sebagai asli, asing, baru, lama. Dan senyatanya, dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, dalam kehidupan subjek, hal-hal nggak pernah tunggal, waktu nggak pernah tunggal. Nah yang terjadi sesungguhnya kan sesuatu di antara; in between. Ya di antara itu memang situasi, suatu space, suatu ruang tempat negosiasi hal-hal itu; kebudayaan-kebudayaan, waktu. Dan sesungguhnya kemudian situasi di antara itu adalah kenyataan. Kenyataan itu sendiri. Yang disebut sebagai kenyataan itu kan, seringkali ketika orang mencoba merumuskan dirinya atau merumuskan kenyataan, orang kan sering berpegang pada kenyataan yang lewat, atau kenyataan yang diidealkan. Tapi kenyataan itu sendiri, adalah di antara; di antara yang lewat, di antara yang dibayangkan atau diidealkan. Dia berada di sana. Kalau dalam konteks cultural, dia juga berada di sana. Apakah Indonesia? Indonesia itu ya di antara sekian banyak. Apakah subjek? Subjek itu ya di antara sekian banyak teks, sekian banyak hal. Situasi di antara adalah itu. Adalah space, yang didiami, yang ditinggali oleh seseorang sesungguhnya, atau sekomunitas. Space cultural, space makna. Aku suka. Itu kami pinjam dari Baba, Homi Bhabha, istilah 3rd reality, 3rd space, itu kami pinja. Dan dia metafor, dia bukan definisi; dia metafora. Karena yang dirujuk oleh istilah itu selalu bergerak kan. Karena pertemuan-pertemuan terus berlangsung, negosiasi terus berlangsung, jadi selalu bergerak. Tetapi adanya istilah itu, adanya metafora itu, membuat kita jadi tidak terjebak di dualisme asli dan asing, kini dan esok. Dualism itu yang ditolak kan. Karena dualisme itu yang memiskinkan, yang mereduksi kekayaan kenyataan. Kalo ktia ngomongin identitas, akan terlalu sempit, akan terlalu miskin ketika ngomong asli dan asing. Iya toh? Karena sebenarnya, ini dari percampuran, pertemuan banyak hal 3rd reality ya in between space, metafora itu. In between artinya, di antara ini dia juga metafora. Artinya dia bukan definisi; dia tidak sedang menunjuk satu kenyataan fix, satu objek. Tapi satu situasi yang terus bergerak juga; abstrak ya?

[...]

Translation by the author

Yudi: [...] The analogy of *Tubuh Ketiga* [...] is like *zooming in* from *je.ja.l.an*; *je.ja.l.an* is a kind of scenery. On the road, for instance, there is expansion, scenery, there are many events [happening at the same time]. *Tubuh Ketiga* was intended to be created like this— we tried to *zoom in* from certain parts of *je.ja.l.an*. When we *zoom in* we perhaps have to focus more, narrow our viewpoints. So here is Indramayu over there which looks like one district. But actually the motivation for *zooming in* and focusing is to find out more about the substance matter— the substance [raised in] issues of *je.ja.l.an*. We tried to read, research, and learn more about these issues, [about] the essence of a particular issue. Amongst those is the issue of the meeting of cultures and [the question of] what kind of attitude persists [and] is taken on by the people when facing meetings of culture. The meeting of past, present and future for example: what do we do? And what is interesting about this? What is productive? We see for example that there is a reactionary attitude that refuses the influence, refuses the meeting, so that it hardens. Whether this is the so-called identity politics, mentalism... bla bla bla. But there's another attitude in this respect [for me] as an artist. My friends and I see this attitude as an attitude that is more productive, open, creative. The question is then, what can we make of this meeting and mixture? What can we do/create? The basic question in *Tubuh Ketiga* is not “Who are we? Who am I?” In our opinion this question is insignificant at the moment. But [we are interested in] the question “What can we create from all this, within this situation?” This doesn't mean that the question of “Who am I, who are we?” is not of importance. But “what can we create?” is the more urgent question.

T: And for the [creative] process the actors and the creative team of Teater Garasi all moved to Indramayu?

Y: Yes, we observed. First observation, then discussion. After the observation and discussion came the improvisation. After the improvisation we discussed again. From a series of improvisations we created— we registered, we coded, we created codes. From these codes we then arranged a composition. This composition is the performance.

T: How long lasted the process in total?

Y: Six months. It began in April but wasn't a continuous process. Observation, discussion, break, workshop, improvisation, discussion, break.

T: And did you also work together with artists from Indramayu?

Y: Yes, two people. Wangi Indria and the guitarist. Wangi Indria is a traditional artist, although tradition actually is also invention. *Tarling dangdut* artists are often humiliated but we actually saw a cool, creative attitude that celebrates the meeting and the change.

T: Is this the theme of "the In-between"?

Y: Yes.

T: This is actually a long-standing theme for Teater Garasi. For example in the performance *Waktu Batu* there is also a transition...

Y: Transition. Just from a different angle. Before it was more like— what is this transition? What [kinds of issues are] raised by this transition and more— more about identity. So this was the question in *Waktu Batu*. The issue we were most involved with was identity. For *je.ja.l.an* it was more about today's realities— or today's meetings, the current situation of meetings. Celebrated with a single creative attitude. So yeah... the issue of cultural meeting/coming together, transition is old but the focus/the angle is different.

T: Can I ask you to tell me a little bit more about the concept of "the In-Between". What is that?

Y: Have you read the blog, yet?

T: Yes, some of it.

Y: Well, there you can find a lot of information. For me, telling you this in a brief and simple way, the in-between is a situation created when things converge/meet. The convergence of culture, the convergence of the native, foreign, new, old. And actually, in everyday life, in the subject life, things never are singular, time is never singular. Well, actually it is something

that happens in the in-between. The in-between is essentially a situation, a space to negotiate these issues. Culture, time. And actually then the situation of the in-between is reality. [...] In a cultural context this [space] also exists. How about Indonesia? Indonesia is in-between these many things. How about the subject? The subject is between many texts, many things. This is the state or situation of the in-between. There is space which is occupied, inhabited by a real person or community. Cultural space, the space of meaning and purpose. Reality itself. I like this. We borrowed the idea from Bhabha, Homi Bhabha, we borrowed the term 3rd reality, 3rd space. This is a metaphor not a definition, it is a metaphor. Because what is referred to as this term is always moving. Due to continued convergences and negotiations it is always moving. But the existence of this term, the existence of this metaphor doesn't trap us in this dualism of native and foreign, now and then.

This dualism should be avoided because this dualism is impoverished; it reduces the wealth of reality. When we discuss identity, it will be too narrow and too poor if we talk about native and foreign. [...] Because actually this metaphor of the 3rd reality is created from a mixture and convergence of many things in the in-between space. In-between is also a metaphor. It means it is not a definition, it does not point towards a fixed reality, one object, but it is a situation that always moves and changes. This is [an] abstract [concept], don't you think? [...]