

Performances of the post-New Order

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Date: 14 November 2005

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Abstract

Performances of the post-New Order explores the ways performances staged in Indonesia since 1998 have made sense of, and contested, the political and social realities of their time. Investigating both performances staged in conventional theatres and those staged in the streets, the thesis looks at the ways these performances have told the story of Indonesia's post-New Order or 'reformasi' era. The thesis contends that performance - which is essentially temporal and necessitates multiple interpretations - is an ideal site for the investigation of reformasi, which has similarly tenuous, contested, evolving and unstable meanings.

Performances of the post-New Order is an inter-disciplinary project. It comprises four inter-related but separate chapters, each of which is informed by its own theoretical approach, and engages with a different aspect of reformasi. This structure reflects both the tensions inherent in inter-disciplinary work and the need to tell several different stories in order to capture the complexities of the reformasi era.

An important aspect of reformasi has been the implementation of regional autonomy across Indonesia. The first chapter of the thesis looks, therefore, at the ways in which theatre performances and events in Sumatra, Sulawesi and Java have attempted to re-articulate the relationship between regional and national identities. Case studies used in this chapter describe the ways theatre groups have taken advantage of greater political space in which to re-imagine cultural identity and their relationship with the political 'centre'.

Violence - in different ways - has been a constant feature of both the New Order and the reformasi eras. Representations of violence and of distressed bodies have been a prominent feature of Indonesian theatre since the 1990s. The second chapter of the thesis discusses representations of violence and physical pain and investigates to what extent it is possible to represent violence without reproducing it. It also draws attention to the fact that representations of violence in contemporary theatre almost always privilege the male body as the site of suffering, usually rendering women invisible.

The third chapter picks up on the theme of women's invisibility, and looks at representations of gender in post-New Order era theatre. This chapter investigates the ways in which gender ideologies are both reproduced and contested in performance, against a background of greater interest in gender issues in the 'reformasi' era.

While the first three chapters draw on case studies of theatre performances staged in conventional theatre venues, the final chapter engages with the idea of performativity in its much broader sense. Looking at one particular site, the

bunderan Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta, this chapter engages with questions about public space, democratic participation, and the 'performance' of political processes and events. It uses the *bunderan* Hotel Indonesia as a site through which to describe some of the complexities of the reformasi era and to provide historical context for contemporary uncertainties.

All four chapters of the thesis in different ways expose the often illusory and ambiguous natures of post-New Order 'Indonesia'.

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All these acknowledgements are made with the usual caveat that I bear responsibility for any shortcomings in this thesis. Translations and photographs, unless otherwise marked, are my own.

Lauren Bain
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Performances of the post-New Order

Introduction

Disiplin Mengantar Reformasi: Untuk Hari Esok Yang Lebih Baik
(Discipline brings *Reformasi*: For a Better Tomorrow)

Government Billboard, Salemba, Jakarta 2001

Reformasi: Mumet Banget
(*Reformasi*: Shocking Headache)

Text from an artwork decorating a kampung entrance way, Magelang, Central Java, 2002

Reformasi Total Sekarang Juga! Jika badan Anda terasa letih dan lesu, kurang bersemangat, jantung berdebar, sering keluar keringat dingin, pencernaan tidak beres, kepala sering sakit dan pusing-pusing sedangkan berat tubuh Anda terus bertambah, itu berarti Anda harus melakukan 'Reformasi Total' terhadap tubuh dan kesehatan Anda... (Total Reformasi Now Too! If your body feels tired and weak, lethargic, if you have heart palpitations, often break out in cold sweats, have indigestion, frequently suffer headaches and dizziness, and you're constantly gaining weight, you must undertake 'Total Reformasi' for your body and health...)

Advertisement for 'Impressions Body Care Centre' *Kompas* 13 March 2001

'*Reformasi*'¹ - and what it might mean for theatre cultures in Indonesia - was the starting point for this thesis. At the end of May in 1998, as banners unfurled on the roof of the parliament building in Jakarta, and as artists staged week-long performances at the makeshift *panggung bongkar* (stage of deconstruction) in the car park at the Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) arts centre, *reformasi* seemed to be about euphoria, freedom, the opening up of space, the end of 32 years of authoritarian rule under Suharto's New Order.

But in the days, months and years that followed the fall of Suharto, *reformasi* became something much more complex. Disparate groups who had united to

¹ Following Marilyn Ivy (1995), I have used quotation marks around the word '*reformasi*' in the first instance to indicate that the term is unstable and contested, a constructed concept laden with complex imaginative dimensions. I will not use quotation marks around the term *reformasi* now that it has been marked.

bring about Suharto's downfall no longer had a common enemy, nor did they have a unified vision of what *reformasi* actually meant. Some groups, such as the *Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa* (Students' Executive Body, or BEM), protagonists in the demonstrations leading up to the fall of Suharto, had identified clearly what they saw as the core principles of *reformasi*. For BEM, *reformasi* meant reforming the legal system; eradicating corruption, cronyism and nepotism; bringing ex-president Suharto and his cronies to justice; amending the 1945 constitution; abolishing the dual-function of the TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* - Indonesian National Armed Forces) and *Polri* (Indonesian Police); and implementing regional autonomy. By early 2001, they had amended this list to include reforming the education system, rejecting the militarization of the civil service, and promoting economic recovery (*Kompas* 21 February 2001).

But while groups like BEM sought to maintain public focus on what they saw as the core 'principles' of *reformasi*, others appeared to lose interest in pressing for a longer term reform agenda, perhaps feeling their mission was accomplished with the fall of Suharto and subsequent general elections in 1999. The usually conservative Jakarta stockbrokers, for example, who had joined demonstrations in May 1998 and had called on 19 May for Suharto to step down, had participated in the *reformasi* movement because they recognized that the New Order was no longer good for business. They also recognized, however, that continuing political instability was likely to prolong the economic crisis, and therefore scaled back their involvement in *reformasi* once Suharto had stood down.

Other groups and individuals - ranging from women's NGOs to groups with fundamentalist Islamic agendas - were empowered and emboldened by the new freedoms of *reformasi*. Sensing opportunity in the New Order's apparent demise, they pursued their own political agendas, sometimes continuing to engage with the broader aims of the *reformasi* movement(s), sometimes not.

To complicate matters further, those with keen instincts for self-preservation (including figures formerly associated with the New Order), outwardly adopted some of the codes of *reformasi* in hurried attempts at self-reinvention. By 2001, the language of *reformasi* had been appropriated for use in a variety of contexts ranging from advertising ('*Reformasi* Total for a slim, new you') to New Order-style government propaganda ('Discipline brings *Reformasi*: For a Better Tomorrow'), while Golkar party banners urged citizens to '*Sukseskan Reformasi*' ('Make *Reformasi* a Success')² and a Yogyakarta restaurant boasted of a secret recipe for '*Bakso Reformasi*'.

In July 2000, the late activist Munir, founder of the Private Commission on Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras), reflected on two years of *reformasi*:

Formally speaking the New Order is finished. But it survives in many prominent individuals and in values. Everywhere we see people talking about *reformasi* but protecting the New Order. I don't think there is a single political party without New Order figures in it. The New Order vision remains strong within them through their views on ideology and on society....Not just the New Order has died these last two years (even though it survives in some forms), but the pro-democracy forces experienced the same problem. They have become a part of the new political system, while intensive opposition promoting democratisation outside the system is exercised by these newer groups. The new groups have a much better perspective on democracy than those who just focused on Suharto. (Munir 2000).

While this thesis attempts to draw attention to positive changes that have taken place since the fall of Suharto, at the same time, following Munir's comment above, it acknowledges continuities between the New Order and *reformasi* eras. Rather than celebrate or romanticize *reformasi*, this thesis characterises

² The word '*sukseskan*' (to make something a success) is deeply rooted in the linguistic style of the New Order, as Pemberton (1994) has pointed out.

reformasi as a complex contest over the definition of what the post New Order era might be.

This thesis will often refer to something called the '*reformasi* era'. For practical purposes, the '*reformasi* era' is loosely defined as the period from the fall of Suharto in May 1998³ until the 2004 general elections, although the bulk of the performances discussed in this thesis were staged in the period 2000-2002. In reality, the parameters of 'the *reformasi* era' are undefined and contested, and whether or not *reformasi* has a 'finishing point' depends on your perspective. *Reformasi* has meant a range of different things to different people: some of the things *reformasi* activists were working towards have been achieved, many have not. Reform in Indonesia - whether or not it is called *reformasi* - remains a long term project, the direction of which will continue to be contested for a long time.

Numerous observers - mostly working from political science methodologies - have documented in substantial detail the processes of political and social change that have taken place in Indonesia since 1998 (see for example O'Rourke 2002; Van Dijk 2002; and the contributions in edited volumes such as Budiman, Hatley and Kingsbury 1999). These writers have investigated a range of aspects of *reformasi*, and between them have mapped out detailed accounts of the events surrounding the fall of Suharto, including the economic crisis, political instability and middle-class opposition that preceded it. Other analyses have addressed specific aspects of *reformasi* such as the ongoing attempts to rebuild Indonesia's economy (Hill 1999), the gradual processes of constitutional and legislative reform (Lindsey 1999) and the implementation of regional autonomy (Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Kingsbury and Aveling 2003). This thesis draws upon but does not attempt to emulate this type of work.

³ While taking the May 1998 fall of Suharto as the starting point of the '*reformasi* era', most observers agree that the process that led to Suharto's fall started with either the 1994 bannings of the publications *Tempo*, *Detik* and *Editor* or with the 1996 raid on PDI headquarters, both events that mobilized unprecedented middle-class opposition to the New Order state (Sen and Hill 2000: 6).

Instead, through its focus on less obvious, 'peripheral' modes of political communication, *Performances of the post-New Order* focuses on aspects of *reformasi* which while less 'concrete' provide different kinds of insights into political culture and change, as well as into the sorts of post-New Order futures that are being and have been imagined (c/f Anderson 1990; Heryanto and Mandal 2004).

Artists and *reformasi*

The fact that the New Order state attempted to control tightly what was published, performed and exhibited by artists has been widely documented (Hatley 1994b; Bodden 1997a; Sen and Hill 2000; Hooker and Dick 1993). Suharto's New Order - like the Sukarno regime before it - had a strong interest in controlling and using the arts for ideological purposes. Not only did it use culture and the arts to pursue its specific agendas of economic development and national unity, the New Order state also developed censorship regimes designed to curtail artistic expression. As a result, artists often had to deploy a range of subversive tactics - including understatement, oblique expression, veiled meanings and analogy - in order for their work to survive (Hatley 1990b and 1994b; Rafferty 1989b:19). Despite state attempts to control the arts, then, artists' use of subversive tactics led to 'much political comment appearing in cultural guise: in journalistic essays, drama, film, poetry, fiction and popular music' (Hooker and Dick 1993:2). In an environment in which it was not possible to express political critique openly, the arts became an important site of and tool for resistance to state power.

The fall of the New Order saw a substantial loosening of state controls on artistic and popular expression. Artists benefited from *reformasi* in a number of ways: they no longer had to seek permits to stage performances or events; they could critique political life more openly; they could demand greater transparency and accountability from government funded arts and cultural institutions; and they had relative freedom from the surveillance and

intimidation that had restricted some of their work in the late New Order period.⁴

But although greater freedom of expression presented artists with more diverse possibilities, it also brought with it new challenges. While during the New Order, theatre was arguably one of the few mediums in which popular political critique was possible, this role was diminished in the *reformasi* era. The media, on which state controls had also been lifted, offered those with a message a much wider audience than could ever be reached through conventional theatre. Newly established political parties, now able to participate in democratic contest, provided another avenue for criticism, as did flourishing NGOs. This opening up of space led some artists to express confusion and frustration about what they perceived to be a loss of relevance and purpose. While during the New Order, the authoritarian state had been an obvious and necessary target for political critique, the more diffuse politics of the *reformasi* era required theatre to pursue alternative strategies in order to retain its relevance. As the writer Afrizal Malna put it, the end of the New Order was, for many artists, 'like the electricity had suddenly been turned off.' (Interview 8 August 2000). The loss of purpose articulated by Malna and by other Indonesian artists has parallels in other countries' experiences of political transition. As Reinelt points out,

South Africa's theatre (during apartheid) has had a very clear social and cultural function, and yet now it is also a theatre suspended in nonbeing before the formation of new social practice. It is not clear what kind of theatre will follow apartheid – it is in the making, indeterminate, full of possibility and danger. (1996:7)

⁴ An example of surveillance and intimidation of artists and intellectuals in the late New Order was the way in which security personnel searched around 200 people who attended a discussion at Teater Utan Kayu in March 1998. Several among those searched by security personnel had books confiscated (*Kompas* 1 April 1998). O'Rourke (2002) also provides a good overview of the way the New Order mobilized surveillance and intimidation against activists in the period leading up to the fall of Suharto.

The process of re-negotiating and re-defining the boundaries of 'the political' is not a project unique to artists in Indonesia. Just as artists in Indonesia expressed a 'loss of purpose' following the fall of the New Order, so too 'political theatre'⁵ in the West (with its roots in Marxist and leftist critique) has undergone a process of radical soul-searching in postmodern times. As Kershaw writes,

...now we have the politics of representation, the politics of the body, identity politics, sexual politics, cultural politics... In the aftermath of the theoretical explosion it becomes no longer credible to box off 'political theatre' as a separate category, because in one way or another all performance and theatre can be seen to be involved in discourses of power, to be in some sense engaged with the political. (1999:63)

While in the past it may have been possible to assume - as Brecht, Boal and Piscator did - that there were 'truths' about political 'reality', postmodernism's deconstruction of grand narratives and universal truths has meant that the kinds of strategies used by earlier generations of radical theatre practitioners have, in many cases, lost their efficacy. In this context, subjectivity and identity - particularly in relation to gender, race, class and sexuality - become equally important aspects of the way we understand 'the political' in theatre and performance practice (Diamond 1996; Reinelt 1996). In post-New Order Indonesia, theatre artists likewise engage with a political landscape in which power has become more dispersed, in which identity politics become a new focus of attention and in which theatrical strategies, therefore, have to be re-examined.

Performances of the post-New Order does not attempt to quantify the 'differences' between theatre practice in the New Order and *reformasi* eras. To do so would imply that the differences between the two eras were clear-cut and

⁵ The wide range of scholarship on 'political theatre' and theatre's potential as a tool for political change includes Auslander 1997; Case and Reinelt 1993; Holderness 1992; Itzin 1980; Kershaw 1992 and 1999; Kees Epskamp 1989.

uncontested, and that there were no continuities across time. While artists may have felt 'like the electricity had suddenly been turned off' in the days following the fall of Suharto, changes in theatre culture would be more gradual, their origins not easy to pin-point. Like theatre in post-apartheid South Africa, theatre in Indonesia's *reformasi* era was in a transition period that seemed full of 'possibilities and dangers'. Rather than documenting a sudden and measurable change in theatre in the post-New Order, this thesis therefore looks at a range of performances staged around Indonesia since 1998, and investigates the complex ways in which they engage, whether deliberately or not, with the social and political issues of their time.

Although this thesis focuses mostly on the work of artists who aligned themselves in various ways with the *reformasi* movement (or with aspects of it), I have tried to avoid characterizing the Indonesian arts community as an homogenous whole that unambiguously supported *reformasi* from its activist beginnings. Shortly after her release from prison in May 1998, where she had been incarcerated after being charged with 'organising a political gathering' and 'spreading hatred', high profile theatre artist and activist Ratna Sarumpaet spoke out strongly about what she saw as her fellow artists' lack of involvement in the *reformasi* movement,

I question the role of artists (in the *reformasi* activities). During the transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto, artists were articulate. But it's different now. Maybe because they had already been co-opted by the government. Of course there are exceptions like Goenawan Mohamad, Sitok Srengenge, Agus Wage and several other artists of Teater Utan Kayu.Indonesian artists did nothing to protest my arrest, except the artists of Teater Utan Kayu. I wonder why they did not play their role in the reform activities?.... Why did they react only after somebody was dead? After the death (of several students) they read poems. They are busy now only after the efforts to gain reform has started to bear fruits. I am really sad.....in general artworks do not have

the spirit of struggle. I can see how strongly Suharto's regime has co-opted the artists. It has penetrated their brains so that they are afraid their work would offend the government. (Ratna Sarumpaet cited in *The Jakarta Post* 31 May 1998)

As Sarumpaet's statement suggests, while many in the arts community were clearly in the *reformasi* camp, there were also those who had either vested interests in the status quo (for example, those who held positions in government funded or government related cultural organisations), or who took an apathetic and self-proclaimed 'apolitical' position. Reflecting the range of political positions taken by Indonesian theatre artists, some of the works of theatre described in this thesis have been chosen as case studies specifically because of the ways they participate in the re-production of New Order discourses.

Writing about theatre in Indonesia

While a lot is said about theatre in Indonesia - in both formal and informal discussions - relatively little is published. Coverage of theatre performances in the popular media is limited, and while some mass circulation publications (most notably *Tempo* magazine, *Koran Tempo* and *Kompas*) have attempted to improve the quality of debate and critique of the arts in Indonesia, most media reporting tends to describe performances in basic detail rather than offer any critical interpretation. As the playwright and director Putu Wijaya has noted, 'Indonesian modern theatre is assisted very little by critics, in fact it tends to be betrayed (*dikhianati*) by critics' (Wijaya 2003). Cognisant of the deficit of scholarship and writing about contemporary theatre and performance, a number of artists and groups have attempted to create new forums for critical debate about theatre, with mixed results.⁶ The Yogyakarta-based monthly arts magazine, *Gong*, while focusing primarily on the traditional arts is another

⁶ Examples include Teater Garasi's impressive journal, *Le Bur*; the somewhat sporadically published journal published by Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia (MSPI - the Society for Indonesian Performing Arts); and patchy publications by arts institutions, such as Institut Seni Indonesia's *Ekspresi*. In the last five years there has also been a proliferation of short-lived cultural 'bulletins', some of which have sought nostalgically to re-create the underground caché of similar publications produced before the fall of the New Order. These have included Teater Kami's *Djalan Poelang*, and Yogya-based Kedai Kebun's *Halte!* bulletin.

alternative source of commentary. Some theatre groups, aware of the lack of material on the public record about their work, have also produced self-published books that in different ways document their development and history (Sugiyati, Sunjaya and Anirun 1993; Sabur 2004; Janarto 1997). Where possible, this thesis engages with a range of published sources in Indonesian, as well as with comments made by artists in interviews and in formal and informal discussions.

Jakob Sumarjo's *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia* ('Development of Indonesian Modern Theatre and Dramatic Literature', hereafter *Perkembangan Teater*) (1992) remains one of the few attempts to document the history of contemporary theatre in Indonesia. With a strong focus on numerical data, and detailed descriptions of who did what, where and when, *Perkembangan Teater* mostly comprises quantitative data and descriptions of events, rather than detailed analysis or interpretation. Through the data collected, however, *Perkembangan Teater* does attempt to tell the story of the development of modern theatre, from its roots in the late colonial era, through the post-independence era of western realism, to the emergence of Rendra, Teguh Karya, Putu Wijaya and Arifin C Noer in the late 1960s and 1970s. It also discusses the influence on modern theatre of traditional and folk theatre forms and the impact of the establishment of government-funded arts institutions such as TIM in the late 1960s. Although published in 1992, Sumarjo's history finishes in the early 1980s.

The emergence of the playwrights and directors Rendra, Putu Wijaya, Teguh Karya and Arifin C Noer sparked a resurgence of interest in 'Indonesian theatre' from both Indonesian and non-Indonesian critics. In what remains one of the most cogent pieces of writing on the theatre of this era, Goenawan Mohamad defended these artists against criticism that their work lacked cohesion, and familiar dramatic structure. On the contrary, Goenawan argued, these artists' attempts to incorporate traditional elements into contemporary

work would revitalize Indonesian theatre, resonate more effectively with young, educated, urban audiences, and present new creative possibilities for the future of Indonesian performing arts (Mohamad 1973). From this point on, building indirectly on nationalist ideas about the importance of fostering 'national culture', theatre discourse in Indonesia began to focus on the ways contemporary theatre might incorporate elements of traditional performance, in doing so becoming more 'Indonesian' and less derivative of 'Western' culture. Several observers picked up on playwright Putu Wijaya's 1985 description of this kind of work as *tradisi baru* (new tradition), and subsequently characterised *tradisi baru* as part of the project of defining Indonesian identity in the postcolonial era (Rafferty 1989; Gillitt Asmara 1995).

Questions about how theatre in Indonesia related to the political and social context of the New Order have been a major preoccupation for both critics and practitioners over the last thirty years. It would be difficult to have conceived a project like *Performances of the post-New Order* without this body of scholarship as a starting point. In her extensive work on theatre in Yogyakarta and Jakarta during the New Order, Hatley has discussed the dynamic between folk theatre, such as *ketoprak*, and contemporary forms, and has investigated the ways in which theatre can shed light on the social context in which it is produced. She has also shown how theatre became a site of resistance to New Order norms (1990b and 1994b), and how theatre participated in 'constructions of tradition' during this period (1993). Hatley's essays on the ways in which theatre reproduces gender ideologies (1990a) and on women's participation in theatre (1994a) remain among the very few scholarly works that look at the gender politics of Indonesian theatre. This thesis uses these two essays as a starting point for a more detailed account of the ways in which gender politics are manifested in the work of several theatre groups in the post-New Order era.

Another significant international scholar of New Order era theatre, Michael Bodden, has likewise written about the ways theatre was used as a tool for

political resistance, both by workers' theatre groups (1997a) and by popular middle class groups such as Teater Koma (1997b). More recently, Bodden has looked at the relationship between regional theatre culture in South Sulawesi and what he terms 'national' theatre culture (2001), and at the ways in which the work of the influential (but now defunct) group Teater Sae adopted various 'postmodern' features as part of its response to the late New Order political and social environment (2002). Bodden's work, like Hatley's, has provided a starting point from which this thesis has developed ideas about theatre in the post-New Order period.

Several Indonesian writers have made substantial contributions to the literature on contemporary theatre over the last ten years. In his book *Teater dan Ideologi Politik* ('Theatre and Political Ideology') (2001) Radha Panca Dahana investigated the work of Teater Koma, Teater Mandiri and Teater Sae, all of which were active in Jakarta in the late New Order era, and attempted to demonstrate the extent to which their works reproduced or challenged state discourse. Working from a semiotic approach to interpreting theatrical imagery, there are a number of problematic aspects to Dahana's work including its failure to acknowledge that works of theatre inevitably have multiple interpretations. Despite its shortcomings, Dahana's book was, however, an important contribution to understanding theatre and politics in Indonesia. Afrizal Malna, who was himself the main writer for Teater Sae, has been another of Indonesia's most prolific writers on theatre since the fall of the New Order. His writing, which has been published mostly in the Jakarta daily *Kompas*, has regularly provided insightful commentary on new performance works and performance events, ranging from Teater Garasi's *Waktu Batu* (Malna 2003) to the 1999 Makassar Arts Forum (Malna 1999) (both projects that are discussed in detail in this thesis). In a way that relates individual events to the broader political context of the post-New Order. Finally, there are a number of Indonesian writers on theatre who have focused on documenting theatre cultures in particular regions: Fahmi Syariff and Yudhistira Sukatantya,

for example, have both written extensively on theatre in Makassar and South Sulawesi, the history of which is well-documented through their conference papers and articles. In particular, Sukatanya's book *Profil 5 Teater Di Makassar* ('Profile of 5 Makassar Theatres', 2002) usefully documents the history of five contemporary theatre groups in Makassar. In Bandung, reflecting the active theatre scene there, local newspapers often publish extended reviews and essays on theatre. Among the most prolific essayists and reviewers, Saini KM has written extensively about older generation theatre groups like Studiklub Teater Bandung, while Benny Yohanes has written a number of thoughtful pieces on the work of Teater Payung Hitam and other younger generation groups.

Relating to existing scholarship

Performances of the post-New Order builds on existing scholarship - both about performance in Indonesia and about Indonesian politics and culture more generally - in several important ways. As an exploration of theatre and performance in the *reformasi* era, it is unique. There is little scholarship yet on theatre in the post-New Order era, and there have been no published studies that look at such a range of contemporary performances from different parts of Indonesia during this period, to see what they might tell us about the new kinds of political and social dynamics that have emerged since the fall of Suharto.

Performances of the post-New Order explores the work of some established artists (including Teater Koma, Teater Mandiri, and Studiklub Teater Bandung) about whom much has been written in the past. But it also looks at the work of a younger generation of Indonesian artists whose work has not been widely (if ever) written about, including Teater Garasi, Teater Payung Hitam, Teater Kami, Teater Noktah, Rombongan Sandiwara Petta Puang, Komunitas Teater Perempuan Randa nTovea and Teater Perempuan Sumatera Utara. Most of the artists working in these groups were born after the New Order came to power: they are the generation of artists who will create the narratives of the post-New

Order. Understanding the ways that their generation engages with the political and social issues of their time is critical to understanding *reformasi*. While there have been some short pieces published on the work of these groups, none have been the subject of sustained scholarly research.

The thesis is also set apart from existing literature by its inter-disciplinary approach, which has been developed as an attempt to reflect better the complexities of post-New Order political culture. In drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives - from theatre and Indonesian studies as well as from disciplines including anthropology, women's studies and architecture - *Performances of the post-New Order* explores the ways in which the conceptual frames of gender, violence and regional/ national identity might assist us to understand better the dynamic between performance and its context. This represents a significant departure from scholarship on theatre in the New Order period, which tended to emphasise, appropriately, the ways in which theatre resisted *state* power.

This thesis re-evaluates what is meant by 'Indonesian theatre' and who participates in it. Recognising that most existing scholarship and commentary about 'Indonesian theatre' is actually usually about theatre produced by men in the major urban centres on the island of Java, *Performances of the post-New Order* develops detailed case studies of performances created by artists from regional areas as well as by women. While there has been some scholarship on gender in Indonesian theatre (Hatley 1990a and 1994a), it remains an area that has rarely been the subject of sustained scholarly analysis. Likewise, reflecting the prejudices of some Indonesian artists themselves, and reinforced by a system of arts patronage and legitimisation under the New Order that unquestionably privileged artists in the 'centre' (Derks 2002), contemporary theatre created in areas outside of Java has been rarely studied or documented.⁷

⁷ As noted above, there is a small amount of scholarship by non-Indonesians on contemporary theatre outside of Java, including an historical overview of the theatre scene in Makassar

One of this thesis' major contributions, therefore, is the way it positions questions about gender and regional theatre practice as central to its analysis of 'Indonesian theatre'.

One aspect of the thesis' theoretical approach that sets it apart from existing work on performance in Indonesia is the way it explores the notion of performativity, and in so doing looks at 'performance' in its much broader sense. Investigating performativity - and the ways in which events outside of formal theatre settings, such as demonstrations, draw on performative strategies - has been a major project for performance studies scholars in recent years (Kershaw 1999; Schechner 1993; Esherick and Wasserstrom 1990; Cohen-Cruz 1998). As Kershaw observes, while theatre becomes commodified and removed from some of its radical potential, *performance* has 'become ever more crucial in the great cultural, social and political changes of our times' (1999:1). In exploring the notion of performativity in the context of Indonesia's *reformasi* era, this thesis contributes to Indonesian studies a new understanding of the ways performance and politics might interact, and argues that reading performativity is critical to understanding political communication.

In summary, *Performances of the post-New Order* makes several new contributions to the field of Indonesian studies. It goes beyond the work of scholars who have focused on theatre in New Order Indonesia, by investigating the theatre and performance of a new era. In so doing it explores the work of a new generation of artists whose work has rarely been examined, and develops an inter-disciplinary approach in order to understand better the changed and more diffuse political dynamics of the *reformasi* era. It deliberately looks at case studies of performances from regional areas and by women artists to

(Bodden 2001) and an essay on the work of West Sumatran playwright Wisran Hadi (Hatley 1991). While in many regional theatre communities there are individuals who take on a role as local expert on their own region's theatre history (for example Yudhistira Sukatanya and Fahmi Syariff have both played this role in Makassar), it is rare for Indonesian writers from, say, Jakarta or Yogyakarta to write about theatre from outside their region. The one major exception to this is the Jakarta-based writer Afrizal Malna, who has written fairly extensively on theatre and cultural politics in South Sulawesi (see for example Malna 1999).

demonstrate how different kinds of political analysis might be necessary in contemporary times. Taking up a major theme of recent performance studies scholarship it also broadens the category of 'performance' and argues that performance is central to post-New Order political cultures. In various ways, therefore, this thesis contributes not only to existing scholarship on Indonesian theatre and performance, but also to work in a range of other fields including performance studies, women's studies and Indonesian politics. Each chapter will therefore introduce and engage with a range of other theory as appropriate to the questions under examination.

Structure, methodology, approach

Many of the ideas in *Performances of the post-New Order* originated during a five month internship I undertook from March to July 1998 at Gedung Kesenian Jakarta, one of two government-subsidised performing arts centres in Jakarta. A general curiosity in the arts scene in which I was then working, and the political changes of the time, sparked a desire to research and document more thoroughly the range of theatre practice that was taking place, and to investigate how it related to its political and social context. The case studies used in *Performances of the post-New Order* have been chosen from a vast range of performances that I saw during fieldwork in various parts of Indonesia from 2000 to 2002, and were chosen because they stood out as illuminating some of the key concerns of the *reformasi* era.

Performances of the post-New Order is an inter-disciplinary project. It comprises four inter-related but separate chapters, each of which is informed by its own theoretical approach, and engages with a different aspect of *reformasi*. This structure reflects both the tensions inherent in inter-disciplinary work and the need to tell several different stories in order to capture the complexities of the *reformasi* era. The central themes of each of the four chapters have been chosen carefully, in order to highlight contrasting aspects of *reformasi*.

An important aspect of *reformasi* has been the implementation of regional autonomy across Indonesia. The first chapter of the thesis looks, therefore, at the ways theatre performances and events in Sumatra, Sulawesi and Java have attempted to re-articulate the relationship between regional and national identities. Case studies used in this chapter describe the ways theatre groups have taken advantage of greater political space in which to re-imagine cultural identity and their relationship with the political 'centre'.

Violence - in different ways - has been an enduring characteristic of both the New Order and the *reformasi* eras. Representations of violence and of distressed bodies have been prominent in Indonesian theatre since the 1990s, and have been a particular feature of much politically engaged theatre in the lead up to and following the fall of the New Order. The second chapter of the thesis discusses representations of violence and physical pain and investigates to what extent it is possible to represent violence without reproducing it. It also draws attention to the fact that representations of violence in contemporary theatre almost always privilege the male body as the site of suffering, usually rendering women invisible.

The third chapter of the thesis picks up on the theme of women's invisibility, and looks at representations of gender in post-New Order era theatre. This chapter investigates the ways gender ideologies are both reproduced and contested in performance, against a background of greater interest in gender issues in the *reformasi* era.

While the first three chapters draw on case studies of recent performances, the final chapter engages with the idea of performativity in its much broader sense. Looking at one site, the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle (hereafter the *bunderan* Hotel Indonesia or *bunderan HI*) in Jakarta, this chapter engages with questions about public space, democratic participation, and the 'performance' of political processes and events. It uses the *bunderan* Hotel Indonesia as a site through

which to describe the complexities of the *reformasi* era and to provide historical context for contemporary uncertainties.

Performances of the post-New Order does not claim to be a comprehensive survey of *reformasi* era theatre, nor does it claim political neutrality. Documenting all theatre production that took place during the *reformasi* era would be impossible. Likewise, it would be naïve to suggest that this project could be politically neutral. *Performances of the post-New Order* is instead explicitly (although not blindly) sympathetic both to the opposition movement that brought about the fall of the New Order and to longer term efforts for democratisation, de-militarisation, economic recovery, justice and accommodation of cultural and religious plurality in Indonesia.

Performances of the post-New Order begins the project of investigating the ways 'post-New Order Indonesia' is imagined, defined and contested.

Performing regional, national, 'Indonesian' identities



'Satu Cita-Cita, Satu Indonesia'
(One Aspiration, One Indonesia)
billboard, Yogyakarta 2002



'Lestari Budaya Daerah'
(Preserve Regional Culture)
street painting, Makassar 2002

One of the most important aspects of reform in the post-New Order era has been the implementation of *otonomi daerah* (regional autonomy). As several observers have noted, the devolution of power to the local level has been accompanied by 'new struggles for political and economic power' and by the emergence of 'novel forms of politics based on local identity.' (Aspinall and Fealy 2003:1; see also Ford 2003). Debates around decentralization - and its possible meanings for local, regional and national politics - have been intensified by the fact that it is taking place against the background of powerful discourses about national unity and a contested process of democratisation

The *otonomi daerah* legislation - known officially as laws 22 and 25 of 1999 - has been widely hailed as being one of the most important pieces of legislative and administrative reform implemented since the fall of the New Order. At the same time as being 'one of the most radical decentralization programs attempted anywhere in the world' (Aspinall and Fealy 2003:4), Indonesia's *otonomi daerah* legislation was implemented at a time when international attention on - and domestic anxiety about - the possible 'balkanisation' of the

archipelago was at its height.⁸ *Otonomi daerah* was an attempt both to respond to calls for greater control by local governments over local resources and to quell any further demands for independence from provinces such as Aceh, Papua, Riau and East Kalimantan.

This chapter investigates the ways in which new kinds of identity politics - precipitated in part by *otonomi daerah* and the new political spaces created by the fall of the New Order - might be manifested in theatre culture, in both the regions and the 'centre'. Throughout Indonesia's postcolonial history, theatre and the arts have been an important site for the expression and identification of what it might mean to be 'Indonesian'. In the context of post-New Order Indonesia, this is complicated by new forms of regional identity politics. As Michele Ford has argued, debates about identity politics 'have multiplied across Indonesia in the wake of the implementation of regional autonomy' (2003: 132). The ways regional theatre cultures express simultaneously a sense of 'Indonesian-ness' and 'regional-ness' may shed light, therefore, on the ongoing contest over post-New Order national identity.

This chapter looks at how theatre and theatre events (such as festivals) have both reflected and contested the narratives associated with decentralization and nationhood. It starts by providing an overview of what *otonomi daerah* has entailed, and the debates it has generated. As background to the case studies that follow, the chapter also looks at the way regional cultures were constructed and treated by New Order cultural policy. The first case study looks at the inaugural festival of Sumatran theatre, held in the Sumatran city of Jambi in November 2000. As well as discussing the festival itself, I will look at the work of Padang-based ensemble Teater Noktah, who presented their work *Tarik Balas* at the festival. The second case study looks briefly at attempts in the South Sulawesi capital of Makassar to revitalize local culture in the post-New

⁸ See for example *Kompas* 28 October 2001, which cites President Megawati's 2001 *Hari Sumpah Pemuda* speech in which she warned of the possibility of balkanisation, should the implementation of *reformasi* go wrong. For an alternative view, see Cribb (1999).

Order, and at Sulawesi's role in hosting several national level arts festivals. It then looks at a performance staged several times around Makassar for Indonesian Independence Day in 2002, by local group Rombongan Sandiwara Petta Puang. Finally, this chapter discusses a three year theatre project called *Waktu Batu*, devised by Yogyakarta group Teater Garasi, which used Javanese mythology and history as a starting point for an exploration of the themes of time, transition and identity. Although these case studies differ in a number of important ways, they all demonstrate the 'contested-ness' of identity politics at local, regional and national levels in the post-New Order period and, in a variety of ways, open up space for new kinds of identity formulations in the future.

What is *otonomi daerah*?

Aspinall and Fealy note that although the idea of regional autonomy had been raised at various stages in Indonesia's past, both Sukarno's Guided Democracy and the New Order 'were centralized, authoritarian regimes in which the authorities saw regionalism as a major threat to Indonesia's survival as a unitary state' (2003:2). When Laws 22 and 25 of 1999 came into force on 1 January 2001, they set out a new paradigm for the relationship between regional and central governments in Indonesia. They effectively ceded responsibility for most areas of government policy - with the notable exceptions of foreign policy, defence and security, monetary policy, legal and religious affairs and national planning functions - to the *kabupaten* (district) level. *Otonomi daerah* gave control of health, education, culture, labour, the environment, and natural resources to *kabupaten* governments across Indonesia. It also gave *kabupaten* the authority to elect and dismiss their own *bupati* (literally 'regent' or 'district ruler', who during the New Order were appointed by the central government), to organize their own local bureaucracies and to manage their own budgets. Importantly - especially for resource rich provinces - it also gave the regions a greater share of the revenue produced from within their borders.

The devolution of these powers to the *kabupaten* - rather than provincial level governments - was controversial. While supporters of devolution to the *kabupaten* level argued that it was more democratic, as it would lead to greater accountability at the local level, its detractors argued that devolution would exacerbate problems of governance and corruption. Many expressed a (seemingly well-founded) fear that *otonomi daerah* could lead to the widespread emergence of 'mini-Suhartos' at the local level (*Kompas* 14 May 2001). Media commentary regularly pointed out that the 'money politics' associated with national level politics in the past would merely be transplanted to the district level (*Kompas* 26 April 2001 and 3 May 2001). As *otonomi daerah* was being implemented, commentators warned that it was important to ensure that the failures of central government administration were not just transplanted to the regions. As one political analyst pleaded in an opinion piece for *Kompas*,

We should not allow history to repeat itself with the implementation of *otonomi daerah*, by making the prison (*penjara*) of Jakarta into the prison of Riau, Aceh or East Kalimantan. Jakarta's failures have had enough of an impact on our lives: we should never again repeat its mistakes.' (Piliang 2001)

To an extent, those who warned of increased corruption and graft at the local level appear to have been proven right. Sidney Jones, for example, has pointed to one case in which a *bupati* embezzled the entire budget of his *kabupaten* (Jones 2004). Local government officials have not only exploited their increased access to state revenue: there have, for example, been high profile cases in which local government officials have been involved in large scale extortion of business (Aspinall and Fealy 2003:6).

Another common criticism of devolution to *kabupaten* level was that it was bound to fail because few districts possessed the capacity to take on such a broad range of new responsibilities. Human resources at the provincial - let alone *kabupaten* - level were limited, and to manage portfolios like health and

education would be a huge undertaking, for which regional governments were poorly prepared. This was exacerbated by the fact that - at the time of devolution - neither the mechanisms by which service delivery would be measured, nor the relationship between central and regional governments, were clear or well developed. Just weeks before the implementation of *otonomi daerah*, Robert Simanjuntak, head of Public Planning and Policy at the University of Indonesia, wrote that

...in health and education, central, provincial and district governments will all have responsibilities. But it is still not clear as to which level of government will have responsibility for which aspects of policy.

(Simanjuntak 2000).

In February 2001, Ryaas Rasyid, who had at the time recently resigned from his position as Minister responsible for Regional Autonomy, declared that 'the implementation of regional autonomy has been extremely worrying. The regions have tended to determine their entitlements in their own individual ways. On the other hand, the central government is increasingly powerless and unable to control the direction of regional autonomy' (*Kompas* 20 February 2001).

But although concerns about the quality of human resources in regional areas were often well founded, they were perhaps also motivated by the condescending attitudes of central government officials towards their regionally based colleagues. As some of the participants in a seminar on regional autonomy, held in Makassar in November 2000, stressed,

The central government always assumes that the regions are not ready to implement regional autonomy, at least in terms of human resources. But the problem is really not whether or not the regions are ready or not, but whether or not the central government is willing to hand over authority. These sorts of difficulties have led regional officials to conclude that the 'autonomy' being given is not only 'half-hearted' - recently it's been more like 'quarter-hearted'. (*Kompas* 6 November 2000)

Criticisms of regional governments' human resources also tended to ignore the fact that in many cases, officials at *kabupaten* level had always been involved in the delivery of basic services, they just had never had *control* over them. Given that central government officials stood to be the big losers from the decentralization process, it was not surprising that they would be amongst the most vocal critics of its implementation.

Although the devolution of authority to the *kabupaten* level may have been justified as an attempt to increase local accountability and control, it was largely motivated by the imperative - in the aftermath of East Timor's independence ballot - to squash provinces' separatist aspirations, by addressing some of the equity issues that arose from the New Order's centralized system of government. As Aspinall and Fealy argue, 'devolving power to the districts was...partly aimed at diverting local communities' attention away from ethno-regional concerns and towards immediate local economic and governmental issues' (2003:4). Certainly those who stood to gain from *otonomi daerah* were keen to present it as a mechanism through which the central government could prevent the balkanization of Indonesia. Syaukani H R, then the Head of the Association of Indonesian Kabupaten Governments (*Asosiasi Pemerintahan Kabupaten Seluruh Indonesia*) and *Bupati* of the district of Kutai in the newly wealthy province of East Kalimantan, commented for example that,

Regional autonomy has strengthened national unity. I can't imagine what the status of our national unity would be if regional autonomy were taken away. Certainly it is rare now that we hear about regions wanting to separate themselves from the sovereign state. (*Kompas* 20 February 2001)

Rather than being motivated by a genuine desire to see greater local control over local affairs, *otonomi daerah* was more likely offered as part of a new strategy through which Jakarta could maintain control of potentially wayward provinces. By devolving responsibility to the *kabupaten* rather than provincial

level, the central government was in fact creating a 'divide and rule' scenario in which the *kabupaten* were competing against each other - and against provincial level governments⁹ - hence limiting the chances that they would coalesce around a new politics of independence based on ethnic and regional identity. The creation of new *kabupaten* within provinces - a process known as *pemekaran* (literally meaning 'blooming') - can also be read as a part of this strategy of control¹⁰. It is perhaps no coincidence that *pemekaran* has been most strongly resisted in those provinces where there are existing separatist movements, such as in Papua (International Crisis Group 2003a).

Also motivated by concern for national unity were those who argued against *otonomi daerah* on the grounds that it would encourage new and 'dangerous' forms of identity politics. While this chapter deals mostly with the positive aspects of this new identity politics, increased attention on the politics of ethnicity has exacerbated communal conflict in some cases. The emerging trend for *Bupati* and other local government figures to identify themselves as '*putra daerah*' (literally, 'sons of the region') to gain electoral advantage is symptomatic of an increased awareness that one's right to govern can be closely related to - or in fact dependent upon - one's place of origin. While local elites continue to campaign for political office on the grounds of ethnicity, the line between reclaiming ethnic identity and institutionalizing ethnic discrimination becomes increasingly blurred. What would be the implications for non-*putra daerah* in West Java, if for example, as one regional cultural summit proposed in 2003, the system of regional government in that province were reformed to reflect more accurately 'traditional Sundanese cultural values'?¹¹

⁹ For examples of the way *otonomi daerah* legislation impacted on relationships between *kabupaten* and provincial governments, see *Kompas* 19 April 2001, *Kompas* 9 May 2001.

¹⁰ The process of *pemekaran* led, for example, to the province of South Sumatra being split into fourteen *kabupaten* (as opposed to seven *kabupaten* prior to decentralisation). Jambi, which originally consisted of four *kabupaten*, now consists of twelve. See for example *Kompas* 16 May 2001.

¹¹ This proposal was put forward at the '*Temu Budaya Jawa Barat*' (West Java Cultural Summit) sponsored by the Department of Education and Culture in 2003. The

Another major concern voiced in the context of *otonomi daerah* debates was that decentralisation would lead to greater inequality between rich and poor regions: while regions like East Kalimantan stood to make substantial gains, large parts of Eastern Indonesia were less likely to benefit. In some cases these arguments were framed by powerful nationalist discourses and fuelled by anxiety that increased disparity of wealth would encourage newly rich provinces to break away from Indonesia. Far from being merely about the best ways to deliver democratisation, better services, and local control over resources to local communities, the debates over the implementation of *otonomi daerah* were therefore very much about addressing perceived challenges to Indonesia's sovereignty.

At the same time, some observers - particularly those in the regions - argued that the *otonomi daerah* legislation did not go far enough. One metaphor frequently used to describe the legislation from the regions' point of view, was that it was as if 'the head had been freed but its tail was still being held' (*Kompas* 6 November 2000). Another aspect of this criticism was that the legislative reforms merely benefited those who had been at the middle levels of power during the New Order, and that 'old predatory interests incubated under the New Order's vast system of patronage' would successfully reconstitute themselves in the post-New Order political context (Hadiz 2003:119).

Criticisms of *otonomi daerah* and its implementation were clearly varied and motivated by a broad range of political interests. But these criticisms were also matched by high hopes - from many quarters in both Jakarta and the regions - that *otonomi daerah* would deliver both a better way of managing government services, and a mechanism through which some of the inequalities of the New Order era could begin to be addressed. Commentators suggested that *otonomi daerah* was an integral part of democratisation and a way to manage emerging

recommendations of the meeting were posted on-line at <kongres.budpar.go.id> accessed 14 May 2004.

ethnic tensions (*Kompas* 11 December 2000), that it provided the Indonesian people with a unique opportunity to shape their own governments (*Tempo* 25 December 2000), and that it had the potential to heal some of the injustices and 'traumas' of the past (*Kompas* 16 August 2000). *Otonomi daerah* had the potential to 'restore dignity' to regions that had hitherto been disregarded (*Kompas* 7 December 2000) and it promised to create new spaces for the expression of regional identity.

During my fieldwork in both Sumatra and Sulawesi, almost everyone I spoke with expressed hope (albeit often measured) for what *otonomi daerah* promised to deliver, and recognition that the legislation had the potential to deliver at least some of what the regions deserved. The implementation of regional autonomy might have been 'half-hearted' and somewhat chaotic, but it promised to be an improvement on the New Order paradigm, in which regions were rewarded for their obsequiousness to the central government and central government officials determined what would constitute a region's ethnic and cultural identity.

This chapter has so far attempted to capture the complexities of the debates surrounding the implementation of *otonomi daerah*. By its very nature, the process of decentralisation was experienced differently across Indonesia. In all regions, however, factors including the control of resources, ethnic politics, and the ability of political figures to either gain or maintain power, come into play. It is against this background that I will now look at the ways decentralization has impacted on the arts in Indonesia.

***Otonomi daerah* and the arts**

Discussion about Indonesian modern art actually focuses only on the growth and development of art in Java and Bali. It's as if these two regions (and in particular a number of big cities in these regions) are the centre that represents the map of modern art in Indonesia. The fact that attention is focused on art in Java and Bali means that other regions'

potential is obscured. Sumatran art, for example, is not considered to be on the map of Indonesian modern art. (Mamannoor 2000:4)

The marginalization of regional arts practitioners from 'mainstream' arts discourse in Indonesia is nothing new. In both the visual and performing arts, critical acclaim and attention for contemporary work has been largely focused on artistic production in the major cities in Java, and to a lesser extent, Bali. With some notable exceptions (Hatley 1991, Bodden 2001), scholarship on contemporary theatre has almost exclusively focused on Java-based groups. National media attention and criticism (which brings with it legitimization) has likewise been monopolized by artists based in the 'centres' of Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bandung, and attempts by regional cultural workers to draw attention to the discrimination they face have often been met with scorn by Jakarta's cultural establishment (Derks 2002:329). Although often concerned with 'the political' aspects of theatre culture, most Java-based theatre practitioners and observers have usually failed to recognize the political ramifications of regional bias for the construction of the 'map' of 'Indonesian theatre'. This chapter argues that, following the fall of the New Order, there has been an opening up of space in which the concerns, interests and artistic achievements of regionally based theatre practitioners have become more prominent within national theatre culture, and that at the same time, regional theatre communities have become less inclined to look to Jakarta for artistic legitimisation. These developments need to be read in the broader political context of *otonomi daerah* and the processes of political and social change associated with *reformasi*. They also need to be understood against the background of the New Order's approach to cultural development in the regions, a brief discussion of which follows.

New Order cultural policy and regional culture

The New Order state was not disinterested in regional cultures or traditions. On the contrary, it sought 'legitimacy from a national culture constructed from regional cultural traditions' (Hatley 1991:2). Evidence of the New Order state's

interest in cultivating and re-inventing regional traditions can be found for example in its use of regional architectural styles (Kusno 2001), in its portrayal of regional diversity in developments such as *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* (Errington 1997; Pemberton 1994; Acciaoli 1985) and in the rhetoric of its official cultural policy, which defined 'national culture' as comprising 'the highest cultural forms of the regions of all Indonesia' (*Undang-Undang Dasar - The Indonesian Constitution - Article 32 Chapter XIII*, cited in Zurbuchen 1989).

Examples of the New Order's prescriptive approach to cultural 'development' - particularly in relation to traditional and regional cultures - are numerous. Acciaoli, for example, cites the case of a group in Central Sulawesi who were instructed by government officials to come up with dances to accompany their chants 'in a manner more compatible with the culture of the greater Palu area' (1985:153). In this way, Acciaoli argues, *pancasila*¹² did not only influence but came to *constitute* 'traditional' culture. What was portrayed as 'traditional' for particular groups was in fact prescribed by the state so that it could be incorporated neatly into displays and performances intended to showcase 'regional diversity'. Zurbuchen likewise recalls a festival held in Sumatra during the New Order era, called *Revitalisasi Seni Tradisi* ('Revitalising the Traditional Arts', which presented rare or disappearing performance genres. Zurbuchen writes that

...before the local groups performed, they were shown Javanese and Balinese dances; these were included in the program as examples of 'more advanced arts'. (1989:133)

In some regions, provincial governments took the idea of 'revitalisation' into the realm of fabrication, as Timothy Daniels has shown in his account of the 'Festival Sriwijaya', a South Sumatran event that invented ceremonies and

¹² *Pancasila* refers to the five 'basic principles' of the Republic of Indonesia. These are: belief in God, humanity that is just and civilized, the unity of Indonesia, democracy and social justice. The New Order state, however, co-opted the term *pancasila* for its own political purposes.

other cultural 'traditions' in order to evoke and reify images of the pre-colonial Sriwijaya empire (Daniels 1999).

During the New Order, regional governments' energies in the cultural sphere were often focused on presenting festivals - particularly of traditional theatre and dance - which were often staged like a competition, usually adjudicated by senior government officials, sometimes brought in especially from Jakarta or Java. In what Hatley refers to as 'packaging' an 'impression of colourful cultural diversity' (1993:18-19), artistic achievement was judged according to criteria which related back to the state's interests. While in some cases these celebrations may have led - at the local level - to a sense of shared identity, festivities of this type were essentially created to fit within the state's conception of its 'development' agenda. As Acciaoli writes, during the New Order, regional diversity was 'valued, honoured, even apotheotized', but only as long as it remained 'at the level of display, not belief, performance, not enactment' (1985:161). While expressions of regional identity were encouraged, therefore, at a 'decorative' level, they were carefully controlled so as not to become 'an alternative focus of allegiance and identity.' (Foulcher 1990b:302).

Central government sponsored cultural activities were mostly focused on the traditional arts, fulfilling what Zurbuchen describes as the state's desire to 'do something' to traditional culture in order to 'develop' it (1989:129).

Contemporary theatre was perhaps in a different 'category' and was less useful to a state that appeared to be interested in diversity primarily for decorative purposes and as a tool to boost tourism. As Hatley notes, 'Where state authorities organize and fund festivals and competitions of regional performing arts, modern theatre receives relatively little attention' (1993:20).

Suffice to say that by the time *reformasi* was underway and the implementation of *otonomi daerah* imminent, many contemporary theatre artists in the regions

were hopeful that the new era would bring with it a shift in the way they were treated by Jakarta's arts bureaucracies. As Iswadi Permata, director of the Lampung group Teater Satu explained,

During Suharto's New Order everything was centralised. Jakarta. So the development of theatre in the regions - in Jambi, in Lampung or wherever - was always dependent upon policy made in the centre. For example Jakarta might put out a policy: 'for this year we will delve into the traditional arts.' So all the regions would have to do that. But this was not matched with financial support. Why? For the most part, the funding was kept in the centre. The regions only received a small percentage, and then that would have to be divided again. These were the sorts of conditions that governed artistic production ... When regional autonomy is implemented... the regions (will) have the authority to decide what our programs and policies should be.

(Interview, 26 October 2000).

While artists in many regions articulated high hopes for the decentralised future, government officials from Jakarta were doing their best to explain exactly how *little* change would be taking place under the new legislation. When Sri Hastanto, who was responsible for managing the implementation of arts programs and policies for the then Department of Education and Culture (DEPDIKNAS), addressed participants at the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatra*, in Jambi in October 2000, he made it clear that he saw little possibility that *otonomi daerah* would change the way DEPDIKNAS operated. In fact, he said, decentralization would consolidate the Department's current role,

The principle task of (my department) is to...make policy and to provide direction as to how the arts in Indonesia can be managed to ensure continuity and progress....the fourth pasal of the UU No 22/1999 (the regional autonomy legislation)...will not change our focus or our tasks. In fact it will consolidate them... (Hastanto 2000)

If Hastanto's paper was any indication, the central government's arts and cultural bureaucracy appeared not to have had a plan for how to deal with the new challenges presented by *otonomi daerah*. But two years later the rhetoric - at least from some sections of the bureaucracy - was beginning to sound a little different. When DEPDIKNAS hosted its Fifth Cultural Congress (*Kongres Kebudayaan V*) in Bukittinggi in October 2003, it clearly had made some effort to incorporate the concerns and aspirations of the regions. Publicity material stated, for example, that 'the subject matter for discussion at the Congress has been drawn together from the *bottom up*, through a program of cultural meetings at the regional level'. While several of the *regional* level meetings reported back to the Congress in familiar language that emphasized New Order era concepts such as 'development' and the 'unity and integrity of the nation', others appeared to take the challenge of reform more seriously, the Manado meeting for example concluding that 'genuine regional autonomy should be seen as an opportunity for regions to empower themselves while at the same time making a contribution to shaping a richer and more democratic national culture'. While there may have been some justified skepticism about whether these extensive regional consultations would lead to any real change, the statements that emerged from the Congress demonstrated at least a rhetorical departure from the cultural policies of the New Order. The Congress' final statement, which declared that 'cultural identity is not something that is intact (*utuh*) and solid (*padat*). Instead it comprises many variable and overlapping elements'¹³, was symptomatic of this shift.

While the Fifth Cultural Congress is just one example of a cultural policy making forum in post-New Order Indonesia, it is useful as an example of how regional and national governments' conception of their role in fostering cultural 'development' has changed. Attempts have been made to redefine the role of the regions, particularly in relation to the 'centre', and in doing so, to restore a sense of pride and celebration of local culture. While there are indications that

¹³Details of the proceedings of the Fifth Cultural Congress can be found on the Congress website: <kongres.budpar.go.id> accessed 14 May 2004

in some areas *otonomi daerah* has led to limited real change, there are unquestionably some contexts in which the fluidity and 'contestedness' of local culture has been celebrated, even in official discourse. The notion that culture is not inherently 'intact or solid', for example, would not have been sustained in a New Order manifesto of the sort produced by the Cultural Congress in 2003.

What follows in this chapter is an attempt to investigate in more detail what these changes might mean for theatre culture in various parts of Indonesia. In what ways do theatrical performances - and the festivals in which they are often presented - provide insights into the politics of decentralization? In what ways have artists attempted to deal with or respond to the tensions and contradictions that have emerged between 'national' and 'regional' culture? In what ways have they challenged - or on the other hand, re-produced - the central government's attempts to order, control and define national identity? How have audiences interacted with these experiments? The case studies discussed in this chapter both perpetuate old narratives, and create new ones, about what it might mean to be 'Indonesian' in the post New Order era.

New centres, new paradigms: *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera*

The inaugural festival of Sumatran theatre - or *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* - held in Jambi in October 2000 attracted little attention from Java-based artists or media¹⁴. For the participants - and particularly for the arts community of Jambi - however, it was a significant event that made a positive statement about the strength of cultural production outside of Java. The festival, held shortly before *otonomi daerah* was formally implemented, appeared to be imbued with a sense of pride in Sumatran cultural diversity as well as a desire to be positioned on the 'map' of Indonesian theatre culture.

The river-port city of Jambi, capital of the Sumatran province of the same name, is relatively isolated. Paper and oil are Jambi's two significant

¹⁴ The sum total of media coverage in the Jakarta press, to my knowledge, was a six line blurb taken from the festival's own promotional material, published in *Kompas* on 30 October 2000.

commodities and there is little tourism. Jambi is closer to Singapore than it is to Jakarta, a trip to the island city-state taking only two hours by fast ferry. As a province relatively rich in natural resources, Jambi stood to benefit from *otonomi daerah*, although not to the same extent as the neighbouring province of Riau. Local artists, officials and NGO workers to whom I spoke during my fieldwork there were unanimously positive about what *otonomi daerah* might bring, and enthusiastic about the potential for greater self-determination over economic, social and cultural policies. Although several people with whom I spoke were enthusiastic about the possibility of 'bypassing Jakarta' and making links directly with international colleagues (for example in Singapore, and further afield in New York), and expressed some resentment of the way in which they had been treated by Jakarta in the past, they remained, for the most part, committed to contributing to the project of Indonesian national culture. Unlike its neighbouring province of Riau, Jambi did not have a large or well organised secessionist movement. In interviews conducted throughout the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera*, participants said that they were determined to gain recognition for their work, to correct some of the perceived inequalities and injustices of the Jakarta-centric arts world, and to debunk some of the stereotypes about artists in the regions. But they were also very strongly committed to the idea of being a part of the *Indonesian* arts community. In seminars held on both theatre and the visual arts, as part of the festival program, participants continually stressed that they saw decentralization as presenting a big opportunity through which they could challenge Jakarta's cultural hegemony. None, however, advocated a future in which there was no role for 'Indonesian-ness'.

While the *Forum Teater se-Sumatera* - involving groups from all Sumatran provinces - was the centerpiece of the Jambi Arts Centre's festivities in October 2000, the program for the week also included a visual arts exhibition and seminar, a seminar on theatre, an exhibition of theatre photography and video documentation, a festival of student theatre from the province of Jambi itself,

and a book fair. Rather than attempting to 'package' traditional culture for tourism, or for 'development', the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* was instead primarily a forum for the exchange of ideas and skills, an opportunity for artists from Sumatra to have - for the first time - a chance to develop an understanding of what 'Sumatran theatre' (if there was indeed such a thing) was like. As one participant suggested, the festival was a starting point from which 'artists from Sumatra should build networks so that...people (would) no longer see Java as the centre of power' (Syuhendri Interview October 26 2000).

As a result of all this activity, throughout the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera*, the Jambi Arts Centre was crowded with artists and their support crews, who generated an instant sense of critical mass and excitement. The festival's opening ceremony, held at the Arts Centre, presented an interesting image of the way in which Jambi perceived itself within national and regional culture. The Governor of Jambi, H. Zulkifli Nurdin - widely known to have been a strong patron of the city's arts community in particular through his personal support of the establishment of the non-government Kajanglako Arts Centre¹⁵ - spoke passionately about the importance of the arts for regional identity. The arts were 'not just about entertainment', he said, and it was important to support both traditional and contemporary arts as they 'reflect who we are as a society'. This kind of rhetoric - in particular its advocacy of the importance of *contemporary* art - represents a departure from the New Order-style rhetoric about the need to develop regional culture through the traditional arts, discussed above.

The Festival opening ceremony was, however, not only about speeches. It also included eclectic performances including a local rock band called ASAS, a

¹⁵ The Kajanglako Art Centre in Jambi was established in April 1998 with a focus on providing training in various local traditional art forms. Although now defunct, the Centre's work particularly with local communities was widely recognised as important and well conceived. The Centre's most notable achievement was arguably the presentation of a large festival of local traditional performing arts, involving communities and villages throughout the province of Jambi. This festival was referred to positively by many members of the Jambi arts community. See for example *Kompas* 5 Juli 1999.

children's performance of a traditional dance from the region and a 'happening art'¹⁶ performance installation devised by the festival coordinator Didin Siroz. The opening event - and indeed the whole festival - was characterised by Jambi's and Sumatra's pride and desire for recognition as an alternative to Jakarta's version of official culture. Although Jakarta bureaucrats were present at the opening ceremony, they were - in contrast to the way they may have behaved during the New Order era - somewhat peripheral to the main narrative, and not invited to play any ceremonial role (Zuburchen 1989: 133-134). It was clear that the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* was about realising Jambi's and Sumatra's - rather than Jakarta's - aspirations. *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* was clearly not intended to be the kind of festival in which Jakarta officials would pass judgment on the quality of local groups' performances, although, as I will discuss shortly, this is in fact what ended up happening.

Attendance levels at the festival were excellent. The Arts Centre's main theatre was packed on most nights, with standing room only for almost all the performances. The audience - visibly comprising a large number of children and families, perhaps enticed by the promise of free entertainment - appeared fully engaged with the diverse performance styles presented, ranging from a full length production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to a traditional Acehnese monologue. Audience members even sat through one performance, Teater Satu's folk tale adaptation, *Si Aruk*, in candle-lit semi-darkness after a storm caused a power blackout.

But despite the festival's focus on celebrating Sumatran identity - and showcasing the achievements of Sumatran theatre artists - many participants clearly still sought, to some degree, legitimization from Jakarta. Praise from

¹⁶ 'Happening art' is a term used widely by the younger generation of Indonesian performers and artists. The term, always used in English and not in Indonesian translation, describes a genre of performance, often highly physical and performed in public spaces. The closest approximation to 'happening art' in Western performance art discourse might be 'performance installation'. 'Happening art' performances became a staple of *reformasi*-era demonstrations and political rallies, which are discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

visiting Jakarta bureaucrats and arts managers, it seemed, was still highly valued. Didin Siroz, the festival coordinator, and himself a theatre director, noted for example that

...(the momentum at the Festival of Sumatran theatre) is extraordinary because suddenly it's clear that every region of Sumatra has strength. Has strength. So if in the past we would always see Jakarta as the centre, it's clear now - as Ratna Riantiarno said herself when she was here yesterday - that Sumatra is also a centre. No longer do we see Jakarta as the only centre for the arts, because obviously Sumatra is its own centre. Centralisation is a thing of the past. Indonesia has many theatre scenes. (Interview, Jambi 27 October 2000).

As these comments indicate, as much as Sumatran theatre groups would like to be their 'own centre', legitimization is still - to some extent - sought from Jakarta based figures such as Ratna Riantiarno, who was invited to attend the festival in her capacity as the then Chair of the Jakarta Arts Council. Ratna's presence at the festival - albeit only for one night - was seen by many to lend the event status and a sense of prestige and connection with a wider 'Indonesian' theatre community, which it may not otherwise have had. A similar theme emerged in comments made by Syuhendri, the Director of Padang group Teater Noktah, one of the Festival participants. In discussing the quality of the performances in the festival, he said, for example,

I think that (the group from) Lampung is far more advanced than the others. They have some well established actors with extraordinary acting ability, I think *as good as Jakarta or Bandung*. This really is an interesting phenomenon for the development of theatre in Sumatra.

Clearly people from this region are not downtrodden, and this makes a very interesting statement. (Interview Jambi, 27 October 2000, emphasis added)

While festival participants were keen to point out that the event demonstrated the strengths of Sumatran theatre and the potential for Sumatra to 'be its own centre', the benchmark with which they were to be compared remained the

'centres' of Jakarta and Bandung. Furthermore, recognition from Jakarta based theatre experts was apparently mandatory for the process of becoming a new 'centre'. While *otonomi daerah* has led - at least in the short term - to increased opportunities for the expression of diverse and sometimes contradictory regional identities, the process of shifting the centre of cultural legitimisation away from Java is going to be a much longer term project.

Not all artists from Jambi were happy with the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera*. One frequently aired complaint was that in order to participate in the festival, groups had to be endorsed - and funded - by their own local Arts Centre or Arts Council, and that consequently, the groups participating were those with strong connections to their local arts bureaucracies. One local artist referred to the festival as a 'public servant' (*pegawai negeri*) arts festival, alluding to the fact that some participants were also employees of government owned cultural facilities. The festival did not fully reflect the extent of arts practice in Jambi, it was argued, and there were many artists doing interesting work with community groups, who felt excluded from the program. Echoing the debates that took place in Indonesian theatre circles in the 1970s, others noted that the attempt to categorise works as either 'traditional' or 'contemporary' was counter-productive¹⁷, as it ignored the widespread tendency of much contemporary work to draw on or 'quote' traditional idioms, performance elements and stories (Hatley 1991).

Consistent with emerging debates about ethnicity and political representation - and the potentially problematic *putra daerah* ('sons of the region') discourses referred to earlier in this chapter - some of the festival's detractors also pointed out that coordinator Didin Siroz's credentials for running a Festival of Sumatran theatre were lacking because he was neither Sumatran, nor originally

¹⁷ Most groups presenting work at the Forum Teater Se-Sumatera performed both a 'contemporary' and a 'traditional' work. Many of the 'contemporary' works, including the one by Teater Nuktah discussed below include substantial elements that could also be described as 'traditional'.

from Jambi. Similar questions could presumably have been raised (although to my knowledge were not) about the director of the Lampung based group Teater Satu, Iswadi Permata, who although identifying strongly as an artist from Sumatra, is ethnically Javanese. Although these arguments did not emerge in printed form, their existence in informal discourse in the 'margins' of the festival, demonstrates that while events such as the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* play an important role in subverting Javanese cultural hegemony, they also have the potential to become vehicles for an unproductive ethnic essentialism. In the era of *otonomi daerah*, questions about who can and can not speak on behalf of certain groups - many of whom justifiably feel they have a right to tell their own stories, after being repressed for several decades by the central government - have become more contentious. Given that theatre is an important tool for the imagining and projection of identity, it should come as no surprise that theatre events become a site at which these sorts of questions are played out.

Regional identity, *randai* and *reformasi*: the case of Teater Noktah's *Tarik Balas*

Having discussed some of the debates and issues surrounding the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera*, this chapter will now look at a work presented at the festival, by Padang group Teater Noktah. Teater Noktah's adaptation of the script *Tarik Balas*, by West Sumatran writer Hardian Radjab is an interesting case study in the context of this chapter, as it is a performance that simultaneously draws on its own regional iconography and tradition and engages with issues relevant to all regions of contemporary Indonesia. The play - which draws loosely on the traditional Minangkabau theatre form *randai* - also raises some complex questions about democratisation, modernity and contemporary political contests.

Observers of Indonesian contemporary theatre have often noted the ways in which it draws on and references traditional sources (Goenawan 1973, Hatley

1991, Gillit Asmara 1995). As Hatley argues, contemporary theatre does not in itself 'contribute to and embroider upon a continuing cultural tradition' but rather 'quotes from that tradition' (1991:2). Teater Noktah's production of *Tarik Balas* is a work that simultaneously 'quotes from' and problematises aspects of traditional culture. *Tarik Balas* poses questions about issues such as the applicability of *adat* (traditional) law in a modern world, and the pitfalls of the autocratic, 'strong' leadership valued in 'traditional' Minang society. While attaching great importance to Minang culture's ability to change with the times, *Tarik Balas* also foreshadows (perhaps unintentionally) the somewhat uneasy relationship between 'traditional culture' and democratisation.

Tarik Balas is certainly not the first work by a Minang writer to question *adat* cultural mores. The pre-World War II writer Hamka, for example, wrote a large number of works critical of Minangkabau's matrilineal system (Hatley 1991: 4). More recently, Wisran Hadi's plays - despite critical acclaim in both national and international forums - have been criticized from within the Minang establishment for 'perceived offence to Minangkabau cultural tradition' (Hatley 1991:4). With the implementation of *otonomi daerah*, however, 'traditional culture' has taken on, in many regions, a new importance. The unanimous decision by the West Sumatran legislature, taken in late 2000, to replace the village (*desa*) administrative system (imposed on regions during the New Order), with the traditional Minangkabau structure of *nagari* exemplifies an enthusiasm for reclaiming a hitherto 'marginalized' (*dipinggirkan*) traditional Minang identity (*Tempo* 17-24 December 2000)¹⁸. In the era of *otonomi daerah*, returning to 'traditional culture' becomes synonymous with the project of subverting Jakarta's neo-colonial control over the regions.

'Local traditional culture' is as much a construct in West Sumatra as it is elsewhere. The Minangkabau, West Sumatra's dominant ethnic group, are well

¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the West Sumatran legislature's decision to 'return to *nagari*' see Fahany 2003

known in the scholarly and popular imagination for their matrilineal traditions (Kato 1982), strong Islamic values (Abdullah 1985), proclivity for migration (*merantau*) (Kato 1982; Naim 1985) and arguably democratic traditions, in which decision making was guided by the principle of consensus. The *resilience* of Minangkabau 'traditional culture' as it faces the challenges of modernity is a common theme of both academic literature and the rhetoric of West Sumatran politicians and public figures. It is also regularly pointed out that Minangkabau people are well represented - especially on a per capita basis - in elite circles in Jakarta. As Joel Kahn proposes, however, it is more likely that the 'origins of Minangkabau tradition....lay not in the shrouded mists of time but in fact in the period of Dutch colonial rule' (1993:viii) and that 'the constitution of the Minangkabau is a peculiarly twentieth-century project' (1993:186). 'By accentuating particular features of pre-modern life in Western Sumatra, and downplaying or ignoring others', Kahn argues, 'Minangkabau intellectuals, Dutch orientalist and colonial officials built up images of Minangkabau in the 'time of *adat*' which are not so much inaccurate as selective' (1993:186). The fact that Minangkabau 'traditional culture' may be a product of selective imagination does not, however, make it any less significant, particularly for those groups attempting to increase their stake in its definition.

The project of continuing this 'constitution' of Minangkabau identity in the early twenty-first century was epitomized by a series of well organised, large scale cultural events held for the 'expatriate' Minang community in Jakarta. The October 2000 *Pentas Budaya Minang* (Minang Cultural Performance) program, held at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Arts Centre in Jakarta under the patronage of high profile Minang Indonesians was a good example of this. Such events often serve to reinforce the ways in which Minang identity is not only compatible with - but comes to be an essential part of - Indonesian national identity. As Fasil Djalal, the head of the organizing committee for *Pentas Budaya Minang* wrote in his introductory program notes,

...a Minangkabau migrant (*perantau*) will try not to leave behind his identity, manners, or Minang-ness (*keminangan*)...in fact he will attempt to ensure that Minang-ness continues to develop within a pluralistic Indonesian culture (Djalal 2000).

The role of contemporary artists in West Sumatra, therefore, can be a complicated one. Not only can it be politically risky to contest the notion that 'traditional culture' was a stable and homogenous entity in the first place, in the context of *otonomi daerah*, to critique 'traditional culture' may be seen by some to undermine the project of empowering regional communities in the post-New Order era. It is against this complex political background that Teater Noktah's performance of *Tarik Balas* must be read.

Established in 1993, Teater Noktah is a small ensemble of artists in their twenties and thirties. While other artists from Padang - most notably Wisran Hadi's Teater Bumi¹⁹ and, in dance, the late Gusmiati Suid's company Gumarang Sakti - have developed a profile outside of West Sumatra, prior to performing at the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera*, Teater Noktah was relatively unknown outside of their home town. In Padang's relatively small arts scene, Teater Noktah attracted some notoriety when in 1996 it presented a work called *Lini*, devised and directed by Lilik Zurmalilis, the wife of the group's usual director, Syuhendri. *Lini* was controversial for several reasons: it was a physical theatre piece that did not use a script, it attempted to deal with 'big' themes - such as the meaning of morality, and the tensions between logic and religion - and, not least importantly, it was devised by an inexperienced female director. Its use of semi-naked performers also caused a stir in Padang's relatively conservative Muslim community, one reviewer asking, for example, 'how are we meant to react to a performance that tells us about morals but at

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the work of Teater Bumi and playwright/ director Wisran Hadi see Hatley 1991

the same time uses near-naked performers?' (*Singgalang* 27 October 1996)²⁰. But the non-linear, non script based style of *Lini* - which was partly inspired by the work of Jakarta based artists such as WS Dindon and Afrizal Malna - appears to have been something of a shortlived experiment for Teater Noktah. Their repertoire, according to director Syhendri, now consists mostly of adaptations of existing 'conventional' scripts by writers such as Arifin C Noer.

Teater Noktah's production of *Tarik Balas*, like the work of Wisran Hadi and Gusmiati Suid before it, loosely references *randai*, the traditional Minang folk theatre form. *Randai* performances narrate local Minang legends and stories, and incorporate martial arts, dance, folk song, music, and acting (Pauka 1998:2). The most instantly recognisable element of *randai* is its use of a distinctive circular dance formation, which marks various stages and transitions in the story telling, and in which all performers participate. In one of the few overviews of the history and development of *randai*, Pauka notes that 'a *randai* script is episodic and loosely structured. The story is arranged into parts that are acted out in dialogue form, and parts that are narrated through song lyrics, called *gurindam*' (1998:49). Teater Noktah's director, Syuhendri, says that rather than following the rigid physical structure of *randai*, he tries to capture something of its 'spirit and essence' in works like *Tarik Balas*.

***Tarik Balas*: synopsis**

Tarik Balas is a story that touches on questions about justice, leadership and the need for tradition to change with the times. As I have suggested above, it is a work that problematises aspects of traditional culture at the same time as 'quoting' from it.

²⁰ There was a large amount of commentary and debate about the work *Lini* when it was performed in 1996. Examples include *Singgalang* 30 September 1996; *Harian Haluan* 10 September 1996; and *Harian Haluan* 22 October 1996. In August 2000, when I first interviewed Syuhendri, Teater Noktah's director, he was keen to promote his wife's directorial achievements ahead of his own, and commented that her work had attracted significant attention.

Tarik Balas tells the story of a conflict between two brothers. The eldest, Sutan Marajo Basa is the leader of the *nagari*, and a 'born' leader who has a naturally authoritative bearing and strong overbearing personality. The younger brother, Sutan Balun is much more understated and 'noble', a campaigner for justice and the rights of people to be heard. The brothers disagree passionately over the interpretation of their community's laws, known as the '*undang-undang Tarik Balas*' (which could be translated as 'the laws of retribution'), which dictate, without any flexibility that 'a debt of gold must be paid with gold, a debt of honour must be paid with honour, a debt of life must be paid with life'. Sutan Balun - a reformist - thinks the *Undang-Undang Tarik Balas* is unjust, outmoded and not a good way to govern. Sutan Marajo Basa - reminiscent perhaps of Suharto - becomes increasingly intolerant of dissent, and in his paranoia comes to interpret any disagreement as rebellion. This prompts Sutan Balun to ask, 'what is becoming of this region if all discussion from below is seen as insubordination?'

Their mother, Indo Jalito, acts as a kind of 'oracle' throughout the piece, giving advice, warnings and sage observations. She encourages Sutan Balun to go on a journey, to *merantau* (migrate), to leave the *nagari* temporarily, to search for meaning and examples of justice elsewhere. Meanwhile, she counsels Sutan Marajo Basa with the aim of assisting him to become a less paranoid, more just leader. She warns him of the dangers of focusing only on his own status and position while ignoring the rights of those he governs, of becoming obsessed with the trappings of authority at the expense of justice. She delivers several sermons about leadership and responsibility, which although heavy-handed in style and tone, make clear *Tarik Balas*' central messages.

Some time later, after his period abroad, Sutan Balun returns to his *nagari*, where his elder brother is still governing, and where the *Undang-Undang Tarik Balas* continues to be the basis of all legal decision making. Upon his homecoming, Sutan Balun becomes known by his royal title, Datuk Perpatih,

while his brother has assumed the title of Datuk Katumanggungan. Old animosities, it seems, have not dissipated in the intervening years, and it becomes clear that Datuk Perpatih will continue to advocate reform of the *Undang-Undang Tarik Balas*, which is not, he argues, a sound basis for a modern society.

The situation is complicated somewhat because Datuk Perpatih has been accompanied by a dog, which has viciously bitten an innocent citizen. The question as to how the dog should be punished comically becomes an illustration of the inappropriateness of the *Undang-Undang Tarik Balas* as a framework for law and order, when Datuk Katumanggungan suggests that the legal system must be adhered to by all, Datuk Perpatih argues that surely this means that the injured man should therefore bite the dog back! When Datuk Katumanggungan protests that this proposal is 'irrational' (*tak masuk akal*), Perpatih replies that

...of course it's not rational. It's not healthy. It's not appropriate for well-mannered people (*orang beradat*). And yet this is what our law dictates. It's according to the laws. A bite must be paid for by a bite.

This is word of the law, and it's bitter.

And so, with a couple of concluding speeches about the need for laws that 'give justice to all', the two Datuk agree to change the *nagari's* system to one that is more appropriate for its era (*sesuai lagi dengan tuntutan zaman*), a system with checks and balances based on 'rationality'. And so *Tarik Balas* ends on a note of reconciliation and consensus, as the two Datuk agree to reform their *nagari's* laws, for the benefit of their people.

The script of *Tarik Balas* tells a fairly didactic and moralistic tale that effectively reinforces a number of powerful myths about Minangkabau culture. The process of *merantau* is central part of Sutan Balun's coming of age, while Minangkabau's 'inherent' ability to rule by consensus is emphasized by the eventual reconciliation and agreement between the two brothers. *Tarik Balas*

also reinforces the idea that Minangkabau culture is not rigid and is able to change with the times, which in turn demonstrates its resilience. It raises some important questions about the challenges posed to *adat* law by concepts like democracy, human rights and justice, but does so in a relatively simplistic way. The *Tarik Balas* script employs little of the ambiguity that one suspects has characterised some other Teater Nuktah productions, such as *Lini* discussed above. Teater Nuktah's staging of *Tarik Balas*, which incorporated the *randai* trademark 'circle' as well as traditional music and song, however, added depth and complexity to what is otherwise a relatively didactic, one dimensional script. And although the *randai* circle was only used once during the performance (a traditional *randai* performance would use it many times), when it took place the packed audience in Jambi's *Taman Budaya* let loose with an enormous cheer, responding extremely warmly, it would seem, to the work's engagement with traditional performance forms.

But perhaps the most striking element of Teater Nuktah's adaptation of the play was the ensemble cast's use of huge lengths of red and yellow cloth. According to Syuhendri, the colours chosen have political significance for Minangkabau people, yellow symbolising the birthplace of the Minangkabau kingdom, red symbolising another area of Minangkabau territory which has been the birthplace of a large number of radical and reformist Minang figures. At the same time, Syuhendri noted, the same colours were used by two well known political parties, and he was conscious that their use in *Tarik Balas* evoked the contemporary struggle between Golkar and PDI-P. While the *Tarik Balas* script - which was written in 1988 - arguably offers a veiled critique of the New Order's approach to justice, human rights and autocratic leadership, Teater Nuktah's adaptation seeks to make a new connection with the politics of the post-New Order era.

What Teater Nuktah was actually trying to achieve by making this connection - other than pointing out that Indonesia's contemporary crisis is perhaps

comparable to that faced by the *nagari* in *Tarik Balas* - was not entirely clear. The work was, nonetheless, an interesting attempt to merge some of the questions about Minangkabau *adat* raised in *Tarik Balas*, with a broader commentary about the contemporary national political situation. And there were several other references to the issues facing Indonesia as nation - for example, frequent allusions (not scripted) in chorus scenes to ongoing conflicts in Aceh and Ambon, as well as to widespread poverty, violence and the breakdown of social order. In one scene, a chorus member breaks free from the crowd and shouts 'we must look for a director, this is chaos' ('*kita harus cari sutradara, ini kacau*'). Crowd scenes - such as one in which the chorus yell 'we demand justice' ('*tuntut keadilan*') - played on the familiar slogans and performative style of mass demonstrations of the post-New Order era, and were reminiscent particularly of the then very recent actions outside the Attorney General's offices in Jakarta, demanding that Suharto and his family be brought to justice.

Messages in Teater Noktah's *Tarik Balas* about the necessity of reform and the need to develop adequate institutions and processes to respect justice and human rights are essentially compatible with the progressive elements of Indonesia's *reformasi* project. Its willingness to ask difficult questions about the appropriateness and fairness of traditional mechanisms for dealing with conflict and law enforcement (the *undang-undang tarik balas*) makes a welcome intervention in debates about legal reform in contemporary Indonesia. Likewise, its advocacy for just and radical leadership, such as that exemplified by Datuk Perpatih, was timely and constructive. There were, however, aspects of *Tarik Balas* - as well as the audience response to it - that could be said to celebrate a kind of fetishised and anti-democratic 'traditional culture', and that lead to unintentional internal contradictions.

In *Tarik Balas*, both Sutan Balun and Sutan Marajo Basa are born into the positions of leadership, and inherit their titles as leaders of their *nagari*. While

the *nagari* structure is celebrated in scholarly and popular literature as being supposedly and inherently 'more democratic' than traditional structures elsewhere in Indonesia, the positions enjoyed by the two Datuk in *Tarik Balas* are never contested. Their right to occupy positions of power is entirely unquestioned: although it is suggested that Sutan Marajo Basa might modify his leadership style so as to be more agreeable to the people, there is no real suggestion that the people might choose to overthrow him, or indeed that they may be able to choose an alternative leader. Once going through their respective rites of passage, they automatically acquire their royal titles of Datuk Perpatih Nan Sabatang and Datuk Katamanggungan. So while on one hand, *Tarik Balas* is a work that strongly advocates reform and justice of a kind, on the other hand it is also silently endorses an acceptance of a feudalistic system of inherited power.

The final point about *Tarik Balas* is in fact more about the audience response to the work than about the production itself. I have mentioned that the audience reaction to the use of the *randai* 'circle' in *Tarik Balas* was extremely enthusiastic. Perhaps the audience's reaction was inspired by a sense that, finally, here was a work that celebrated the uniqueness and proud heritage of Sumatran theatre. The *Forum Teater Se-Sumatra* was, after all, precisely about providing Sumatran theatre with an opportunity to reassert and explore its identity after three decades of Javanese cultural hegemony. Cheering the *randai* circle, then, was perhaps partly about expressing pride in the survival and re-interpretation of traditions such as *randai*: and as I have argued above, in the era of *otonomi daerah*, the celebration of 'traditional culture' takes on a new political significance. While events such as the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatra* and performances like *Tarik Balas* make important political statements about the meaning of regional identities, to an extent they also - ironically - continue the New Order's project of celebrating the decorative aspects of a simplified and unproblematised 'traditional culture'.

The Makassar theatre scene

The theatre communities of Makassar in South Sulawesi share with their counterparts in Sumatra a strong desire both to forge a distinctive regional identity and to gain recognition as part of a national Indonesian theatre culture. The theatre communities of these two regions differ, however, in several important ways. While the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* was presented by organisers as the first ever festival of Sumatran theatre, Makassar's theatre community has been organizing Sulawesi-wide festivals since the 1950s (Bodden 2001: pages not numbered, citing Syariff 1999:31). Indeed, the first such festival clearly staked out a position in the emerging national Indonesian theatre culture, stating that their attempt 'to raise the quality of drama' would contribute to the broader project of developing national culture (Bodden 2001). So while the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* was conceived very much as part of an agenda to 'write back' to the Javanese 'centre' of cultural production, arts festivals held in Makassar in the post-New Order era - given the long history of such festivals in South Sulawesi - have served a slightly different function.

In his very useful overview of the process of defining regional and national identity in the South Sulawesi theatre community over the last three decades, Bodden notes that 'the formation of a regional cultural identity within an urban national cultural sphere involves great tensions and a complex context' and that these processes have to be seen against the background of changing centre-regional relations, as well as regional cultural workers' relationships with local audiences (2001). This chapter will build on Bodden's work by looking at a recent example of the ways in which one theatre group in South Sulawesi, Rombongan Sandiwara Petta Puang (hereafter Petta Puang) has negotiated the 'great tensions' and 'complex context' in which they operate. The specific case study is a series of performances staged around Makassar by Petta Puang as part of celebrations for Indonesian Independence Day in 2002.

As Elizabeth Morrell (2000) has noted, following the fall of the New Order, a number of attempts were made in South Sulawesi to use a 'cultural approach' to celebrate local identity, represent cultural and religious diversity and invoke images of the province's proud pre-colonial and maritime past. Such an approach may partly have been inspired by a desire to quell potential unrest and re-inspire community investment in the idea of national unity, in the wake of the then recently held independence referendum in East Timor. Events such as the celebrations held in Makassar for New Year's Eve in 1999, the *Makassar Art Forum* of September 1999, driven primarily by artists and NGOs, were examples of this new 'cultural approach'²¹. The former event was significant also in that it marked the official re-adoption of the name Makassar, following years of being known as 'Ujung Pandang'. As Morrell argues, the name Makassar itself both recalled the glory of the former maritime power and evoked 'a strong sense of place, encompassing the maritime heritage which is *not* inherent to Makassar identity' (2000:7 emphasis added)²². Public events such as the 1999 New Years Eve celebrations would seem, like attempts to craft a distinct Sumatran identity discussed earlier in this chapter, to be about reclaiming the right to self-define local culture and identity. Attempts to encourage representations of pluralism and tolerance at events such as these - while enabled by the greater political freedoms of the post New Order - were perhaps also prompted by fears that this same political freedom was leading to an alarming increase in ethnic and sectarian conflict that had the potential to undermine national unity.

²¹ There were numerous other examples of the 'cultural approach' being used in Makassar. In 2000, artists, NGOs and religious groups collaborated on a large scale performance event focusing on 'conflict resolution'. A number of NGOs in Makassar also collaborated with theatre groups on issue-specific campaigns, a good example of which was the performance *Bom Waktu Perempuan* developed by Teater Kita Makassar in partnership with women's rights NGO LP3i, which focused on raising awareness of domestic violence issues.

²² In a deconstruction of the stereotype of the Bugis seafarer and the predominance of maritime narratives in reconstructions of Makassar history, Pelras argues that 'a closer look at their history reveals that only a small proportion of (the Bugis) have ever been engaged in maritime activities.' (1998:20)

South Sulawesi's relationship with the Indonesian national project has - since the Revolution of 1945 to 1949 - been ambiguous. The province's position in the revolution was, for example, described as being that of both 'puppet and patriot' (Harvey 1985:223): it was both the site of bitter resistance to the Dutch and later, a centre for Dutch power and the capital of the shortlived Dutch Federation of East Indonesian states. From 1950 to 1965, the province was the site of Kahar Mudzakkar's Darul Islam rebellion, arguably one of the most brutal post-revolutionary struggles, which Harvey suggests had its roots in the bitter divisions that emerged between rural and urban communities during the Revolution (1985:223). The ambivalence of some in South Sulawesi towards the project of Indonesian nationalism continues to hold sway. In October 1999, following the failure of the province's 'favourite son', BJ Habibie, to retain the Presidency, student protesters in Makassar led calls to establish an 'independent Sulawesi' and an 'independent East Indonesia' (Nawi 2001:50-51). Although they did not lead to a groundswell of support for the independence cause, as Aspinall has argued, the speed with which these protests were launched suggests a willingness to question the national project that perhaps does not exist to the same extent in most other regions (Aspinall 2002). After the 2004 parliamentary elections, South Sulawesi has held the dubious distinction of both being one of the Golkar Party's most loyal strongholds and having an alleged member of the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah, Tamsil Linrung, as one of its representatives in the national legislature. Suffice to say that South Sulawesi is a region in which the project of Indonesian nationalism is openly and constantly contested.

As Bodden notes, like their colleagues in Java, artists from Makassar grappled in the 1970s with questions about inserting 'local colour' (*warna lokal*) into their work. While - as Bodden suggests - Jakarta and Java based figures became in the 1970s and 1980s 'the main sources of authority in theatrical matters' for many in Makassar's theatre community, since the 1990s Makassar's artists appear less inclined to look to Jakarta for judgment on their artistic

achievements. The region's most active theatre groups - Teater Kita Makassar, Sanggar Merah Putih Makassar and Petta Puang - in different ways are influenced both by local tradition and contemporary national and global culture. The Makassar theatre community's relationship with the Jakarta/ Java centre, on the most part, would seem to be characterised not by a desire to separate from the centre but rather by a demand for 'recognition of South Sulawesi as an equally fertile arena in which national culture, with a local perspective, could be produced.' (Bodden 2001).

In the context of this discussion, one event, the 1999 Makassar Art Forum, deserves special mention. The Makassar Art Forum - which clearly aspired to be seen as both a national and international 'level' event²³ - brought together artists, NGOs and members of the community in what was described as an attempt to eliminate the kind of 'local nationalisms' that emerged following the fall of the New Order. In order to achieve this aim it sought to provide a forum for the kind of inter-cultural interactions that characterised both the contemporary era of globalization and the city of Makassar's own history as a significant hub for regional trade (Halim HD cited in *Republika* 1 September 1999). While many were enthusiastic about the pluralistic aims of the Makassar Art Forum²⁴, the event and its organisers were by no means universally respected or liked. Organisers had to defend themselves, for example, against allegations that the Forum was a 'vehicle for the political elite' (*Kompas* 6 September 1999; *Madani* 30 September 1999; *Panji Masyarakat* 22 September

²³ Organisers of the Makassar Arts Forum took every opportunity to emphasise the international credibility that the Forum would have. Picking up on this, a substantial amount of press coverage highlighted the participation of artists from elsewhere in Indonesia and from overseas in the Makassar Arts Forum. Media commentary proclaimed, for example, that the Arts Forum would be hosting artists from far afield, including Los Angeles and Solo (*Harian Binabaru* 24 August 1999), that the Arts Forum would involve collaborations with artists from around the world (*Harian Binabaru* 12 August 1999) and that the Arts Forum would be of 'international standard' (*Pedoman Rakyat* 12 August 1999).

²⁴ Media coverage of the Makassar Arts Forum was widespread and included positive reviews of specific Forum events. Commentators pointed out that the Forum's aims were consistent with the projects of democratisation and decentralization (*Forum Keadilan* 26 September 1999), that it presented an innovative example of how the regions could 'institutionalise diversity' (Sudirman HN 1999); and that its success demonstrated the 'failure of the centre' to come to terms with cultural diversity (Malna 1999).

1999). Support from the major government arts and cultural vehicles - including the South Sulawesi Arts Council (*Dewan Kesenian Sulawesi Selatan*), the Makassar Arts Council (*Dewan Kesenian Makassar*) and the South Sulawesi Arts Coordination Body (*Badan Koordinasi Kesenian Sulawesi Selatan*) - was also limited (*Harian Binabaru* 9 September 1999; *Mingguan MaRaja* 5 September 1999). Forum organisers noted, in response, that such criticisms were symptomatic of official arts bodies' fear of 'outsiders', and that ironically (and contrary to these bodies' claims) it was in fact the official arts institutions themselves who had 'politicised the arts'. One of the achievements of the Makassar Arts Forum, they argued, was that it made the arts councils and other official bodies 'look outdated'. Nevertheless, these sorts of criticisms and tensions no doubt contributed to the difficulty that organisers faced when their attempts to mount a second Makassar Art Forum in 2001 and then again in 2002, failed. The 1999 Makassar Art Forum remains noteworthy, however, for its attempt to re-imagine the cultural relationship between centre and region, and to develop new ways of thinking about the concept of 'unity in diversity', so central to the way in which Indonesian nationalism has been conceived.

The following case study, which looks at performances staged by the theatre group Petta Puang, in and around Makassar for Indonesian Independence Day in 2002, extends some of these ideas about cultural expression and the construction of identities in the post-New Order era.

Celebrating nationhood in South Sulawesi: Petta Puang performs 17

August

Established in the mid 1980s, when it worked under the name of Teater Mekar Buana, Petta Puang is Makassar's most popular and commercially successful theatre group. Petta Puang's performances are based on a local folk theatre form, *kondo buleng*, which originated in the early twentieth century and is known for having been used to express resistance to the Dutch during the late colonial period (Morrell 2000). Since their establishment, Petta Puang have

developed a reputation for their ability to use light-hearted satire to communicate serious social critique to audiences ranging from villagers in outlying islands to Jakarta's political establishment, including former President Megawati and members of her Cabinet. Critics have praised, amongst other things, the group's flexibility, acting ability, and skill at generating 'story ideas that take the reality of everyday life as a starting point' (Julan em Saho's 2000).

Petta Puang's ability to convey contemporary social messages using local idiom and language²⁵ has seen them work with a range of organisations, for causes as diverse as voter education, coral reef conservation and HIV/AIDS awareness²⁶. Their ability to perform anywhere, to incorporate any theme for any audience has been widely noted (*Fajar* 13 September 1999). As at least one critic has argued, Petta Puang's work in civic education can be seen to play an important role in the long term project of democratisation. Furthermore, the group's irreverent, self reflexive humour enables it to communicate important messages without being didactic or 'preaching' (Sudirman HN 2001).

At the same time, however, the apparent malleability of Petta Puang's political commitment has also been questioned by some activists. Despite its recent work with a range of NGOs, and reputation for social criticism, Petta Puang - like Yogyakarta's Teater Gandrik, with whom comparisons are often drawn - started out producing theatre that conveyed messages on behalf of the New Order state. The character Petta Puang in fact made his inaugural appearance when Teater Mekar Buana (as the group was then known) was invited to devise a performance for the Bone district branch of the then Department of Information (DEPPEN) who were seeking folk theatre groups to represent the

²⁵ Petta Puang's performances use mostly Bahasa Indonesia, however they do incorporate Bugis language in performances in some circumstances.

²⁶ Petta Puang is not the only group in Makassar producing this kind of work in partnership with NGOs. Most notably, a group called Karaeng Tojeng has used a similar style to Petta Puang in its work with a network of NGOs on anti-corruption campaigns. See for example *Fajar* 10 March 2002 and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* 9 March 2002

district at a DEPPEN sponsored *Pameran Pembangunan Sulawesi Selatan* ('Exhibition of South Sulawesi's Development') held at the Somba Opu fort²⁷ in 1992 (Sukatanya 2001:56-58). Petta Puang continued its links with the Indonesian government for some time after this initial partnership with DEPPEN. Their willingness to perform at Golkar Party campaign events in the lead up to the 1997 General Elections drew sharp criticism from local activists, who argued that Petta Puang had become a 'propaganda tool' for political interest groups (Akbar 1997 cited in Sukatanya 2001:68). Director Bahar Merdu's argument, that it was 'market forces' (*masalah pasar*) rather than political affiliation, that drove the group's decision to perform during election campaigns (Merdu cited in Sukatanya 2001:68-69) highlights the group's pragmatism and commercial orientation, which still informs their approach today.

Petta Puang's work is indeed 'traditional' in many respects. Performers - many of whom wear traditional clothing - improvise around set narratives, and the role of the director in rehearsals is extremely flexible (Sudirman HN 2001:6). Their work has been described by several observers as exemplifying the possibility for an 'Indonesian theatre' that 'no longer is subservient (*patuh*) to the rules (*kaidah*) of western theatre' (Sukatanya 2001:61). At the same time, however, Petta Puang's work incorporates a number of 'modern' elements, including, as Bodden notes, a 'self-reflexivity' that breaks 'the barrier between performers and audience' (2001: pages not numbered). The music that accompanies their performances also incorporates a range of influences including *dangdut*, pop music, and advertising jingles in addition to traditional

²⁷ The Somba Opu Fort was, during the New Order, turned into a kind of 'Taman Mini' for South Sulawesi, complete with traditional architecture and cultural displays. Although the cultural park has now fallen into disrepair, Somba Opu remains a place of significance for many in Makassar's arts community, several of whom - including artists from the group Teater Kita Makassar - attach to the fort great spiritual significance. It has also been the site of organised resistance to official cultural bureaucracy, for example a group of twenty student theatre groups whose 'Deklarasi Somba Opu' of 28 April 2002 called for greater transparency and broader participation in arts institutions. Residents of Somba Opu include one of Makassar's leading performance artists, Firman Djalil.

Bugis-Makassar musical styles, and is created from an eclectic range of instruments including the guitar, tanjidor, trumpet and household objects such as eating utensils and plates.

Their satirical critique centres on the character of Petta Puang, a Bugis aristocrat who is portrayed as old fashioned and unable to adapt to modern times, but nevertheless a sharp and astute critic of those around him. The characterisation of Petta Puang varies from performance to performance, depending on the message the group wants to convey: in some stories he is a hero, in others he is the object of jokes. As Sukatanya notes,

One moment he (Petta Puang) is like a father or an elderly relative who's often cruel, cunning, tough, authoritarian, even frightening. But the next moment Petta Puang will appear as a simple (*lugu*) man of the people....(2001:60).

Petta Puang's mannerisms, use of language and relationships with other characters no doubt draw on director Bahar Merdu's own observations of the Bugis-Bone aristocracy, from which he himself is descended (Sudirman HN 2001:7). The name Petta Puang itself - a combination of two aristocratic titles that sound incongruous when used together - implies a ridicule of outdated, primordial and feudal social structures and values (Sukatanya 2001:59). Other regular characters include Petta Puang's obsequious but docile servants, Congak and Gimpe, and Petta Puang's son and daughter, Andong and Minah. While the character of Petta Puang is a satirical representation of the archetypal nobleman, the sycophantic Congak and Gimpe have been likened to modern day Indonesian bureaucrats (Faisal 1997). Andong and Minah, in contrast, are caricatures of young people trying to negotiate the challenges of modernity in a rapidly changing world. Andong in particular is often portrayed as being caught between cultures, somewhat uneasily wearing modern clothing and accessories like sunglasses (Sukatanya 2001:66).

Given Petta Puang's populism and ability to create performances for almost any occasion, it is no surprise that they are regularly invited to perform at celebrations for Indonesian Independence Day. Since the group's inception, Independence Day or *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations have provided both income and opportunities to reach new audiences (Sukatanya 2001:54-55; *Harian Binabaru* 3 September 1999). Independence Day celebrations, in Sulawesi as in Java, are characterised at the local level by a series of events, which usually include competitions for honours ranging from 'best *nasi goreng*' (best fried rice) to 'cleanest *kampung*' (cleanest village), performances by local amateur performance groups and, in 2002, the ubiquitous *poco-poco*, a kind of cross between aerobics and rock eistedford, performed by groups of local women who, by and large, seem to enjoy immensely their time in the spotlight.

Independence Day celebrations also often include more 'professional' performances, for which the community pays an appearance fee. In Java, such performances are usually either *wayang*, *ketoprak* or in the contemporary era, *campursari*. As Hatley notes, in Java, *wayang* was 'a natural choice' for official Independence Day celebrations, and was a performance form well suited to 'a contemporary state, authoritarian and hierarchically structured, which attempts to appropriate for itself the grandeur and mystique of court culture' (1994:232). Performances of *ketoprak* at Independence Day celebrations in Java would usually be based on or include references to stories of anti-colonial struggle, often (but not always) conveying a sense of nationalist pride and identity to audiences (Hatley 1982:58-59). But what of Independence Day celebrations elsewhere in Indonesia? What sorts of national imagery and nationalist narratives do they draw upon? In what ways might Independence Day celebrations, in regions like South Sulawesi, reflect some of the tensions and contradictions that exist between regional and national identities? And to what extent might narratives of nationhood inscribed in present day Independence celebrations reflect the post-*reformasi* political climate? It is with these questions in mind that this case study now turns to a performance staged by

Petta Puang, for Independence Day celebrations in and around Makassar in 2002.

Petta Puang's Independence Day performance was performed in several locations both on Independence Day itself and in the days following. I attended two of these performances: the first was in the middle class housing estate of Bukit Baruga, about half an hour from the centre of Makassar, the festivities organised by the Bukit Baruga community. The second performance was a more official affair, organised by the *Kecamatan Ujung Pandang* (Ujung Pandang Sub-District), and staged in front of the Victoria Hotel in downtown Makassar. In both cases, Petta Puang was the headline act, the drawcard for which audiences would wait until late in the evening.

The event at Bukit Baruga - entitled *Malam Pesta Rakyat Bukit Baruga* (Bukit Baruga People's Night of Celebration) - was staged on a little-used tennis court. On the way to the performance, travelling together in a rented mini-bus, members of Petta Puang talked about the local context in which they were about to perform. Group members expected the Bukit Baruga community to be experiencing a degree of social dislocation: while residents were relatively well-off (with a tennis court at their disposal, for example), they perhaps lacked the sense of togetherness that was an enduring characteristic of poorer communities. The comparatively luxurious lifestyle at Bukit Baruga came at a price: people had come from all over the place to live there, and the community had no 'real identity'. Part of the rationale for holding the Independence Day event, Bahar told Petta Puang members, was to build a sense of community spirit among Bukit Baruga residents.

One of the immediately noticeable aspects of the Bukit Baruga event was the amount of sponsorship it had managed to attract. Sponsors - including Bank Danamon, Telkomsel, Bank Bukopin and even the local *Wartel Alif* - had contributed funds. On the crowded tennis court, beneath massive power lines,

banners advertising *Kartu HALO*, a pre-paid card for mobile phones, fluttered alongside red and white Indonesian flags. Bank Bukopin's sponsorship had also earned it a banner of its own, on which it declared 'With the spirit of the 57th Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia, we propel friendship and solidarity with the people of Bukit Baruga'. Another generic banner, presumably produced by the event's organising community, but echoing the slogan used on banners all over Makassar for Independence Day in 2002, read 'The unity and integrity of the nation are integral to the goals of the 1945 proclamation'.

Slogans about national unity, respecting diversity, and upholding communal harmony featured not only on banners but in the banter of the event's two MCs, who worked the crowd like the professional radio personalities they apparently were. After announcing that 'unity and integrity' (*persatuan dan kesatuan*) of the nation was the theme of the evening, one of the MCs announced a competition to see which chapter of the audience could yell 'Independence!' ('*Merdeka!*') the loudest, which had children and adults alike shouting '*Merdeka!*' into the balmy evening and out across Bukit Baruga's neat rooftops and decorative coconut palms. Throughout the event, apart from the repeated refrain of '*persatuan dan kesatuan*' the MCs also reminded the audience, using the slogan of the contemporary Indonesian Armed Forces, that 'peace' was always 'beautiful' (*selalu damai itu indah*)²⁸ and that they should remember and value diversity (*keanekaragaman penting diingat dan dihargai*). If any further proof was required to demonstrate that New Order style language had retained its currency, one of the MCs beseeched the audience to go away from the night's festivities prepared to do their bit for the implementation of

²⁸ '*Damai Itu Indah*' (Peace is Beautiful) was the slogan used in a major banner campaign organised by the Indonesian Military in 2001-02. The ubiquitous green and yellow banners, proclaiming '*Damai itu Indah*', sprung up all over Indonesia, drawing critical comment (at least in some quarters) for the somewhat incongruous appropriation of the word '*damai*'.

something called the 'vision of independence and *development*' (*visi kemerdekaan dan pembangunan*, emphasis added).²⁹

The event hosted by the *Kecamatan Ujung Pandang - Malam Syukuran HUT RI ke-57* (Night of thanksgiving for the 57th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia) - shared with the Bukit Baruga event the rhetoric of *persatuan dan kesatuan* (unity and integrity). The *Kecamatan Ujung Pandang*, however, had restricted itself to only one sponsor, an organisation called Kibar, a local football promoter³⁰. A major part of *Malam Syukuran*, as a sub-district level event, was prize-giving and showcasing the winners of various awards (best children's dance, best *poco-poco* performance and so on). While the audience was diverse - certainly more diverse than the average audience at the *Gedung Kesenian Societet d'Harmonie*, Makassar's main venue for contemporary theatre, down the road - it also included a large contingent of local government officials.

Petta Puang's Independence Day performance was not a story of heroism or of anti-colonial triumph. Although short in length (around half an hour), it was instead a tale that described the ease with which colonial powers co-opted members of the opposition, and about an indecisive, weak Bugis aristocracy that failed to participate effectively in the anti-colonial struggle. After the character Petta Puang made his entrance and warmed up the crowd, his band sang an upbeat song in which they asked about the nature of struggle (*perjuangan*). 'Struggle, what is struggle?' (*Perjuangan, bagaimana perjuangan?*) they sang, 'To struggle, to struggle, it requires effort, to struggle, to struggle, to struggle it's an effort' (*berjuang, berjuang itu perlukan tenaga; berjuang, berjuang, berjuang sebuah tenaga...*). The band members, although not assuming headline 'character' roles in the performance, are portrayed

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of the New Order's use of the word 'development' (*pembangunan*) see Heryanto (1988)

³⁰ Kibar, incidentally, is a relatively strong supporter of the arts in Makassar, often lending its support to festivals and other events.

throughout as pro-independence fighters, on several occasions interrupting actors' dialogue to remind Petta Puang that he is himself also meant to be part of the anti-colonial struggle.

The story begins when, with great fanfare, a man in Dutch military uniform enters, much to the audience's delight, approaching the stage with a long walk through the area where they are seated. He is accompanied by two soldiers, and he walks with his pelvis thrust forward and a long cane in his hand. When he makes it to the stage, he declares that he has been searching for Petta Puang everywhere. Goaded and teasing Petta Puang, he notes that 'he (Petta Puang) becomes more angry. But the more angry, the more he resists, the more beautiful he becomes', at which point Petta Puang has to calm his enraged musicians. After further dialogue - in which Petta Puang has to be reminded by the Dutch man that they are, in fact, enemies - the Dutch man declares that the real reason he has sought out Petta Puang is that he has heard that tonight there is an 'Independence Party' and he would like to dance (*berjoget*). To hoots of laughter from the audience, he and his soldiers then *berjoget*, pelvises thrust forward, an almost universal image of military men at a bad night club.

As their dancing comes to an end, a young woman enters. Dressed in white and waving an Indonesian flag, she cries '*Merdeka! Merdeka!*' (Independence! Independence!), as she approaches the men and introduces herself, 'I'm Minah, *puteri Indonesia*'. Minah, it turns out, is also Petta Puang's daughter. After making some lewd comments, the Dutch man asks Minah if she will dance with him, which she does willingly, continuing to wave her Indonesian flag. Minah's dancing with the Dutch man upsets several of Petta Puang's band members, as well as her boyfriend, who enters the stage, melancholy and distressed. Minah hands him a letter, which he reads before saying that if she feels that way she should just leave him. As Minah's boyfriend mopes, the Dutch men and his soldiers capture him, saying, 'We're going to capture you. Do you know why we're capturing you? Because you're an extremist'. They offer the boyfriend

food (cheese and potatoes, among other European favourites), in return for his help: if he can use his activist skills to destabilize (*kacaukan*) the city, he will have their protection and will not go hungry.

As the boyfriend goes off to plan the city's destabilisation, the Dutch man and his soldiers get drunk. Not only do they drink but - in a reference to modern day social ills - the Dutch man surreptitiously pulls out some pills, which he gives to his soldiers and then swallows one himself. Once they are intoxicated, Minah's boyfriend returns, calling himself 'the provocateur' (*provokator*). When asked, he assures the Dutch man that everything is arranged for the destabilisation to begin the next day: 'the students are not studying any more, the price of public transport is set to rise, the workers are striking, and women are raising their fists in protest!', he declares. Satisfied that all is arranged, the Dutch man sets about making his provocateur drink as much as possible. Once intoxicated, the provocateur finally collapses in a stupor, from which he wakes up, minutes later, with a noose around his neck. And so the performance comes to a close, with the provocateur being dragged off the stage by the Dutch man's soldiers, and Petta Puang wringing his hands in resignation.

Rather than celebrating Bugis-Makassan contributions to the nationalist struggle, then, Petta Puang's Independence Day performance perhaps surprisingly points explicitly to the inadequacies of the local response to colonial domination. Recalling Harvey's suggestion that South Sulawesi played the role of both 'puppet and patriot' (1985:223) in the struggle for independence, Petta Puang's performance can be seen as an attempt, perhaps, to represent the less desirable of these two roles. The character Petta Puang - who might have been expected to take on heroic dimensions in a tale about the independence struggle - is portrayed as indecisive and weak. Unable to respond effectively to the cruel parody of his Dutch adversary, Petta Puang demonstrates neither leadership nor presence of mind. He fails, for example, to anticipate the ulterior motives of the Dutch man's flirtation with Minah. And

despite being the archetypal patriarch, he has neither instilled in his daughter a strong sense of loyalty to the independence cause, nor addressed the conditions that eventually make pro-independence fighters (like Minah's boyfriend) susceptible to corruption.

In highlighting the inglorious aspects of South Sulawesi's role in the Revolution, Petta Puang's Independence Day performance - in some respects - subverts dominant narratives of nationhood. While providing a local narrative relating to independence, Petta Puang's performance does not seek to invoke the imagery of South Sulawesi's proud pre-colonial maritime past, thereby also resisting one of the major trends in *reformasi* era narratives about the province's history³¹. In drawing attention to those aspects of South Sulawesi's history that are less likely to be remembered in popular narratives and reconstructions of the past, Petta Puang's performance makes an interesting intervention and complicates, to some extent, dominant discourses of nationhood.

But in addition to drawing attention to the Bugis aristocracy's ambivalence towards independence, Petta Puang's Independence Day performance also highlights continuities between the anti-colonial struggle of the past and contemporary conflicts. The co-opting of Minah's boyfriend into the Dutch camp - and his subsequent efforts to destabilize the city - is the part of the story in which audiences would find the most contemporary relevance. Not only does the language used (Minah's boyfriend is a '*provokator*' who is arrested because he is an 'extremist', for example) remind the audience of present day conflicts, in Petta Puang's independence day performance, the Dutch use the same strategies as their unnamed contemporary counterparts to co-opt opposition members. Possibly the most obvious connection with *reformasi*-era Indonesia, however, is the way in which the Dutch soldiers use the tactic of destabilisation.

³¹ Morrell (2000) notes, for example, the ways in which events such as the 1999 New Year's Eve celebrations sought to draw on and reconstruct images of this maritime history.

The notion that battles can be won by de-stabilising communities - and that chaos can be orchestrated by outside forces - resembles strongly the way in which conflicts in many parts of Indonesia have developed in recent years (Kingsbury and Aveling 2003:3). Likewise, the symptoms of chaos identified by Minah's boyfriend - students not studying, price increases for basic services like public transport, workers' strikes and best of all, women raising their fists in protest - are all easily recognizable markers of the post-New Order period. In 2002, as inter-religious violence in the Central Sulawesi town of Poso escalated to new levels, the subtext of Petta Puang's performance - that conflict within communities could be precipitated by more powerful, external forces; and that these external forces sometimes succeed in co-opting local groups for their own purposes - would have rung loud and clear to audiences in Bukit Baruga and in Makassar.

Reading Petta Puang's Independence Day performance is complicated by the way it treats the question of destabilization. On one hand we can read in the performance a quite radical message about the continuities between Dutch colonial power and, perhaps, the present day Indonesian military. By implying that the Indonesian military - or alternatively, militias - could be responsible for social unrest in which Indonesian citizens, ultimately, are the victims, Petta Puang's performance contests one of the dominant narratives of Indonesian nationalism. That is, it challenges the notions that Indonesians are somehow naturally united and that they don't kill their fellow Indonesian citizens. At the same time, however, the images of destabilization presented in the performance - of students protesting, of industrial action and of women campaigning for equality - run the risk of conflating genuine political action with orchestrated chaos. Exposing the degree to which *reformasi*-era social movements have subsequently been co-opted by state apparatuses may be a valid project. But to represent these movements - essentially the drivers of democratisation - as symptoms of interference in local politics by powerful external forces effectively undermines them. Petta Puang may not be intending to say that *all*

protest movements are manipulated by more powerful forces, and by representing political activism as part of a narrative about impending crisis and confusion, the performance effectively discounts the positive aspects of political change.

Related to its portrayal of protest movements and political activism, the final point I would make about Petta Puang's Independence Day performance is that its unifying theme - if there is one - seems to be about political apathy. Political commitments (perhaps like Petta Puang's as a group) are malleable and easily bought, and political action at the grass roots level exists only as a means to an end desired by a more powerful force. Heroism is an abstract concept, and is certainly not embodied by aristocratic figures like the character Petta Puang. Freedom fighters must choose between starving and selling out, and, ultimately, choose the latter. While the characters in the performance pay the price for their follies - Minah's boyfriend is in the end a victim of his decision to sell out - one wonders whether audiences, upon watching the performance, would feel any provocation towards positive action.

If *wayang* performances used in Javanese independence day celebrations were part of an attempt by officialdom to appropriate 'the grandeur and mystique of court culture' (Hatley 1994:232), in what ways did local government authorities in Makassar - which are dominated by Golkar sympathizers - benefit from Petta Puang's self-deprecating, anti-heroic narrative about independence? While Petta Puang's performance may not have perpetuated myths about pre-colonial Bugis seafarers, nor inspired audiences with embellished accounts of how local independence fighters overcame a brutal colonial occupation, it very clearly positions South Sulawesi as a participant in the story of anti-colonial struggle. Whether or not the region distinguished itself in this endeavour is perhaps not the point - Petta Puang's performance primarily locates Indonesian nationalist struggle as something that South Sulawesi was a part of. In this way, Petta Puang's Independence Day performances - while problematic in some respects

- contest many of the dominant narratives of nationalism and demonstrate the way in which regionally based theatre groups have been able to reflect local as well as national aspirations in their work.

Reclaiming memories of 'Java' and 'Indonesia': the case of *Waktu Batu*

Appeals to the past are amongst the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is over and concluded, or whether it continues albeit in different forms, perhaps. Edward Said (1993:3)

In the concluding moments of the second instalment of Teater Garasi's *Waktu Batu* trilogy³², a voice says 'I've heard that Teater Garasi are making theatre from Javanese mythologies. How's that possible? They're not Javanese.' (*Aku dengar Teater Garasi bikin teater dari mitologi-mitologi Jawa. Bagaimana bisa? Mereka kan bukan Jawa*)

While other case studies in this chapter have looked at theatre practice in regions that are often regarded as 'peripheral' to mainstream theatre culture in Indonesia, this final example focuses on a trilogy of works created by Teater Garasi, a group based in the cultural 'centre' of Indonesia, Yogyakarta. If other case studies have demonstrated how artists on the 'periphery' were both drawing inspiration from and writing back to the Java-based theatre establishment, then it was important to look also at how groups in the established 'centre' were reacting to the changed politics of cultural identity in the post-New Order period. While the New Order state may have regularly invoked a version of Javanese culture and tradition, by no means did it encourage or foster debate about the possible meanings of these traditions, nor

³² The three works in the trilogy are '*Waktu Batu. Kisah-kisah yang bertemu di ruang tunggu*' performed in July 2002; '*Waktu Batu (Ritus Seratus Kecemasan dan Wajah Siapa yang terbelah)*', performed in July 2003; and '*Waktu Batu, Deus ex Machina dan Perasaan-Perasaan Padamu*', performed at the Jakarta Art Summit in September-October 2004. I will refer to these works as *Waktu Batu I*, *Waktu Batu II* and *Waktu Batu III* respectively. Where comments refer to all three works I will refer to them as 'the *Waktu Batu* trilogy' or '*Waktu Batu*' as appropriate.

about possible interpretations of history. In raising questions about and problematising Javanese mythologies and history - and using this as a point from which to investigate questions about Indonesian identity - Teater Garasi's *Waktu Batu* has much in common with projects in other regions discussed earlier in this chapter.

The *Waktu Batu* trilogy, developed and performed between 2001 and 2004, has been Teater Garasi's major focus over this time. Focusing on what the group's artistic director Yudi Ahmad Tajudin saw as salient questions about time, transition and identity, the *Waktu Batu* performances are composed of fragments of images and narratives taken from Javanese mythology (the myths of Watugunung, Murwakala and Sudamala) and historical texts about the fall of Majapahit and the colonisation of the Indonesian archipelago. The *Waktu Batu* performances re-present these texts in a fractured, dystopic way, alluding to the commonalities between the various narratives at the same time as juxtaposing them with contemporary cultural references and images. While the project - particularly the first two productions - generated substantial controversy and criticism in some quarters, the third and final installment of the trilogy was hailed by leading figures in the Indonesian arts scene as something of a landmark artistic achievement³³. *Waktu Batu* has put Teater Garasi on the 'map' as one of the leading contemporary Indonesian theatre groups of its generation. While *Waktu Batu* looks to the past (mythology and history) for inspiration, as a trilogy that speaks about identity in times of transition, it is a series of works very much of its times.

³³ Yudi has said that *Waktu Batu III* was the first time Teater Garasi had received substantial praise and positive attention from leading figures in Indonesian theatre. He recalls, for example, the scenes backstage after the performances at the prestigious Jakarta Art Summit in August 2004: senior theatre figures, including Rendra himself, and others bearing praise and kisses of congratulations. This was the first time Garasi had experienced such attention (personal communication 9 November 2004). Perhaps then, *Waktu Batu* was something of a 'coming of age' for the group and the artists involved.

The idea for *Waktu Batu*, conceived by Yudi Ahmad Tajudin, arose in late 2000, during a period of transition - for Yudi personally, for Teater Garasi as a group and for Indonesia as a whole. Yudi writes of this period in bleak terms:

(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. It would shift below the surface, once, then often, a ripple would become a wave that would hit you hard in the face. But, strangely, it would be very difficult to make people wake up. There would be a slap, they would open their eyes, it would surprise them and they would talk about it, but then they'd forget. And so this would go on forever. Amnesia! Amnesia! (Tajudin 2002a: pages not numbered)

While the changes associated with the fall of the New Order and the *reformasi* era were not something Garasi initially identified as a motivating factor for their work, the group has gradually attempted to contextualize their thinking about theatre - and practice - in relation to contemporary social and political events (Tajudin 2002b and Tajudin 2004).

It was in the context of this uncertainty that Yudi, after a long and productive discussion with Solo-based *dalang* Slamet Gundono, became interested in the Javanese ritual concepts of *sukerta* and *ruwatan*, which he describes respectively as 'a state of disorientation in space-time' (*situasi disorientasi ruang-waktu*) and 'a rite, a means of re-orientating the space and time of a person or community, so that they can determine the coordinates of their position in life, and be able to determine the direction in which they are going'. *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.

A sense of confusion perhaps also was one of the motivations for Teater Garasi in choosing to focus on the theme of 'identity'. Even before work on *Waktu Batu* commenced, members of the group said - in answer to questions about how their work related to traditional art forms and culture - that they often felt they looked at Javanese culture as if 'through the eyes of a tourist' (Retno Ratih Damayanti, Interview, 11 October 2000). Although several members of the group were Javanese, few felt any deep connection to Javanese myths and culture. Most group members, including Yudi, grew up to be more familiar with western popular culture than they were with wayang, more likely to have learnt the poetic lyrics of Portishead's latest album than the intricacies of classical Javanese mythology. Well versed in the language of contemporary cultural studies and literary theory, members of Teater Garasi were also aware that while 'identity was never fixed and always indistinct' (Tajudin 2002a), the illusion of an intact and unitary cultural identity remained a powerful tool for the state. In his program notes for *Waktu Batu I*, Yudi notes for example that

It could be that we just don't understand, but often we feel the same degree of alienation from that which is indigenous/ authentic (*asli*) and that which is foreign (*asing*)

One of the script writers on the *Waktu Batu* project, Ugoran Prasad, recalls the trepidation felt by several members of the creative team, when hit with the realisation that only one out of the four of them (Gunawan Maryanto) really had a deep understanding of the mythologies they had undertaken to study and adapt for performance (Prasad 2002:1).

The idea to use the Watugunung myth as a starting point for *Waktu Batu* emerged, Yudi says, from discussions he had with Gunawan 'Cindhil' Maryanto, the member of Teater Garasi with perhaps the best Javanese cultural credentials. The Watugunung myth tells the story of a boy who flees his home after being hit on the head with a rice ladle by Sinta, his mother. The God Siva grants the boy's wish to have power over men and women alike, names him *Watugunung* and declares that he will meet his end when he is confronted by a

monster with the head of a giant turtle and wearing the *panca naka* (five nails). Watugunung then goes on to conquer 27 mountains and kingdoms, and eventually marries a woman who realises, too late, that she is his mother. He eventually meets his end when he is defeated in battle by Wisnu, the god of waters, who assumes his demonic form, tortoise-faced and armed with his sharp *panca naka* nails. Teater Garasi chose Watugunung as a central text for exploration because it tells story of the origins of time and is the founding myth of the Javanese and Balinese calendar systems, the names of days and weeks in the calendars relating to the various stages in the battle between Watugunung and Wisnu.

The other myths incorporated into *Waktu Batu* - Murwakala and Sudamala - are stories that relate to processes of ritual purification, the former being used in wayang performances as part of *ruwatan* rituals. Of the two legends, Murwakala is the one that is more clearly represented as part of the *Waktu Batu* narrative. It tells the story of the birth of Kala, the god of time, who is born after the god Siva forces his wife Uma to have sex with him against her will. When Uma frees herself from Siva's lustful embrace, his sperm falls into the sea, and Kala - an orgre who eats everything - is accidentally born into the world, where he goes on to eat everything in sight, including human beings and the moon. Kala has the strength of the gods who created him, he has 'Siwas's fury, Uma's hatred' (*Waktu Batu II:3*). In *Waktu Batu* it is Kala - rather than Wisnu - who brings an end to Watugunung.

While these myths provided a starting point for the development of *Waktu Batu*, historical texts provided a different but complementary insight into questions about identity. The remembering and forgetting of history, Yudi felt, was a critical factor shaping conceptions of identity in Java. More specifically, a disjuncture between history and memory - a kind of chronic amnesia - had been a central characteristic of Javanese identity since colonisation, and in contemporary times, had exacerbated the confusion of the post New Order

transition period. In order to understand this affliction better, Yudi and others in Teater Garasi studied the history of Java in the 14th and 15th centuries, which like the late twentieth century, was a period of rapid change and a critical transition point. This period of history, which saw the decline of the Majapahit Kingdom and the ascendancy of the Islamic Kingdom of Demak, also saw the arrival of European colonial powers, and marked the beginning of Java's modernity and interaction with global capital. As Yudi writes, this period was the 'first chapter of the modernity that shapes our identity today' (Tajudin 2002a: pages not numbered).

A team of three writers - Gunawan Maryanto, Ugoran Prasad and Andi Nur Latif - developed the script for *Waktu Batu* with input from Yudi and, in the later stages, from the actors themselves. In his essay '*Sedikit Tentang yang Tidak Tertulis di Atas Naskah*' ('A bit about what's not written in the script') (2002), Prasad describes in quite painful detail the difficult, but ultimately successful and rewarding, process of collaborative script development. With the good humour of hindsight, Prasad writes of the challenges, frustrations and excitement inherent in developing a script collaboratively, and in grappling with such big themes. The questions that necessarily emerged during the script development process were broad ranging and fundamental. As Prasad writes, these questions were

about the land we inhabit; about culture; about language; about power; about syncretic and defensive orientations; about ancient Javanese secrets; about Borobodur, which was designed by a Chinese architect; about repetition in time; about colonialism; about globalisation which has been happening since the 16th Century; about the erasure of history (2002: pages not numbered).

Although not stated explicitly, it is clear from Prasad's account that *Waktu Batu*'s complexity and depth as a performance was at least in part due to the joint authorship arrangement which enabled all three writers, along with the

director, to contribute their quite different perspectives and versions of the texts under exploration.

The development of the trilogy involved a long process of research, during which Teater Garasi delved into Javanese mythology and history and visited 12 archaeological sites in East and Central Java³⁴. Apart from visits to archeological sites, members of the group studied a range of texts and held numerous discussions - with scholars and others - about Javanese mythology, calendar systems and ritual concepts. They traveled to Banyuwangi in East Java where they studied the traditional artform *gandrung*. They held exploratory rehearsals in different spaces, including outdoors at Candi Cetho near Solo, and experimented with using different media, including mud (Tajudin 2003). At the same time, group members undertook regular skills training, developing their competence at acrobatics and martial arts, for example. They documented this process in detail and exhibited this documentation at the French Cultural Centre in Yogyakarta in May 2002, in conjunction with a script reading and a public discussion about the *Waktu Batu* development process. Particularly with the first installment of *Waktu Batu*, Teater Garasi demonstrated an unusual openness to and interest in feedback from audience members, for example by hosting a special post performance discussion, with specially invited members of the Yogyakarta community in which a wide range of ideas about the performance were put forward. With funding from the Dutch HIVOS Foundation, they also toured *Waktu Batu I* to Sumatra, gaining comparative insights into different local cultures and inviting responses from audience members who were not necessarily well-versed in the Javanese mythologies that informed the work.

³⁴ These sites were Candi Sewu, Candi Plaosan, Candi Kalasan, Candi Sari, Kraton Baka, Candi Gebang, *candi-candi perwara* around Prambanan, Candi Sukuh, Candi Cetho, and Penanggungan.

The *Waktu Batu* performances

The *Waktu Batu* performances are difficult to write about, in part because they are so dense, complex and visual that to describe particular scenes and images at the expense of others could be problematic. The three works share the same basic script (although numerous changes were made, with new scenes being added and the order shifted around, many of the basic ideas remain the same in *Waktu Batu I, II* and *III*), and the thematic concerns of time, transition and identity remain constant. While the script draws on mythologies and historical texts - and audience members with some knowledge of Javanese mythology would recognize elements of the Watugunung and murwakala stories - it doesn't re-tell these stories in their entirety, nor in a linear way. It uses instead a multi-layered approach with overlapping narratives and text, often with multiple actors playing one 'character', interspersed with fragments that don't easily connect. Images, text, sound and design elements are used in a rich, intellectually demanding pastiche that has the qualities of both mythic tale and music video clip. The *Waktu Batu* works are populated not only by the gods, demons and flawed human beings of mythology, but also by ninja turtles, medical personnel dressed in operating theatre uniforms and masks, catwalk models and projections of Lichtenstein-esque cartoons. Eclectic video imagery, including a repeated image of a man running with clockwork rhythm, is complemented by a soundtrack that includes hip-hop beats, the noise of a chainsaw, and an extraordinary Islamic mantra that charts the genealogical lineage from Adam to the Senopati of Matraman. In a thoughtful response to *Waktu Batu II*, writer Afrizal Malna likened the performance's 'busy-ness' to that of a bus terminal, in the way it simultaneously 'deconstructed (*membongkar*) and carried forward (*mengangkut*) texts, characters, scenes, sounds, graphics, lighting and video...'. With the complex layering of all these elements, Afrizal wrote, *Waktu Batu* was like a 'war of icons' (*perang ikon*), and that rather than having the structure of a story, it instead formed an 'architecture' that 'created space' for a dynamic and new kind of interaction between the texts of mythology and history (Malna 2003).

Poetic - often seemingly obscure - fragments of text are delivered by the performers in a way that initially might seem to be over-dramatic and contrived. Fraught with tension and foreboding of the inevitable chaos caused by Oedipal relationships between sons and mothers, forced sex between godly lovers, and the arrival of ships from the West, both *Waktu Batu I* and *II* contain a lot of angry dialogue and troubled interactions between characters. While perhaps not 'going as far' as some of the explicitly violent imagery of the works that will be described in the next chapter of this thesis, in *Waktu Batu* performers' bodies and voices are distorted, angst-ridden, traumatised by uncertainty and lack of control.

In all three *Waktu Batu* performances, the stage is busy with action, the pace often frenetic. Audience members are forced to make conscious choices about which part of the action to watch, about which images to recall: in each scene the 'main' narrative is accompanied by 'peripheral' action and images, many in the form of slide and video projections. It is only through multiple viewings that audience members can begin to pick up the full extent of *Waktu Batu*'s depth. But this busy-ness, or 'confusion' as it was described by several critics (see the later discussion of reactions to the works) is layered with moments of comparative stillness, a calmness that belies the narratives' dark undercurrents.

Repetition and multiplicity are key devices used throughout all three *Waktu Batu* works. In the prologue of *Waktu Batu I*, for example, characters on a beach watch the arrival of ships from the West. As the ship comes closer, and it becomes clear that it brings blue-eyed foreigners, the people on the beach prepare to flee to the mountains³⁵. The image of a ship's arrival - which in later scenes brings with it all sorts of foreign diseases, including amnesia - recurs

³⁵ In *Waktu Batu II* a similar scene appears not as a prologue but as the first scene. Entitled '*Kecemasan di tepi Pantai*', the language of the scene has been paired right back, to only five words. Five voices, four of which are identified in the script only as 'a person' yell out in the darkness 'A giant?', 'Ship', 'Arrives', 'Machine'. A fifth voice, identified as 'A mother shouting, calling after her child', says 'Hey!' (*Waktu Batu II* : 5)

throughout the work, as if it is the anchor of the distress and confusion manifested throughout the performance. Phrases of text are repeated by various characters in different contexts throughout the performance. Gesture, too, is multiplied and repeated. Sinta, for example, slaps herself in the head over and over again, tortured first by the anger she has shown towards her son, by the realisation that she has driven him away, and then by the discovery that he has become her husband. Other recurring fragments include an image of a ceramic head (in *Waktu Batu I* the head is smashed repeatedly, in *Waktu Batu II* it is not smashed but appears physically on stage and also as a projected image), and the pounding sound of multiple rice ladles hitting a hard surface. Other continuities exist on a more conceptual level - 'amnesia', identified as a source of contemporary troubles, in *Waktu Batu* is associated with the colonial encounter. But it is, of course, also often caused by head injuries of the kind sustained by Watugunung.

Not only are images, text and gestures repeated in multiple contexts, there are multiple versions of characters. There are two Sintas throughout the performance, and - in the scene in which he is struck on the head by his mother - up to four Watugunungs. Adding to the sense of identity crisis created by this multiplicity, several characters morph into other characters. In an early scene depicting the birth of Kala, for example, the actor who plays Siva becomes Kala, while Uma becomes the Hindu goddess of destruction, Durga, who then appears throughout the performance accompanied by her alter-ego, Kali. Later in the performance Sinta, at least metaphorically, also becomes Durga.

While the three *Waktu Batu* works share elements of the same script and the thematic concerns of time, transition and identity, they differ substantially in aesthetic. *Waktu Batu I* evokes a more traditional, 'mythic' feel, and is dense with imagery of the past. Sinta uses an earthenware pot and a giant wooden ladle to cook rice; Uma and Siva travel in a simple wooden boat; a giant turtle sits on stage like a constant guardian of the performance, a reminder of time

passing and futures remaining. Costumes are paired back, their simplicity drawing attention to the contrast between the performance's 'traditional' aesthetic and its use of contemporary performance technologies (video and still projections for example). This serves to reinforce the uneasy - yet co-existing and interdependent - relationship between the narratives of ancient and modern worlds. Contributing also to the 'traditional' feel of *Waktu Batu I* was the decision to stage the Yogyakarta performances at Sasana Hinggil Dwi Abad, a space within the Yogya kraton walls, usually used only for *wayang* performances.

In contrast, *Waktu Batu II* employs the sparse aesthetic of a hospital, the grey, angular performance space lit coldly, furnished with a metal hospital bed and large moveable screens for video projections. Instead of being a static, heavy presence, the turtle in *Waktu Batu II* is motorized, with a human head that sways back and forth on a spring, as it crosses the stage from time to time. One critic likened the characters in *Waktu Batu II* to 'funk wayang' (*wayang-wayang funk*) while the 'atmosphere of the stage was like a visual laboratory' (Malna 2003). In *Waktu Batu II*, a number of characters have a very contemporary edge: Kala, for example, has fire-engine red dreadlocks. Electronic music, video and slide projections are used liberally in *Waktu Batu II*, making more explicit the work's contemporary relevance. Descriptive language in the script also refers to the modern physical environment, for example 'Voices, like machines, get louder' (*Waktu Batu II* script:3).

The ending of the Watugunung myth in *Waktu Batu* differs slightly from conventional re-tellings. The arrival of colonisers' ships coincides with Sinta's discovery that she has married her son. Recognising that he will not be able to overcome the colonial power's technology, Watugunung plans to flee to the mountains, but Kala prevents him from doing this. Watugunung and Kala fight each other, to the soundtrack of a boxing match, under a backdrop of cartoon

projections 'kapow!' and 'wham!' Watugunung is turned to stone, and his mother cries, as the colonisation of Indonesia begins.

Reading the *Waktu Batu* trilogy

The *Waktu Batu* trilogy - in its entirety and as individual works - has generated, as all theatre should, a substantial amount of debate and criticism. Critical responses, both in the press and as informal feedback given to members of the group, has ranged in tone from downright hostility to gratuitous praise, with *Waktu Batu I* receiving perhaps the harshest criticism.

While careful to emphasise what he saw as Garasi's strong points - discipline and commitment, for example - Yogyakarta theatre critic Indra Tranggono argued *Waktu Batu I* had confused audiences through its use of what he saw as the work's 'dark messages, fragmented scenes, unclear characters, a disorderly dramatic structure, otherwise known as lack of focus, and so on.' (Tranggono 2002). Another Yogya-based writer, Hariadi Saptono, argued that while elements of *Waktu Batu* represented an 'artistic achievement' this was in spite of the performance's blurred focus, a consequence of an editing process that was 'so lax' (Hariadi 2002). Both Tranggono and Hariadi bemoaned how audiences would ever understand such a 'confused' work. Audiences would go home from the performance dissatisfied, it seemed, because they would be wondering what *Waktu Batu* was all about.

Other commentators, however, saw the 'confusing' elements of *Waktu Batu* as a positive thing. Partly in response to Hariadi's article, Ags Arya Dipanaya, himself the director of Jakarta-based group Teater Tetas, noted that for his part he enjoyed the confusion created by *Waktu Batu*, 'because there are many things that don't require resolution'. The confusion of *Waktu Batu* was a deliberate strategy, and one that shed new light on contemporary problems, Dipanaya argued:

Teater Garasi is saying something that is perhaps needed in order to answer the questions of our times. (They present) a number of cultural facts which, who knows, could clarify the process of the break-up of a nation, for example. And with its very interrupted and fragmented style - multiple points of focus, complex struggles, its length and constant repetition - this performance has been successful in highlighting a number of problems for its audience. (Dipanaya 2002)

Yogyakarta actor, theatre figure and long-time friend of Teater Garasi, Landung Simatupang, who had the perhaps unenviable task of being the moderator at a post performance seminar on *Waktu Batu I*, echoed Dipanaya's comments. The 'confusion' of *Waktu Batu*, he said, was not without purpose. *Waktu Batu* indeed communicated confusion and disorientation - but this mirrored the way in which young Indonesians related to traditional culture and history. While myths and history were recorded, to some extent, in artefacts and temples, the public's ability to interpret this information was limited.

If we visit temples, as Teater Garasi have done, if we go to Sukuh, Cetho and other sites, there's very limited information about what the temples actually are....(*Waktu Batu I* represents) young people's confusion in dealing with their environment, an environment which is clearly not self explanatory. (Simatupang cited in Teater Garasi 2002:6)

The other frequently expressed criticism specific to *Waktu Batu I* was that - as it was the first work in what was obviously going to be a long term process - it was under-developed, and not in what would be its final form (*bentuk final*). Despite Teater Garasi's efforts to convey to audiences the rigor of their research and rehearsal process, and belief that each performance in the trilogy should stand as a work in its own right, several observers argued that *Waktu Batu I* was 'not ready' (*belum matang*) for public presentation. Theatre director Joned Suryatmoko, who participated in the discussion forum on *Waktu Batu I* said, for example, that while he very much admired the process used to devise the work, it was 'a pity that the performance was presented (in its under-

developed state)'. He went on to say he had heard a suggestion that 'there was no need to perform it, instead the public could learn more about the 'laboratory' (development process)', and that he thought that this 'would have been more appropriate.' (Suryatmoko cited in Teater Garasi 2002:18-19).

Teater Garasi - particularly Yudi and the team of writers - reported being slightly bemused by the criticism of *Waktu Batu I*. Several in the group - particularly some of the performers, who were no doubt hoping for accolades after such a lengthy and demanding rehearsal process - were deflated by what they saw as a lack of positive response. Members of the creative team reported feeling misunderstood - afterall, 'confusion', and the sense of confused identity - was the whole point of the work, so to critique it on this basis seemed flawed. If *Waktu Batu* had communicated something of this confusion to the audience, then for the work's creators, it had been successful. But the criticisms of *Waktu Batu I* left them feeling alone (*kese pian*), isolated from the rest of the theatre community. It would seem, however, that rather than undermining the Teater Garasi creative team's self-belief, these criticisms instead strengthened their resolve and artistic vision. The result of this was that *Waktu Batu II* was far more complicated, and more 'confused', than *Waktu Batu I*. Where *Waktu Batu I* used video projections only in a few key scenes, *Waktu Batu II* used these elements - and more - with abandon. If *Waktu Batu I* was as busy as a bus terminal, the second installment in the trilogy was like a bus terminal on an acid trip.

To return to the questions identified at the start of this chapter, the project of contesting narratives of nationhood and of cultural identity is at the heart of the *Waktu Batu* trilogy. The *Waktu Batu* performances - individually and even more so as a trilogy - point to many of the things that this thesis and particularly this chapter aims to describe. Through the 'confusion' they convey, the fragmented way in which they re-present ancient stories, and the way they identify continuities between moments of transition and crisis, past and

present, the *Waktu Batu* works represent the disorientation experienced by many Indonesians in the post-New Order era.

While *Waktu Batu* points to colonisation and interaction with the West as a source of contemporary uncertainty, it does not seek to reify the pre-colonial past, nor does it posit the existence of a 'pure' traditional culture. While drawing on myths and history, as students of contemporary cultural theory, Teater Garasi have taken care not to treat mythology as an unproblematic discourse, nor as emblematic of a naturalised, unspoilt truth. *Waktu Batu* avoids creating heroes, instead constructing a mythic and historical landscape fraught with tension, conflict and violence. *Waktu Batu* is an attempt to represent what some post-colonial scholars have described as 'hybridity', in that it demonstrates, to use the Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's formulation, 'that the transaction of the post-colonial world is not a one-way process' (1995:183).

Waktu Batu's efforts to resist essentialising representations of culture are partly ensured by the works' structure. The fact that audience members must choose which part of the performance on stage to watch necessitates multiple readings and interpretations of the work. This may lead to 'confusion', but that is precisely the point. Taking the scene '*Terjadinya Kala, Terjadinya Durga*' from *Waktu Batu II*, for example, audience members could pay close attention to the violent interaction between Siwa and Uma, as Siwa tries to force Uma to have sex with him. They would then be mesmerised, perhaps confused, by the transformation of Uma into Durga and Siwa into Kala, and by the emergence of Kali, Durga's alter-ego. But the 'peripheral' action in the scene also includes (but is not limited to): a performer somersaulting across the back of a stage; a tightly choreographed interaction between women (Sinta?) practising dance steps and later running; a vignette in which a man and a woman dance, at one stage the woman being held upside down by her ankles, by the man; a man (Watugunung?) writhing on a hospital bed; a woman singing a Javanese melody in front of a fluorescent green projection of flickering images; a series of

performers striding up the middle of the stage and posing as if they are on a catwalk; a curious image of two men, their heads inside giant kettles, crossing the stage. A hospital worker enters, in operating theatre uniform, carrying a ceramic head and moves sideways, with Javanese dance steps. Sinta starts slapping her own face, a gesture mimicked by other performers, and the noise of a chainsaw fills the space. At the moment Kala is born, there's also a psychedelic swirly projection on the back wall; and in the middle of the scene, stage crew enter the performance to adjust Kali's and Durga's costumes. An image of a human head appears on the video screen, people cross the stage carrying giant rice ladles above their heads. The density of images and action in *Waktu Batu* both forces the audience to take responsibility for interpreting the performance and contests any notion that myths (or histories) are unitary, naturally occurring texts.

On an abstract level, the 'fragmentation' of *Waktu Batu* echos the possible fragmentation of the Indonesian nation-state, the context of which is described earlier in this thesis. Like 'hybridity', the concept of 'fragmentation' has also been an important theoretical tool for post-colonial scholarship. As Gyanendra Pandey has noted,

Part of the importance of the 'fragmentary' point of view lies in this, that it resists the drive for a shallow homogenisation and struggles for other, potentially richer definitions of the 'nation' and the future political community. (cited in Chatterjee 1993:no page number)

Cognisant that the Indonesian national project is a problematic one, *Waktu Batu* does not attempt to seek answers in an alternative form of homogenised nationalism. Fragments of text in Dutch and Javanese sit alongside the mostly Indonesian dialogue, again markers of 'hybridity'. Afrizal Malna's response to *Waktu Batu II* also points to the ways in which the work reflects the Indonesian - as well as the Javanese - condition. Like Indonesia, he notes, Watugunung colonised 27 provinces. The affliction of 'amnesia' identified in *Waktu Batu* was something experienced by Indonesia as a whole: 'Amnesia is a part of

Indonesia's past that has the potential also to (and perhaps is already) become part of Indonesia's future' (Malna 2003).

In thinking about how *Waktu Batu* might critique narratives of nationhood, and open up space for alternative ones, it is useful to recall that the work was devised at a time when Yudi - and perhaps others in the group - were starting to question the project of Indonesian nationalism itself, in particular the narratives of nationhood that led to oppression and dispossession in some regions. In July 2002, at around the same time *Waktu Batu I* was presented, Yudi wrote for example that

When there are Achenese and Papuans fighting to free themselves from this volatile republic, shouldn't we change the song we were taught at school, 'From Sabang to Merakue', which shapes the geographic footprint of our nationalism? At the very least we should sing it with caution. Because we could be wrong. And that mistake...could be fatal. (Tajudin 2002b).

Members of Teater Garasi also recall an earlier point of realisation in relation to experiences of Indonesian nationhood, which occurred when they were working on an adaptation of a Genet play, *Les Paravents*, which they set in the context of contemporary Aceh. During the rehearsal process, they sought out dialogue with Achenese students on campus at Gadjah Mada University, and reported feeling shocked to learn about how ordinary Achenese students regarded the Javanese³⁶.

This increased awareness of the brutality of Indonesian nationalism, and recognition that 'Indonesia' was both the product of colonialism and a coloniser itself, manifests strongly in *Waktu Batu*. The idea that Indonesia suffers a kind of amnesia, and an inability to remember aspects of its violent past, strongly contests the state's dominant narrative of nationhood. Teater Garasi have drawn

³⁶ For a more detailed account see 'Coming to Terms with Diversity: Interview with Teater Garasi' *Seagull Theatre Quarterly* 36/37 July 2003: 124-139

on *Javanese* mythologies to highlight the flaws of Indonesian nationalism, perhaps precisely because these are exactly the same mythologies drawn upon by the state in its imagery and rhetoric about the nation. Other theatre groups have in the past critiqued Javanese mythologies and nationalism, but they have usually done so in ways that suggest that there may be a grass-roots (*rakyat*) centred alternative with which to replace the state's dominant construction of Javanese-ness. *Waktu Batu*, however, constructs a very different narrative about Javanese identity. In depicting Javanese mythology and contemporary identity as being in a state of inescapable crisis, perpetuated by terminal amnesia, *Waktu Batu* creates a new paradigm, one that reflects a new kind of post-New Order identity politics, in which re-exploring history becomes a central question.

Conclusion

The opening up of space for the emergence of new regional and ethnic identity politics has been a key feature of the post-New Order era. In a practical sense, the *otonomi daerah* legislation has driven reform in centre-region relations: while regions now have greater say over how they are run, *otonomi daerah* has also been a mechanism through which the state has limited the effectiveness of nascent secessionist movements. This new politics of centre-region relations has meant that it is now no longer possible to make generalisations about 'Indonesia' or 'Indonesian theatre'. Against this background, theatre communities in various regions of Indonesia have played an important role in articulating a strong sense of regional identity. Theatre performances and events have therefore participated actively in the process of decentralisation, and have been an important site through which post-New Order identities have been expressed.

In several regions around Indonesia, theatre artists and groups have attempted to 'write back' to the Jakarta 'centre', not only through producing work that celebrates (and often contests) their local myths and histories, but through establishing arts infrastructure that enables this work to be presented to a wider

audience. Events such as the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* and the Makassar Art Forum have sought to present regional theatre groups on their own terms, and to create opportunities for interaction between these groups. They are important vehicles through which regionally produced art can be re-positioned 'on the map' of contemporary Indonesian cultural production. In different ways, both the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* and the Makassar Art Forum demonstrate that being recognised at a 'national' level still remains important for regionally-based artists. But in the post-New Order era, these artists are also claiming back space in which they can establish their own 'centres' and systems of artistic legitimisation that serve their interests rather than just those of the Jakarta 'centre'.

The performances discussed in this chapter show how theatre artists have continued one of the long-term projects of post-colonial Indonesian theatre, by engaging with questions about local culture and tradition and incorporating elements of these into their work. The case studies also show how theatre produced in the regions has engaged with questions about 'national' political struggles: the ongoing contest between Golkar and PDI-P, processes of democratisation and legislative reform, political instability and transition are all thematic concerns. While strongly incorporating and referencing local cultural identity, the case studies in this chapter also engage with narratives about 'Indonesia' and the national project. In the case of *Waktu Batu*, the mythology of national identity is critiqued and presented as inherently unstable and complicated. Petta Puang's Independence Day performances, in contrast, participate directly in a celebration of 'unproblematic' national identity (Independence Day itself) at the same time as questioning some of Indonesian nationalism's standard narratives (for example heroism).

Tensions between Indonesia's regions and the 'centre' were exacerbated by the New Order's approach to cultural 'development'. The legacy of New Order cultural policy is likely to continue for many years, and shifts away from a

'centre-region' paradigm will necessarily be incremental. The case studies in this chapter demonstrate that theatre continues to play an important role in redefining relations between the regions and the imaginary centre, sometimes reproducing and sometimes contesting the founding myths of 'regional' 'national' and 'Indonesian' identities.

**Re-inscribing and contesting violence:
the distressed body and the unmaking of language in performance**

The peace was disturbed. It was as if there was no longer peace in this country. It was as though all there was was fear....we had to apply some treatment, take some stern action. What kind of stern action? It had to be with violence. But this violence did not mean just shooting people, pow! pow! just like that. No! But those who tried to resist, like it or not, had to be shot....

Some of the corpses were left (in public places) just like that. This was for the purpose of shock therapy, *terapi goncangan*. This was done so that the general public would understand that there was still someone capable of taking action to tackle the problem of criminality.

Suharto, writing on the *petrus* killings in his 1989 autobiography, cited in Bouchier (1990:196), underlining indicates use of English in the original.

We just wanted to give some shock therapy to GAM, to make them mentally and psychologically afraid of what the future holds.

Lieutenant Colonel Firdaus Kormano, speaking about the TNI's mission to crush GAM in Aceh, quoted in *The Guardian Weekly* May 22-28 2003

....at particular moments when there is within a society a crisis of belief - that is, when some central idea or ideology or cultural construct has ceased to elicit a population's belief either because it is manifestly fictitious or because it has for some reason been divested of ordinary forms of substantiation - the sheer material factualness of the human body will be borrowed to lend that cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'.

Elaine Scarry *The Body in Pain* (1985:14)

In 2000-2001, images of violence and bodies in pain seemed to be everywhere in Indonesian contemporary performance. Whether relentlessly doing sit-ups on a steel operating table, performing headstands with military-drill-like-precision inside metal crates, having dirt poured on one's head, delivering a monologue from inside a closed barrel of water or dragging one's body across a busy road dressed only in a dirty red and white flag, the distressed body was becoming almost a cliché in performances of the post-New Order. As one critic noted in a

review of the work *Sandiwara Dol* by Jakarta based group Teater Kubur, the 'exploration of the body through extreme movements and the technique of *torture* in the use of the main props' had become a recognisable feature of several contemporary groups' work (Srengenge 2000). Likewise the sounds of soldiers' pounding feet, gunfire, explosions, shouted political rhetoric and the appropriation or parody of military symbols and iconography were becoming recognisable - almost normalised - hallmarks of contemporary performance works. In many cases the groups that were representing violence and human suffering were at the same time - and with some notable exceptions³⁷ - experimenting with theatrical forms that were anti-realist, non-linear and that used a primarily physical, rather than language based, style of performance.

In his writings on terror and violence in Colombia, Michael Taussig argues that terror was 'the mediator *par excellence* of colonial hegemony' (1987:5). Following this, it could be argued that terror has been - and perhaps continues to be - a 'mediator' of hegemony in Indonesia. This chapter engages with the body of scholarship that, like Taussig's work, is concerned with the 'narration' of terror and the ways in which narratives of violence are perpetuated (sometimes unintentionally) and subverted (Graziano 1992; Feldman 1991; Nordstrom and Martin 1992; Aretxaga 1993 and other essays collected in Warren 1993). Taussig's argument that people delineate their worlds and politics 'through a dialectics of images and story-like creations rather than directly through ideology' (1987:367) reinforces the need to look at narratives - in this case theatrical narratives - in order to learn about and unpack the 'logic' that might make violence acceptable or ignorable in contemporary Indonesia. It follows that these theatrical narratives could create what Taussig calls 'new spaces of meaning' in which we might locate transgressive potential.

³⁷ Ratna Sarumpaet's *Alia: Luka Serambi Mekah* and Seno Gumira Adjidarma's *Mengapa Kau Culik Anak Kami?* stand out as more conventional dialogue-based 'plays' with themes of violence and military atrocity, produced in this timeframe.

Performances are of course 'make believe'. The pain suffered by the performer having dirt poured on his head or the bruises sustained by the performer being dragged semi-naked across a road in busy traffic are perhaps bearable because they are temporary. The artists making this kind of work are themselves - at present anyway, thanks to *reformasi* - not usually facing immediate threat of incarceration or interrogation. To my knowledge, none of the artists creating the works discussed in this chapter themselves know what it feels like to be tortured, few of them have felt 'for real' the sort of pain they represent. It has been argued that all attempts to 'speak for others' and represent others' pain are inherently violent (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 1989). I do not agree with this argument, but at the outset of this chapter, acknowledge that it is important to be cognisant of who is representing others' suffering and why.

This chapter investigates a number of questions about the growing body of work in contemporary Indonesian theatre that speaks about violence and its consequences. In what ways, and in what circumstances, does representing violence serve the interests of the status quo or, on the other hand, the interests of the reform agenda/s? Is it possible to represent violence in a way that draws attention to its ideological underpinnings without *reinscribing* it? Given Indonesia's proud history of anti-colonial military achievement, in what ways might representations of violence be bound up with notions of national dignity and nationhood? And to what extent might representations of post-New Order social disorder and chaos provide a pretext for a nostalgic longing for the days when stability and order were maintained through a coercive and militarised state?

There are likewise several questions that arise in relation to what I will call - drawing on Elaine Scarry's work - the 'unmaking of language' in many of these performances. In using physical rather than text-based theatrical forms, do recent Indonesian performances exemplify or perhaps clarify what Scarry describes as the 'resistance to language' and 'unsharability' of the experience of

physical pain? (1985:4). Finally, in what ways does the *gender* of the ubiquitous distressed body in much Indonesian theatre shape the sorts of narratives that are being told in this work?

In addressing these questions, this chapter examines case studies of four performances by three different groups: Teater Payung Hitam's works *Kaspar* and *DOM: Dan Orang Mati*; Teater Mandiri's *LUKA*; and Teater Kami's *Fragmentasi: Sebuah Bencana yang Diandaikan*. Before looking at these performances, however, the chapter provides an overview of the many ways in which violence has been manifested in Indonesian society, in both the New Order and *reformasi* eras. It also introduces several theoretical ideas about the representation of violence, to assist with analysing the case studies that follow. In using physical and symbolic vocabularies in preference to verbal language, the works discussed have several things in common with works produced in the 1990s by two theatre groups, Teater Sae and Teater Kubur. This chapter therefore also includes a brief overview of these groups' work.

Violence in Indonesia

As Colombijn and Lindblad have argued, the roots of violence in Indonesia go back a long way, to the colonial era and perhaps beyond. Although the legacy of New Order state violence has left an indelible impression on Indonesia, Colombijn and Lindblad rightly contend that to lay sole blame on the New Order for all contemporary trauma would be simplistic. They write, for example, that

...when the New Order is seen as the source of all violence, people neglect the truth that the Old Order, the revolution years, the colonial era and pre-colonial times were in many ways violent too. (2002:9)

In the same volume, Schulte Nordholt describes the continuities between violent practices in the colonial and contemporary eras, showing how

Indonesians have also inherited a repressive government apparatus that was chiefly designed to effectively exploit the territory and control the

people. A striking similarity...can be discerned between the late colonial-state and the New Order under Suharto. (2002:42)

Parallels between these two eras are not only found in relation to state-sponsored violence: corporations, whether colonial era plantations or contemporary mining companies, also played a role in fostering a culture in which the use of force was normalised (Erman 2002; Agustono 2002).

While it is important to point out that the military was entrenched in Indonesian politics long before the rise of the New Order (Crouch 1978) - and that the use of state violence as a 'mediator of hegemony' (Taussig 1987:5) stems from practices of the colonial era - the New Order nevertheless saw the strengthening of military power and consolidation of military involvement in government. As Bourchier notes, by the 1980s, the Indonesian military had 'extended its control deep within society and penetrated all levels of government' through its pervasive logic of *dwifungsi* (dual-function)' (1990:195). Not only was military force used to control populations in the disputed provinces of Aceh, East Timor and West Papua (see for example Dunn 1983; Osborne 1985; Kell 1995), by the 1980s the military was systematically torturing and killing untried 'criminals' as part of its '*petrus*'³⁸ operations (Bourchier 1990); and state intelligence apparatuses were undertaking 'comprehensive political surveillance' which correlated with 'intermittent but persistent state terror' (Tanter 1990:214).

That the New Order regime used violence as a strategy to obtain, maintain and expand its power is well known and widely documented (see for example Cribb 1990a; Southwood and Flanagan 1983; Schwarz 1994:231-263; Robinson 1995; Wessel and Wimhofer 2001). While certainly not the *only* strategy used by the New Order to legitimate and defend its 'unchallenged' position³⁹,

³⁸ *Petrus* is an acronym for '*penembak misterius*' or 'mysterious gunman'.

³⁹ Several observers have rightly argued that the New Order's longevity was as much dependent on its ability to control discursive space and linguistics as it was dependent upon the use of military force (see for example Heryanto 1988; Tickell 2000).

violence - and the *threat* of violence - underpinned the authority of many key institutions and state apparatuses. As has been the case with other authoritarian regimes, under the New Order violence was 'integral to the generation and sustenance of power' (Graziano 1992:67), the normalisation of excessive force central to the state's legitimacy.

In many cases the justification for this violence - and part of the reason perhaps why so much of it went on unquestioned for so long during the New Order - had its foundations in state discourses that very deliberately constructed imminent and dangerous threats to social order and stability, concepts which according to Bouchier were 'a leitmotif in the ideology of the Suharto regime' (1990:195). Indeed, the very language associated with these concepts - *ketertiban, keamanan, kebersihan* (order, security, cleanliness) - is found in the iconography that frames the entrances of villages, schools and government buildings across Indonesia. The name given to the 1965-66 operation to eliminate communism, *Kopkamtib*, an abbreviation of *Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban* (Operational Command for the Restoration of Security and Order), in itself exemplifies the way the New Order state appropriated words like 'security' and 'order' to describe and rationalise violence. As Colombijn points out,

Many fierce deeds, from the rounding up of hawkers, *becak* drivers and street prostitutes to the invasion of East Timor stem, I believe, from the state attempt to create order (*ketertiban*). At the same time, the state, or certain civil servants or military leaders, have engaged riot gangs to create disorder, for instance in election times, during the Malari riots of 1974 and as perpetrators of the attack on the PDI headquarters in 1996. (2001:29)

The ways in which the pervasive discourses of security and order have been perpetuated and contested in the post-New Order era is something to which I will later return in discussing representations of social chaos and violence in recent performance works.

Under the New Order, violence was not only justified by the state: it was also frequently *forgotten* or *disappeared*. Events such as the 1965-66 killings are, for example, notable not only for their brutality but also for their *absence* from both official and unofficial discourse. As Cribb notes, scholarly and public attention paid to the causes and consequences of the killings - in Indonesia and internationally - was until relatively recently extremely limited, despite the fact that 'events of this kind and magnitude often provoke deep introspection' (1990b:2). There are perhaps continuities between the forgetting and disappearing of violence and the tendency for acts of violence in Indonesia to be committed against unknown outsiders and using techniques that dehumanise victims. Outsiders - whether Chinese women in Jakarta in 1998 or Madurese migrants in Kalimantan in 2001 - have often been the victims of violence in Indonesia. At the same time, military hierarchies of command are designed 'precisely to distance the infliction of pain from its conception' (Ballard 2003:38), while propaganda works to reinforce the 'sub-human' nature of particular groups against whom violence might have been sanctioned, as was the case with the PKI in 1965-66 (Elson 2002).

Perhaps then, acts of atrocity in New Order Indonesia could be characterised as what Graziano - in his ethnography of violence in the Argentine 'dirty war' - calls 'an abstract spectacle' (1992:73). Indeed, acts of military atrocity during the New Order (and to some extent in the contemporary era) were perhaps best characterised by their *un-representedness*. To use Graziano's formulation, unlike conventional 'spectacles of atrocity', which derive power by explicitly marking the human body, covert acts of violence such as the *petrus* killings⁴⁰ and the late New Order 'disappearances' of activists, acquired their efficacy in

⁴⁰ While some aspects of the *petrus* killings, such as the frequent dumping of dead bodies in public places could be described as more conventional 'spectacle', it appears that this was not a major consideration of the campaign. In its later stages indeed a great deal of effort was made to keep the state's involvement in the killings secret. Bouchier notes, for example, that in general 'less thought was given to the packaging of the (*petrus*) campaign than to its execution. The public presentation of the killings was characterised by poor coordination and inconsistency until all reporting of them was eventually forbidden in September 1983' (1990: 188).

a much more 'abstract' way. This kind of 'abstract spectacle', according to Graziano's definition,

differs from spectacles staged in public view in that the rituals of torture, the doing and undoing of the crime on the victim's body, the cries of agony attesting to the generation of power and the restoration of truth, were all brought to bear without direct public witness and therefore engage their participant-observer audience not through graphic displays of atrocity but rather through *representation* of an absence ...whose presence was at once insisted and denied. (1992:73)

In the public imagination, 'mysterious' disappearances, secret mass graves, and covert surveillance become part of a 'vague but insistent, never completed nor resolved, an endless, ephemeral, undefinable, uncertain torture' while 'the disappeared body was no longer alive but never dead, never buried, never fully spoken, and consequently never fully silenced' (Graziano 1992:73).

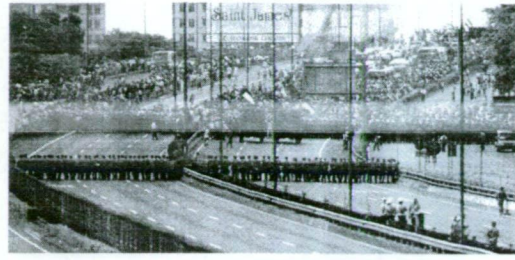
This idea of 'representation of absence' and of 'abstract spectacle' is important in the context of this analysis because of the ways performances, staged by theatre groups around Indonesia leading up to and since 1998, have challenged the invisibility and deniability of New Order state violence. The ability - and limitations - of theatre, in beginning the process of making state violence *visible* and perhaps *less* 'abstract' is therefore one of the key concerns of this chapter. At the same time, it is important to be alive to the possibility that in times of political and social confusion, making violence visible in some instances might provide impetus for pro-status quo nostalgia about how much better things were when social stability was militarily enforced.

Violence in the late and post-New Order eras



Victims of *Trisakti* shootings
Jakarta 12 May 1998

Photo: Mostista Pambudi, courtesy of Galeri Antara, Jakarta



Demonstration and soldiers
Jalan Sudirman, Jakarta, September 1998

Photo: *Kompas*

The late and post-New Order eras have been extremely violent times. Examples of violence experienced by communities in Indonesia since 1996 have included (but are not limited to) mass riots; looting and burning of publicly and privately owned buildings and infrastructure; demonstrations (and the use of force by the military and police against demonstrators); inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict; abductions and kidnappings of activists; armed conflict associated with independence struggles in East Timor, Aceh and West Papua; random acts of street violence, such as the lynching and burning alive of petty criminals; mass rape, particularly of Chinese women during the 1998 Jakarta riots; and acts of terrorism, such as the bombings of churches in Jakarta at Christmas in 2000. As Colombijn and Lindblad note, this ‘paroxysm’ of violence has meant that ‘once neutral geographical names have acquired strong connotations of gruesome violence’ (2002:1), the names of towns such as Sampit and Poso for example now synonymous with violent clashes between Dayak and Madurese and Christian and Muslim communities respectively.

As the economic crisis of 1997-98 increased pressure on the New Order, the state became increasingly dependent on the use of violence for its own survival. Abductions of activists (O’Rourke 2002:69-70), increasing pressures and interrogations of artists and intellectuals, particularly those associated with pro-democracy organisations and expanded ‘undercover’ presence of intelligence operatives were all symptomatic of the regime’s willingness to use covert violence and intimidation in order to stay in power. The arrest of theatre

director and playwright Ratna Sarumpaet and five other activists in March 1998 on charges of organising an event intending to 'spread hatred' is just one example of the state's increasing reliance on intimidation and violence (Hatley 1998). Such arrests and abductions were of course being played out against a background of increasingly large and defiant demonstrations, which had prompted Suharto to order his generals to 'act firmly - without hesitation - against any violations of the law' (*Jakarta Post* 13 February 1998).

The violence of the period immediately leading up to the fall of Suharto in May 1998 has been well documented, both by scholars and by the popular media. Two related events - the shooting of students at a demonstration outside the Trisakti University campus in West Jakarta, and the subsequent riots across Jakarta and Solo - have become essential markers of the *reformasi* era. Importantly, the violence associated with these events was no longer 'abstract' but was represented with dreadful clarity to the public. The following description of the Trisakti incident⁴¹, pieced together from reports in *Suara Pembaruan*, *Gatra* and *Forum Keadilan* demonstrates the way in which - precisely at the moment the New Order was crumbling - acts of police and military violence became representable:

Troops suddenly fired rubber bullets, lobbed tear gas canisters and charged towards the students. They attacked not only those who were on the street but those who had already receded to the campus grounds as well. They lashed out with their long batons and kicked at students who had already fallen to the ground. One was dragged and thrown into a grimy canal that ran alongside the highway. Female students - perhaps including some that had been passing out flowers earlier that afternoon - were groped and beaten before being thrown to the ground. (O'Rourke 2002:92).

⁴¹ For more detailed accounts of the Trisakti demonstration as well as the events leading up to it see O'Rourke (2002: part 1); and Forrester (1999: 1-69). Several of the articles included in Aspinall, Feith and van Klinken (1999: especially 41-70) also provide an overview of these events and the ways in which they were interpreted by western observers.

As well as reporting the Trisakti violence in detail, in the immediate aftermath of the event, the Indonesian media also published investigative reports that presented divergent viewpoints on what had actually happened at the demonstration and where the live bullets had come from. These reports - as well as the widespread circulation of pictures depicting hospital beds draped in white sheets, under which lay the bodies of dead Trisakti students - show how violence, in the dying days of the New Order, become momentarily less 'abstract' and perhaps more like conventional spectacle.

Some aspects of the violence associated with the Jakarta and Solo riots of 14-16 May 1998 were also highly visible. That the riots were violent was not questioned: officially the two days resulted in 1217 people losing their lives (a further 31 were unaccounted for), and more than 6000 buildings being destroyed including 2547 shop houses, 1819 stores, 1026 private homes, 535 bank branches, 383 office buildings, 40 shopping malls, 15 markets, 12 hotels, 11 police stations, 9 petrol stations and 2 churches, in Jakarta alone (Forrester 1998:243).

Violence against women - widespread in the riots (*Kompas* 14 July 1998; TGPF 1998) - was not, however, represented with the same degree of transparency. The military's response to the widespread reports of rapes committed against Chinese women during the riots, for example, was a reminder of a familiar pattern of the silencing and disappearing of atrocity (Blackburn 1999). The murder of Marthadinata, an eighteen year old member of *Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta* (abbreviated to TGPF - the team that investigated the rapes) shortly before she was due to go to New York to present testimony to human rights organisations, as well as General Wiranto's assertion that 'there's no clear evidence (of the rapes) therefore it didn't happen' (cited in Blackburn 1999:436) all point to concerted attempts by the state - or at least elements within the state - to reinstate the 'abstract spectacle' of violence that so effectively permeated and perpetuated the New Order's veneer of stability and

order. While some state sponsored organisations - *Komnas HAM* (Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission), for example - were openly critical of the government's apparent scepticism about the rapes (Blackburn 1999), there remained limited public space in which to address the grim reality of mass violence against women. As several observers have noted, while male victims of torture often become heroes if they survive their ordeal, the stigma associated with rape means that victims are often 'doubly de-humanised' (Colombijn and Lindblad 2002:18-19, see also Heryanto 1999:301-305). This point is important insofar as it illustrates that while there may have been greater willingness to acknowledge acts of military violence in the *reformasi* era, the extent to which violence could be acknowledged was both limited and gendered.

Heroes, martyrs and separatists

Narratives of heroism and martyrdom abound in popular images of the events surrounding the fall of Suharto, and are often evoked in the imagery used in contemporary theatre performances. The *pahlawan reformasi* (heroes of *reformasi*), perhaps best represented by the deceased Trisakti students and by the thousands of students who swamped the grounds of the parliament buildings leading up to and immediately following the fall of Suharto, are depicted almost universally as young and male, usually Javanese and often holding up familiar symbols of Indonesian nationhood (often a national flag). That symbols of heroism and martyrdom play a critical role in galvanising, sustaining and defining the *reformasi* movement is not something this chapter intends to dispute. In many ways the use of such images was an essential part of a progressive moment in Indonesian history that points towards greater openness, democratisation, and a less militarised political culture.

But at the same time, images that invoke powerful ideas about martyrdom and heroism are perhaps powerful precisely because they also in some ways call upon a symbolic vocabulary that was central to the ways the New Order defined and remembered itself. In the public imagination, *pahlawan reformasi* are

generally not female, nor Chinese, nor fighting for separatist causes. As the case studies used later in this chapter will demonstrate, in appropriating images of (male) physical suffering and military oppression, contemporary theatre performances also re-produce aspects of these popular images of heroism and martyrdom, raising questions about how 'radical' some of these performances actually are.

While in the post-New Order era it may have become more possible to represent violence perpetrated by the military and the state against Javanese males, violence suffered by communities in East Timor, Aceh and Papua has remained un-representable and 'abstract'. While military brutality during and immediately after the 1999 referendum in East Timor was described as 'an orgy of violence and destruction' (Kingsbury 2000:100), few images of this violence were represented in the Indonesian media. Far from being heroes or martyrs, the East Timorese victims of violence were dehumanised rebels, while the perpetrators of the violence - with their long hair and often basic weaponry - were presented in ways that resonated with earlier images of heroic revolutionaries and bandits of the late colonial era (Colombijn and Lindblad 2002:19). *Reformasi* may have made it more possible to critique the military, and to expose some of their atrocities, but only to the extent that such critiques did not disrupt pre-existing myths of nationhood.

violence, representation and language

The above discussion raises a number of questions about representations of and silences about violence in Indonesia. The performances discussed later in this chapter all attempt - in various ways - to draw attention to violence in Indonesian society. At the same time, they also use images of physical pain and distress as a medium to express concern about contemporary political and social issues. This chapter now introduces number of theoretical ideas about violence and representation, to assist the interpretation of these performances.

In her influential book *The Body in Pain*, for which she undertook extensive interviews with casualties of war and victims of torture, Elaine Scarry argues that physical pain - which is trans-cultural and ahistorical in nature - is 'resistant to language'. According to Scarry,

Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. (1985:4)

Moreover, pain's 'resistance to language is not simply one of its incidental or accidental attributes but is essential to what it is.' (1985:5). Scarry discusses in detail literature's lack of ability to describe and communicate physical pain, and also refers briefly to the visual arts and cinema (1985:51-53). 'The artist', she writes, 'ordinarily falls silent before pain' (1985:10). In making this argument however, Scarry does not mention any possibility of representations of pain in *physical language*, as might be made possible through theatre or dance. Her definition of 'language' therefore is limited to 'verbal objectification' (1985:51-53).

Scarry's analysis is relevant for reading representations of violence and physical pain in contemporary Indonesian theatre particularly because the 'distressed body' was not appearing in 'well made plays'. Instead it was represented in non-realist, non-linear performances that used physical vocabulary rather than words as their main medium. This then prompts two possible interpretations: firstly that Scarry's theory is limited by its solitary focus on *verbal* language or secondly, that perhaps the trend to depict violence and pain in physical, non-verbal theatre precisely proves Scarry's point.

In an interesting critique of Scarry's theory, which examines representations of violent 'forcible feeding' of suffragettes in early Twentieth Century Britain, Caroline Howlett argues that 'it is not that pain is resistant to representation, but that representation is resistant to pain' (1996:4). Howlett argues that it is

important to note that the state and state institutions have a political interest in keeping pain unrepresentable. Therefore, although images of suffragettes being force-fed were in mainstream circulation, these images did not represent the women's pain in a way that made it '*readable* as pain' (1996:5 emphasis added). One of the obvious consequences of this, Howlett argues, is that processes of political change are delayed for as long as it takes to mobilise public sympathy for - in this case - the suffragettes.

Despite their differences in approach, and disagreement about the *representability* of pain, Scarry's and Howlett's work share an assumption that pain, violence and power are 'intricately bound up' (Scarry 1985:12). Likewise this chapter is concerned with questions about the possibility of representing pain and what this might 'do' not only to language itself but also to the ways in which language might be *understood*. An adequate account of the difficulty of representing pain and violence needs to consider both points of view. Perhaps there *is* something 'universal' and 'ahistorical' about the way in which the human body experiences pain and perhaps there are common difficulties across cultures about articulating and expressing pain. At the same time, it is important that analyses of representations of pain are grounded historically and take into consideration whether or not the political and social context enables the recognition of pain *as* pain: in Howlett's terms, is the pain 'readable' as such? While from the urban centres of Java some types of violence and pain in the *reformasi* era - such as that suffered by the victims of the *Trisakti* incident - might be representable and readable, other violence - such as that suffered by victims of the TNI's 'shock and awe' campaign in Aceh or by women raped in the May 1998 Jakarta riots - is not.

Having discussed some of the theories that deal with the relationship between pain and language, it is worth noting briefly the ways in which language itself may be an *inherent part* of violence. Recent work investigating the production, reproduction and subversion of power - both in Indonesia and elsewhere - has

also often focused on the ways in which discursive and linguistic strategies might be used by regimes as a means of control. Numerous post-colonial scholars have, for example, argued that 'the colonial process itself begins in language', and 'the control over language by the imperial centre...remains the most potent instrument of colonial control', while the 'values' of language underpin all social, economic and political systems and hence, their power. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995:283). The idea that violence can be embedded in language is particularly helpful in the analysis of Payung Hitam's work *Kaspar*, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Having looked briefly at the ways in which violence has been manifested in both the New Order and *reformasi* eras, this chapter turns now to the theatrical legacy of two groups, Teater Sae and Teater Kubur, whose work in the 1980s and 1990s broke new ground in Indonesian theatre and which set the scene for the works to be discussed in detail in the case studies that follow.

Unmade language and symbolic distress: the work of Teater Sae and Teater Kubur

In a 1994 overview of cultural expression during the New Order, Hatley writes that

in TIM's down at heel back theatres or other modest locations in the city, small, lesser known groups project a very different experience of contemporary social reality (compared with Teater Koma). Darkly surreal plays by groups such as Teater Sae and Teater Kubur project through disjointed action and dialogue the confused consciousness of their subjects, the urban underclass, their traditional structures of meaning dissolving, bombarded with ideology and advertising messages. An intense energy of expression conveys the depth of their frustration and pain. (1994b:247)

Stylistically different from the work of most other Indonesian theatre groups in the 1980s and early 1990s, the work of Teater Sae and Teater Kubur has been

immensely influential for the current generation of Indonesian theatre artists. According to one Indonesian theatre critic, Teater Sae in particular 'brought a new alternative to the world of theatre in Indonesia' (Dahana 2001a:39), while another critic described the work of both groups as a 'rebellion' (*pemberontakan*) against 'mainstream' and 'established' (*mapan*) theatre groups (Tranggono 2002). Although not a *direct* influence for some of the contemporary groups discussed in this thesis, both Teater Sae and Teater Kubur opened up space for the imagining of a different kind of theatre and a different kind of oppositional politics in theatre - and it is this aspect of their role in Indonesian theatre history that I am most concerned with here.

Teater Sae was active until 1994, under the direction of Boedi S Otong. Their work represented what many still see as a major shift in approach to theatre both in style and subject matter, and has been described variously as '*teater esei*' (literally 'essay theatre') and '*teater puitik*' (poetic theatre) (Ginanjari 1991), and as '*teater rujak teks*' (literally 'fruit-salad-text theatre') (Yohanes 1999:247-252). One of the main characteristics of Teater Sae's work was a fragmentation of character, plot and language resulting in a deliberate lack of linear, rational or clear 'narrative'. In describing Teater Sae's work, several observers have drawn on the vocabulary of the visual arts. Afrizal Malna, the writer who worked with Boedi Otong in creating Teater Sae's works, has for example described the group's style as an 'installation of ideas' (*instalasi gagasan*) (Malna cited in Bodden 2002:305). Radha Dahana notes that in Teater Sae's work, unlike that of other more conventional groups, audiences would not meet 'doctors, farmers, traders, politicians or artists', or 'characters' of the kind acknowledged and legitimised by state institutions. Instead they might find apparently disconnected images such as 'a naked person, ironing in a washbasin, a man wearing a bra, (and) a housewife carrying a gun on her shoulder' (2001b:31-32).

Teater Kubur, whose director Dindon WS was himself a member of Teater Sae in its early days, works in a similar style. Best known for a trilogy of works produced over the 1990s - *Sirkus Anjing*, *Tombol 13* and *Sandiwara Dol* - Teater Kubur is still active. They share with Teater Sae a view of human experience and identity as fragmented, and likewise employ an abstract, deliberately jarring, nonsensical aesthetic that explores the limits of the human body - and probably more so than Teater Sae - its threshold for pain, terror and fear. Commentaries on Teater Kubur's work usually mention the chaotic-ness of their performances, as Dahana has noted, their work is all about chaos, 'chaos as symbol, symbol as chaos', something which encouraged audiences to 'look at art in a different way' (2001b:134). At the same time, their works deliberately juxtaposed the human body with inanimate objects - chairs, rubbish bins and brooms - that became an essential part of the movement. In Teater Kubur's work, then, we see a deliberate breaking down of meaning and of order, a questioning of the very value and role of human beings in postmodern, industrialising Jakarta, an ongoing contestation of the symbolic capital of the New Order state and its apparatuses, that in some ways foreshadows the case studies that I will discuss shortly.

In Dahana's book, *Ideologi Politik dan Teater Modern Indonesia*, Boedi Otono is quoted as saying that theatre 'is not a place that brings enjoyment' (*bukanlah tempat yang menyenangkan*) (2001a:38). The work of both Teater Sae and Teater Kubur is often described by the use of words like 'chaos', 'fragmentation', 'disjunction', and 'difficult'; words which immediately contrast with the lexicon of official state discourse: *ketertiban*, *keamanan*, *kesatuan*, *persatuan* (order, security, unity, integrity), described earlier in this chapter (Bodden 2002:314). Teater Kubur's dystopic vision of urban modernity likewise was far removed from the idealised images of 'development' that characterised state iconography and rhetoric during the New Order - instead, as one critic wrote, 'in their (Teater Kubur's) plays, 'the civilisation of the city is depicted as a world full of terror, where people live in anxiety and fear'

(Srengenge 2000). In a context in which the state's legitimacy depended heavily on concepts such as stability and order, performances that 'murdered' the 'norms of order' (Yohanes 1999:247), held new kinds of radical possibilities, possibilities that were further enhanced by demanding audiences' active involvement and implication in the dystopic performance worlds.

While Teater Sae did use written scripts, writer Afrizal Malna contended that they would deliberately use language (or in some cases non-language) that was 'not pleasant to read' ('*yang tidak enak dibaca*'). In some cases the sentences spoken by performers were non-sensical, with words being used in deliberately jarring ways. This was, Afrizal argued, part of a response to the 'bureaucratisation' (and perhaps commercialisation) of language in globalising New Order society, where language was as much a tool for controlling citizens as it was for selling products (Malna cited in Bodden 2002:306).

The 'unmaking' of language in the world of groups like Teater Sae and Teater Kubur suggests several things. Firstly, it supports the argument that artists were starting to question the adequacy of the Indonesian language for expressing the political and social realities experienced by many Indonesian citizens during the New Order. By the mid 1980s the 'good and correct Indonesian language' ('*Bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar*') encouraged by the state was perhaps hindering rather than assisting many theatre artists' ability to communicate, especially in ways that were politically and socially critical. Interestingly one of the other groups often hailed as producing effective political critique during the 1980s and early 1990s was the Solo-based group Teater Gapit, whose work used low Javanese rather than Indonesian (Day 1999; Hatley 1993:64-65 and 1990b:340-342).

Secondly, just as the ability of officially sanctioned language to make sense of the world was falling; physicality, movement, space, visual symbols and their complex inter-relationships with words opens up a new range of possibilities

for expression, subversion and exploration. Perhaps at the same time that familiar language was being 'unmade', this new physical expression of fragmentation and disjuncture was part of the process of 're-making' a much more plural, more complex and inherently contestable picture of Indonesian reality. And thirdly, as I have argued elsewhere (2000), by creating theatre without using written scripts, artists were sometimes better able to avoid difficulties with state-censors, given that meanings were confused, fragmented and open to multiple interpretations.

This leads into the final point I want to make in this very brief analysis of these two very influential theatre groups. Teater Sae and Teater Kubur were important not only because they demanded that audiences start thinking about and interpreting theatre in new ways, but because they shifted the basis of and invented new tools for critique. In contrast with groups like Teater Koma (whose work will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis), they may not have staged plays that blatantly critiqued military or government corruption, or highlighted the widening gap between rich and poor. But what they did do was to contest the symbolic concepts that underpinned and legitimised New Order ideology. Although 'abstract', these sorts of performances were very much concerned with interrogating New Order structures, power and their serious implications for the urban working class.

In the political context of the 1980s and 1990s, much of the work produced by these groups was radical in that it forced audiences to pay attention and to ask questions, it demanded that expectations about theatre be revised, it contested the 'stability' upon which New Order logic and grand narratives were based. It is hoped that this very brief discussion of some of the 'origins' of what is now often (not unproblematically) described as *teater tubuh* will provide some background about the ways theatre culture in Indonesia was shifting in the 1980s and 1990s. Contemporary representations of distressed bodies, physically extreme critiques of military authority, images of the individual in physical

crisis and the simultaneous erosion of ‘meaning’ in language did not suddenly appear from nowhere. The images and strategies used by groups in the *reformasi* era build on the space opened up by the work of groups like Teater Sae and Teater Kubur. Whether or not these same strategies have the same impact or radical potential in the contemporary era is a central question that will be explored throughout the following case studies.

Violence and masculine suffering in the work of Teater Payung Hitam



Scenes from Teater Payung Hitam's *Kaspar*, Indonesian Art Summit, Jakarta 2001

photos: Teater Payung Hitam

The recent work of Bandung-based group Teater Payung Hitam perhaps best exemplifies the late and post-New Order trend towards non-verbal, physical and overtly political theatre that pushes the human body to its limits as part of its critique of New Order (and now post-New Order) politics. Payung Hitam's work, immensely influential for a younger generation of Indonesian theatre artists, has attracted substantial critical acclaim over the last ten years, and their work has been presented on the European festival circuit as well as at high profile Indonesian arts events such as the 2001 Indonesian Art Summit.

Under the direction of Rachman Sabur, himself a graduate of the Bandung realist theatre tradition pioneered by Studiklub Teater Bandung⁴², Payung Hitam's work has evolved from fairly conventional Indonesian language adaptations of western scripts into a distinct style of highly physical, visual and violent performance. In a review of Payung Hitam's 1999 work *Merah Bolong*,

⁴² Studiklub Teater Bandung's (STB) work is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. STB's dominance of the theatre scene in Bandung over a period of 30 years meant that most Bandung based actors have at one stage trained with or have some connection with them.

the writer and critic Danarto described their style as '*teater gebuh*', a term which he defined as

theatre which unites (*menyatukan*) the performer's body with elements of the stage, the social situation, the condition of the audience and involves performance 'without a script'. (Danarto 1999)

Sabur himself describes the group's decision to move away from language-based work, as being motivated by a desire not to preach to (*menggurui*) audiences, and because the use of physical vocabulary and imagery makes the work 'sharper (*lebih seruh*), more terrifying (*lebih dahsyat*)' (Sabur Interview 19 June 2000).

Payung Hitam has also been praised for its use of technology, including multimedia and sound design (Saini 2004:6); the rigour of their training process (Yohanes 1996); and their 'artistic honesty' (Yohanes 2004:62). Tony Broer, Payung Hitam's lead actor, has also been singled out for the 'militancy' of his work (Husein 2001) and for his physical stamina and ability (Suyono 1998). Payung Hitam are set apart from the several other Indonesian theatre groups working in this 'genre' by the high skill level of their performers as well as the strength of their stage and lighting design.

Payung Hitam's overt political commitment to critiquing the New Order state has also been widely noted. One of Bandung's leading older generation theatre figures, Saini KM (who himself was strongly associated with New Order cultural bureaucracy, having been a senior official in the Department of Education and Culture in the 1990s) has noted, for example, that Payung Hitam have long been 'very much involved and committed to social, political and humanitarian issues of their nation' (2004:7), a comment which interestingly, he qualified, by distinguishing Payung Hitam's 'political' leanings from those of LEKRA in the 1960s:

Although the work of Teater Payung Hitam has very strong political nuances, it's (still) theatre. It is an affirmation of the artist's personality

(*pribadi seniman*) in the context of his times, in which he happens to be motivated by issues that have very strong political nuances. (Saini 2004: 8)

Other observers have described Payung Hitam as a group who are 'uncompromising (*ulet*) in their search for the possibility of new language in political theatre' (Suyono 2001), and their work as 'highly appropriate' (*tepat*) for the late New Order and early *reformasi* eras (Bodden 2004:11).

That violence has been a constant theme of Payung Hitam's work has been noted by several observers. In an articulate essay about Payung Hitam's work, the Bandung theatre critic Benny Yohanes (himself the director of a group called Teater Re-Publik, whose work is in many ways similar to Payung Hitam's), wrote that

Rachman Sabur's theatre presentations are usually characterised by a kind of obsession and a visual fascination with violence. Payung Hitam's stage is often crowded with implements and images of violence. These images of violence are manifested explicitly in the stage design as well as in their acting style. (Yohanes 2004:61-62)

Payung Hitam's use of military and legal symbols is also often noted, one reviewer listing 'berets, military boots, military insignia, legal scales, black *peci*, drums, pistols, balls and chains, handcuffs, recordings of officials' speeches, the noise of explosions, and the thunder of helicopters' as being familiar elements of their works (Suyono 2001).

While in Payung Hitam's work it is the performer's body upon which physical pain is inflicted, audiences too are often threatened and forced to experience the threat of violence. In their work *Merah Bolong*, in which performers were buried beneath piles of stones (see images below), for example, audiences were subjected to performers kicking and throwing stones and rocks in their direction. As Danarto noted, this strategy ensured that

the audience, who are usually passive and want to be entertained with pleasant (*enak*) performances, all of a sudden understand what it would feel like to be terrorised. The rocks put the audience in a constant state of anxiety. Immediately one thinks of demonstrators, who also often throw stones. (Danarto 1999)

Likewise, in a review of Payung Hitam's 1996 production of *Kaspar*, another Bandung reviewer, Agus Sarjono, noted that the performers' use of space meant there could be no distance between them and the audience and that it was as if Payung Hitam wanted to 'involve the audience so that they would *experience* violence for themselves.' (Sarjono 1996, italics in the original).



Images from Teater Payung Hitam's performance *Merah Bolong*, Bandung 1999

Photos: Yunarius Harisinthu

This case study looks at representations of violence in two of Payung Hitam's works, *Kaspar*, which was first performed in 1994 but has since been re-worked and staged several times since the fall of the New Order, and *DOM: Dan Orang Mati*, performed in Bandung and Jakarta in 2000. I will describe both performances before commenting on the ways in which they represent violence and the experience of physical pain.

Kaspar

Hailed as a 'masterpiece' (Ismet 2004:101) and described as evoking the 'atmosphere of a concentration camp' (Yohanes 1996), *Kaspar* was the work through which Payung Hitam established its 'brand image' (Saini 2004:6). Originally devised and performed in 1994-95 as a response to the bannings of

the mainstream publications *Tempo*, *Editor* and *Detik*, the first version of *Kaspar* generated an unprecedented level of critical response in the popular media (Bodden 2004:11). The work has since been revised several times and has continued to impress critics as powerful commentary on the political issues of its times⁴³.

Payung Hitam's *Kaspar* was based on a work of the same name by Austrian playwright Peter Handke, who is best known for the classic avant-garde work *Offending the Audience*. The play *Kaspar*, first performed in 1967, is loosely based on the true story of Kaspar Hauser, who walked into Nuremberg in 1824, aged 17, and able to speak only one sentence. Kaspar Hauser quickly became a curiosity: he was an almost adult human without any language skills, who had apparently been raised in captivity and isolation, a human body who had never been socialised, a blank canvas for indoctrination. In Handke's work, Kaspar is interrogated, taught, controlled and tortured as part of the authorities' project to 'normalise' him. The play therefore follows Kaspar Hauser's journey as he learns to speak, to interact with the world and to become a normal, social human being. As Handke's alternative title for the work, *Speech Torture*, indicates, the play is about the violence of language itself. As the character Kaspar learns to speak, he is indoctrinated, shaped, socialised, controlled, and eventually destroyed by the structures in which he finds himself.

Payung Hitam's production of *Kaspar* transports its audience into a chaotic, violent world that shares many of the characteristics of contemporary Indonesia. As in Handke's original, we follow Kaspar's infuriating journey of learning to move and talk as an adult human being. In doing so he experiences a full range of emotions, including fear, rage, wonder, confusion, frustration, and joy as he transforms from an almost pre-human state into an angry, adult human

⁴³ Reviews of the post-New Order versions of *Kaspar* include Husein (2001) and Suyono (1998), both of which make useful comparisons between post-New Order and New Order versions of the work. I have seen video recordings of all of the versions of *Kaspar*, as well as the live version performed in 2001. This case study describes the 2001 version of the work.

male. Payung Hitam's *Kaspar* is a largely non-text based, highly physical work that deals with all the themes of Handke's original but locates them in the context of post-New Order Indonesia.

Kaspar's explorations in speech and movement are overshadowed by an omnipresent offstage voice, which periodically broadcasts reminders about language and power. The voice announces, for example, that once you can speak in sentences you can communicate, but you can also lie to yourself and to others. Language empowers the individual - with the ability to communicate - but it also is a trap, a powerful structure, from which it is impossible to escape. As he begins to experiment with language, Kaspar says 'I want to become...I want to become like a person who once was before' (*'Saya ingin menjelma...saya ingin menjelma seperti orang yang telah pernah ada'*), a phrase he repeats multiple times as he experiments with the sound of his own voice and the shape of the words.

Throughout the first half of the work, Kaspar interacts with a group of six soldiers (who are also, apparently, 'Kaspars' themselves, alter-egos of the 'real' Kaspar), who teach him about surveillance, torture, fighting, guns and bombs. Throughout the performance they march, run, climb, do headstands and assemble bombs in near perfect unison and with military-like precision. As they sit upright with their pistols held to their crotches, they also educate him about masculinity in a militarised world. During fluid sequences of discovery and indoctrination, Kaspar encounters and learns about new and strange objects with childlike fascination and confusion. At one point, human figures made out of tin cans descend from the roof, and in a later scene, a hundred paper planes descend on Kaspar as he tries to make sense of his surroundings. But as Kaspar learns about language, he also learns about weapons and fear.

In the second half of the work, the soldiers (or 'Kaspars') are replaced by politicians who, wearing colourful suit jackets and clown masks, make a huge

amount of noise, crashing through debris of tin cans that - by this point in the performance - litter the stage. The noise escalates as they smash iron sticks on scaffolding, and an enormous alarm clock beeps incessantly in the background. They also deliver a series of empty speeches from a platform of microphones. Payung Hitam's production of *Kaspar* is an assault on the senses, with screaming, yelling, and crashing, accompanied by the ominous, booming off stage voice over which continues to command and indoctrinate both Kaspar and the audience.

As Kaspar learns more words and sentences he speaks more of torture, suffering, lies, and a feeling of emptiness and sickness. He says, eventually, that he doesn't want to speak words any more: what is one to do when 'freedom' (*kebebasan*) doesn't really mean freedom, when 'openness' (*keterbukaan*) doesn't mean openness, when rules are rules but are not upheld. The corruption of language and truth turns human beings into animal-like bodies: 'instead of becoming human', Kaspar says, 'I'm just a goat or a monkey' (*saya hanyalah kambing atau monyet*). The process of socialisation and indoctrination has essentially de-humanised him. The work becomes progressively more chaotic and violent, and ends with a massive explosion, while the incessant alarm continues to sound in the darkness, as if urging us, unsuccessfully, to wake up.

Writing about the 1994 version of *Kaspar*, Bodden has pointed out that - like many other Indonesian performances of the 1990s - the work emphasises physicality rather than story (Bodden 2004:20). In the 2001 version of *Kaspar*, Payung Hitam's use of the human body remains very powerful. The body of Tony Broer, the performer who plays Kaspar, is the focus of the performance, his intense physicality reflecting the torture experienced by Kaspar as he is indoctrinated. Kaspar is naked from the waist up, and, like the performers who play the soldiers, wears skin coloured stockings covered with wart-like bumps. The performers' nakedness draws attention to the human body's vulnerability as well its strength. In *Kaspar*, performers' bodies are pushed to their absolute

limits. They are forced to conform to rigid military drills, crammed into tiny metal cages, tortured into submission. Bodies are acrobatic, powerful, and muscular but also contorted and stressed, the wart-like bumps stuck to their legs like cancerous growths. The physicality of the performers in *Kaspar* is juxtaposed, however, with the teachings of the official voice, which says over the loudspeaker at one point, 'Don't move too much. Don't communicate with movement symbols. You must communicate with words. With sentences.....you must be verbal'. The political critique of *Kaspar* is therefore communicated through the suffering and resistance of the human body as it struggles against an oppressor who tries to deny it movement. Following Scarry's formulation, *Kaspar*'s political critique is precisely about 'unmaking' verbal language: but in doing so, it replaces or 'remakes' it with a physical vocabulary that is ultimately a more appropriate medium through which to express experiences of violence.

At the same time, the naked, seemingly vulnerable body is juxtaposed with the use of metal, especially steel, in almost all elements of the stage design. In addition to the hundreds of empty cans strewn across the stage, the design utilises a backdrop of steel scaffolding, metal chains, barbed wire, metal chairs and trolleys and a metal cage into which *Kaspar*, the politicians and soldiers are locked at various times. While visually the steel creates an image of a dystopic, over-industrialised landscape, it is also used as a strong element of the sound design: steel cans spectacularly crash to the floor while performers use steel rods to beat on scaffolding, creating a discordant soundtrack that builds in tempo as the project of *Kaspar*'s socialisation intensifies. In an interview with *Kompas*, director Rachman Sabur said that the use of the steel could be read as a representation of violence itself, as if to indicate that violence was everywhere, something that surrounded people and in which all people were implicated (*Kompas* 9 August 2003).

From 1994 to 2001: differences and continuities in *Kaspar*

Given that *Kaspar* was first produced in 1994, a number of questions arise about the revisions that have been made to the performance since that time. Does the fact that Payung Hitam have revised this work several times mean that they have run out of new ideas for performances? Or is there a solid rationale for re-working the performance for a new political context?

As noted above, when Payung Hitam first presented *Kaspar* in 1994, the work was inspired by the bannings of news magazines *Tempo*, *Editor* and *Detik*. According to Sabur, at that time, the figure of *Kaspar* was intended as a symbol of oppression, an individual who was no longer free to be himself in a world in which language itself was controlled so tightly by the state. The banning of *Tempo* and the other publications, it seemed, demonstrated the farcical nature of a world in which the government would speak of 'openness' and 'freedom' but qualify it by arguing that publications had to be 'free but responsible' ('*bebas tetapi bertanggung jawab*'). The authorities controlled words and language to such an extent that their meaning was corrupted, their utility as a tool for critique undermined (Sabur Interview 19 June 2000).

These ideas and themes still resonate in the 2001 version of *Kaspar*: but the changed context means that there are new 'layers' to the text. *Kaspar* remains a symbol of the oppressed and the indoctrinated, and the questions about the control of language by authorities are still highly relevant. At the same time, however, the work is now full of imagery and language that directly critiques the military and politicians as a source of violence in society, which was not the case in the earlier production of the work.

A significant new aspect of the work in the *reformasi* era was the way it highlighted the corruption of reformists upon their entry into existing systems of power. In 1998, for example, when a revised version of the work was performed in Jakarta in the lead-up to the MPR session at which a number of

decisions about Indonesia's political future were to be taken, the performance utilised a recording of a BBC interview with Amien Rais, one of several reformist figures who were beginning the process of becoming part of Indonesia's political institutions (Suyono 1998). While the 2001 production, did not have any direct references to specific politicians it nevertheless made explicit the fact that politicians and the military were the primary objects of critique. That post-New Order versions of *Kaspar* have continued to impress critics points to Payung Hitam's skill in making connections with their contemporary context, and highlights the continuities between the New Order and *reformasi* eras.

I will now turn to another Payung Hitam work, *DOM: Dan Orang Mati*, before discussing in further detail representations of violence in both *DOM* and *Kaspar*.

DOM: Dan Orang Mati

While in *Kaspar* violence is manifested in diverse ways, including through language, Payung Hitam's work *DOM: Dan Orang Mati* (*DOM: And People Die*, hereafter abbreviated as 'DOM'⁴⁴) deals very explicitly with physical violence and human rights abuses in Aceh. During my fieldwork I saw two versions of *DOM*, the first staged at STSI⁴⁵ in Bandung in June 2000, the second staged at Gedung Kesenian Jakarta three months later. Where observations apply to only one of the performances, this will be noted.

DOM was initially written as one of a series of poems by director Rachman Sabur, in response to what he saw as grave violations of human rights across Indonesia. The poem begins with an image of an old woman, a 'friend' of the writer, opening a photo album which contains images of people who have died,

⁴⁴ The acronym DOM is also widely known to stand for 'Daerah Operasi Militer' (Military Operation Area), the term used to describe Aceh under martial law in the 1990s.

⁴⁵ STSI is the popular abbreviation for *Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia*, the main performing arts teaching institution in Bandung.

an album depicting a 'black history' (*sejarah hitam*). It describes another friend who is an Indonesian military officer who wears insignia indicating that he works on the military campaign in Aceh, where human rights violations are often committed. The poem concludes with the lines 'for justice and truth/ whoever the perpetrator/ must be stopped and prosecuted'. While the poem itself has a very flat and matter of fact tone, the performance of *DOM* is full of confronting imagery and Payung Hitam's trademark physicality.

In the Bandung version of the performance, the audience enters the theatre through a central aisle filled with a row of suspended wooden picture frames, each of which contains a bone or several bones. Each frame and its bones are illuminated by a bare light globe, and the space is eerily quiet, except for the foreboding chime of a bell. Once the audience is seated, an old woman enters from the back of the auditorium and makes her way slowly up the aisle, peering curiously at each frame and its bones. When she reaches the stage she sits in a rocking chair from where she watches the performance. The Jakarta version of *DOM* began differently and did not feature the old woman, instead opening with an image of a man positioned inside a wooden frame. A group of five male performers surround him and shake the frame violently and noisily.

DOM, like a photo album, is a series of images rather than a linear story. Each image speaks in some way about human rights abuses, military atrocities and the Indonesian state's involvement in this violence. While the subtext is that *DOM* is specifically about Aceh (as the title of the work indicates), the imagery could apply to any number of situations in Indonesia where military atrocities have been committed. Like other Payung Hitam works, *DOM* is chaotic but tightly choreographed, intensely physical, an unrelenting assault on the audience's senses. The dominant symbol in *DOM* is that of human bones, while images of figures including Suharto, Wiranto and Habibie are repeated in different ways throughout the performance. Bones appear as the 'counters' on giant abacuses, which are rattled incessantly by six performers who move in

tandem across the stage. As an Acehese melody plays, men emerge with tombstones, which they incessantly bang into the ground. At one point, four performers, all wearing Suharto masks, line up on stage coughing violently (emulating the real Suharto, who was at the time claiming he could not stand trial due to illness) and sucking hungrily on bones, gnawing and slurping for every last scrap of marrow. A floor-to-ceiling banner depicting a generic outline of a four star general's head hangs as a semi-permanent backdrop to the performance. In one scene several similar banners, bearing the outlines of the heads of Suharto, Wiranto and Habibie move from side to side across the stage, as three men run between them, looking around, confused as if everywhere they looked and in every direction they could run was the New Order. The Indonesian flag is also used as a powerful symbol in *DOM*: in one scene a man waltzes across the stage with a dead man's body as his partner and a small Indonesian flag in one hand.

DOM employs a number of tactics through which to implicate the audience in its violence. At one point, for example, huge military search lights pass overhead, surveilling the audience and pausing at times in order for blinding light to be shone in audience members' faces. The use of sound in *DOM* is also confronting, with the audience constantly experiencing a barrage of noise ranging from gunfire, helicopters, the crunch and rattle of human bones, and the thud of helmets and military boots being dragged across the stage.

Reading representations of violence in *Kaspar* and *DOM*

In both *Kaspar* and *DOM*, violence is constant. It is the key feature of Kaspar's relationships with both political and military 'characters', and it is essential to the coercive strategies (both physical and mental) used by the invisible authorities to control and indoctrinate him. Military violence is, of course, the central theme of *DOM*.

Both performances make significant contributions to the project of making violence in Indonesian society visible and less 'abstract'. In *Kaspar*, learning about violence is a central part of being socialised in the contemporary world: as Kaspar learns to speak, for example, one of the first words he learns is 'bomb'. Through its focus on language, *Kaspar* also highlights the ways in which a range of structures reinforce and perpetuate violence, to the extreme point where participation in these structures leads to self destruction: in the final moments of the performance, we see an image of Kaspar with a bomb hanging around his neck. In highlighting multiple manifestations of violence in Indonesia - terrorist bombings, the Indonesian military's violence towards GAM, as well as 'everyday' violence - *Kaspar* draws attention to a range of atrocities that have deep historical roots but which are also contemporary, *reformasi* era issues. *DOM* - with its explicit focus on military atrocity in Aceh - likewise draws attention to the ways the Indonesian state has used violence against its citizens, and in focusing on Aceh questions indirectly the legitimacy of maintaining a unitary Indonesian state by force. While the hero figure in *DOM* resembles in many ways the archetypal '*pahlawan reformasi*' (*reformasi* hero), in making him Acehnese, *DOM* challenges the dominant, Java-centric construction of heroism. By using the human body as the main tool for communicating the experience of pain and violence, both works demonstrate that while pain might be 'resistant to language', it is representable using the physical vocabulary of performance. In many respects, therefore, *Kaspar* and *DOM* are both works that pose important questions about violence and military power in Indonesian society.

At the same time, however, there are limitations to Payung Hitam's critique, and it would be a mistake to argue that representations of violence like those in *Kaspar* and *DOM* are entirely unproblematic. Both *Kaspar* and *DOM* persuasively draw attention to the endlessness of cycles of violence, but they are not works that offer much hope, or any alternatives. Kaspar is effectively unable to resist indoctrination, he is trapped: the only way in which he can

become human and ever hope to interact with society, is to become like the soldiers or the politicians. He must accept that there is no truth in language, and that once indoctrinated he has no capacity to protest or resist the structures of communication into which he enters. These structures, inherently violent, have in fact *constructed* him, and it is as if he will not survive without them. So perhaps in another context, these sorts of representations would be counter-productive, as they effectively destroy any possibility of change. In *DOM*, military atrocity and power is likewise impossible to escape. The rattle of bones on abacuses, the thud of tombstones hitting the ground, the wailing of women who have lost their children and husbands, the military's incessant search for separatists is unrelenting. While the hero figure resists strongly, he is ultimately unable to interrupt the cycle of violence in which he finds himself.

One of the fundamental tensions in analysing works like *Kaspar* and *DOM* is whether or not representations of violence can indeed be counter-discursive, or whether, in the end, they are - by normalising these kinds of representations - to some extent serving the interests of those in power. As Scarry writes,

Given the fact that actual weapons ordinarily hurt rather than heal persons, it would be surprising if the iconography of weapons ordinarily worked to assist those in pain, and of course it does not. (1985:17)

It may be possible to argue that, in the Indonesian context, because of the invisibility of violence in other mediums, works like *Kaspar* and *DOM* do more than just reproduce violence. By making violence visible in the first place, Payung Hitam's works represent an important first step towards provoking the kind of 'deep introspection' that has rarely characterised dominant Indonesian political discourse.

The gender of the bodies in *Kaspar* and *DOM* also makes a difference to the way in which we might interpret the works. By representing only male bodies in pain, like so many other works in this genre, *Kaspar* effectively represents the *male* body as being the primary site of both suffering and resistance. In

Kaspar, the state, the citizen, the military and the politician is male; it is a work that locates all power and all resistance in the male body. In *Kaspar*'s dystopic world, there are no women at all - and although it could be argued that this perhaps reflects more on the make up of the theatre community in Bandung than on directorial intention - it absolutely makes a difference to the way in which we read the performance. *Kaspar* in many ways makes a progressive, anti-authoritarian, challenging statement about power and society, but in using only male bodies to describe power struggles, it effectively makes women's position in these power struggles invisible. And *Kaspar* is by no means an isolated example of the tendency to represent pain, suffering, power and subordination as if they are exclusively male domains. Male bodies in pain are everywhere in Indonesian theatre: and it is imperative that any reading of these otherwise progressive works takes this into account.

In *DOM*, unlike in *Kaspar*, there are women performers. Not only is the spectacle of *DOM* observed closely and with great sadness by the elderly woman, in one scene, two women sit at the front of the stage, desperately scrubbing and washing long red cloths. Consumed by uncontrollable sobs as they wash the cloths, the women are archetypal grieving widows or mothers. At one point, a male performer tries, without success, to stop them crying. In the Jakarta version of the performance, a woman emerges carrying large bones on her shoulders. She approaches four male figures who clearly represent the authorities, and screaming is heard, along with the sound of someone slurping and eating noisily. According to one reviewer, this scene represented 'the suffering of mother earth (*ibu pertiwi*) who has seen so many of her children dead and buried because of military violence and greed' (Wirawan 2000). While women are represented, therefore, as suffering emotionally from violence, their bodies are not marked in the same way as those of the men in the performance: physical pain is something inflicted only upon male performers. At the same time, *DOM* draws on and perpetuates some of the myths about anti-authoritarian male heroes, discussed earlier in this chapter. One performer,

Tony Broer, physically strong with wild long hair, represents perhaps the archetypal 'people's hero'. As one critic put it, throughout the performance, he is constantly 'inspiring fervour, protesting against injustice, protesting against arbitrary use of power, protesting against violence by kicking the billboard with the general's picture' (Aritonang 2000).

There is a fine line between representing and reproducing violence. In the hands of a less skilled director, some of the images used by Payung Hitam could easily become gratuitous and sensationalist and could undermine the gravity of its intended critique. I have argued here that *Kaspar* and *DOM: Dan Orang Mati*, in making violence less of an 'abstract spectacle', begin the essential project of remembering and acknowledging Indonesia's violent past and present. Both works also highlight the fact that the project of resistance begun in the late New Order period is far from over, and that while some of the objects of critique may have changed, ending cycles of violence is a long-term endeavour. Interrogating these sorts of narratives, as this case study has done, can contribute to addressing the pressing need to understand more fully the ways in which violence has and continues to be a major force that shapes contemporary Indonesia. At the same time, this case study has drawn attention to some of the limitations and problems that are inherent in representations of violence, and has highlighted the potential for otherwise progressive works to inadvertently depict the male body as the only site of pain, oppression and resistance, thus limiting the scope of their critique. Some of these ideas are taken up in the following case study, in which I discuss the work *Luka* (Injury) by Putu Wijaya's Teater Mandiri.

Violence and narratives of nationalism in Teater Mandiri's *LUKA*

In the introduction to a collection of his short stories, the writer and theatre director Putu Wijaya writes,

...for me writing is cutting throats. My own throat and other people's, but then it should not hurt, and if possible it should go unnoticed. It

should be done in a stealthy way, pussyfooted and tricky, and sometimes on the sly, and if possible all traces should be erased. I do not pretend to give a recipe, let alone to create heroes. I just want to sweep people along to show them there are many alternatives to the ones that have piled up and have led to violent conflicts and disjunctions that turn people into separate individuals or distinct groups. I choose anecdotes. Funny things, light, strange, sometimes things that do not make sense, to shock, to pinch, interest, disturb, terrorise people so that they will stop for a moment and think and remember again that they are persons like others. (1995:373-4)

Violence is central to Putu Wijaya's work, in both the fields of literature and theatre. It is both a thematic concern and, as the quote above indicates, essential to the way Putu thinks about his artistic practice. This case study explores representations of violence and nationalism in a post-New Order work produced by Putu's theatre group, Teater Mandiri.

After working in theatre as a member of Bengkel Teater Rendra in the late 1960s, Putu established his group Teater Mandiri in 1971 along with a few fellow employees of *Tempo* Magazine. Since its establishment, the group has produced at least one new work each year, and has gradually developed a very recognisable and unique style that Putu refers to as *tontonan* (spectacle). As Hatley notes, this focus on making *tontonan* results in performances that work through emotional empathy and absurd humour rather than structured plot and dialogue. Through bizarre images and events, his (Putu Wijaya's) plays evoke feelings of alienation and confusion among urban Indonesians amid changing social norms, and ridicule egotistical, corrupt, social practices. (1994b:225-6)

Unsurprisingly, Putu's theatre shares many of the characteristics and themes of his fiction, which as part of the 'anti-realist literature of the Jakarta centre' (Foulcher 1990a:104) has been described as 'rebellion against meta-narratives', and as 'postmodern metafiction' (Clark 2001) and as work that reflects 'the

post-modern nightmare of life in Jakarta' (Hatley 1994b:247). In one of the few scholarly works on Putu's theatre work, Ellen Rafferty writes that

Putu's dramas offer a concatenation of strange scenes often arranged in seemingly illogical sequences. The dramas are peppered with a humour which may be lewd but is more often black and biting. The harsh, cruel tone of the plays which is designed to 'hurt' is presented in a fast-paced, rhythmical manner. The plays are both visually and aurally busy, at times verging on the chaotic. The cyclic structure which characterises many of Putu's plays creates a feeling of 'going nowhere' because the central problem of the play remains unresolved at the conclusion.

(1989b:16-17)

Putu's performances - like those of many of his contemporaries - have largely avoided censorship through the use of 'tactics such as understatement, oblique expression and veiled meanings' which disguise 'underlying criticisms of Indonesia's social conditions and national development'. (Gillit Asmara 1995:171).

There are several reasons why I have chosen to discuss Teater Mandiri and their 2001 work *Luka* in this chapter. Firstly, by discussing this group I hope to provide a sense that the representation of violence and physical pain in theatre is not necessarily exclusively the domain of younger generation artists, although they are among the most active proponents of this type of work. Secondly, Putu's explicit aim of creating a kind of existential 'terror' for audiences makes Teater Mandiri's work an obvious case study for an investigation of representations of violence in theatre. Not only is writing, for Putu, about 'cutting throats': he has also described his work as a process of creating 'mental terror' from 'real life' (Wijaya 1996:451). The title of this particular work, *Luka* - literally meaning 'injury' or 'wound' - immediately provokes questions about what kind of injury might be imagined in the work. Who or what is injured and why? *Luka* is a work in which physical, emotional or existential pain becomes a major subject for exploration.

Thirdly, it has been suggested that at least one of Putu Wijaya's works of fiction - the novel *Nyali* (Bile) - is an attempt to give expression to 'remembered history', in particular the recent memory of the 1965-66 killings. *Nyali*, which in Foulcher's words, bore 'no direct relation to history or observable reality at all' and was 'a story of inhuman violence and cruelty, and political betrayal and deceit', depicted violence being perpetrated by 'an unidentifiable enemy and its pursuers'. In representing a 'developmentalist-minded military ruler' who was the victor in a coup of unclear origins, and in stressing the inherent evil of the 'enemy within', *Nyali* provides clues that the history of 1965-66 was becoming 'part of the 1980s collective consciousness' (Foulcher 1990a:104). Given the *physicality* of performance and its resulting suitability as a medium for representing pain and terror, there seems to be significant likelihood that some of the ideas developed in novels like *Nyali* might find further expression in Teater Mandiri's performance works. While Putu Wijaya's literature has been more widely studied than his theatre, the dynamic, interactive, physical nature of performance makes it an ideal site for the investigation of some of the ideas that Foulcher raises in his essay about Putu's fiction and memories of the 1965-66 killings.

tontonan and teror

Tontonan (spectacle) and *teror* (terror)⁴⁶ are words that invariably come up in any discussion of Putu Wijaya's theatre. Both terms - and their specific use in Teater Mandiri's lexicon - are essential for understanding what the group is trying to achieve with its performances.

The term *tontonan* firstly provides some clues about the ways in which Teater Mandiri might imagine its work and aesthetic. Teater Mandiri's work is first and foremost intended to be *visual*. As Rafferty points out, '*tontonan* theatre' is

⁴⁶ To reflect Teater Mandiri's own usage of the terms *tontonan* and *teror* - and because the English approximations are imprecise - I will continue to use the Indonesian language words, when using them to describe Teater Mandiri's work.

an extension of the *mini-kata*⁴⁷ theatre Putu performed in while still with Bengkel Teater Rendra, and is a theatrical style that 'stresses the visualization of an idea over its narration' (1989b:15). In Putu's words, *tontonan* 'does not have to consist of dialogues, stories with plots, characters, conflicts and moral messages'. Just as a spectacle becomes a spectacle by virtue of spectators, Teater Mandiri's *tontonan* theatre implicates the audience as being essential to its theatricality. Teater Mandiri intends its works to be 'a sort of collective meditation, not an entertainment, although it can entertain' (Teater Mandiri 2001:1). Likewise it uses various strategies to disturb the narrative and 'remind' the audience that what is on stage is not 'reality' but spectacle.

Tontonan became a conscious artistic approach for Teater Mandiri in 1975-76, when the group produced three works (*Lho*, *Nol* and *Entah*), none of which were text-based (Rafferty 1989b:17). Seeing itself as antithetical to naturalistic, conventional theatre, *tontonan* theatre makes no 'truth claims' and its abstract style demands multiple interpretations. Although sometimes departing from a script as a starting point, 'text is not sacred', and is developed in conjunction with a rehearsal process. In this theatre, the performers are not necessarily required to 'act', instead they are 'multifunctional', going 'in and out of roles', sometimes portraying characters, sometimes portraying more abstract entities like values and emotions, sometimes as 'shapes' to fill in a scene. Performers also regularly assume the roles of stage crew, often making themselves visible to the audience, again in an attempt to draw attention to the constructed-ness of the theatrical spectacle. Teater Mandiri's most recent works - including *Luka* - have rigorously explored the potential of a giant shadow screen, much like the one used in *wayang kulit*, with the performers creating a massive shadow-spectacle behind the screen.

⁴⁷ The term *mini-kata* was coined by critic Goenawan Mohamad to describe the style of work produced by WS Rendra and his company Bengkel Teater in the early 1970s (Goenawan 1973:99). A precursor for the non-verbal avant garde theatre of the late 1980s and 1990s (discussed earlier in this chapter), *teater mini-kata* involved performers using half-words and sound rather than scripted text to communicate.

Teror is the second key concept in Putu Wijaya's thinking about theatre. The fact that *teror* is so explicitly Teater Mandiri's goal makes it a particularly interesting group to discuss in the context of this chapter. *Teror*, according to Teater Mandiri, however, is not *only* about physical terror, which is evoked through constant use of images of violence. Teater Mandiri intends to cause audience members mental, spiritual and intellectual terror through shocking their 'inner life' and forcing them to reconsider accepted norms. Teater Mandiri's 'mental terror' is created 'by turning logic upside down', by playing with the accepted logic of theatrical representation itself, by delving into the worlds of dream, fantasy and myth in considering contemporary social and political realities. In defining *teror* in this way, and in recognising the emotional, symbolic and non-physical manifestations of violence, Teater Mandiri opens up possibilities for interesting explorations of the variety of experiences of terror that characterise many Indonesians' lives.

The following analysis of *Luka* will ask a variety of questions about the efficacy of this *tontonan* theatre, and the extent to which *teror* might create space for new ideological possibilities. Although Teater Mandiri maintain that they are essentially 'anti-ideology', I would argue that works like *Luka* demonstrate their commitment to and ability to open up new ways of thinking about conflict and violence in contemporary Indonesia. In this way, Teater Mandiri's work in the *reformasi* era has been part of a critical and progressive process of acknowledging violence in Indonesian society. Although the group perhaps does not aim to provide alternatives, the act of making violence visible - often in quite shocking ways - is at least a provocation towards positive action.

I will argue in this chapter that works like *Luka* demonstrate that although *representable*, violence still remains 'resistant to language', in that *Luka*'s most successful moments are those based on physical expression and visual spectacle. It is important to note that representation of violence is nothing

particularly new for Teater Mandiri - as Rafferty points out, the work *Lho*, staged in 1975 included a 'brutal gang rape scene' (1989b:19). What is new, however, in the post-New Order, is an increased ability to make more obvious links between the violence in the performance and state actors (for example by projecting images of Suharto or Prabowo as a backdrop to the performance). I will argue, however, that in both *Luka* and Teater Mandiri's immediately previous work, *Ngeh* (staged in 1998), investigations of state-terror are ultimately limited by an attachment to nationalist symbols and rhetoric that to an extent undermines their radical potential.

Luka

The first time I saw a section of the work *Luka* was in a hot, sweaty rehearsal studio in a back street of the central Jakarta suburb of Cikini. One of the most enjoyable things about watching Teater Mandiri in rehearsal is that - just like watching a *wayang kulit* performance from the *dalang*'s (puppeteer's) side of the screen - it is possible to see how the performance is constructed. When watching a live rehearsal it's difficult to imagine exactly how the performance will look when viewed from the other side of a huge white screen. In this rehearsal - like many others no doubt - almost thirty performers were being put through their paces, climbing all over each other in serpentine fashion, as coloured lights flashed around the room, deliberately disorientating and distorting. Music, like a nightmare soundtrack, thumped into the warm evening outside.

One of the reasons I recall Teater Mandiri's rehearsal studio is that rehearsals for *Luka* were held at a time (early 2001) when on some nights it could be difficult to get to the rehearsal venue because of violent demonstrations at a Golkar office nearby. At several of these demonstrations, teargas was fired and on one occasion several protesters were hospitalised, one with very serious injuries (*Jakarta Post* 17 February 2001), his case later taken up by the Indonesian Human Rights Commission. Rehearsals were cancelled on some

nights because cast members were frightened to come to Cikini if there was word of a demonstration taking place. The real terror outside the rehearsal venue was omnipresent, a constant reminder that Teater Mandiri's performances were simultaneously an inadequate and necessary expression of the violence that has long characterised the struggle for power in Indonesia.

Luka is a loose adaptation of the script *The Coffin Is Too Big for the Hole* (*The Coffin*) by the late Singaporean playwright Kuo Pao Kun. *The Coffin* is a deceptively simple story about a child who is unable to bury his grandfather because the coffin is bigger than the one-size-fits-all grave. Community conflict ensues. Eventually it is agreed that the grandfather can be buried alongside a child because when combined their plots of land are big enough for both coffins. First performed by Teater Mandiri in late 2000 at the Festival of Asian Theatre in Tokyo, *Luka* was re-worked for its Jakarta production to enable a much larger cast of performers to participate. *Luka* is the first Teater Mandiri work not to have been based on a script by Putu Wijaya himself, although by his own admission, the adaptation of Pao Kun's original script was very 'free'. In an interview, Putu explained that he chose to adapt *The Coffin* partly out of necessity: in order to accept the invitation to present a work at the Festival of Asian Theatre he had to work on one of Pao Kun's scripts. He was also attracted to the script because of similarities between *The Coffin* and some of his own works - especially *Aduh* and *Gerr*, produced in 1974 and 1981 respectively - which dealt with the ritual of burial (Interview 19 March 2001).

Luka deliberately assaults the audience's senses. The spectator is bombarded with a spectacle of shadow images, music, sounds, light and relentlessly physical action. Through creating a dream-like world of shadows and light which plays with images that reflect both nightmare and contemporary political events, *Luka* manipulates and terrifies audiences. Just as one is concentrating on the in-focus then out-of-focus shadows, trying to work out what they might be - or being lulled by a quiet and dimly lit series of images - the action will

suddenly jolt and change. Supported by sudden shifts in lighting and music, the audience is subjected to a constant flow of images, thoughts and ideas, none of which provide clear narrative and all of which demand that each audience member find meaning for themselves.

In *Luka*, text - along with 'character' - is kept to an absolute minimum. The audience is given just enough - in spoken dialogue as well as program notes - to understand that the basic story is about a community in conflict over the burial of the too-large coffin. We learn that the difficulty of burying the large coffin is caused by bureaucratic inflexibility: a coffin that doesn't fit the 'standard measurements' (*ukuran standard*) is just too difficult for the authorities to deal with. There is also a suggestion that corruption has led to the enforcement of such rules and regulations and a lack of respect for the community's wishes. When petty bureaucracy and corruption take precedence over respect for the burial of fellow citizens, conflict naturally ensues.

On one level, *Luka* tells a visual story about human bodies, members of this fictional community, struggling with the monster coffin. Readings of *Luka* in relation to its contemporary social and political context are many, and it is worth noting that in the press conference before the work's Jakarta performance in March 2001 Putu resisted the temptation to 'tell' the public what the work was 'about'. He made it clear, instead, that for a variety of reasons, *Luka* had enormous relevance for contemporary Indonesia - ongoing conflict, violence, political crises and the impotence of the political elite had inspired the work - but that he would give audiences space in which to interpret the work in their own ways (Teater Mandiri press conference 19 March 2001)

The use of the shadow screen in *Luka* results in a heightened focus on the human body. For most of the performance - and with some notable exceptions, including the opening scene in which a Balinese dancer performs briefly in front of the screen - bodies are visible only as shadows. Combined with the lack of spoken text in the work, this means that most of the time performers are

not 'acting' out roles, nor are they 'characters'. Behind the screen, lit in various colours and accompanied by the relentless soundtrack, the performers' bodies are sometimes - but often not - recognisable as bodies. There are moments in the performance where the bodies look more like animal figures or are twisted to look misshapen or deformed. One performer in the group, an elderly woman who has a badly curved spine, is partially disabled. Teater Mandiri's performance style makes her 'deformities' less 'unnatural' and her physicality, which in some groups might be regarded as a negative thing, becomes a strength and an inspiration for other performers.

So in *Luka*, most representations of violence and the body in pain are - partly as a result of the use of the shadow screen - very abstract. I have written elsewhere (Bain 2001a) that in one fragment of *Luka*, the shadows of a hundred hands stretch upwards, trying to reach something, grabbing desperately at the air. Perhaps other audience members, like myself, wondered whether these hands were reaching for food, water, or perhaps a lift up onto a boat? This particular fragment instantly reminded me of the refugee crisis following from horrific ethnic violence in Sampit, Central Kalimantan, which was front page news in February 2001, shortly before *Luka* was performed. At the same time, this fragment could represent any sea of desperate peoples' hands, from any one of many conflicts, and this is just one example of the way in which *Luka* encourages audiences to consider the way in which images of desperate people have become normalised in post-New Order Indonesia. The injuries (*luka*) suffered by Indonesians - and perhaps 'Indonesia' itself - are *Luka*'s central concern.



Scenes from Teater Mandiri's *Luka*, Jakarta, March 2001

Photos: Teater Mandiri

The use of the shadow screen also draws attention to the 'real' human body when it appears in front of the screen, without its shadowy alter-ego. The photographs above demonstrate the contrast between the visual impacts of the body as it appears in its 'natural' state in front of the screen and the body as shadowy narrative behind the screen. The (male) body in pain, struggling under the weight of the screen is eventually revealed to the audience, as shown in the photo on the right. The other photo captures effectively the way bodies appear in the scenes enacted behind the shadow screen. The contrast between these two representations of the body has the effect of making the 'real' human pain of the body in front of the screen more intense and intimate for the audience. Although the images of violence depicted in shadow are strong, as soon as the audience can connect the narrative to a 'real' human body and its (his) individual suffering, its impact becomes increasingly powerful, as if giving a human face to the abstract *teror*.

Physical pain and the experience of violence are, then, represented both with clarity and an abstract sense of distance in *Luka*. Again, in support of Scarry's argument about pain's 'resistance to language', these representations are made using physical vocabulary rather than words. Although *Luka* does show individuals in pain - for example the three men struggling under the weight of the huge coffin shown above - it also attempts to represent collective and societal pain. As one reviewer commented, *Luka* 'challenges' (*menentang*) the audience's 'awareness' (*kesadaran*) of many things, especially of the 'injury

that becomes our collective suffering' (*luka yang menjadi penderitaan bersama*) (*Kompas* March 31 2001). Ironically, although 'abstract' in an aesthetic sense, *Luka* contributes to making pain and violence in Indonesian society *less abstract* in the sense discussed by Frank Graziano, discussed earlier in this chapter. Indeed in placing violence and pain at the very centre of representation - to the extent that the aim of the performance is to 'terrorise' the audience - *Luka* confronts the invisibility and absence of violence directly, and demands that the audience pay attention to pain.

The community's struggle to bury the coffin is a narrative - most clearly - about people suffering at the hands of corrupt bureaucracy, and the inhumanity of inflexible rules and regulations that do not tolerate difference. At a time when the ability to reconcile, express and celebrate difference was one of the key challenges faced in Indonesia *Luka* raises timely and serious questions and makes an important contribution to dialogue about the issues of plurality and identity. Bureaucratic complicity in the erasure of difference is the main target here, as highlighted by a few sections of spoken text in *Luka*. At one stage, for example, someone declares 'prostitutes, pick pockets, DPR members, the President, they're all the same' (*pelacur, pencopet, anggota DPR, Presiden, semuanya sama*). In many ways *Luka* is a performance that embodies many of the positive aspects of the *reformasi* agenda: it is critical of the elites and of the controls placed on people by the New Order, it is supportive of basic human rights, and urgent about the need to open up dialogue about conflict and plurality. It is also a work that by virtue of its refusal to dictate meaning to audiences is significantly democratic.

But does the fact that it seems again to be the *male* body in pain, and the male body that suffers so visibly under the burden of the coffin (which is, after all, that of a patriarch) change anything about the way this particular narrative of *reformasi* might be interpreted? I am going to argue here that the gender of the distressed body in this case does alter the way we might read *Luka*, but at the

same time it is important to note that gender politics in *Luka* are perhaps more complex than in Payung Hitam's *Kaspar* (in which all the performers were male). In *Luka* more than half of the performers were women, and the use of the shadow screen and abstract performance style, with few 'characters', meant that there were few stereotypical representations of women or, for that matter, of men. In the shadow creations gender is also often erased, as performers embody animals, spirits or emotions. Likewise the performance techniques used demand that the women performers be physically strong, mobile and fit, while the Teater Mandiri 'trademark' respect for diversity means that the women in *Luka* come in all shapes and sizes. In various ways then, *Luka*, with its use of the shadow screen, perhaps (accidentally?) subverts dominant gender ideologies.

At the same time, however, it is the ubiquitous half-naked male body that is represented as suffering pain. Although women are very active in the performance behind the screen, their bodies rarely appear in front of it. In fact women performers appear twice in front of the screen: the first is performing a Balinese dance as *Luka* begins; the second is a female *sinetron* (locally produced genre of TV drama) actress making a cameo appearance as one of two western tourists taking photos of the *Luka* chaos, a fragment that although reflecting thoughtfully on international insensitivity and voyeurism in relation to Indonesia's crises, does nothing whatsoever to disrupt stereotypes about the ways women's bodies can be represented on stage. In a work that is about pain and injury (collective and individual, physical and mental) it is critically important that we notice that it is *male* pain, and a male struggle against corruption and bureaucracy, that is made explicit. That the male body is used to represent all Indonesians - or at the very least all members of the make-believe community in *Luka* - reinforces the notion that political and social agency, oppression and suffering, and the struggle by progressive forces for democratic change, are essentially male experiences. To read *Luka* in this way is not to undermine its essentially progressive politics which, as I have argued, point

toward a more democratic, tolerant and ultimately less violent future. Rather, in problematising the way in which men are visibly ‘doing the struggling’ and ‘suffering the pain’, I hope to draw attention to the tendency of *reformasi* narratives (and other narratives of struggle throughout Indonesian history) to privilege the male body as the site of all experience, which of course it is not.



Scenes from Teater Mandiri's *Luka*, Jakarta March 2001

Photos: Teater Mandiri

As other case studies in this chapter have demonstrated, Teater Mandiri is not the only theatre group to represent pain and suffering as an almost exclusively male experience. The ways in which gender ideologies are perpetuated and challenged in theatrical expression will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter: suffice to say here that any analysis of the trend in recent Indonesian performance to use the human body as a site for critique of contemporary political and social orders should at the very least be aware of feminist readings of this work, which might point to the limitations of critique that locates a ‘universal’ and /or ‘national’ experience specifically in the imagery of the distressed *male* body.

The final point I want to make about *Luka* is about the way it embraces, draws upon and perpetuates a particular kind of Indonesian nationalism. These ideas also point to the inter-relatedness of nationalism and conceptions of *reformasi*, which require unpacking if we are to develop a more complex understanding of the narratives that inform competing notions of what *reformasi* and post-New Order Indonesian identity might be. In a work that is otherwise highly abstract

and open to multiple interpretations, the final scenes of *Luka* are somewhat surprising. A review of Teater Mandiri's 1998 work *Ngeh* identifies a similar (in fact almost identical) problem: after 50 minutes of impressive and at times terrifying shadow images of violence, *Ngeh* audiences were subjected to composer Harry Roesli singing his well known anthem '*Jangan Menangislah Indonesia*' (Don't Cry Indonesia)⁴⁸ while a group of young children ran up onto the stage. As the reviewer noted, this scene was 'clichéd optimism: in the middle of destruction, hope always grows, because children are the future!' (Srengenge 1998b). Clearly the critic's declaration (in the same review) that Roesli's *Jangan Menangislah Indonesia* made him want to cry (presumably for all the wrong reasons) was not heeded by Putu Wijaya when he made *Luka*, with almost exactly the same ending. In *Luka*, we also hear *Jangan Menangislah Indonesia*, and although we do not see children running onto the stage this time, the white screen is rolled back and we see a huge red and white Indonesian flag being draped over the coffin as it is finally about to be buried. Meanwhile in the background are projected images of anti-corruption slogans, perhaps a final reversion to text in case the earlier part of the performance was too abstract or misunderstood.

So although *Luka* is a performance that in various ways effectively critiques many aspects of Indonesian social and political life it does so at the same time as invoking one of the classic symbols of Indonesian nationhood. While valuing plurality and difference, it remains strongly grounded in a conventional sense of national unity. While successfully making visible the suffering of people and communities at the hands of bureaucracy, *Luka*'s pro-*reformasi* logic does not extend to allowing a space for voicing concerns about whether or not the idea

⁴⁸ Roesli wrote *Jangan Menangis Indonesia* whilst being detained in Cimahi along with student activists in 1978. The song was often used in protests and events leading up to and following the fall of Suharto. More recently *Jangan Menangis Indonesia* has been used in memorial and fundraising concerts related to the 2002 Bali Bombing. See for example *Kompas* December 1 2002.

of a unitary 'Indonesia' might be a force that has caused suffering for some Indonesians, such as those in Aceh and Papua.

Coincidentally, while searching for information about the origins of Harry Roesli's *Jangan Menangislah Indonesia*, I found an article about an event called 'Gelora Reformasi', organised by student activists in Bandung shortly following the fall of Suharto. Evidently Roesli performed at this event, as did a student theatre group from the Philosophy Department of Bandung's Parahyangan University. This group - like so many across Indonesia during this time - also made use of the national flag, which in the final scene was used to cover and wrap up parts of the set that had been destroyed by the enacted communal violence. So although this was, 'a performance that depicted fear about Indonesia's possible fragmentation' (*pementasan yang merupakan gambaran ketakutan akan terpecah belahnya Indonesia*), the exploitation of the national flag as a 'unifying force' meant that the work was well received (*Parahyangan Online* 5 June 1998). I mention this particular report and event not because it is exceptional but because it indicates the prevalence of the use of the national flag and national symbols in *reformasi* era iconography. At certain times, perhaps this appropriation can indeed be subversive - but by 2001, when *Luka* was performed, the progressiveness of this kind of appropriation perhaps deserves to be problematised. The use of the Indonesian flag in the final scenes of *Luka* was - like the singing of *Jangan Menangislah Indonesia* - at best clichéd, at worst blind to the ways in which many Indonesians were and are questioning the meaning of conventional nationalism and its associated symbols.

Luka is a work that very clearly makes visible the experience of physical and mental pain. It is easy to imagine that many audience members would experience some sort of *teror* after being drawn into a fantasy world that exposes deep anxieties and bombards the viewer with images of violence. I have argued here that *Luka* exposes some of the injustices and inequalities that

characterise contemporary Indonesian society; it is highly sympathetic to human rights, democratisation, and the establishment of the rule of law over corruption. It is a work that both reflects existing ideas about what *reformasi* might be and creates a *reformasi* narrative of its own. In doing this, however, it also demonstrates the reliance of these narratives on a very conventional conception of what being 'Indonesian' might mean. In invoking nationalist symbols so unproblematically it is a work that exemplifies the way in which the conventional logic of *reformasi* in fact reproduces some of the New Order's ideological foundations.

Fragmentation and the violent overthrow of autocracy: Teater Kami's *Fragmentasi*

Based in a *kampung* in Lenteng Agung in South Jakarta, Teater Kami is a small ensemble of actors who have not had any formal artistic training. Under the direction of Harris Priadie Bah, who was formerly a member of Teater Sae, Teater Kami was founded in the early 1990s and like many of the groups discussed in this chapter maintains a position deliberately outside the so-called 'mainstream' of the Jakarta theatre community. They resist having a set 'style', preferring to challenge themselves and audiences by continual reinvention of form (Harris Priadie Bah, Interview, 15 February 2001). Their works have ranged from a production of Australian playwright Jack Hibberd's *Who* in the mid 1990s which made use of a 'cartoon like' aesthetic (Dahana 2001b:163-165) to a new adaptation of Roestam Effendi's 1926 work *Bebasari*,⁴⁹ which involved a collaboration with a percussion group from the island of Batam and borrowed design and performance elements from Minangkabau artistic traditions (*Kompas* January 17 2002).

Always political yet 'not deliberately so' (Priadie Bah Interview 15 February 2001), the group's work incorporates elements of folk theatre, physical theatre,

⁴⁹ *Bebasari*, written in 1926 and first published in 1928 is the first known Indonesian language dramatic script.

borrowed translations of western scripts and is comfortable about the resultant hybridity. Aside from producing theatre, their activities include establishing a Jakarta-based network of independent theatre practitioners and publishing a bulletin, *Djalan Poelang*, which aimed to contribute to the discussion of issues affecting theatre culture specifically in Jakarta⁵⁰. Various members of the group, especially Priadie Bah, have also been active in the somewhat sporadic movement pushing for reform to the *Dewan Kesenian Jakarta* (DKJ - Jakarta Arts Council)⁵¹. Teater Kami have been notably committed to touring their work and have recently performed in arts festivals as far afield as Palu in Central Sulawesi and the island of Batam in the Riau archipelago, which has resulted in a number of collaborations including the involvement of musicians from Batam in *Bebasari*. Teater Kami's work is funded sporadically and mostly by foreign cultural institutes like the Japan Foundation and by *kantong budaya* (cultural communities)⁵², arts spaces often run by artists themselves, usually equipped with basic stages in open-air settings. Teater Kami's work does not generate the kind of media coverage and mainstream critique enjoyed by some of the other groups discussed in this thesis: while members of the group claim not to aspire to the celebrity status of established artists like Putu Wijaya and Ratna Sarumpaet, nevertheless they protest both the lack of financial support

⁵⁰ Sadly *Djalan Poelang*, which was published irregularly and only when funds allowed, ceased publication in 2001.

⁵¹ The movement to reform the DKJ gathered momentum and achieved some success during the *reformasi* period following the resignation of Suharto in May 1998 (see for example *Jakarta Post* 3 June 1998 and *Jakarta Post* 7 June 1998). The aims and objectives of the reform movement at this time were outlined in a document 'Forum Jakarta Untuk Reformasi Kesenian' which formed the outline of a two day seminar held at TIM in Jakarta on 13-14 June 1998. Although this movement succeeded in making some key personnel changes at the management level, the underlying structure of the DKJ remained unchanged until 2003 when several influential figures in the arts community, including writer/ director Ratna Sarumpaet, successfully lobbied the Jakarta City Government for more funds and substantive reform. Teater Kami's Director Priadie Bah was subsequently appointed to the DKJ's theatre committee, a position he still holds.

⁵² The term '*kantong budaya*' literally translates as 'cultural pocket'. *Kantong-kantong budaya* emerged in the late New Order period (Halim HD 1999), and have continued to play an important role in arts scene in many parts of Indonesia in the *reformasi* era. *Kantong budaya* are usually characterised as oppositional, at least insofar as they resist the culture of production that might be associated with government run arts infrastructure. The closest equivalent to '*kantong budaya*' in Australia would be an 'artist run space' or 'artists' community'.

and media attention that is the ongoing predicament of the resolutely avant-garde performance group in Jakarta.

This discussion will focus on one of Teater Kami's recent works, *Fragmentasi suatu bencana yang diandaikan* ('Framentation: A disaster assumed', referred to hereafter as *Fragmentasi*) which was first presented in Jakarta at Teater Utan Kayu in November 2000. Compared with many other Teater Kami works, *Fragmentasi* had greater longevity and reach, touring to several cities in Java and to Palu in Sulawesi before being performed again in Jakarta at The Japan Foundation in February 2001. Originally - for reasons that will become clear in the following discussion - I had intended to include this analysis in the following chapter, on gender in performance, because *Fragmentasi*'s representation of a woman in power and of the 'chaotic' relationship between a woman leader and her male 'followers' raises some very interesting questions. But the fact that the performance also raises questions about violence, language and physicality meant that in the end it seemed that including it in this chapter would open up greater possibilities for analysis. It becomes, therefore, an excellent illustration of the ways in which questions about gender ideologies and identities intersect with other sorts of ideological formations that are under critique in this and other chapters of this thesis.

Fragmentasi was inspired by and adapted from a short play by Samuel Beckett called *Catastrophe*. The work utilises an old convention - the idea of a 'play within a play', or rather a *rehearsal* within a play - to explore the phenomena of the power of a director over her actors⁵³, and subsequently the reproduction and subversion of that power. In *Fragmentasi*, The Director (Russy Maulina), and her assistant (Harris Priadie Bah, who is Teater Kami's real director) preside over a series of highly physical scenes - or *fragments* - enacted by three anonymous male performers.

⁵³ In the original Beckett play, the director is assumed to be male. The fact that a woman plays the role in Teater Kami's production raises some complex questions which I will discuss below.

In examining the process of a 'rehearsal', the work is first and foremost an investigation of the codes of power and hierarchy implicit in theatre production. Priadie Bah points out that part of the attraction of Beckett's *Catastophe* was that it enabled a commentary on the power of directors, the violence that often characterises directors' relationships with performers and the dangers of the hubris that sometimes results from directorial control. He notes - as do many other commentators on contemporary theatre in Indonesia (for example Tranggono 2000) - the tendency of groups to rely heavily on a charismatic director figure, and for works to be associated with the leader rather than with the group as a whole. And indeed this is something that Teater Kami attempts to subvert through its own process and decision making structure - the choice of the name 'Teater Kami' ('our theatre') in itself exemplifies what is a serious commitment by Priadie Bah not to become a charismatic, autocratic director figure⁵⁴.

In a book that tries to engage with the 'symbiotic' relationship between theatre and 'terror', Anthony Kubiak argues that Beckett's play *Catastrophe* helps us to understand better 'the fine lineaments of terror' (Kubiak 1991:134). In *Catastrophe*, he writes,

Beckett confronts the relation between tyranny and theatre directly.... (it is a play) in which the theatre that gives birth to tyranny, and the tyranny that supports theatre, bleed almost imperceptibly into one another. Indeed, even the relations of power in this play are fused: is the figure in the chair, concealed, constructed, formalised - the victim of domination, or the formal representation of tyranny? We come to realise that the fusion itself emblematises the absolute and pervasive tyranny of the theatrical ontology, in which each of the participants in the theatrical spectacle is alike victim and victimiser. (1991:134)

⁵⁴ From the limited amount of observation I have done of Teater Kami's rehearsal process, I would argue, however, that to a significant degree the group is still very much 'led' by Priadie Bah

In Teater Kami's adaptation of *Catastrophe*, the ambiguity and fluidity of the relationship between the ruled and ruler, and the changing dynamic between victim and perpetrator of violence likewise makes the performance a very interesting one to discuss in the context of this analysis of violence and the body in recent theatre performances in Indonesia.

In addition to raising questions about power and violence in theatre itself, however, the multi-layered narrative and logic of *Fragmentasi* can be applied to power in society more broadly. Whether the tyrant is a theatre director, a president, a religious leader or a village head does not really matter, because *Fragmentasi* essentially interrogates the dynamic between oppressor and the oppressed, the overthrow of the oppressor by the oppressed, and comments indirectly on the sinister capacity of violence to reproduce itself.

Throughout *Fragmentasi*, the three male performers - who can be read as symbolising the *rakyat* (literally 'the people', although the term *rakyat* also has a connotation of 'grass roots community') - move in, out and around three triangular blocks in tightly choreographed configurations. They are essentially performers carrying out the instructions of the Director and her Assistant, their bodies apparently little more than tools for the creation of an individual's aesthetic vision. These performers have no voice of their own, and when they sing and speak they are, at least initially, merely carrying out the instructions, reading from a script that pre-determines what they can say and when they are able to speak. Their actions, highly choreographed and closely observed by the director and her assistant, express none of their individual creativity but take place merely to realise the vision of an egotistical director. As Priadie Bah writes in the program notes for *Fragmentasi*, the 'actor is the carrier of the burden of (the director's) desires (*kehendak*), the assistant director executes the director's desires, the director is the owner of desires'. Furthermore, these relationships are 'indisputable' (*tak terbantahkan*) (Teater Kami 2000). *Fragmentasi* exposes, therefore, the director's aggression and violence at the

same time as indirectly raising questions about individual responsibility in circumstances in which a 'just carrying out orders' mentality is normalised and unchallenged. The relationship between director and performers is, therefore, a metaphor for the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, whether in Indonesia or elsewhere.

At first the rehearsal within the performance unfolds as planned. The performers run through their scenes, sometimes provoking criticism from the watchful director and her assistant, both of whom rest in directors' chairs on the sidelines, all powerful, full of ambition and scorn, the assistant wearing a beret and dark glasses. The director is anxious for her artistic vision to be realised but appears to sense no challenge to her authority. The various scenes enacted by 'her' performers make use of original music, dance, piles of earth, sticks, *topeng* masks, based around the three triangular rostra. The performers wear anonymous black leotards, sometimes donning other items of clothing such as balaclavas and white business shirts as they duck in and out of the rostra, march around in unison, following the director's script and commands. The performers' 'scenes' in *Fragmentasi* are neither linear nor are they based around a unitary 'plot' or 'story'. One scene, for example, consisted of the three performers picking up baskets of dirt, pouring the dirt on the floor into neat pyramid shapes and after marching around sticking long sticks into the pyramids of dirt. Another scene had them wearing balaclavas and leaping into position on top of the rostra, covering their mouths, ears and eyes in a series of 'hear no evil - see no evil - speak no evil' poses. Later in the performance they pick up the triangular rostra and twirl them around on their heads, they march around singing an original song by Harris Priadie Bah called '*Ayo Maju Hai Rakyatku*' ('Onward my People'), and swing long sticks by their sides in pseudo-paramilitary fashion.

In most of the scenes, the performers are silent, as if deprived of speech somehow by the tyranny of their theatre. Although probably not a deliberate

strategy, the choice of physical performance in this respect raises a number of questions about the dynamic between language, power, agency and the centrality of the human body to theatrical expression. As the performers' silent, pliable bodies enact the scenes they have apparently rehearsed many times before, they draw attention also to the way in which in performance, bodies come to be more than 'just' bodies. The performers' bodies in *Fragmentasi* are, on one level, tools for a director who wants to realise a grand artistic vision. But they are inscribed with identity, and are sites through which the director's power can either be given expression or resisted.

The performers do - albeit momentarily - find a voice, when in one scene they start chanting repeatedly in military-like unison '*kamu siapa, saya tidak peduli, saya tidak peduli siapa kamu*' ('who are you, I don't care, I don't care who you are'). It is not clear to whom this statement is directed, and perhaps that is precisely the point. This chanting scene raises, however, questions about identity (individual, group, nation), and the role that its *erasure* (not caring about it) might play in the tyrant's (read: director's/ president's/ regime's) project. The military-like performance of the chant also suggests that we question perhaps military motives and commitments to the same sort of erasure of identity politics, leading us to question the harm this might do to the individual.

The performance climaxes - or, depending on how you read it, descends into chaos - when the performers eventually surround and attack the director. 'This scene is not in the script' the director shouts, as her assistant and the 'performers' stage a swift coup in which she is killed. She is pushed to the ground, surrounded by men wielding sticks, forced to surrender and 'brought to justice'. Her physical pain, although not entirely visible (when she is 'killed' she is surrounded by stick wielding revolutionaries), is assumed.

On one level then, *Fragmentasi* is about the way in which authoritarian leaders have to be destroyed completely in order for there to be any possibility of positive action. Until the leader is destroyed and replaced, there is apparently no space for the 'people' to have a voice or to build anything independently of the power hierarchy under which they have suffered. But at the same time, *Fragmentasi* is more complex than that. In a deliberately un-didactic fashion, *Fragmentasi* leaves open the question about the transfer of power following the Director's demise. Will the power simply be transferred to the shadowy Assistant Director who is likely to be equally as tyrannical? Will anything actually change with the destruction of the Director? Do the people themselves have any role or agency to reform the hierarchy under which they are presently ruled? And does the Director's overthrow through violent means rule out or limit the possibility of non-violent transfer of power in the future? Will the 'people' be trapped in an eternal cycle of violence? This is perhaps where the questions that Kubiak raises in relation to Beckett's script *Catastrophe*, and the blurred relationship between victim and perpetrator of violence, are especially relevant.

On one level *Fragmentasi* can and should be read as an expression of the frustration felt by many Indonesians about the possibilities for positive political change in a period of constant transition. In *Fragmentasi*, as in post-New Order Indonesia, leaders are overthrown, often violently, only to be replaced by equally corrupt new leaders. On one hand, the ability of the shadowy Assistant Director to work together with the people to overthrow their dictator makes a positive comment about the political agency and the power of people to change hierarchies. But at the same time the 'unresolved' nature of the performance - and the way it alludes to the possibility of an endless repetition of authoritarian power structures - challenges assumptions about the possibility of peaceful transitions and alternative forms of government. In this way, *Fragmentasi* is perhaps an accurate reflection of contemporary anxieties about the possibility of democratic reform in Indonesia; while it brings into focus important

questions about the ways authoritarian leaders can be overthrown, it also points to the longer term difficulties inherent in overthrowing cyclical violence.

Teater Kami's *Fragmentasi* does not attempt to propose any definitive answers to the question of how to escape the endless repetition of violence. Hierarchies - and binary oppositions between powerful and powerless - are in some ways reinforced by *Fragmentasi*. The only way to remove the dictator, afterall, is to destroy her. But at the same time, the work subverts this, in that it questions the real bases upon which 'powerful' and 'powerless' are defined. It is a work that on the one hand reinforces stereotypes about the violent overthrow of an autocratic leader but at the same time forces us to consider the prospects for longer term and meaningful change in the aftermath of a leader's demise.

Thinking about *Fragmentasi* in the light of some of the theoretical ideas introduced earlier in this chapter, it seems appropriate to deal first with questions about the representability and expressability of pain and violence. As mentioned above, this is not a work in which experiences of pain are made explicit. The 'distressed body' does not appear here as it does in the other works discussed in this chapter. *Fragmentasi*'s radical potential lies however in the way in which it exposes violence in a more lateral sense: the relationship between the Director and the performers for example could be characterised as a violent one even though they do not come to physical blows. Coercion and intimidation, the attempt to control the minds and bodies of one's subjects, the Director's egotistical pursuit of total 'creative' control (artistic vision?), the constant *threat* of physical violence are portrayed in *Fragmentasi* as being central to methods of domination. At the same time, being as it is about *theatre*, the work challenges its *own* underlying power structures and hierarchies, demonstrating significant self-awareness and reflexivity.

Making visible the sorts of power relations that underpin and legitimate violence in society is of course not something that is particularly unique to

Teater Kami's work, nor is it especially new in Indonesian theatre. What makes *Fragmentasi* interesting is the way in which it blurs the seemingly inevitable binary opposition between powerful and powerless, the way it challenges the idea that power might rest in a single location. While there are many examples of New Order era plays in which leaders (including, sometimes, theatre directors) are overthrown, these tended to demonstrate the ways in which leaders were corrupted by power, while the *rakyat* would wait for the emergence of a new leader, instead of organising democratically. Images of corrupt elderly kings nearing the end of their tenure were similarly common in New Order era texts (Hatley 1993). *Fragmentasi*, in contrast to these sorts of representations, portrays power as no longer being exclusively in the hands of the elite: instead power is a more dynamic process in which the *rakyat* too play a role.

Fragmentasi is a work in which language is, if not 'unmade', at least stripped back to its most basic state. As mentioned above, the subordinated 'actors' in *Fragmentasi* have lost all power of speech, the very few words they speak or sing during the play are scripted and controlled by the Director. Their bodies are also controlled in order to realise the Director's creative vision. Interestingly, they do not express pain or suffering: instead they are almost machine-like, disembodied perhaps from any emotional association or individual expression of their position. Indeed the (invisible) violence that characterises their relationship with the Director is most obviously manifested in the way in which the performers have been dispossessed of any kind of individual expression. This means that the violence represented in *Fragmentasi* is much more subtle than the kind of full-on body torture of Payung Hitam's *Kaspar*, but no less sinister for its subtlety. One of the questions that arises - keeping in mind Caroline Howlett's (1996) idea about the 'readability' of representations of pain - is whether or not audiences actually recognise the performers' suffering as such. The efficacy of more subtle, 'disembodied'

representations of violence therefore is something that comes into question in interpreting Teater Kami's *Fragmentasi*.

Despite its significantly progressive politics in relation to the characterisation of power and subordination, *Fragmentasi* can also be read as a work that reinforces the necessity of violence for political change. Although not endorsing violence as a strategy, the audience is not encouraged to imagine alternatives. While the consequences of the Director's destruction are unclear, one questions whether the play ultimately enables Indonesian audiences to imagine popular participation in less violent and perhaps more democratic transitions of power. In this way, *Fragmentasi* can be read as both an interrogation and critique of power in Indonesian society (or perhaps in any society) and simultaneously as a work that reinforces and guarantees the inevitable repetition of violence as a 'strategy' to bring about change.

One final aspect of *Fragmentasi* that deserves consideration is the casting of a woman in the Director's role. At first glance, *Fragmentasi* subverts dominant gender stereotypes because the (initially) powerful figure is being played by a woman, and because Rusy Maulida's characterisation of the Director is tough and uncompromising. Until the last ten minutes of the performance, she encounters little opposition from the performers nor from her assistant director: in many respects she subverts the stereotypical portrayals of women that will be discussed in the next chapter of this thesis. She relates to men only by ruling them, and she is - at least in the first section of the performance - both physically and vocally powerful. At the same time, however, it is worth asking whether Teater Kami's decision to cast a woman as the director indicates an underlying anxiety about women in positions of power. As the next chapter will show, representations of powerful women are relatively rare in contemporary theatre in Indonesia: it is important to question, therefore, why it is that when a powerful woman is represented, she is portrayed as a tyrant and has to be killed off violently.

Members of Teater Kami reported being surprised by questions - raised in post-performance discussions in Surabaya - about representations of gender in *Fragmentasi*. Clearly they were not expecting the work to be read in this way. In response, Priadie Bah argued that the idea of a woman being in power was in the first place subversive, and that it was important to represent women - like men - as being corrupted by power. In some respects, Teater Kami's decision to cast a woman as the director in *Fragmentasi* does subvert expectations about what roles women performers can play in contemporary theatre. But the subversive potential of this casting decision is undermined by the lack of visibility of powerful women in Indonesian theatre more generally. *Fragmentasi* unconsciously supports, therefore, a discourse about gender in which powerful women are to be feared and opposed, and in which 'the oppressed people', again, are represented as being male.

Fragmentasi is a work that demonstrates many of the contradictions of post-New Order Indonesia: while it is possible to critique power in a growing range of ways, and possible to imagine power and violence more laterally, the transition to imagining a future in which ordinary people are able to participate in non-violent dialogue with their leaders is a much more difficult and long term proposition.

Conclusion

The works discussed in this chapter - Teater Payung Hitam's *Kaspar* and *DOM*, Teater Mandiri's *Luka* and Teater Kami's *Fragmentasi* - all demonstrate how theatre has participated in the project of making violence in Indonesian society visible, and less of an 'abstract spectacle'. They also demonstrate how the human (usually male) body in pain has become one of the dominant symbols of crisis, conflict, confusion and change in contemporary Indonesia. In these works, performers' distressed bodies come to symbolise not only the suffering

of individuals and of communities, but of the Indonesian nation as a whole, something that is often emphasised through the use of nationalist symbols (such as the Indonesian flag). In using physical vocabulary rather than text-based forms of communication, these performances exemplify what Scarry calls 'the unmaking of language' in representations of physical pain and violence.

In the works discussed in this chapter, violence is represented with progressive, anti-militaristic intention. Military brutality in Aceh and inter-communal tensions are explored by Payung Hitam and Teater Mandiri respectively, in recognition that an important step towards ending violence is to acknowledge that it is happening in the first place. Violent images and narratives are also used to raise questions about issues that are, at least on the surface, unrelated to violence: bureaucratic corruption, autocratic leadership and language, for example. While none of the artists involved in the case studies discussed in this chapter would advocate a return to the authoritarian past of the New Order, it is nevertheless important to ask whether their images of social disorder and chaos unintentionally serve to reinforce a nostalgic longing for stability and certainty, and whether there comes a point at which these images no longer provoke introspection but emphasise instead that Indonesia was an easier place to live when Suharto was in power.

While representing violence in order to make it *visible* may have been a critical aspect of critiquing state power during the New Order, it is also important to question the extent to which this kind of critique remains progressive in the *reformasi* era. In reproducing violent imagery, the performances discussed in this chapter reinforce a bleak view of state power and portray political contest as inherently violent. While these works are in many respects radical critiques of New Order state power, their iconography does not necessarily transcend New Order paradigms, nor offer alternatives. We see this, for example, in the endless repetition of violent action and the subordination of the individual: leaders have to be killed off violently, individuals are co-opted into the

dominant symbolic order and thereby de-humanised, while images of Suharto constantly recur. The only work in which violence does come to an end, Teater Mandiri's *Luka*, represents the solution as somehow being associated with nationalist revival.

Finally, all four works discussed in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which theatrical narratives of the post-New Order era have continued to privilege the male body as the primary site of resistance and experience. Women's bodies are, by and large, visibly absent from theatrical critiques of the military, of political crises and appeals for human rights. In the one instance in which a powerful woman is represented, she is an authoritarian leader and has to be violently removed. It is with this in mind that this thesis will now turn to an analysis of gendered identities in post-New Order performances.

Gender identities in post-New Order performance

...there aren't any (women theatre directors or writers in Indonesia).

WS Rendra, addressing the Australian National Playwrights Conference, Sydney 1996

It is always worth asking, 'Where are the women?' Answering the question reveals the dependence of most political and economic systems not just on women, but on certain kinds of relations between women and men.

Cynthia Enloe (1989:133)

The provocateur to his Dutch boss: 'Don't worry mister. Everything is in chaos. Everything is going to plan - students have stopped studying, the price of public transport has increased, women are raising their fists.'

From a scene in Rombongan Sandiwara Petta Puang's Independence Day performances, staged in various locations around Makassar, August 2002

In February 2001, the *Dewan Kesenian Jakarta* (DKJ - Jakarta Arts Council) organised what it billed as an important seminar on theatre. Despite being a self-proclaimed attempt to resurrect 'Indonesian theatre' from what the seminar organisers saw as a serious state of decline, for most of the 200 attendees the event was probably unremarkable. Speakers included both the elder-statesmen of the Indonesian theatre world and their heirs-apparent, and they mostly addressed familiar themes: the need to develop a culture of theatre criticism, the grievous state of the Jakarta Theatre Festival, and the need for theatre to reconnect with the general public. Most of the artists I spoke with during the seminar tolerated the dirty floors, faulty microphones and fluorescent lights of TIM's *Galeri Cipta II* for the day but said they went home without learning anything particularly new.

The event was remarkable, however, in a way presumably not intended by the organisers. It was remarkable (and at the same time totally typical) because it

was all about men. Men were doing the speaking, the questioning and the moderating, men were launching and selling their books about theatre, men were sitting outside the seminar room smoking and sharing news. Only one of the twelve invited speakers and one of the five moderators was female, and of the many questions asked from the floor throughout the day, only one was asked by a woman. Women were in attendance at the event but had limited profile in the formal proceedings.

Several questions emerged from this instructive day of observation. Firstly, the invisibility of women in formal theatre discourse seemed to belie the fact that theatre production in Indonesia - as elsewhere - remains highly dependent upon women's labour. If women were largely invisible in the formal discourses about Indonesian theatre, then in what ways was this invisibility reinforced by the ways in which the theatre performances themselves represented women? Was it possible that women's invisibility in theatre discourse was Jakarta specific and something that needed to be read in the context of the cultural hegemony of organisations such as TIM and the DKJ? Perhaps given the opening up of space for cultural expression in other parts of Indonesia, as highlighted in the first chapter of this thesis, it would be erroneous to assume women's subordination in Indonesian theatre culture on the basis of one event organised by a government-backed arts institution in the nation's capital.

These are the questions that inform the following discussion and case studies. This chapter firstly provides some theoretical background about reading representations of gender in visual culture, specifically in live performance. It then looks at the ways in which theatrical production in Indonesia relies on women's labour, and investigates some of the barriers to women's participation in theatre, particularly as writers and/or directors. Following this discussion, I will present five detailed case studies through which representations of gender identity in contemporary performance in the post-New Order will be investigated. Some of the performances discussed demonstrate the ways in

which dominant gender discourse is perpetuated by theatrical representation. Other examples highlight, however, the possibilities for women to create different kinds of spaces and narratives, and for women (and sometimes men) to work together productively to represent and create alternative models of gender relations.

This chapter's central argument is that the production of theatre in Indonesia is highly dependent upon particular kinds of relationships between men and women, and also upon particular notions of masculinity and femininity. This culture of production is however by no means monolithic or unchanging, and to some extent there has been increased potential for change in the post-New Order era. I argue that questions about gender identity should be central to an analysis of the politics of theatre and performance, particularly in the context of the post-New Order period, which has been characterised as 'one of the most raucous periods of identity politics in Indonesian history' (Budianta 2002:37).

Why gender?

The topic of gender and identity in contemporary Indonesia is extremely complex. This complexity is a consequence of a variety of inter-related factors, including the ambiguous, fluid nature of gender ideology, the dynamics between conceptions of nation, class, ethnicity and gender, tensions between 'traditional' and 'modern' conceptions of gender roles, the influence of religion, the impact of interventions made by the state in constructing gender ideology, and the increasing centrality of global capitalism in prescribing gender norms. Many of these ambiguities and tensions are reflected in recent publications dealing with gender and body politics in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia (among others: Atkinson and Errington 1990; Sears 1996; Ong and Peletz 1995; Sen and Stivens 1998).

One of the ways in which we can gain insight into the tensions and ambiguities inherent in gender ideologies is through analysing representations of gender in

visual and other media. Consequently, numerous essays and papers have been written about the representation of women in Indonesian film, *sinetron* TV programs and in the mass media during the New Order era (Sen 1993, 1994 and 1998; Sunindyo 1993 and 1996; Aripurnami 1996; Brenner 1999). Much of this work has looked at the relationship between representations of women in the popular media and the state's conception of women's role, which Julia Suryakusuma has described as 'state-ibuisim'. The New Order state, she argues, represented 'female dependency as ideal' and positioned women as 'appendages of their husbands' (1996:98), while it used programs such as the PKK (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* - Family Welfare Guidance program) and *Dharma Wanita*, an organisation for the wives of civil servants, to spread its doctrine about women's role⁵⁵. Drawing on Suryakusuma's work, in a study of representations of women in magazine advertising, Suzanne Brenner notes that

even if the (New Order) state did not go so far as to dictate how women could be portrayed in the media, its messages linking good citizenship for women to good domestic qualities were omnipresent. (1999:15)

In New Order era theatre, as in popular culture, characteristics such as 'grace, modesty, refinement, fragility and dependence' (Hatley 1990a:180) therefore became dominant and desirable features of 'femininity', while in the cinema of the era, female characters who resist gender stereotypes usually either ultimately conform to gender norms, or meet with unfortunate ends (Sen 1994:131-156).

The New Order state's policy relating to women's role was, however, not static, nor was it the sole factor influencing gender ideology. During the 1980s, along with rapid economic growth and the expansion of the middle class, there was a 'growing emphasis in government policy statements and publications on

⁵⁵ The New Order state's policy on the role of women has been summarised as follows: 'Women should be a wife and associate of her husband, an educator and cultivator of the younger generation, a controller/ regulator of the household, a worker who contributes to the family's income, and a member of community organisations, particularly those dedicated to organising women'. (Sears 1996: 19)

women's paid and productive role in the economy' (Sen 1998:42), which translated into a shift in the way middle-class women were represented in the mass media. From the 1980s, the media and advertising industry was increasingly active in constructing the ideal of the 'modern' woman with a career of her own (Sen 1998:46-55).⁵⁶ Global capitalism, therefore, becomes as important as state policy in determining the way women and men are portrayed in the media: if selling goods to women means representing them as active subjects in their own right, then marketers will do this.

Although there are several studies of representations of women in the post-New Order era underway, published material on the contemporary context is limited. This chapter therefore aims to contribute to the growing body of work investigating both the continuities and changes that can be seen in representations of women in visual culture in the late 1990s until the present. The post-New Order state's position on gender is, like its position on so many other issues, in a state of flux. The contest over gender ideology is influenced by many factors, including the demands of religious groups, the symbolism of Indonesia having had a female head of state (juxtaposed with the poor representation of women at other levels of politics), the increasing profile and reach of gender programs run by both local and international NGOs and a process of decentralisation that means in some cases a return to more feudal gender norms, which may in some cases suit the interests of men rather than women (Budianta 2002). If anything it is this complexity and fluidity that characterises the case studies and material to follow.

Despite the relatively developed literature on representation of gender in Indonesian popular culture and media, with one or two notable exceptions (Hatley 1990a and 1994a) there have been few attempts to investigate critically

⁵⁶ Certainly, as Sen points out, this does not mean that domesticated, dependent women are no longer represented. Rather these images are more prevalent in 'the lower end of the advertising market' (1998:46), with advertising pitched at middle class women providing a greater range of images of modern womanhood.

either the participation or representation of women in live theatre and performance. Although the absence of women from the fields of theatre directing and writing is often *noted* (for example Kalangan Anak Zaman 2000:197-207; Sumarjo 2000)⁵⁷, the possible ideological reasons for and consequences of this absence are almost never investigated in any depth. Histories of and commentaries on the development of contemporary Indonesian theatre are usually mapped out around six statesmen of theatre (*tokoh teater*) - WS Rendra, Putu Wijaya, Teguh Karya, Arifin C Noer, Suyatna Anirun and Nano Riantiarno - all of whom are of course male (see for example Durachman 1986, Sumarjo 1992)⁵⁸. In Jakob Sumarjo's *Perkembangan Teater Modern dan Sastra Drama Indonesia* (1992) - one of the few Indonesian language histories of modern Indonesian theatre - women exist in the sections dealing with the themes of love and prostitution but do not appear anywhere else. In his 1968 study of the East Javanese folk theatre form *ludruk*, James Peacock does make passing reference to representations of women but this is not a major focus of his work. While not specifically about theatre, a collection of keynote speeches on Indonesian culture delivered at TIM during the 1980s and 1990s, published by TIM in 1999, does not feature any women at all (Sarjono 1999).

Just as mainstream critiques of Indonesian politics have often ignored questions associated with gender and have by default ascribed agency 'almost exclusively to men' (Sen 1998:37) analyses of theatre and performance although often concerned with the *political* or *ideological* have rarely paid attention to gender as a possible category of political analysis. One of the aims of this chapter,

⁵⁷ Sumarjo notes, for example that 'the role of women in writing drama is limited. So far, only one work (sic) written by a woman is known....Although women have participated in the modern theatre since the beginning of the twentieth century in *Komedie Stamboel* dan *Bangsawan* (travelling theatre), their activities have consisted primarily of acting or directing. They have not been involved in script writing. Only recently has a female director and author of drama appeared in the person of Ratna Sarumpaet.' (2000:45)

⁵⁸ Hatley makes an interesting comparison between women's participation in traditional/ folk theatres and contemporary theatre 'By comparison (with folk theatre) modern theatre on the whole seemed a much more exclusively male phenomenon - the domain of long haired, intense young playwright directors and actors with radical political views and artistic philosophies, and audiences of very similar composition, male, youthful, 'counter-cultural'.' (1994:18)

therefore, is to position questions about gender as central to the analysis of the politics of Indonesian theatre production and practice.

As has been demonstrated by scholars in fields including postcolonial, cultural and women's studies, discourses are formed not only by what is said but also by what is *not* said, by the visible as well as the invisible. As Gayatri Spivak has advocated, there is a need for 'an espousal of, and an attention to, marginality - a suspicion that what is at the centre often hides a repression.' (1987:31). To return to one of the quotations used at the start of this chapter, 'it is always worth asking, where are the women?' (Enloe 1989:133). Only when we do this do we start to get a more substantial picture of the role that gender might play in shaping the narratives of contemporary Indonesian theatre. While many (male) theatre practitioners in Indonesia may not see gender as important, this reflects the fact that dominant, patriarchal gender ideology is often simply not questioned because it appears 'natural' and because those who question it are often marginalised from the institutions that define and control cultural capital.

At the same time, the *reformasi* era was characterised by an opening up of space in which the concerns of women activists and feminist groups were becoming more prominent. Understanding the ways in which this might be reflected in the narratives of contemporary theatre therefore seemed an important issue to address in this thesis. While not wanting to overstate the real extent of post-New Order reform, since 1998 feminist activism and critical debate about gender related issues has increased significantly. Concrete manifestations of this have included the changing of the name of The Ministry for Women's Role to Ministry for Women's Empowerment (Johanson 2001), the centrality of women's NGOs and activists in the *reformasi* movement (Budianta 2002), the convening of a national women's forum in Yogyakarta in December 1998, the proposal for a 30 per cent quota of female candidates in the 2004 General Elections (*Kompas* 23 September 2002 and 30 September

2002) and widespread programs aimed at raising awareness of domestic violence.

The Indonesian arts world has not been immune from this shift and in some cases foreshadowed it. Observers have argued, for example, that Ayu Utami's novel *Saman* resisted and subverted dominant notions of femininity espoused by the New Order (Hatley 1999b; Clark 2001). Similarly in the visual arts, the work of Arahmaiani and Bunga Jeruk (amongst others) was throughout the 1990s counter-discursive in problematising stereotypical portrayals of women (Wright 1999; Kuss 1999). Given that this thesis aims to investigate the ways in which theatre has made sense of post-New Order political and social realities - and that shifts in gender ideology have been an important feature of this era - it follows that gender should be a key category of analysis for this project.

Many scholars have posited that (especially in times of change) women's bodies become inscribed with notions of modernity and tradition, progress and crisis, even patriotism and anti-patriotism (Brenner 1999; see also Heng and Devan 1996; Siapno 2000:275-295). Stereotypes of women therefore often reflect tensions and anxieties related to changes in political and social structures. Likewise women's activism and increased visibility is sometimes perceived to be both a symptom and a cause of social chaos and uncertainty. The quotation from a performance by Makassar theatre group Petta Puang, used at the start of this chapter, is a case in point: 'women raising their fists' is portrayed, for example, as being a defining element of social chaos and crisis.

Finally, as Ong and Peletz have noted, an analysis of 'body politics' in postcolonial societies can provide insight into the politics of identity and nationalism (1995:6). If this is the case, an investigation of the ways in which women's and men's bodies are (or are not) represented in performances may provide some further clues about identity and nationalism and the ways in which they are contested in post-New Order Indonesia. In fact *performance*, as

a mode of expression that uses the body as one of its primary tools, is ideally suited to this type of analysis.

Reading representations of gender in visual culture and performance

Since the publication of Kate Millett's seminal work *Sexual Politics* (1971), western feminist theatre, film and literary scholarship has provided a range of theoretical concepts on which this chapter will build. More specifically, there is now a significant body of feminist theatre and performance scholarship that has provided rich material concerning ways of reading, looking at, interpreting and creating *performance* from a feminist perspective (amongst others: Austin 1990; Aston 1995; Canning 1996; Case 1990 and 1988; Cixous 1984; Diamond 1997; Dolan 1988; Goodman 1993; Hanna 1978; Martin 1996).

As theatre critic Gayle Austin points out, a feminist critique of theatre at its most basic means 'paying attention to women. It means paying attention when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not.' (Austin 1991:1). A feminist analysis demands, therefore, a reading of the representations, silences and invisibilities that contribute to the formation of gender ideology. Austin reminds us that a feminist reading of a text means 'pointing out, when necessary, that while the Emperor had no clothes, the Empress had no body' (1991:1). A feminist analysis of theatre requires a re-evaluation and a questioning of precisely those things which seem most 'natural' in the conventions of representation, viewing and interpreting theatrical codes.

French feminist scholar Teresa de Lauretis has also described the role played by absences and silences in representation, and although her work deals specifically with lesbian representation, a similar framework could apply to reading gender representation more broadly. de Lauretis writes:

There are some people in the audience who do see what the conceptual system of heterosexuality, the Play's performance, attempts to keep invisible. These are lesbian people, who can see it because their own

reality is not represented or even summarised in the Play, and who therefore reorientate their attention toward the backgrounds, the spaces, activities and figures of women elided by the performance (1987:172). In this way, de Lauretis not only critiques the silences and absences that characterise representation of sexuality in visual media but also offers alternative ways of reading or viewing that might subvert the ideology of a text.

A key concept often employed by feminists in understanding gender in visual culture has been Laura Mulvey's idea of the 'male gaze' (1975). Mulvey's seminal work interrogates the way in which mainstream (Hollywood) film culture creates a polarity between woman as image and man as the possessor of the gaze; woman as passive, man as active. In film at least, the 'male gaze' is manifested in several sites: women characters are looked at by the male camera (man), by other male characters and by male viewers of the film. Women are therefore constructed by the conventions of representation as objects 'to be looked at'. The 'male gaze' then demands also that female audience members identify with the male point of view when watching Hollywood films. Feminist performance critics have frequently drawn on Mulvey's idea of the 'male gaze'. As Jill Dolan notes, feminist performance criticism has been motivated by the way in which 'theatre creates an ideal spectator carved in the likeness of the dominant culture whose ideology he represents' (1988:1). The ways in which women - both as spectators and creators of theatre - can subvert the male gaze and its associated representational conventions therefore becomes a key concern of the project of feminist performance criticism, of which this thesis is a part.

Taking Mulvey's work a step further in its application to theatre (as opposed to film), Elin Diamond has argued that

feminist film theorists, fellow-travelling with psychoanalysis and semiotics, have given us a lot to think about but we (feminist theatre scholars), through Brechtian theory, have something to give them: a

female body in representation that resists fetishisation and a viable position for the female spectator. (1997:44).

Diamond's proposal is that Brecht's theory of alienation could be applied also to the dominant 'sign-system' of gender representation. This is made possible, Diamond argues because using a Brechtian performance model

the female performer, unlike her filmic counterpart, connotes not 'to-be-looked-at-ness' - the perfect fetish - but rather 'looking-at-being-looked-at-ness' or even just 'looking-ness' (1997:52).

In this way, some forms of theatre, particularly those drawing on a Brechtian awareness of the constructed-ness of performance, offer interesting potential for the subversion of the ways of viewing prescribed by patriarchal structures of representation.

Since the 1970s, Western feminist theatre scholars have also been concerned with projects that aim to expose the naturalisation of patriarchy in canonical texts, through reinterpreting existing stories from women's perspectives.

Adrienne Rich usefully refers to this as 'Re-Vision' (1979). This concept applies, for example, to the feminist practice of searching for 'lost' theatrical history and texts authored by women as well as the re-interpretation of existing myths and stories which have become patriarchal in their systems of representation (Aston 1999, Goodman 1993). Others have argued that the solution is for women to 'write themselves' and thereby to cease being a marginalised other (Cixous 1981:250). Several examples used later in this chapter will look at ways in which some Indonesian women working in theatre are trying to 'write themselves' as active subjects in performance and to create spaces for women as viewers of performance.

Many feminists have argued that in order to subvert dominant gender ideology through theatre, the apparatus of representation itself has to be challenged (Dolan 1988). The form of theatre usually known as 'psychological realism' has been problematised by many feminist theatre scholars and practitioners,

who argue that it merely reproduces and reflects dominant (patriarchal) ideology (Belsey 1980; Case 1988; Dolan 1988). In realist 'well made plays', with their often domestic focus, women are often portrayed as existing only in relation to men. Women might challenge dominant structures but rarely overcome them - the status quo and the 'normal' stability of hetero-patriarchy always remains intact. Several writers have similarly critiqued Stanislavsky 'method' acting - often associated with a realist style of work - pointing out that it requires the female actor to identify and position herself 'within the range of systems that have oppressed her very representation on stage' (Case 1988:122). I will use some of these ideas in reading the representation of women in a work produced by Studiklub Teater Bandung, which is arguably Indonesia's best established theatre group working in the realist tradition, a group that adheres very strongly to Stanislavsky 'method' acting.

Western feminist theatre scholarship points to more radical forms of performance - including non text-based performance (Tait 2001) and Brechtian-style performance (Diamond 1997) - as having greater potential for critique of patriarchal social orders. It is posited that these performance forms, in questioning the existence of a 'stable', 'normal' and 'apolitical' 'reality' offer greater possibilities for the articulation of uncertainty and for questioning systems of representation. It should come as no surprise, then, that in the Indonesian context several of the theatre groups who are attempting to challenge dominant gender ideology have found their voice in non-realist, non-text based performance forms.

Where are the women in Indonesian theatre?

The production of theatre in Indonesia, as in most other countries, is very much dependent on women's labour. Women work in Indonesian theatre groups in all sorts of roles, including as performers, stage managers, organisers, producers, publicists, designers and providers of tea and refreshments for fellow cast members. But with one or two exceptions, which I will discuss shortly, women

are usually not directors or playwrights. And it is these roles that generally bring power and legitimization in the arts world, the right to make creative decisions, invitations to speak at high profile forums on theatre and recognition in the theatre community as 'serious' artists. I will argue in this chapter that women's work often plays a critical role in enabling men to pursue their artistic practice. Women often have jobs that support their families whilst their husbands are pursuing their creative (but usually not well paying) interests (Hatley 1994a). While most Indonesian theatre workers - male and female - have to have jobs outside of theatre in order to survive, many men are able to devote more time to their work in theatre because their wives work *and* take care of domestic concerns. What follows is a brief sketch of the ways theatre production in Indonesia depends on women's work.

Managers and organisers

Women have excelled in the field of arts management in Indonesia. The careers of noted artists such as theatre director/ playwright Nano Riantiarno and choreographer/ dancer Sardono W Kusumo have been assisted substantially by women's (in fact their wives') talents in marketing, managing financial and human resources, organising international engagements, ability to speak English, negotiating contracts and raising sponsorship. While successful arts managers such as Ratna Riantiarno and Amna Kusumo are neither exploited nor forced into managing their husbands' creative projects, the availability of their dedicated, creative, highly skilled and often unpaid labour has contributed significantly to their more famous husbands' successes.

Sugiyati SA (Yati), the wife of the late director of Studiklub Teater Bandung (STB), Suyatna Anirun, describes her role in the company as the 'STB housewife' (*Ibu rumah tangga STB*). As a senior female member of STB, she says, she is the 'kitchen person' (*orang dapur*) as well as the 'Minister for Finance' (*menteri keuangan*). In a book celebrating STB's 30th anniversary, she writes:

And so it goes, whenever we decide to do something, the details will always be the 'kitchen person's' responsibility. If STB celebrates its birthday, everybody will be hanging around chatting with old friends, but I will be organising so many things behind the scenes, which means that sometimes this work is forgotten because it's not visible. If we're in rehearsal for a performance, all the 'kitchen duties' including sewing costumes, organising logistics, making decorations, preparing publicity material and all sorts of other things take up almost all of my time up until the curtain goes up, so I'm usually exhausted because I've hardly slept for days before the performance. When all the others are exhausted after the performance and are resting, the kitchen person still has to wash the used costumes, iron and hang them in the cupboard so that they're not destroyed by moths, wash dirty combs and brushes, separate safety pins, hair nets, elastics, hair pins and other accessories that have become muddled up. (Sugiyati 1993:124)

What Yati does not mention about her role in STB is that she also is one of the star performers in the group's works, including in the STB performance discussed later in this chapter. I would suggest that the role played by Yati in the production of STB's performances, is the norm for women working in most of the theatre groups I surveyed during my fieldwork.

In many ways women's skills in handling the financial side of theatrical production, attracting audiences, and managing resources fits neatly with well documented assumptions about women's ability to manage money and commercial activities in Java and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. As numerous observers have noted, however, while women's management ability is acknowledged and expected, it does not necessarily equate with power and prestige (Sullivan 1994; Brenner 1995). Writing about women in traditional marketplaces, Brenner notes for example that

Excessive attention to financial matters and the pursuit of wealth is said to indicate low status, lack of refinement and a corresponding lack of

spiritual potency..... (men usually) avoid the marketplace, where it is especially hard to maintain linguistic propriety and an image of perpetual composure. The majority of Javanese men are more than happy to leave the business of buying and selling to their wives. (Brenner 1995:26-30)

Given the long standing association of women with financial management in Java and elsewhere in Indonesia it is perhaps no coincidence that women's skills in the area of management are exemplified in the Indonesian performing arts world.

performers and muses

The production and management of theatre is not the only field in which women's labour has assisted male artists' careers. Women's work on as well as off stage plays a major role in the creation and presentation of performances. In addition to the case of STB's Yati, discussed above, there are countless examples in Indonesian theatre history of women performers who have starred in productions directed by their husbands: WS Rendra's current wife Ken Zuraida designs sets and has performed in several of his works; the late Arifin C Noer's wife Jajang was actively involved as a performer with his group Teater Kecil in the 1970s; and Ratna Riantiarno of course performs in most of Teater Koma's works as well as being the group's manager and head of production. At the 'avant garde' end of Indonesian theatre production, Margesti, the then-wife of Teater Sae director Boedi S Otono, was regarded as one of the group's most powerful performers. Likewise groups discussed elsewhere in this thesis including Teater Kubur, Teater Kami, Gandrik, Stock Teater, Sanggar Merah Putih Makassar, Studiklub Teater Bandung and Teater Noktah are - if not at present then at least in the recent past - examples of male directed groups where the wife or girlfriend of the director has been a performer. In many cases, these women's performances have been regarded as critical to the overall success of their husbands' work and to the realisation of his artistic vision.

What are the implications of this scenario for women performers? The immediate lesson is that in many instances, the casting of female actors depends very much upon their relationship with the (usually male) director. On the other hand, given the barriers to participation in theatre described below, perhaps it is no coincidence that the relatively few women who continue to work as performers after marriage and starting a family are those who are married to men who share a similar commitment to and passion for theatre. After all, a male director who can only realise his artistic vision if his wife performs in his play is naturally not going to object to her being out late at rehearsals most nights for three months.

At the same time, there is an ongoing trend for theatre groups - particularly in Jakarta - to involve high profile *sinetron* actors in starring roles. Teater Koma, Teater Mandiri and Teater Tetas are amongst the most high profile groups who have cast *sinetron* actors in their performances in recent years, while a one-off production of Nawaal el Saadawi's *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by feminist NGO *Solidaritas Perempuan* in April 2002 also involved high profile female *sinetron* actresses such as Nurul Arifin and Ria Irawan. While casting a *sinetron* star certainly results in wider audience appeal and provides a guarantee of extensive media coverage, such casting strategies are often looked upon cynically by theatre directors who regard it as 'selling out' and as potentially compromising artistic values. Of course in some cases *sinetron* actors have also trained in theatre and do television work in order to earn a living, but in the majority of instances they are invited to perform because of their fame rather than talent. This is relevant to a discussion of women in theatre because in the vast majority of cases it is *female sinetron* stars who are co-opted by theatre groups. It is clearly famous *women's* bodies and images that hold the greatest marketing appeal (*daya tarik*), and as a result, a particular kind of (*sinetron*) femininity that becomes naturalised in theatrical representation. In contrast to the practice of some avant-garde theatre groups in Indonesia, where female and male

performers are put through the same grinding physical rehearsal process, the treatment of *sinetron* actresses' femininity is often reminiscent of traditional theatre forms, where women performers would be involved as actresses or *pesinden*, to portray particular stereotypically 'feminine' attributes. The casting of *sinetron* actors in theatre is a practice that on the one hand enables these women actors to extend their acting experience and lends them credibility (albeit temporarily) as 'real artists'; on the other hand it limits the choices for non-famous but arguably equally talented women who might otherwise be cast in these roles. Most importantly it is a practice that exemplifies the dependence of much theatrical production - especially in Jakarta, and at least as far as ticket sales are concerned - on the marketing of women's bodies and sexuality.

There aren't any

The reasons for the so-called absence of women from writing and directing roles in Indonesian theatre are varied, but most frequently cited is the reality that most rehearsals and performances are held at night and that this is prohibitive for many women. As Hatley points out, 'the timing and culture of theatre activity does not fit well with family life' (1994a:27). For many women, societal and parental pressures that equate being out late at night with promiscuity mean that they are less willing to participate in theatre; for others there are other responsibilities at home that are more pressing, especially after marriage⁵⁹. For many younger women the need for parental permission to participate in late night activities is a barrier to their participation, as is the 'bohemian image' of theatre as an undesirable profession in which 'one dresses untidily, grows long hair and is destined for unemployment' (Yudiaryani Interview 9 April 2001).

⁵⁹ The 'drop out' of talented women from theatre following marriage and pregnancy is something that male theatre directors often cite when asked about the involvement of women in their groups (Joko Bibit Santosa Interview 6 June 2000, Hanindawan Interview 18 October 2000)

While the aspiring young male theatre director is able to stay up talking with (male) colleagues until late at night after a performance or a rehearsal, his female colleagues are often not at liberty to do so. This is important because discourses and ideas about theatre often circulate and are developed through informal discussions held at dimly lit food stalls several hours after a performance - whether at the *Taman Budaya* in Solo, at *Kampus Undalas* in Padang or at *Gedung Societet d'Harmonie* in Makassar. These are sites where aspiring (male) performers, directors, writers can debate and test out ideas; these are sites from which women are often (sometimes unconsciously) excluded because of the way 'culture' determines that 'good girls' do not stay out late.

A further barrier to women becoming theatre directors is the patrilineal way in which knowledge and skills are transferred across generations of theatre workers. It appears that to date there has been little space for women in the *genealogy* of Indonesian theatre. Prominent male theatre directors and theatre critics often trace their 'roots' in theatre back to their early experiences working with/ under another male director. For example Putu Wijaya, Sitok Srengenge and Radha Panca Dahana were all at various times members of Bengkel Teater Rendra; Nano Riantiarno trained with Teguh Karya's Teater Populer; numerous Solo artists including Teater Ruang's director Joko Bibit Santosa learnt about theatre from their experience working with Teater Gapit; Dindon of Teater Kubur, Harris Priadie Bah of Teater Kami, Ram Prapanca of Teater Kita Makassar and various members of Surabaya group Teater Api were either members of Boedi Otong's Teater Sae or collaborated with Teater Sae at some point. When women do emerge as directors in their own right, such as in the cases of Ratna Sarumpaet (who trained with Bengkel Teater Rendra) and Margesti (who, as mentioned earlier, was a key performer with Teater Sae), they are the rare exceptions that draw our attention to how few women are involved overall in theatre as directors and/or playwrights.

Evidently the informal mentoring that occurs between many senior - usually male - theatre directors and their promising young disciples is a key way in which up-and-coming theatre directors learn their craft. Whether or not these patriarchal mentoring relationships are *deliberately* gender biased is not the point: in practice they exclude women. In addition, given the above discussion of the role of husband-wife teams in many theatre groups, such a patrilineal system *particularly* excludes those women whose boyfriends or husbands are not involved in the activities of the theatre group concerned, as well as those women who are uninterested in developing (or in being *perceived* to be developing) a sexual relationship with the group's director. I would argue that the unofficial patrilineal system of theatre training has in the past been naturalised to such an extent that it is not questioned or even considered as a factor that might contribute to the 'non-existence' of women theatre directors and playwrights.

In spite of the difficulties faced by women who want to establish a career in theatre, they are *not* completely absent from writing and directing in Indonesian theatre. Unarguably Indonesia's best known woman theatre director and playwright⁶⁰, Ratna Sarumpaet, has been very active in both theatre and activist circles since the 1970s. Following the banning of her works *Marsinah Nyanyian Dari Bawah Tanah* (Marsinah: Songs from the Underworld) and *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah Accuses), as well as her continued political outspokenness and imprisonment towards the end of the New Order, Sarumpaet has also achieved a much higher profile internationally than many of her male colleagues. Although not intending to produce 'feminist' work, and - arguably not actively nurturing younger women artists - Sarumpaet's involvement in Indonesian theatre has played an important role in challenging the notion that women can not be directors or playwrights. Her plays provide a starting point for the development of repertoire in which women (particularly

⁶⁰ Sarumpaet is often erroneously referred to as 'the only' woman playwright/ director in Indonesia.

those played by Ratna herself) are represented as well rounded, strong, politically aware and autonomous characters. Despite her personal ambivalence towards the feminist movement (Hatley 1998), many of her plays have highlighted struggle of women against oppression by their husbands, their employers and by the state. Beyond this, the degree to which her approach to production and narrative style of theatre subverts dominant gender ideology is debatable, however the contribution that her work has made to Indonesian theatre deserves acknowledgement, visibility and serious critical consideration.

In addition to Ratna Sarumpaet, there are several other women theatre directors who although active over the last fifteen years have not achieved anywhere near the same sort of profile. One of these women is Yudiaryani, a lecturer, performer and director based at the ISI art school in Yogyakarta. Through her group *Komunitas Teater Perempuan ISI Yogyakarta* (ISI Yogyakarta Women's Theatre Community), Yudiaryani has been developing repertoire that deals with women's concerns and stories at the same time as developing the skills of young women performers and theatre workers. Her work, although perhaps not attracting the level of critical comment that other active Yogya-based groups enjoy, has certainly made some impact on the wider theatre community. Likewise she has been a key figure in the establishment of a Women's Studies Centre at ISI and in developing inter-disciplinary collaboration with other academics for publishing projects focussing on gender in the arts⁶¹, initiatives that at the very least will promote the discussion of gender-related issues, if not increased gender awareness. In recent times, several other women directors have emerged, including Margesti, the ex-wife of Teater Sae director Boedi Oton, and Shinta Febriany, who works mostly as a performer with the group Sanggar Merah Putih Makassar but recently toured her own work *namaku adam tanpa huruf kapital* to various cities throughout Java, to widespread critical acclaim.

⁶¹ See for example the edition of the ISI produced journal *EXSPRESI* (1:2000) titled *Dari Bias Lelaki Menuju Kesetaraan Gender* (From male bias to gender equality).

Women such as Ratna Sarumpaet, Yudiaryani, Margesti and more recently Shinta Febriany have opened up possibilities for women in theatre. No longer is it completely unthinkable for women to be directors and writers, nor is the language of feminist analysis completely foreign in theatre culture. To 'pay attention to women' (Austin 1991:1) in theatre is perhaps not as difficult as it once was. However when action is taken to include women's voices in publications about theatre or when a woman performer dares to point out that it's unfair that she should have to wear a short skirt when it doesn't fit with her interpretation of her character, reactions from the theatre community often betray the ongoing patriarchal assumptions and structures that underpin thinking about theatre. When Kalangan Anak Zaman, a group of young artists affiliated with Yogyakarta's Teater Garasi, included an interview with Yudiaryani in their publication *Kepingin Riwayat Tentang Teater di Yogya* (2000) for example, several established theatre figures informally expressed concern that she (Yudiaryani) was 'not important' and 'not on the same level as the others (for example Rendra and Putu Wijaya) in the book'. Members of the Kalangan Anak Zaman editorial team defended their choice, however, arguing that they thought it was important to include women's voices in the publication (field notes, Yogyakarta August 2000). Likewise at seminars and discussions in a variety of contexts when questions about representations of gender are raised they often bring about nervous laughter, incredulity, surprise or simply avoidance of the question.⁶²

To return for a moment to some of the questions posed at the start of this chapter, it seems essential to argue that although women are definitely marginalised (indeed, almost absent) from mainstream histories and 'maps' of

⁶² Discussions at which I have observed these sorts of reactions include a post performance discussion with Teater Ruang held at Sanggar Kuaetnika, Kersan, Yogyakarta 7 October 2000; a seminar held as part of the Pertemuan Teater Eksperimental Mahasiswa Nusantara, Padang 9 August 2000; and at a discussion in which I spoke about gender and performance, at Teater Utan Kayu in Jakarta in September 2001.

contemporary theatre in Indonesia, they are certainly *not* marginal to theatrical production. Their lack of profile at discussions such as the one organised by the DKJ in February 2001 serves to perpetuate the myth that there are few ('only one') women theatre directors in Indonesia: but as the work of Ratna Sarumpaet, Yudiaryani and other artists included in the following case studies demonstrates, women's absence from these sorts of forums does *not* in itself indicate that they are unable to produce theatre that speaks about their experiences and concerns and that resonates with audience members.

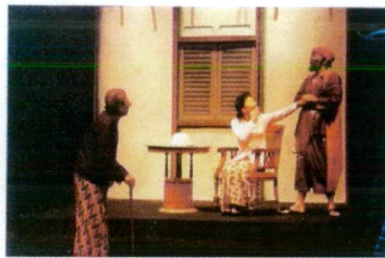
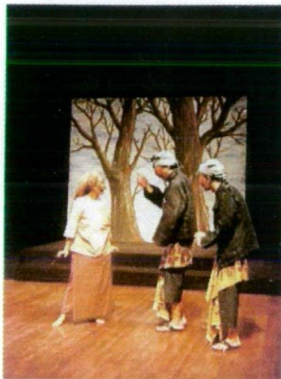
The narratives that are being told through contemporary performance in post-New Order Indonesia are highly dependent upon ideas about the ways in which men and women should relate and behave. At the same time, the culture of theatre production is likewise sustained by a system in which women are managers but not the artistic leaders of groups, a system in which women's sexuality can help to sell tickets but which rarely credits their ability to speak about the production they are selling. Given this context of theatrical production then, readings of ideology in theatre in post-New Order Indonesia (or for that matter in any era, anywhere) must take into account gender politics.

Performances

Given the general lack of critical work on gender in contemporary Indonesian theatre, these case studies are necessarily only a starting point. They intend to stimulate further debate and inquiry in this field and to begin a process of questioning what gender might mean for the ways in which we read the narratives of contemporary Indonesian performance. A 'gender lens' can, of course, be applied to any performance, and it has been difficult to choose which works to write about in this context. The works chosen here represent a broad range of both mainstream and experimental groups, from a variety of places in Indonesia. They have all been presented since the fall of the New Order and many engage actively with the political and social issues of their times. Many of the performances discussed exemplify the contradictory ways in which

gender can be represented in performance. They also highlight the capacity for 'gender blindness' to be shared across genre (folk, 'modern' and avant garde theatres) and regardless of other ideological commitments.

Silent princesses and loud village wives in STB's *Tabib Gadungan*



Images from STB's *Tabib Gadungan*
Photos: Yunarius Harisinthu

Studiklub Teater Bandung (STB) prides itself on being one of Indonesia's oldest modern theatre groups. It is best known for its Indonesian adaptations of European texts including Shakespeare, Chekhov and Moliere. STB works in the realist tradition, and their approach to performance and acting has been strongly influenced by Stanislavsky. Their work also aims to find commonalities between 'Western' theatre and Indonesian folk theatre traditions (Sugiyati, Sunjaya and Anirun 1993; Anirun 1999), hence the following example of a Moliere play being adapted and performed in the style of Sundanese folk theatre. The company has spawned several off-shoots including a group called Actors Unlimited, who see themselves in some way as continuing on the STB tradition, but with a focus on more recent plays. STB's work is regarded by some in the Indonesian theatre community as conventional and old-fashioned, but despite these criticisms the group is still regarded by many as playing an important role in introducing a style of performance which has contributed to the development of modern Indonesian theatre.⁶³

⁶³ The fact that STB was the inaugural recipient of a large grant from the Kelola Foundation to tour *Tabib Gadungan* to three cities in Java in 2001 demonstrates the high esteem in which the group's work is held by the arts community. The decision to award the grant to STB was made

STB's production of *Tabib Gadungan*, an adaptation of Moliere's *Le Medicin Malgre Lui* (the English translation is usually *A Physician in Spite of Himself*) was produced in 2000 and presented in Jakarta and Bandung, before touring to several cities in Java in early 2001. When the work was first performed in Bandung it was a critical success, one reviewer describing it as one of STB's 'most successful' works to date and was praised especially for its attempt to find the common language of French and Sundanese folk theatre traditions (Husein 2000). Based on a translation from the original French by Teguh Karya and Henky Sulaiman, STB's version of *Tabib Gadungan* was adapted and directed by the company's director, Suyatna Anirun, who has been the group's director throughout most of its history. The performance I saw was presented in Cirebon, late on a Friday afternoon, to an extremely rowdy crowd of mostly young people. For many in the audience this was first time they had seen live 'contemporary' theatre performance. Despite their rowdiness (as one teacher complained, 'they are more like soccer fans than a theatre audience') the audience was engaged throughout the performance, cheering, shouting out and laughing uproariously.

Tabib Gadungan begins with the story of Bini, who is furious with her husband, Laki, because he continually argues and beats her, until she's in pain (*sampai kesakitan*). She nags him for being lazy and for financial irresponsibility, he responds by hitting her. By chance, the servants of a wealthy old man pass by, looking for a skilled physician who can cure their master's beautiful daughter who has suddenly been struck down by a mysterious illness that has rendered her mute. In order to get revenge, Bini proclaims that Laki is the sought after physician - taking pains to point out that Laki is modest and will only acknowledge his professional gift if he is first beaten up.

by an assessment panel of 10 established figures in the Indonesian performing arts scene. I attended their panel meeting as an observer.

After being soundly beaten up by the wealthy old man's servants, Laki reluctantly agrees that he is indeed a famous physician. He visits the wealthy man's house where it emerges that the beautiful daughter's sudden illness has meant that she is unable to marry the man her father has chosen for her. Santi (the daughter), it turns out, is in love with another man, Jaka, who is poor and has no immediate inheritance. Meanwhile Laki's charade, as a famous but unconventional physician, both impresses Santi's father and causes jealousy amongst the household servants as he makes advances on a (married) nursemaid. It transpires that Santi has been pretending to be ill, in order to avoid the unwanted marriage. Assisted by Laki, she manages to run away with Jaka briefly but in the end he returns her to her father, and applies for her hand in marriage formally. At this point it emerges that Jaka's rich uncle has just died, leaving a large inheritance, so Santi's father permits the two to marry. The play ends with Jaka and Santi living happily ever after and Laki returning to the forest, where he resumes life with Bini.

On one level *Tabib Gadungan* is a familiar story about young lovers who disobey parental wishes, a story about love transcending wealth. It's also a slapstick comedy - it is driven along by mistaken identity, is fast moving, bawdy and colloquial and plays on stereotypes of both women and men. At the same time, however, the play is an example of the way in which theatre can reflect and perpetuate conservative gender ideology.

Tabib Gadungan is framed by men commenting on women. In the opening scene we are welcomed by an introductory dialogue between the rich man's two servants and a neighbour, all of whom are men, in which they describe Santi as 'young', 'pretty' and 'cute', and Bini, who's 'sexy but impudent beyond help'. While the narrators are not entirely sympathetic to Laki, the narrative structure positions him as the subject and the focus of our attention: although he is ridiculed and a stereotype himself, he is at least an active subject.

In contrast, the female characters in the play exist only in relation to men: as nagging wife, servant, potential wife, disobedient daughter.

Feminist theatre critic Gayle Austin has argued that feminist theatre criticism at its most basic involves 'paying attention to women' (1990:1). As a starting point for thinking about gender in *Tabib Gadungan*, therefore, we might look first at its three women characters. The first is Bini⁶⁴, who is old, nagging and opinionated. In the written script she's not described as ugly (the only physical description of her in fact is '*bahenol*' (voluptuous/ sexy) in the opening scene), however in STB's production she was undoubtedly performed 'ugly' rather than 'sexy', perhaps drawing directly on the stereotype of the nagging village wife, who appears regularly in the folk theatre traditions upon which this production of *Tabib Gadungan* draws.

Bini's criticisms of Laki (he doesn't work, he spends all her money, he's stupid) are met with insults and beatings. Laki's insults (and indeed, his comments throughout the play) are antagonistic not only towards Bini but towards women in general. For example he declares: 'oh it's a real pain in the arse to have a wife. And the poets are right when they say that women are uglier than *Kuntilanak*'⁶⁵. Although Bini's retorts match Laki's insults, she is unable to defend herself against physical violence. Despite her protests, Bini pretends to enjoy being beaten when it comes to outward appearances. At one point, a neighbour attempts to intervene to stop the beatings and Bini says, 'but I like him hitting me. Really...why are you interfering? ...do you think this is your business?... (to the audience) Look at this stupid idiot who thinks he can stop a husband from beating his wife.'

Bini in fact goes out of her way to insult the neighbour for being so stupid as to interrupt, which prompts the neighbour to ask if he can join in the beating. It

⁶⁴ Bini's name in itself has a colloquial meaning of 'whore', although *laki-bini* also means 'husband and wife'

⁶⁵ *Kuntilanak* in Javanese myth is a malicious supernatural being who is the spirit of a woman who died in childbirth and who appears as a beautiful young woman with a hole in her back.

should be noted that Laki's justification for beating his wife is that 'five or six beatings for people who live together will deepen the feeling of love'.

Throughout this scene, the Cirebon audience roared with laughter.

When Laki enters the rich man's house we are introduced to the play's second female character, Inang⁶⁶ the nursemaid employed at the rich man's house.

Inang is assertive and vocal in her support of Santi's choice of potential husband. Judging love to be more important than money, Inang guesses that Santi's mysterious illness is in fact lovesickness, and, like many working-class female characters represented in traditional theatre forms, she is unafraid of 'telling it like it is'. Inang is also the object of unwanted sexual advances from Laki, who feels her breasts after knowing her for only several minutes, but backs off reluctantly when he is apprehended by Inang's husband.

Hatley has pointed out that in *ketoprak* folk theatre performances, women characters often are allowed to explore a greater emotional range than men and also are not as sensitive to status as men - however this is accompanied by a corresponding loss of prestige and refinement (1990a). I would suggest that exactly the same thing is occurring with Inang and Bini: while they may be able to voice opinion, this does not mean they have any power. Essentially Inang and Bini are vehicles for satire about the tensions between men and women, a satire in which men are the on-lookers and women are the object of the joke.

The third female character in *Tabib Gadungan*, Santi, is the binary opposite of Bini: attractive, young, unmarried and totally unable to speak. Silent throughout most of the play, she barely says a word, even when she is 'cured' and has her voice back. She is the embodiment, perhaps, of Laki's ideal woman, when he says, 'what stupid man would not want a mute wife? It would be best that I didn't cure her'. Like the nagging wife and the comical nursemaid, the stereotype of the silent beautiful princess is not unique to *Tabib Gadungan*

⁶⁶ *inang* literally means 'wetnurse', while *inang-inang* means mistress

and appears frequently in Indonesian folk theatre forms, such as *ludruk* and *ketoprak*, which often juxtapose the aristocratic princess and the loud, unromantic village wife (Hatley 1990a). And in New Order era Indonesian cinema, as Krishna Sen notes, 'the final moment of restoration of femininity (in female characters) is represented by silent passivity in the woman', while 'critically acclaimed films have used the metaphor of silence to construct the ideal woman' (1994:141).

STB of course fuses the traditions of both folk theatre and realism, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter the latter has often been criticised by feminist theatre workers and scholars. Gillian Hanna, who was a founding member of the British feminist socialist theatre company Monstrous Regiment writes about the experience of performing in realist plays:

Rarely were we able to play women who lived on stage in their own right. We were always someone's wife, mother or lover. ... Our theatrical identity was usually defined in terms of our relationship to the male characters. We only had an existence at all because we were attached to a man.... (Hanna 1991: xvii)

This comment can be easily applied to *Tabib Gadungan*. Women are wives, daughters, maids and exist only in relation to men, while their relations with *each other* (in the case of Inang and Santi) are not represented. Any potential disruptions to their relationships with men are resolved by the end of the play. In *Tabib Gadungan*, women are allowed to - and do - resist their oppression, for example through Bini's clever deception, Inang's repeated refusals of Laki and Santi's faked illness. But in what Belsey has called 'an endless repetition of 'normal' familiar action' (1980:90), in the end they do not actually change anything about the power structures - or the men - that oppress them. Bini does not actually leave Laki, while Santi's resistance means that she gets the man of her choice but she swaps her dependence on her father for dependence on her new husband.

Tabib Gadungan is one example of the way in which dominant stereotypes of women are drawn on and given further legitimacy through contemporary Indonesian language theatre. It should not be forgotten of course that the play was originally written by a French man, and that its representations of gender can therefore not be seen to be exclusively or innately 'Indonesian'⁶⁷. What does give us some clues about gender ideology specifically in Indonesia however is the ways in which STB's production draws on familiar folk theatre stereotypes of women and uses them in a contemporary context. The production exemplifies the ways in which gender ideology is simultaneously shaped by local and global influences, it demonstrates the commonalities between conceptions of the female subject (read: object) in both traditional and 'modern' theatrical narratives. *Tabib Gadungan* is not necessarily representative of all STB productions, nor of Indonesian theatre more broadly, as following examples will demonstrate. But the fact that the production attracted both critical acclaim and major financial support indicates that the Indonesian theatre 'establishment' - consciously or not - supports systems of theatrical representation that subordinate women. The next case study, in which I will discuss a performance by another well-established theatre group, Teater Koma, provides a slightly different picture of the ways in which women have been represented in contemporary performance in post-New Order Indonesia.

Female presidents and vociferous feminists in Teater Koma's *Republik Bagong*

Widely regarded as the most commercially successful contemporary theatre group in Indonesia (see for example Hatley 1992, Zurbuchen 1989, Bodden 1997), the work of Jakarta-based Teater Koma makes an interesting case study precisely because of its popularity. In the context of late and post-New Order

⁶⁷ See Scolnicov (1994) for a feminist critique of representations of women in Moliere's other works.

theatre, Teater Koma is the only group which consistently sells-out performances and can sustain a performance season of more than one week⁶⁸.

Their audience base, developed over the last 24 years with the help of persistent marketing strategies and consistent media interest in their work - particularly following the banning of the plays *Sukses* and *Opera Keco* in 1990 - is largely middle class. Data collected in the late 1980s for example indicates that over 60 per cent of Teater Koma's audience is university educated⁶⁹. Their extraordinary productivity, averaging at least four productions per year and often commented on by observers (for example Dahana 2001a: 40), also makes them unique in the Indonesian theatre scene. In recent years they have extended their program of 'main stage' productions in Jakarta to include shows designed specifically for touring to regional areas and have performed small scale works in venues ranging from schools to shopping malls.

Drawing inspiration from folk and contemporary theatre practice and late colonial era *tonil* music-theatre, Teater Koma's work has been described as 'colourful, fast-paced, humorous yet thought provoking' (Hatley 1992:x), as 'vivid, energetic burlesque that leaves its audience relaxed and laughing' (Zurbuchen 1989:127) and as 'popular middle class social criticism' (Bodden 1997:262). Indonesian theatre critic Radhar Panca Dahana has characterised Teater Koma's work in general as being 'more fluid, easier to understand, more entertaining and consequently more commercially successful' than that of their contemporaries (Dahana 2001:35). Teater Koma's work is typically full of jokes, songs, a bright - often gaudy - aesthetic, and contemporary relevance. A cross between wayang, Brecht and Broadway, it is full of skillful mimicry of

⁶⁸ In the time I was in Jakarta there were two possible exceptions to this: Ketoprak Humor, staged regularly and screened weekly on tv enjoys consistently large audiences. Likewise Remy Sylado's musical drama *Siau Ling* attracted substantial audiences particularly from amongst the Chinese community.

⁶⁹ For a more recent discussion of Teater Koma's management and marketing practices see R.Riantarno 2000.

both the slang of Jakarta's streets and the transparent rhetoric of official discourse.

Scholarly work on Teater Koma has in the past focused on their role in resisting dominant New Order ideology and providing accessible yet serious critique of a range of social, political and economic issues in the 1980s and 1990s particularly in the context of Indonesia's rapid 'development' and the emergence of the politically significant middle classes (see Hatley 1990b; Bodden 1997; Zurbuchen 1989). Commentators have praised Teater Koma's willingness to deal with themes including corruption, democratisation, presidential succession and the impact of development on poor communities, and their plays during the New Order period often sought to represent the experience of those rarely represented - beggars, prostitutes and the destitute. In relation to the banning of the play *Sukses*, Michael Bodden has argued that not only did Teater Koma challenge the New Order by raising controversial themes and issues, it also threatened the regime by transgressing the symbolic order, 'the norms of style and taste' which supported and legitimized the New Order state's hegemony (Bodden 1997).

Criticisms of Teater Koma's work however were often based on the assertion they tended to glamorise the experience of the poor for middle class consumption without urging any fundamental change (Zurbuchen 1989:127). It is worth noting also that the theatre community has long had an ambivalent relationship with Teater Koma, as evidenced by the discourses surrounding the bannings of their work in 1990: WS Rendra for example is cited as saying that although he was not supportive of the closing down of *Sukses*, he found their work 'pornographic, vulgar and catering to low tastes' (Bodden 1997:270). Teater Koma's popularity amongst Jakarta's elite has ironically been both a criticism (its popularity means that it's lightweight) and a direct cause of the group's long running struggles with the authorities (its popularity increased its impact and made it therefore more subversive). Teater Koma's use of symbol

may be 'simple' and 'transparent' compared to that of its contemporaries (Dahana 2001a), but the ease with which their work could be understood was perhaps precisely one of the reasons why it was perceived to be a threat to the New Order.

In the post-New Order era, with greater freedoms and less state control over their right to stage performances, Teater Koma has faced significant challenges. In short, the process of adapting to greater freedom has raised important questions in relation to modes of critique and the role of theatre more generally. On a personal level, members of Teater Koma have also dealt with the difficult transition from being regarded as brave leaders of a struggle for freedom of expression to being self-described as 'returning to the mainstream' (N.Riantiarno Interview Jakarta, 9 August 2000). As soon after the fall of Suharto as August 1998, critics of the group's work *Opera Sembelit* were describing the need for Teater Koma to change its style, to move beyond using performance as a replication of everyday life and to re-evaluate the 'obvious' nature of their critique (see for example Srengenge 1998a). Instead of being a force of resistance, Teater Koma's work was, in the period immediately following the fall of Suharto, being described as 'what you read in the paper but six months too late'. 'Obvious' criticism of political and social affairs - once Teater Koma's unique hallmark - was now being churned out daily by the newly free press and a proliferation of TV political talk shows. 'Actually I'm confused' (*ternyata saya bingung*) became the catch-cry of both Nano and Ratna Riantiarno when they spoke on different occasions about the consequences of *reformasi* for their work (*Kompas* 2 May 2001, R Riantiarno 2000).

To the external observer the most obvious manifestation of this 'confusion' was the group's return - in 1999 and 2000 - to staging old works such as *Opera Primadona* which had been in repertoire for a long time. The venue chosen for performances - the fully equipped but difficult to access *Teater Tanah Airku* at

Taman Mini on the outskirts of Jakarta - seemed to exacerbate perceptions that Teater Koma were more interested in selling tickets to their loyal middle class audience (who had to have their own cars just to get to the theatre) than in developing any significant new work. As beneficiaries of the new *reformasi* era perhaps they found it difficult to find anything new to critique. In an interview with *Kompas* (2 May 2001), Nano Riantiarno confessed that he had - in 1998 - sworn never to write a new work again, because of the extraordinary pace of change in Indonesia. In the interview he went on to explain that he was forced to reconsider this position because of his drive as an artist 'to...reinterpret (*tafsir kembali*) what is going on around us.' He declared that those outside of the political process had a responsibility to comment on and critique the situation: 'I can't be silent...if I'm silent I'll go mad....(in the end) I told my friends: we have to resist this atmosphere (the post-New Order) with works of art.'

One of the products of Riantiarno's renewed commitment to writing new work and critiqueing the political environment of the *reformasi* era was the *Bagong* trilogy, which commenced with the staging of *Republik Bagong* in Jakarta in April-May 2001.

***Republik Bagong* synopsis**

Republik Bagong uses well known wayang characters to satirise contemporary Indonesian politics. The play provides the *punakawan* (clown) character of Bagong with a spectacular *carangan* (branch) story of his very own⁷⁰, and in doing so, it tells the story of recent Indonesian history and political manoeuvrings.

⁷⁰ In discussing the work, Nano Riantiarno says he believes that Bagong (unlike his *punakawan* brothers Semar, Gareng and Petruk) has never had his own *carangan* story. See *Kompas* 2 May 2001. In the same article it is noted, interestingly, that Bagong has been banned in the past: for instance in Solo in the 18th Century the Dutch colonial authorities banned Bagong because of his propensity for asking questions, and Bagong only re-emerged in performances in the Solo area after independence. This is in contrast to Yogyakarta where he apparently has always been allowed to emerge as he pleases.

Republik Bagong is set in the kingdom of Amartapura where the King, Sang Raja Yudhistira and his allies, the *Pandawa* (the forces of good), are under threat from a band of evil characters who want to take over the throne. The forces of evil succeed in their quest for the throne, but Lesmono, their leader, is quickly surrounded by groups who are demanding political representation. Women, led by Srikandi (wayang's warrior princess), start to demand equality. A range of other groups establish political parties and demand that they be allowed to contest an election. This situation enables Bagong to emerge as a potential political leader. An election takes place, and is contested by four parties: the *Srikandi* party (the women's party), the *Lesmono* party, the *Pandawa* party and the *Bagong* party. The *Srikandi* party wins by a small margin, but is unable to take office because the kingdom will not accept a woman leader. So Srikandi approaches Bagong and asks him to lead the kingdom in her place.

Bagong reluctantly takes power. He is the most unlikely leader, an accidental President who would rather be telling jokes than making important decisions. His position as leader however ignites the anger of Btari Durga, Lesmono and the forces of evil, who immediately unleash terror, planting bombs across the kingdom, wrecking havoc and causing great instability. As leader, Bagong loses his 'bagong-ness'; his wife Ni Pesek becomes obsessed with the financial trappings of power and Bagong loses his ability to ask questions and make jokes. He wants to resign, wants to stop, he begs to 'become Bagong again'. *Republik Bagong* ends with a mournful Bagong monologue: full of regrets and exhausted, he is uncertain where or to whom he should turn for help. He is a corrupted critic, a pathetic President awaiting rescue.

Republik Bagong - performed in the 800 seat Graha Bakti Budaya Theatre at TIM in Jakarta - sold out very quickly. Several additional performances were scheduled to meet demand and media coverage was extensive. Audiences were attracted, no doubt, by the reputations of Teater Koma and Butet Kartaredjasa

(who played Bagong and is famous in his own right for his satirical monologues lampooning Suharto and Habibie⁷¹) as well as by the potential for humorous reflection on the increasingly bleak political outlook in Jakarta. Critics, myself included, who had asked 'what's interesting about Teater Koma these days?' (Bain 2001c) before the show opened were resolutely answered. As Indonesia found new depths to its multi-dimensional crisis (*krisis multi-dimensi*), Nano Riantiarno found his voice again. Mainstream political discourse - including newspaper opinion pieces and TV talk shows - started to refer to the play and to use it as a tool with which to en-liven discussion about Gus Dur's faltering presidency⁷². At a street side foodstall near my house in Cikini, discussion ran hot for several days about the new '*wayang* play about Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid)'. Gus Dur himself was said to have seen the show several times.

It is worth noting at this point that the play is relatively sympathetic towards Bagong. Although it shows him being corrupted, it very clearly represents this as being a consequence of him being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and of him being in a role he never sought. In contrast to his political opponents, he is not portrayed as being power hungry or innately evil, and is perhaps the only well rounded character in the play, long monologues giving him some opportunity to explore an emotional range that is not provided for other characters. *Republik Bagong* clearly shows power and responsibility lying in the hands of Lesmono and Btari Durga (read: Golkar) with whom international forces - including election monitors and aid agencies - are (knowingly or not) complicit. The critique of US intervention in Indonesian political affairs is memorably driven home by a tongue-in-cheek rendition of a song titled

⁷¹ See Hatley (1999a) for a more detailed discussion of Butet's monologues.

⁷² At the time *Republik Bagong* was staged, impeachment proceedings against the then President Abdurrahman Wahid were well underway. A mass prayer session had mobilised thousands of Wahid supporters from East Java, Jakarta residents were preparing for the 'Special Session' of the MPR which was likely to formalise the impeachment process. Media coverage of these events was comprehensive but tended to be unimaginative and dominated by a small group of political commentators. The perspective that theatre could add to general discussions of the political situation was undoubtedly welcome.

'*Pengamat Independen*' ('Independent Observer') to the tune of *The Star Spangled Banner*.

Reading gender in *Republik Bagong*

Republik Bagong is of interest for an analysis of gender and representation in performance for several reasons. Most importantly, it is the first representation (to my knowledge) in contemporary Indonesian theatre of Megawati's inability to assume the presidency in 1999 on account of her gender. The play also satirises a women's political party (Partai Srikandi) and feminist agenda, creating some instructive stereotypes of women activists. Teater Koma's work also lends itself to an analysis of gender dynamics because, in the words of director Nano Riantiarno, it aims to 'provide a mirror' in which the contemporary social and political condition is reflected (*Kompas* 2 May 2001; see also Riantiarno 1992). As this case study will demonstrate, there are a number of interesting *contradictions* in the gender dynamics of *Republik Bagong*, contradictions which perhaps 'reflect' the ways in which relations between men and women are played out in wider - at least urban middle class - society.

To some degree, *Republik Bagong* is a work that respects the 'equality' of men and women. Both men and women are objects of *Republik Bagong's* satirical critique, while men and women participated in the staging of the production with relative equality, both in terms of casting and backstage production roles, although slightly more title roles were played by men. As discussed above, Ratna and Nano Riantiarno often describe how they see each other as equal and complementary partners in creating and sustaining Teater Koma's work. The 'modern woman' - educated, financially independent, often bilingual, and media savvy - is relatively well represented in Teater Koma's membership and audience. Teater Koma's rehearsal and production space appears to be one in which both men's and women's voices are heard and respected.

The casting of Ratna Riantiarno in *Republik Bagong* as Btari Durga - the all powerful and underlying cause of the unrest in Amartapura - subverts assumptions about which roles are appropriate for women to play. Indeed this casting decision works against the assumption that as the director's wife, Ratna should be cast in roles that allow her to be beautiful and heroic. Btari Durga is neither of these things, perhaps allowing her to explore a powerful character in a way that transgresses expectations of her 'range' as a performer: in this role, Ratna is allowed to be large, loud and evil, something that may surprise long-term observers of Teater Koma's work.

At the same time however, the subversive potential of *Republik Bagong* is for several reasons limited. Of particular interest in this regard is the depiction of Partai Srikandi, and of Srikandi herself (played by Ratna's sister, Sari Madjid). Amartapura's Srikandi - although clearly meant as a caricature of Megawati - appears to bear little resemblance to the real Megawati. The first thing one notices about Srikandi is that she is a great deal stronger than Megawati in her 'feminist convictions' and political ambition for women. It is worth noting at this point that the caricatures of other recognisable political figures (Lesmono as Habibie, Bagong as Gus Dur) resembled much more closely the characters' 'real' behaviour. The similarity between Lesmono and Habibie's 'style' was commented on in a review in *Koran Tempo* for example (28 April 2001), despite their obvious differences in physicality (Lesmono was played by a very large actor). In comparison, Sari Madjid plays Srikandi as strident, aggressive, extremely loud voiced and independent: in no way does her performance, or the script, make an attempt to satirise Megawati's real behaviour.

Partai Srikandi is established by a group of several women: Srikandi herself, Banowati, Sumbadra and Larasati. Although they feature in short scenes throughout the play, their most significant scene is one in which they decide to form their party. The women turn to political action after lamenting the dreadful (*gawat*) state of their country. Banowati's son, Lesmono, is vulnerable and

controlled entirely by 'Paman Sengkuni' (presumably Suharto). They speak of behind-the-scenes scheming and the high likelihood of bloodshed and war. From the outset Srikandi is the leader, declaring that 'we must quickly take action', before launching into a speech about what must be done. At this early stage, Srikandi's call to arms is based on gathering women together on the basis that they are anti-war and anti-violence. As her speech continues, however, she becomes increasingly vehement and aggressive. She declares that the women should 'strongly condemn those at war regardless of whether they are our husbands, children, in-laws or family.' She then stridently turns her attention towards men in general, declaring that

Our protest is directed primarily at men. For too long, men have dominated and oppressed us, been arrogant and terrible towards us. Now is the time to take part. We no longer want to be positioned behind men or to be left behind by men. Women must become number one. We must.

Her friends immediately support her, and ask how they should pursue this agenda. Srikandi of course suggests that a political party for women be established. At this point her language and call to action becomes more extreme and a parody of the 'dangerous' feminist. She implores her supporters to take to the streets (*turun ke jalan*) in order to tell the people about the 'evilness of husbands' (*kebobrokan para suami*), and to spread word about men's 'bad image' (*citra buruk*). The longer term plan, Srikandi declares, is to seize power from men to ensure a better future. She concludes by softening her speech, urging her friends not to forget that women are vitally important in society because they are the source of all life, giving birth and nurturing humanity.

Throughout the scene Srikandi is depicted as a tough warrior: she speaks clearly, very loudly and forcefully. She is a natural born leader: 'perfect' (*cpcok*) as head of a political party, according to her friends. Her characterisation represents many of the clichés about what it means to be a 'feminist', and on the several occasions I saw the performance, the audience

seemed to find her speech funnier the more extreme it became. Her friends, in contrast, are constantly giggling, a cross between cheer-leaders and politicians' lazy wives, they are always late for meetings and easily led by their bossy warrior friend.

Later scenes reinforce this representation and introduce some schmaltzy declarations and songs about love and women's natural role as mother and nurturer⁷³. Their rhetoric is portrayed as uncompromising and tough but illogical and inconsistent: at one point Banowati says, for example, 'all who are anti-war and anti-violence - come together! But those who are anti-us, whoever they are, can die a painful death!'. Their election campaign is based on their continued man-hating rhetoric advocating for women's rights is satirically juxtaposed with a refrain of a song called *Dengan Cinta* (With Love).

Srikandi's victory in the election is announced by Bagong's fellow punakawan characters, Gareng and Petruk, whose shouts of 'Long Live Mbak Sri!' (*Hidup Mbak Sri*) are quickly followed by 'But wait a moment! Can men agree to be governed by women? Clearly all parties reject this.' Srikandi is disappointed and, as we know, hands the leadership to Bagong, saying wistfully 'maybe Srikandi's time has not yet come'. Given that *Republik Bagong* was performed at a time when Megawati's imminent ascendancy to the presidency was assumed by most Indonesians, there were nods and whispers throughout the audience, as if to confirm 'yes her time has almost come'.

In thinking about Srikandi and what we can learn about gender ideology from her depiction in *Republik Bagong*, it is important to note the *lack* of resemblance between Srikandi and Megawati, despite the obvious connection made between the two. Their only similarity in fact is their electoral fate, and similarities between Srikandi's rhetoric about motherhood and Megawati's

⁷³ See for example 'Nyanyian Bagi Perempuan' (Riantiarno 2001:55); and 'Dengan Cinta' (N. Riantiarno 2001:58)

description of herself as 'mother of the nation'. As Sen notes, in Megawati's 'speeches and rare interviews she has played on this image of herself as mother' (2002:54).⁷⁴ Throughout her presidency, Megawati was widely characterised by her silence, lack of 'ability' to articulate policy clearly, lack of rapport with the media, lack of outward manifestations of leadership and as a 'puppet' of other forces, most notably of her husband Taufik Kiemas. So what is it that inspires a caricature of Megawati as a man-hating but articulate feminist when she's actually not one - and when there are so many other things about her that beg for critique? In drawing on stereotypes of feminists in this way, is Teater Koma demonstrating its discomfort with depicting real women leaders? And what is it that leads to the conflation of women in politics with a ruthless, man-hating version of 'feminism'?

It is worth noting at this point that on one level, *Republik Bagong* is in fact sympathetic towards women in politics. The resistance to having a female head of state is represented, for example, as being as farcical and as extreme as Partai Srikandi's man-hating position. Indeed one reading of *Republik Bagong* could be that the ridiculous refusal not to allow a female head of state has led to a deepening of Indonesia's political crisis. *Republik Bagong* is also essentially a play about Gus Dur, not about Megawati, and consequently expectations for a fully developed critique of Megawati are perhaps misplaced.

In Partai Srikandi we see perhaps a representation not so much of Megawati but of feminists in general. It is a representation that - in its very *contradictions* - appears to reflect contemporary anxieties about women's demands for equality, their increased visibility in the public realm and the ways in which this may or may not disrupt their ability to carry out their 'essential' duty of child bearing and nurturing. Thus Srikandi is able to urge women to wage war on 'husbands'

⁷⁴ An interesting example of this can be seen in Megawati's speech to a pro-integration rally in East Timor just prior to the referendum there in 1999. Although at that time not yet President of Indonesia she actively exploits the metaphor of mother and child to describe the relationship between Indonesia and East Timor. The speech is part of footage in the documentary film *Scenes from an Occupation* (Baranowska 1999).

at the same time as strategically using the kind of language of motherhood that both state policy and feminist activists in the *reformasi* era have so often drawn upon. In some respects the characterisation of Srikandi also seems to draw directly from the rhetoric of feminist organisations such as Suara Ibu Peduli, who have very deliberately used the language of motherhood and ‘constructed a maternal image for itself’ (Sen 2002:57) to mobilise large numbers of women under a feminist reform banner, especially in the late New Order period.⁷⁵

Republik Bagong plays on these ‘contradictions’ of feminism in such a way that their irreconcilability becomes part of the joke. Partai Srikandi is ‘funny’ because it plays on the *extremity* of female behaviour: and the juxtaposition between outrageous feminist aggression, female foibles (being late to meetings for example) and an appeal to women’s natural role as mother is indeed absurd. The lack of ‘logic’ in Srikandi’s rhetoric effectively positions feminism as something that apparently has no rational basis.

In *Republik Bagong*, the emergence of feminism in the form of Partai Srikandi becomes part of the narrative of a destabilised, chaotic, crumbling kingdom. Just as Petta Puang’s Independence Day performance cited at the start of this chapter includes ‘women raising their fists’ as one of the characteristics of social chaos, *Republik Bagong* represents aggressive feminism as being a consequence of social disintegration. If we extend the logic of these representations then it is no coincidence that the physical and economic security of the kingdom of Amartapura is undermined (bomb explosions, workers’ strikes, street violence and rapid inflation are among the symptoms of this) at exactly the same moment that women’s voices start to be heard in the public arena.

⁷⁵ Debate about the strategic use of the word ‘ibu’ by SIP has been wide ranging. For a defence of SIP’s use of this rhetoric see Budianta (1999), who argues that SIP’s use of language enabled them to mobilise a much wider range of women than would have been possible had they relied only upon more conventional feminist language.

This relates directly to the arguments posed earlier about the ways in which in times of change women's bodies might come to be inscribed with notions of crisis, instability, and national identity. In *Republik Bagong*, while Partai Srikandi is certainly not depicted as the *cause* of crisis, its emergence is clearly part of a more general disorder. Women's activism comes to be seen therefore as evidence of general social disharmony rather than as a movement based on genuine inequalities or injustice. The ideological effect of this portrayal is that it deflects attention from the real work of the feminist movement in Indonesia which is, far from aiming to 'seize power from men' (as Srikandi advocates) largely focused on campaigning on issues such as domestic violence, promoting women's access to legal representation and advice, improving women's access to education and developing programs that facilitate women's political participation.

In conflating firstly Megawati with a feminist agenda and then feminism with social upheaval, *Republik Bagong* is a work that (perhaps by default) upholds and reproduces patriarchy. Its fearful, exaggerated and confused portrayal of feminism is perhaps only 'reflecting' wider social attitudes. But herein lies one of the limitations of Teater Koma's work - in seeking only to 'reflect' reality, in no way does it take the more radical step of forcing audiences to confront the very real anxieties associated with this reality. Instead, feminists become the object of a joke that only succeeds in perpetuating dominant ideology.

In highlighting some of the ideological limitations of *Republik Bagong* I have no intention of diminishing the importance of Teater Koma's work in providing relevant, contemporary, accessible political critique. For many of the reasons discussed earlier in this case study, *Republik Bagong* can be regarded as a successful production, and Teater Koma remains an important contemporary theatre group that engages a growing audience with many important issues of the times. Gender politics is clearly not the 'main theme' of *Republik Bagong*, but this does not mean that we should not actively unpack the ways in which

gender ideologies might be embedded in the work. There is a fine line between *reflecting* social reality and condoning the sorts of inequalities that are then reproduced by the reflection. *Republik Bagong* is an excellent example of the way in which stereotypes of women can reflect societal ambivalence about change and instability; at the same time, the humour that results from these sorts of stereotypes effectively naturalises antagonism towards feminism. But *Republik Bagong* is simultaneously a work that demonstrates the capacity of women performers to take on complex roles that subvert mainstream notions of femininity: Ratna Riantiarno was, after all, cast in the role of Durga, the play's main villain. Like other Teater Koma works, *Republik Bagong* includes a diverse range of representations of gender, and demonstrates the complicated ways in which theatre subverts and also perpetuates dominant gender ideology.

Radical rock stars in *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*

The case studies looked at so far have focused on performances by groups that can be considered part of the 'mainstream' of Indonesian theatre. STB and Teater Koma enjoy profile as 'established' groups who have clear identities, loyal audiences and long histories. Both STB and Teater Koma also come from major urban centres where there is relatively well developed theatre infrastructure and at least some tradition of theatre criticism. Both groups also have been run by male directors who are widely recognised as senior figures in the theatre establishment.

The following case study is about a group that in many ways is the antithesis of Teater Koma and STB. *Komunitas Teater Perempuan Randa Ntovea* (Randa Ntovea Women's Theatre Community, hereafter Randa Ntovea)⁷⁶ is from the remote regional capital of Palu, in Central Sulawesi. Members of the group are all women aged between 18 and 25 and their explicit aim is to create work that transcends dominant gender ideology, increases public awareness of women's

⁷⁶ Randa Ntovea means 'perempuan tersayang' (adored woman) in Bahasa Kaili, a local language of Central Sulawesi

subordination and creates an alternative to what they describe as the 'phallic' culture of the arts world (Randa Ntovea 2002).

Material produced by Randa Ntovea suggests that Palu is far from being a supportive environment for the production of theatre. The city is isolated: to travel to Palu from Jakarta by boat takes five days. Makassar, where Randa Ntovea have in the past presented work and collaborated with the group Teater Kita Makassar, is two days away, either by sea or by road, and the cost of flying is prohibitive. Palu itself is not known for its cultural life - in fact Palu residents often complain that the only time their city appears in national news is when there is another campaign to have its name changed (*palu* means 'hammer' in Indonesian and has become something of a joke). Randa Ntovea's promotional material describes conditions in Palu as 'extremely unfriendly to the production of serious art like theatre' and mentions several times that they are one of a very small number of arts groups in their city. In many ways geographic isolation is perhaps a blessing and a curse: while it means that Randa Ntovea lack access to a community of peers and theatre infrastructure, it also means that there is plenty of cultural space in which to create work without expectations, pressure to conform and the legacy of previous generations.

In April 2001, however, Palu hosted a major arts event called the Palu Indonesian Dance Forum (which despite its misleading name was a multi-artform festival). The event attracted participants from all over Indonesia and although criticised in several forums for its organisation (or lack of) did succeed in temporarily shifting the usually Java-focused attention of many in the arts community. This event was significant for the development of Randa Ntovea for several reasons: it provided the group with exposure to a wider audience as well as with the opportunity to see art from elsewhere in Indonesia. It was also at this event that Randa Ntovea's work *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* ('Women Rock Breakers'), the focus of this case study, was first presented. The

work has since been further developed and has been presented several times at theatre festivals in Makassar, Surabaya and Mataram (Lombok).

Perempuan Pemecah Batu has no 'synopsis' as there is no text and there are no 'characters'. Essentially the performance is a series of scenes that depict various aspects of the experience and work of the women who break rocks (the rocks are carted off to build roads and buildings), in the villages of Vatusampu and Vatutela on the outskirts of Palu. The performance has been created to be staged outdoors with a 'set' of rocks scattered around on a dirt floor. The performance takes place either in the round or with audience seated on three sides of the performance space.

The central image in *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* is of women and rocks. It is difficult to describe the work in any other way. Women grind rocks on mortars, women pick up rocks and pelt them against walls, women hit rocks with metal mallets and with other rocks. Throughout the performance there is a constant soundtrack of eerie music and the sounds of the rock-breakers: mallets pound rocks, excavation tools scrape across hard surfaces, pebbles are ground slowly into dust. At one point the women scavenge around carrying canvas bags into which they put pebbles and smaller stones. Another scene focuses on one woman performer sifting a collection of pebbles with a giant sieve. She shakes the sieve and the audience's attention is drawn in by her focus, which is undividedly on the endless process of sifting and shaking the pebbles. Larger rocks are rolled around the space methodically, pounded and then with a massive effort, attached to an industrial pulley and winched into the air. Women walk around the space carrying buckets of rocks across their shoulders; when one woman collapses two others hold her gently. Women drag themselves along the ground using metal claw-like tools that are designed for a combination of climbing and excavation; they pick up rocks with these tools and solemnly give them to members of the audience.

In the most recent performances of *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* performers have been dressed in long, almost Victorian looking black skirts and singlet tops⁷⁷. Their clothing is so 'inappropriate' for their work of breaking rocks, hurling rocks at walls and crawling in the dirt that it draws attention to the ways in which 'feminine' dress both constricts women's physical capacities and constructs an image of what may or may not be appropriate 'feminine' behaviour.

The experience, suffering and strength of women is central to the narrative of *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*. It is a work that demands that we 'pay attention to women' and creates a representational space in which women are no longer 'other': the audience has no choice but to observe and react to the struggle and the strength of the women moving, pounding and scavenging for rocks. *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* is also a work that guarantees that women are seen as active subjects: in spite of obvious oppression and struggle, they are autonomous agents who exist in their own right. Importantly, they are represented independently of men - the existence of the men in their lives is immaterial; their only relationships are with each other, and these are simply but powerfully represented when two women come to the aid of a friend who has collapsed under a burden of rocks.

The women in *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* resist stereotypes. They are not 'dutiful daughters', 'nagging wives' or 'silent princesses'; they are neither 'bad girls' nor 'good girls', neither 'sluts' nor '*perawan tua*' (old maids); they are not 'career women', 'simple housewives' or 'unruly tomboy teenagers'. They bear no resemblance at all to the sorts of attributes espoused by the state's *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Duties of Women) ideology. Rather than being characterised by their modesty, fragility, domesticity, dependence on men and

⁷⁷ This is one aspect of the performance that has changed since the work was first presented. In earlier performances the performers wore black body suits that allowed maximum freedom of movement. As discussed, the long dresses actually add another layer to the performance in highlighting the way that women's bodies come to be inscribed with particular notions of femininity (and therefore 'feminine' behaviour) through clothing.

sexual attractiveness, these women are physically strong, unrefined and do the sort of work that official policy would rather we forgot about. The women in *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* challenge our assumptions about what might be regarded as the most 'natural' female attributes: as a result they expose the ways in which patriarchal representational conventions normalise particular sorts of images of women and constructions of femininity.

Perempuan Pemecah Batu is essentially about representing those who are usually un-represented (or un-representable) in contemporary Indonesian culture - and while it doesn't seek directly to 'give voice to' or 'speak for' the experiences of women who work as rock breakers it does aim to speak *about* those who rarely have a chance to speak for themselves. *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* is a work that uncovers some of the implicit silences about the oppression of the working class and of women in particular, and it makes subjects of those who have been absent from hegemonic 'development' discourses of the New Order period. It speaks about the kind of slave labour work that 'development' is often built upon but chooses not to acknowledge. The women in *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* are performing labour which would be associated with pre-modern, feudal times and in representing their experience Randa Ntovea is effectively drawing attention to the gross contradictions and inequalities which exist in contemporary Indonesia. Part of the subversive-ness of Randa Ntovea's work is about focusing our attention on the usually invisible.

Members of Randa Ntovea identify several motivations for creating this work. Firstly, they say, most people in the community don't know that there are still women who work as *pemecah batu* and yet developments that are taken for granted such as buildings, roads, and bridges depend on their labour. The tendency of development to marginalise an underclass of people - and specifically women - is an issue that needs urgently to be discussed. At the same time, the struggle of these women can be read as a symbol of women's struggle more generally (Interview Randa Ntovea, Makassar 21 May 2001).

Perempuan Pemecah Batu certainly represents the *oppression* of women, but it does so in a highly counter-discursive way. While it doesn't provide any clues or answers about the ways in which women might resist this oppression, in the context of contemporary Indonesian theatre the act of representing *pemecah batu* as autonomous subjects *at all* transgresses the norms of theatrical narrative. Comparisons could perhaps be drawn with the performances by the female performer Gesti in Teater Sae productions such as *Biografi Yanti* (which dealt with the difficulties of marriage). Gesti, then the wife of Teater Sae director Boedi S Otono, expressed in her work her anger and frustration about marriage - although representing the oppression of women she was at the same time using her body in performance as a site of resistance and opposition towards these structures (Hatley 1994a).

Many of the western feminist theatre scholars who have critiqued realism and 'method' acting, have argued that physical performance opens up new possibilities for disturbing dominant conceptions of femininity, and for breaking linear realist narratives which perpetuate the 'endless repetition' of failed action and women's continued subordination (Belsey 1980:90). In the Australian context, feminist theatre scholar Peta Tait has argued that women's work in physical theatre and circus for example 'is as much an implicit subversion of the socialisation of the female body into a narrow range of feminine behaviours as it is about performing feats of skill and daring for an audience' (Tait 1994:124). Although *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* does not involve the sort of daring acrobatic feats that Tait describes, it does subvert assumptions about the female body's physical capabilities. These are women who can move, carry and throw rocks and use industrial lifting equipment. These are women who can climb mountains and scavenge for hours in dirt in order to find the rocks from which they make some sort of a living. In training for the performance, members of Randa Ntovea worked as *pemecah batu*. This kind of 'lived experience as process' is central to their work and something

which they incorporate as a working philosophy. In fact the first time I met members of the group they were washing dishes at a food stall in front of the Gedung Kesenian Societet de'Harmonie in downtown Makassar, where they were developing a short performance on the theme of women and kitchens.

In another place and time, a work such as *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* could be critiqued for being an attempt by young middle class women to appropriate the experience of the poor for the sake of art. While it is of course important that Randa Ntovea are alive to the implications of 'speaking for others' (Alcoff 1992), there are clearly some contexts in which for political reasons speaking for others is highly necessary. Indeed, the act of 'not speaking' and ignoring the experience of women such as the *pemecah batu* would serve only to perpetuate the cycle of their invisibility. When *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* was in the *Festival Teater Katimuri* (Eastern Indonesia Theatre Festival), in Surabaya in September 2002, Randa Ntovea appeared to be one of the few groups who were able to resist the popular trend of objectifying women and drawing attention to the other-ness of their sexuality. 'Speaking for others' therefore is an essential step to take if it assists the project of overcoming objectification and redefining the possibilities for representation of women in performance.

Randa Ntovea's *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* exemplifies the way in which women theatre practitioners in some cases are taking control of the 'means of production', to create narratives in which women exist independently of men, control their own representation and are able to deconstruct and distort dominant stereotypes of femininity and womanhood. *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* is an example of what Helene Cixous calls woman 'writing herself', a process through which it is possible for women to transcend 'otherness' (1981:250) and become autonomous subjects. Randa Ntovea has only been in existence since 1999 and as a result their repertoire is not extensive: at the time of writing they are known mainly for *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*. Many observers appear to be hoping that they are not a 'one hit wonder', and that they

can continue to exploit the possibilities offered by a city like Palu that is free of some of the expectations and norms that govern the 'centres' of artistic legitimacy (Halim HD personal communication 4 June 2001; see also *Bali Post* 22 July 2001). These observers are full of hope because Randa Ntovea's work is a provocation towards rethinking and deconstructing dominant images of gender, modernity and class. *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* is a simple but highly subversive performance that disturbs dominant conceptions of the Indonesian citizen, woman and worker.

Stories of wives and workers from North Sumatra

As suggested above, Randa Ntovea's approach could be problematised for the potentially exploitative dynamic between the privileged women who create the work and the women whose life experience they represent. The following case study focuses on a group who - although also committed to a vision of women's empowerment - have a very different approach to creating theatre.

The group Teater Perempuan Independen Sumatera Utara (North Sumatra Independent Women's Theatre) comprises women workers from plantations and fishing communities. Most members are the wives of farmers and fishermen, and many are very new to the world of theatre and performance. The focus of this discussion, a performance called *Suara dan Suara (Voices and Voices)*, is a group-devised work based on members' real-life stories.

Teater Perempuan Independen Sumatera Utara traces its origins to 1999, when an NGO called HAPSARI ran a workshop to explore the possibilities of using theatre as a tool for education and empowerment. As a result of this workshop, Teater Perempuan Independen was established, making it one of the first theatre groups in Indonesia to focus on giving expression to the experiences and concerns of working class women from rural communities (interview with Lena Simanjuntak, Jakarta 7 September 2002). *Suara dan Suara* was the first work that Teater Perempuan Independen has performed outside of Sumatra.

Performances staged in Jakarta in September 2002 attracted a great deal of interest, both because of the high quality of the performance, the rarity of all-women theatre groups and the politically sharp, accessible subject matter.

The first thing that one notices about *Suara dan Suara* is that there are so many women on stage. There are eighteen performers and they are all on stage for the entire performance. In small, intimate performance spaces such as Teater Utan Kayu, where the work was presented in Jakarta, the impact of so many ordinary women's bodies filling theatrical space should not be underestimated.

Many of the theoretical arguments that apply to *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* also apply to *Suara dan Suara*. Like *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* this is a performance that demands that we listen to women's stories from their points of view. *Suara dan Suara* is likewise about women creating and controlling their own narrative and representational spaces, 'writing themselves' and creating female characters that are human subjects in their own right. Although male characters feature in *Suara dan Suara*, they are all played by women, in a reversal of the convention (found in many traditional Indonesian theatre forms) for female roles to be played by men.

The narrative structures and performance style of *Suara dan Suara* differs significantly, however, from *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*. *Suara dan Suara* is structured in three main sections, each of which has its own self-contained narrative. The stories are sourced directly from the women's personal experience and were chosen and the performance text was devised collectively by the group. The performance is strongly grounded in conventional dialogue but also draws intermittently on local oral traditions, music and song. Although the three sections mostly use a linear narrative in parts they make use of what in Brechtian terms might be described as 'alienation', as characters break the main narrative with 'external' commentary, a technique that serves to highlight, for example, the inconsistencies between official rhetoric and the experience of

real women. The other Brechtian technique that is used throughout the work is the convention of having all performers on stage at all times: when not 'acting' in a scene, performers sit on the edges of the performance space as observers. The performance therefore draws our attention not only to women as performers but also to women as *viewers* of the performance.

The first section of *Suara dan Suara* introduces the audience to the lives of the women who work on plantations as daily contracted labourers (*buruh harian lepas*). These women do not have permanent jobs (or any of the attached benefits like housing, medical care and regular salaries), and must report to plantation owners on a daily basis for whatever work happens to be available. In the words of the group's director Lena Simajuntak they are regarded as the 'lowest caste' of plantation worker. This section of *Suara dan Suara* essentially exposes the huge gap between official state rhetoric and the lived experience of women contract labourers. It also tells the story of a woman worker who is sexually assaulted by her employer, the *mandor* of the plantation, and explores her options for escaping the situation.

At several points in this narrative an 'external' performer reads sections from the Indonesian constitution and other legal documents pertaining to workers' and women's rights. Knowing that in Jakarta there would be feminist and workers' rights activists in the audience, the performers asked several times for audience help with interpreting the text of these legal documents. The absurdity of official rhetoric is quickly exposed: in making use of this device, the performance effectively implicates and positions the audience in the ideological frameworks and practices that bring about some of the injustice described in the main narrative.

The second section of *Suara dan Suara* tells the story of a woman who struggles to escape domestic violence because it has become so normalised. The woman's husband is unemployed, so against his wishes she must work

selling *jamu* (traditional medicinal herbs) in order to keep her daughter at school. As a result of village gossip, her husband hears an unfounded rumour that his wife is having an affair, so he beats her and her daughter repeatedly. They escape and seek refuge with an older woman relative. Meanwhile, he is gambling and having an affair of his own with a woman who he eventually takes as a second wife. The story then deals with the stigma faced by a woman filing for divorce and the social pressures placed on women by a patriarchal culture that has co-opted women as well as men into its norms. This section directly confronts the commonly held wisdom that it's 'better to be beaten than to be divorced' (*lebih baik dipukulin daripada jadi janda*) and directly provides some alternative choices for women in abusive domestic situations.

The final section of *Suara dan Suara* deals with the experience of a woman from a fishing community, whose husband dies at sea when his small boat is caught up in a large commercial trawling net. This story highlights both the insensitivity of authorities to women in general (and to this woman in particular) and demonstrates the often tragic impact of commercial development on poor communities. This section in particular makes use of traditional fisherwomen's songs and is partly told as the cast undertake collective activities such as repairing fishing nets and rowing a fishing boat.

Suara dan Suara demonstrates the way in which theatre can communicate a message and raise awareness of pressing social issues without being didactic. It is in many respects 'conscientising' theatre that has strong educational objectives, and seeks to use theatre as the medium for pursuing the aims of various unions and workers groups. The hardships faced by women in poor communities are rarely represented in theatre, or for that matter, elsewhere in contemporary culture. *Suara dan Suara* presents women's experience in a way that draws attention to the hardships they face but also ultimately celebrates their strength rather than victimhood.

Director Lena Simanjuntak, who is Indonesian but lives in Germany with her husband for most of the year, is the only member of the group with any formal training in theatre. Apart from working with the women from Teater Perempuan Independen Sumatera Utara, Simanjuntak has recently worked with a community of sex workers in Surabaya, who have gone on to set up their own theatre group that now runs independently of her involvement. The eighteen performers in *Suara dan Suara* meanwhile have had limited formal theatre training, which at times means that the performance is 'rough' around the edges: words are mispronounced or lines are forgotten. One performer reads from a script because, she says, 'I have only recently learnt to read and I enjoy doing it.' But in this context, lack of formal training frees the group to produce theatre that is unconstrained by artistic conventions and is refreshingly unselfconscious about its place in the arts world.

Suara dan Suara is an example of the way theatre is being used in some parts of Indonesia as a tool for democratisation. It is an integral part of an approach to education in which various unions and NGOs are involved. Teater Perempuan Independen's work is not only about enabling women's voices to be heard, but is part of an overall agenda to provide poor communities - and especially women - with alternatives and opportunities for empowerment. At the same time it is about a process of 'returning the folk theatre to the people' (*mengembalikan teater rakyat kepada haknya rakyat*), and about claiming back the representational space of theatre for the expression of ordinary people's (and specifically women's) concerns.

One aspect of the audience's response to *Suara dan Suara* particularly deserves discussion. During at least one performance, many members of the audience laughed during a scene that represented a woman being raped. When questions about the audience's response to this scene were raised during a post-performance question and answer session, one of the performers involved in the scene (upon whose personal story the scene was based) said that she was upset,

confused and angered by the audience's laughter. It was unacceptable, she said, for rape to be laughed at, and she was not sure why the audience found the scene funny: the performers had not deliberately been playing 'for laughs'. Audience members came up with several possible reasons for the laughter. One theatre critic said to me after the performance that if the audience laughter was not expected, then the performers were 'bad actors': he was unable to see that the laughter perhaps reflected a problem with the audience's point of view. Another male audience member attempted to justify the laughter by arguing that it reflected the audience's discomfort. He thought that laughing was a reflex response - the audience knew no other way to deal with what was a very confronting scene. This was disputed, however, by an NGO activist who spoke passionately about how the audience's laughter was a result of the long-held but often prevailing misconception that rape is about sexual promiscuity rather than violence. The fact that many male audience members were unable to come to terms with the notion that laughing at rape is offensive exemplifies the extent to which patriarchal ways of viewing visual culture in Indonesia have been normalised.

The fact that ordinary women's stories such as those in *Suara dan Suara* appear so *extraordinary* reflects the dominance of patriarchal narrative and representational conventions in Indonesian theatre. The fact that we *notice* when there are eighteen women on stage telling their stories tells us something about what we *don't* normally notice: that is, that theatre normally is all about men. *Suara dan Suara*, like Randa Ntovea's *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*, exposes the ways in which dominant gender ideology naturalises women's silence and invisibility. Unlike *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*, however, it *also* makes the connection between gender and class oppressions, and implicates the audience in the very ideological structures that it critiques.

The next and final case study looks at a performance by the Yogyakarta-based Teater Garasi, whose work was also discussed in an earlier chapter of this thesis.

Snake women and dog men: Teater Garasi's *Repertoar Hujan*

September 2002. It's a busy night at Teater Garasi's *sanggar* (studio) in Bugisan, Yogyakarta. The group is working on an adaptation of a script by renowned Solo group Teater Gapit, and has invited Inong, a female performer who worked with Teater Gapit, for a discussion. Inong (or Inonk as she is sometimes known), in her post-Gapit career, is now herself an innovative performer-director and has been producing her own work, often with strong gender themes.⁷⁸ Inong's stories about Gapit, funny, warm and told mostly in Javanese, mingle with the sounds of *dangdut* and *wayang kulit* that float across the nearby *sawah* from distant radios. The discussion is recorded with meticulous attention by a young female member of Teater Garasi who sits in front of a computer, set up on one corner of the *pendopo*. Ferry Handayani, one of Garasi's regular performers, has a young baby and asks questions of Inong as she rocks her child to sleep.

Earlier in this thesis I discussed Teater Garasi's three year *Waktu Batu* project. Both *Waktu Batu* and the work to be discussed in this case study, *Repertoar Hujan*, demonstrate the ways Garasi's work represents the tensions and contradictions faced by young people in contemporary Indonesia. These tensions and contradictions include - but are certainly not limited to - those related to negotiating gender ideology.

As noted in the case study of *Waktu Batu*, members of Teater Garasi are relatively young (all born in the 1970s) and all are well educated, the majority

⁷⁸ Hatley (forthcoming) discusses Inong's recent work, along with that of other women performer-directors Shinta Febriany from Makassar and Cok Sawitri from Bali. While not included as case studies in this thesis, the emergence of these three women artists in different regions of Indonesia emphasises the way women artists have thrived in regions outside of the traditional 'centres' of Indonesian theatre culture.

having attended the prestigious Gadjah Mada University. Teater Garasi has an artistic director, Yudi Ahmad Tajudin, who is usually their spokesperson although he does not direct all of their works himself. Two other members, Retno Ratih Damayanti and Gunawan Maryanto have also directed works, with Retno in particular attracting the attention (and perhaps jealousy) of the wider Yogyakarta theatre establishment when she adapted and directed Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* for an all-female cast in late 1999⁷⁹. While this chapter will not look in detail at Retno's *Sementara Menunggu Godot*, her work exemplifies Teater Garasi's comparative sensitivity to gender issues and particularly their active interest in the development of women as performers, directors and technical workers in theatre (the men in the group cheerfully report that they were responsible for 'konsumsi' - the preparation of food and drink for the cast and crew - on the production of *Sementara Menunggu Godot*). While the founding members of Teater Garasi were all male, the group has a strong and active female membership. The discussion with Teater Gapit's Inong referred to earlier in many ways highlights the way in which Teater Garasi accommodates and respects the participation of women in their work - in this case through involving a woman as a guest speaker and providing an environment in which one of Garasi's members was able to participate actively at the same time as she nursed a young baby.

In the first half of 2001, Teater Garasi produced a work called *Reportoar Hujan* (Rain Repertoire)⁸⁰, which they staged at the end of the rainy season in March 2001 at six places in Solo and another six in Yogya, using a new venue almost every night over a period of two weeks. According to the director, Gunawan Maryanto, there were several reasons for touring the work in this way. From an artistic point of view, Maryanto argued that through touring, the performers

⁷⁹ In an interview Retno speaks of the reaction of older, more established theatre artists who condescendingly declared that she was 'unwise' and 'extremely brave' to take on such an important work.

⁸⁰ The work was subsequently re-named *Tentang Seorang Lelaki Yang Demikian Mencintai Hujan* for its presentations in Jakarta and Bandung, but for the sake of simplicity I will continue to refer to it as *Reportoar Hujan*.

were forced 'to continue developing the work', which was far preferable to becoming 'bored and lazy with it' (Maryanto Interview 25 March 2001). At the same time, Teater Garasi, like several of their contemporaries, have acknowledged that there is a need for modern theatre to be presented in contexts that encourage communities to engage with performances. By touring to various venues Teater Garasi sees itself as contributing to a broader project of 'socialising' of theatre⁸¹. The audiences for *Reportoar Hujan* were as diverse as the presentation contexts. At Negeri Suket, the home and studio of Solo's contemporary *dalang* Ki Slamet Gundono, for example, the majority of the audience comprised local villagers who had not seen contemporary theatre before. At other venues, especially those on university campuses, audiences were representative of the 'typical' theatre going community of young people, activists, fellow artists and students.

Reportoar Hujan was developed over a period of over six months, and took as its starting point a half-finished poem by director Maryanto. The poem contained two key images: a man being caught in the rain, and a woman who waters her flowers in the late afternoon. The poem also suggested that the man caught in the rain was in fact Sangkuriang, a character from the traditional Sundanese legend of the same name, and the woman watering her flowers was Dayang Sumbi (Sangkuriang's mother). These images became the basis of an exploration and creation of what I have referred to elsewhere as a kind of visual poetry in performance, a poetry based on physicality and the dynamic between bodies in space (Bain 2001b).

⁸¹ Members of Garasi have spoken at various times about their admiration for the ways in which two Solo groups - Teater Ruang and Teater Gidag Gidig - present work in a way that facilitates community access. Gidag Gidig's program 'neighbourhood theatre' (*teater untuk tetangga*) has often been cited as a successful example of the way in which contemporary theatre can reach and interact with wider audiences.

Reportoar Hujan was a departure from Teater Garasi's previous work in that it used a physical/ movement based form of theatre and almost no text.⁸² The physical style and language of the work emerged partly as a result of the happy coincidence that the group were undertaking workshops in *butoh* and martial arts at the time that Maryanto first wrote his poem. More concerned with image and symbol than with telling a story, *Reportoar Hujan* traces how two characters, perhaps (but not explicitly) Sangkuriang and Dayang Sumbi, came to be caught in the rain and watering flowers respectively. The production utilised a simple (but not simplistic) design and minimal performance space - as evidenced by its 'transportability' during its season.

Reportoar Hujan is both very personal and 'universal'. It does not pretend to deal with 'the big issues', and according to Maryanto, this is a deliberate strategy (Teater Garasi 2001). But in dealing with 'small things' - being caught in the rain and watering flowers in the afternoon - the work indirectly focuses the audience on critical issues of power, agency and human relationships. At the same time, *Reportoar Hujan* is also a re-visioning (of a kind) of the tale of *Sangkuriang*, and it is this - as well as the work's representations of women's bodies and sexuality in physical performance - that can contribute to this chapter's discussion of gender identity and performance.

Sangkuriang

The story of Sangkuriang has often been compared to that of Oedipus, and shares several features with the Watu Gunung myth, discussed earlier in this thesis as part of Teater Garasi's *Waktu Batu* project. Most versions of the Sangkuriang legend tell the story of a princess called Dayang Sumbi, who drops her shuttle while weaving. She vows that she will marry whoever returns the shuttle to her. A dog brings her the shuttle, so she must marry him. She and the

⁸² Although Garasi had used elements of physical theatre before, *Reportoar Hujan* was the first of their works to be entirely based on physical idiom. See *Suara Merdeka* March 16 2001 and the radio program 'Obrolan Seputar Teater Tubuh' produced by radio UNISI and Yayasan Cemeti and broadcast on 9 March 2001 for further discussion of this.

dog, Tumang, have a son, Sangkuriang. Sangkuriang often goes hunting with Tumang but is unaware that he is in fact his father. One day, Tumang disobeys Sangkuriang whilst on a hunting trip. So Sangkuriang kills Tumang and brings his heart back for his mother to cook. Dayang Sumbi only discovers that the heart belongs to Tumang when it is too late. She is horrified and explains to Sangkuriang what he has done. Sangkuriang is likewise horrified and leaves the palace vowing never to return. Meanwhile, Dayang Sumbi deeply regrets that she has lost her son. She prays and isolates herself from society hoping to redeem her sins, until one day the gods grant her eternal youth and beauty.

Eventually, many years later, Sangkuriang returns to his homeland. He sees a beautiful young girl with whom he falls in love, not realising that the young girl is his eternally youthful mother. Dayang Sumbi accepts his proposal of marriage until one day, shortly before their wedding day, Sangkuriang asks Dayang Sumbi to help him tidy up his head-dress. Naturally Dayang Sumbi is shocked when she notices that he has a wound in his skull identical to one that her son Sangkuriang had, and so she comes to the realisation that her handsome suitor is in fact her son. So Dayang Sumbi plans a way to get out of her marriage.

She declares that she will marry Sangkuriang only if he can do two things. He must dam the Citarum River and build a big boat that can be used to cross the river, and the two tasks must be completed by the following dawn. Sangkuriang makes good headway into the challenge, but realises that his efforts are in vain when he sees dawn rising on the horizon. Dayang Sumbi has actually created an illusion of dawn, but her tricks are justified as disastrous incest is averted: Sangkuriang is ultimately unable to meet the challenges set. In anger, he overturns the boat he has almost finished and it becomes the *Tangkuban Prah* near Bandung. Day breaks and order is maintained.

Re-incarnating Sangkuriang

Teater Garasi's *Reportoar Hujan* is by no means an attempt to tell the story of Sangkuriang and Dayang Sumbi in its traditional form. Neither is it a deliberate attempt to re-vision the story from a feminist perspective in the way advocated by Western feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich (1979) and Angela Carter (1979) or in the Indonesian context, by Toeti Heraty in her work *Calon Arang : Kisah Perempuan Korban Patriarki* (2000). Indeed much *could* be said about the reasons for Dayang Sumbi's apparent acceptance of bestiality, her portrayal as a 'bad repenting mother' and as a relatively passive object of Sangkuriang's sexual advances. The somehow inherent value of 'eternal beauty' for women espoused by folk stories the world over is also something that deserves interrogation.

But *Reportoar Hujan* does not directly or intentionally tackle these issues; what it does do, however, is depict women as autonomous individuals who participate in and initiate relationships with men and with each other. As a result it is possible to read the work as a text which subverts dominant representations of femininity, female sexuality and gender relations. The fact that it does this at the same time as drawing inspiration from the folk-tale Sangkuriang is to a degree coincidental. However on another level perhaps there is a degree to which positive 're-visioning' is going on in an unconscious way, as a result of the impact that the women in Teater Garasi have on the creation of work.

The physical, non-linear style of performance, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter, also lends itself more to exploration of women's physicality and different kinds of representations of gender and sexuality than does conventional realist theatre. Working in this style perhaps enables the women performers to explore a range of expression that would not otherwise have been possible and certainly, it appears, was not something envisaged by the show's director. Indeed, when asked about the representation of gender in the work, Gunawan Maryanto says modestly that it came about 'almost unconsciously

and because of the input from the female performers.' In order to illustrate the subversive potential of *Reportoar Hujan*, I will now describe it in further detail.

***Reportoar Hujan* performance synopsis**

A male performer runs around the small performance space - he's caught in the rain and his search for cover appears futile, his run becoming faster and faster until he falls flat on his face. As he lies there we hear the sound of a radio being tuned, momentarily stopping on samples of different music: Javanese *gamelan* and The Beatles' *Seargent Peppers* album are sampled along with the sound of radio static. The man covers his ears, then emerges with sunglasses on, performing classical Javanese dance to the music, a parody perhaps of the constructed 'contradictions' between tradition and modernity in contemporary Java.

Suddenly the focus switches and we watch a woman in a green sleeveless dress enter; her back to the audience, she is holding a huge banana leaf above her head to protect herself from the rain. She moves slowly - in fact, she glides - across the back of the performance space, her feet in a soundless sideways traditional dance movement. In a sudden moment of anger she snaps and starts smashing the leaf on the ground, as the male performer cowers in the background. She smashes the leaf until it is in shreds, the audience cowers too, silent in the face of the incredible power of this beautiful woman. Perhaps - although we don't know this for sure, unless we closely read the program notes⁸³ - she is a reincarnation of Dayang Sumbi, who as we know was also surprisingly capable of violence.

In the next fragment of *Reportoar Hujan*, another female performer pulls a metal bucket on wheels slowly into the middle of the performance area. Slowly she sits in the bucket, moving her arms as if paddling it somewhere. Gradually

⁸³ It should be noted that one audience member commented in a post-show discussion (at Sanggar Teater Ruang, Solo March 27 2001) that although she had arrived late, she recognised almost immediately that this work was 'like Sangkuriang'.

her body changes, unfolding upwards like a plant stretching for sunlight. The woman in the green dress reappears, gliding across the back of the performance space again, this time throwing small pebbles into the bucket. She moves closer to the bucket, finds it half full of water and starts washing her arms, cleansing herself in solitude, a moment of calm after her violent outburst earlier. She moves gradually to scraping her finger nails across the bucket, making a sound effect like finger nails scraping on a blackboard, her solitude also a kind of torture.

The male performer returns this time as a dog. According to members of Teater Garasi he is meant to be 'half-man-half-dog', again a reference to the dog-father-husband Tumang in the story of Sangkuriang. He is on all fours, his tongue hanging out, approaching the woman in an affectionate and slightly predatory way. She becomes animal like too, and they fight, wrestle like animals, pouncing on each other, their movement tightly choreographed and extremely athletic. The scene is sexually highly charged and although bordering on violent, the male and female performers are unquestionably portrayed as being 'equal': if anything the female is dominant. They jointly 'give birth' to a third performer, a female half-woman-half-dog, who takes over the sexual wrestle with the male, as the first female performer withdraws and reverts to being fully human.

In the following 'scene' the woman in the green dress is combing her hair slowly. Suddenly she reaches for something in mid air and the two women almost embrace, they reach for each other in a momentary tenderness, only for one to be pushed away violently by the other. This sequence is repeated twice, but the second time the sexual tension and physical relationship between the two women is given more time to develop before the 'green dress' woman pushes the other woman away violently.

As this relationship between the two women is being played out, the male performer is completely suppressed. He's out of the action in a corner, drooling and slightly delirious, like a defeated boxer in pain. Slowly, his body begins to form the recurring image of the plant stretching upwards for the sun from the metal bucket. Again a woman emerges throwing pebbles at the bucket while the other woman runs in circles (exactly in the opposite direction to the way in which the man ran at the start of the performance). She collapses and entwines with the male performer, becoming part of the plant image. The 'green dress' woman enters with a watering can and waters her 'flowers' in the late afternoon. Beep beep b-b-beep - like morse code - sounds from the radio: technology punctuating the simplicity of a woman watering her flowers or perhaps a reminder of the multi-layered codes that permeate this performance.

Reading gender in *Reportoar Hujan*

So what can an abstract performance like *Reportoar Hujan* tell us about gender and identity? Interestingly, questions about gender and sexuality were raised in several of the post-performance discussions I attended.⁸⁴ Perhaps because of the way in which the work threatens an omnipotent and unquestioned dominance of masculinity, and also plays with the idea of bestiality, its implications in terms of gender relations and sexuality were noticed by many. This is not to say however that these observations were being made out of any kind of feminist consciousness, in fact I would argue precisely the opposite.

Audience members wanted to know whether the performance augured badly for relationships between men and women.⁸⁵ Did, for example, the portrayals of physically strong women fighting as equals with a man mean that Teater Garasi (and Gunawan Maryanto in particular) felt that women were *more* powerful

⁸⁴ I refer specifically to discussions held at Sanggar Teater Ruang, Solo March 27 2001 and at the Japan Foundation, Jakarta April 17 2001.

⁸⁵ To my knowledge these questions were asked by men. Women - not unusually - were not particularly well represented in post-performance discussions and as far as I know did not engage in the debate about what *Reportoar Hujan* might mean as a reflection of relations between men and women.

than men and/or becoming dangerously powerful in the contemporary era? If women had power (read: equality) how would men be able to relate to them? The notion that women might be able to respond to a man's (or a man-dog's?) attempt at forced 'seduction' appeared to be disorientating, if not shocking, for some audience members. At one of these discussions, for example, a fellow (male) theatre director asked one of the women performers, Sri Qadariatin, how she transformed from being 'such a beautiful feminine character' into a terrifyingly powerful 'snake woman'. The transformation of a woman into a *woman-dog* with her own 'animal' desires also perhaps contributed to the general sense of disquiet about the implications of *Repertoar Hujan*. The sexualised relationship between the two women was rarely, if ever, mentioned in public discussions, although I would suggest it may have contributed to the sense of unease voiced by several male audience members. And at the same time, questions about any deliberate intention to problematise or destabilise traditional representations of gender and sexuality were skilfully deflected by the show's director. Clearly, he would have us believe, there was no intention to subvert gender stereotypes, it had just turned out like that!

The physicality of the women in *Repertoar Hujan*, as with Randa Ntovea's *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*, can in itself be read as subversive. In the use of performers physicality as well as the representation of their strength, *Repertoar Hujan* achieves what Peta Tait refers to as a deconstruction of the polarities between femininity and masculinity (Tait 1994). Indeed in *Repertoar Hujan*, the characteristics typically associated with masculinity and femininity are likewise blurred and disassociated from the gender of the performer. As with *Perempuan Pemecah Batu*, the athleticism, speed and strength of the women performers in *Repertoar Hujan* effectively shifts the boundaries of possibilities in terms of how women can be represented.

In the case of *Repertoar Hujan*, however, perhaps the implications are different because - in contrast to *Perempuan Pemecah Batu* - a male character and his

lack of total power is also represented. As the above examples from post-performance discussions would seem to indicate, audience members' disquiet about the gender implications of *Reportoar Hujan* can be read as a manifestation of the (often unconscious) importance attached to preserving relationships which are founded on the subordination of women. There are no prizes for guessing what would (not) be said had Teater Garasi presented a conventional version of *Sangkuriang*, with its sexually passive, eternally beautiful Dayang Sumbi. It is no coincidence then that these concerns emerge precisely at the moment when a *man's* relations with these women is depicted: and in this respect it is instructive that there appear to be no similar concerns raised about Randa Ntovea's work.

Teater Garasi's *Reportoar Hujan* is a work that provides performers (male and female) with space to explore an unusually wide emotional and physical range. Although intentionally being 'about' the small things - like getting caught in the rain and watering flowers - its narrative also raises questions about sexual power, relationships, violence and human vulnerability. It is a work that (perhaps accidentally) demonstrates both the agency of women performers to create spaces within theatrical representation for their own autonomy. At the same time, the director's apparent evasion of questions about gender and sexuality indicates a difficulty or discomfort with articulating any sort of position on these issues; it is a discomfort that reflects perhaps the contradictions faced by a company like Teater Garasi. Whether strategic or naïve, this apparent discomfort seems to reflect the contradictions experienced by many young people in Indonesia in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. In *Reportoar Hujan*, as in other recent works, such as the *Waktu Batu* trilogy, Teater Garasi have indicated (at least unconsciously) their willingness to include gender ideology as a factor in the contemporary uncertainty with which their work engages.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how a number of theatre artists and groups in Indonesia have participated in the project of contesting and re-defining gender ideologies in the post-New Order era. It has also demonstrated how some theatre groups and productions continue to perpetuate gender ideology that limits the sorts of roles women can play and represents them as subservient to and dependent upon men for their identity. This chapter has also shown how in some cases, women characters come to embody deep anxieties about social change and political instability. In so doing, and in contrast to much previous critical commentary on theatre in Indonesia, this chapter has argued that gender is an important category of political analysis, and that 'paying attention to women' and the ways they are (or are not) represented is critical to understanding theatrical narratives and their ideological dimensions.

At the same time as unpacking representations of women in post-New Order theatre, this chapter has looked at the ways in which theatrical production depends upon women's labour, and upon particular ideas about how women and men should relate to each other. This chapter has highlighted the critical contribution made by women to theatre cultures in Indonesia and has begun a project of addressing the gender blindness that characterises much commentary on Indonesian theatre. It has also shown, however, that while theatrical production will probably continue, for the foreseeable future, to rely heavily on women's unpaid and invisible labour, women have in the post-New Order era begun to take on a more diverse range of roles.

Theatrical representations of women - such as those in *Tabib Gadungan* - often draw upon deeply entrenched stereotypes about the way women should behave, look and relate to men. But several theatre groups have started to challenge this. A new generation of women artists, including the members of Randa Ntovea, have made the project of challenging patriarchal systems of representation central to their work. Other new generation groups, such as Teater Garasi,

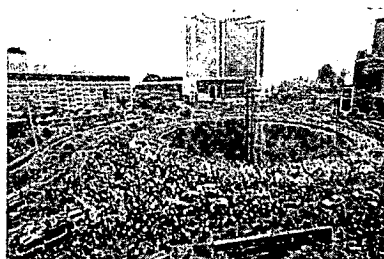
foster actively the development of women as performers, directors and as active participants in their creative process. Projects led and funded by NGOs - and often made possible by the fall of the New Order - have also contributed to the diversification of theatrical representations of women, and in cases like the production of *Suara dan Suara*, have used theatre to empower disadvantaged women and to increase public understanding of issues like domestic violence⁸⁶.

Finally, this chapter has shown how women theatre workers in regions outside of Java have been able to 'write back' to theatre's established centres, and to create their own narratives in which women exist in their own right as active subjects. Jakarta's theatre establishment may perpetuate the sense that there are few, if any, women involved in theatre. But women in regional areas have in the post-New Order era perhaps been better able to take advantage of the increased space for identity politics in part because there is less historical baggage, and fewer fixed expectations about what theatre is about. In addition to Randa Ntovea and Teater Perempuan Sumatera Utara, women artists such as Shinta Febriany in Makassar, Cok Sawitri in Bali and Inong in Solo have become innovative performer-directors in their own right. At the start of this chapter I used an example of a seminar about theatre in Jakarta to highlight the marginalisation of women from mainstream theatre discourse, and asked whether this was perhaps Jakarta specific. Jakarta (and to a lesser extent, Yogyakarta and Bandung) may imagine itself as the 'centre' of theatrical production in Indonesia, but it is far from representative of the broader Indonesian theatre community. That women artists have thrived in regional areas demonstrates the way questions about the relationship between women and men in theatrical production also demand that we pay attention to other types of power relations, for example between 'centre' and 'region'.

⁸⁶ *Suara dan Suara* was by no means unique as an attempt to use theatre to draw attention to domestic violence issues. Another example (among many) was the project *Bom Waktu Perempuan*, devised by Teater Kita Makassar and presented under the auspices of the Women's Legal Aid organisation LBH-P2i in March 2001, which also sought to increase public awareness of domestic violence and related issues.

The contest over defining post-New Order Indonesia is far from over. This thesis has already demonstrated that questions about identity have played a central role in *reformasi* era politics. The theatrical narratives that have emerged since 1998 point to an Indonesia in which gender identity, like national identity, is contested and will continue to play a central role in Indonesia's cultural politics.

**The performance of democratisation:
performing *reformasi* at the *Bunderan* Hotel Indonesia**



National strike organised by BEM SI (*Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa se-Indonesia*) rejecting fuel price increases, *Bunderan HI* Jakarta, March 2001



Image from an anti-violence action leading up to the *Istighosah* mass prayer session, *Bunderan HI*, Jakarta, April 2001

This final chapter of *Performances of the post-New Order* was inspired by a series of interruptions. In early 2001, I was regularly distracted from my ‘real’ research by the spectacle of demonstrations, strikes and rallies, many of which were happening close to where I lived in Jakarta. I was frequently unable to get to rehearsal venues and performances because demonstrators would block roads, causing long traffic delays. Luckily, however, the more I watched this spectacle, the more interesting the ‘performance’ of demonstrations became, and in some cases demonstrations were more compelling than the theatre performances I was ‘meant’ to be watching.

Although not fitting conventional definitions of ‘theatre’, the demonstrations, strikes and political rallies of the *reformasi* era were unquestionably performative. Their very success was usually dependent upon the length of time they could hold the attention of an audience, whether live or via the media. If, as Esherick and Wasserstrom have argued, ‘as a political mode, theatre is only as powerful as the audience that it can move’ (1990:842), many of the demonstrations and rallies of the post-New Order era were powerful indeed.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Observers estimated, for example, that over 800,000 people attended some of Megawati’s rallies in Central Java during the 1999 election campaigns. PDI-P’s final campaign day in the elections, 3 June 1999, was marked by an enormous parade involving an estimated 1 million

As Esherick and Wasserstrom note, successful demonstrations thrive on spectacle, generate a sense of carnival, and involve a cast of performers, often dressed in costume. Even when acting spontaneously, protesters often have a common understanding of the 'script' from which they are working: they know how to behave, what sites to occupy and what words to chant (1990:839). In the context of demonstrations in Indonesia, there is also often a sense that demonstrations are doubly performed: one's fellow protesters might not be who they are pretending to be. Are they *really* protesting or just *acting* on behalf of someone more powerful? Are they 'genuine' demonstrators or *provokators* (provocateurs)? Is the guy with the camera working for *Kompas* or state intelligence? (Brown 1999).

Much of the literature on demonstrations and protest movements discusses the symbolic importance of the appropriation of particular spaces (see amongst others Jordan 1998, Schechner 1993, Lazić 1999). As Richard Schechner has pointed out,

If there is a tradition (and not only in the West) of constructing grand monuments specifically to present performances - arenas, stadiums and theatres - so there is as well a long history of unofficial performances 'taking place' in (seizing as well as using) locales not architecturally imagined as theatres. (1993:48-49)

To extend the theatrical metaphor, demonstrations are often planned with a particular stage and backdrop in mind. Most importantly perhaps, successful demonstrations often attempt to subvert the symbolic order by appropriating language or symbols associated with state authority, and, like avant-garde theatre, often attempt to re-write and contest dominant codes of power.

people (O'Rourke 2002:238). The media audience for these events was, of course, much larger again.

In this chapter I will investigate the ways in which protesters and political campaigners in Indonesia have used performative strategies to achieve their objectives in the post-New Order era. I will do this by looking at one major site of protest, the Hotel Indonesia (HI) and its famous *bunderan* (traffic circle), in central Jakarta. Given that the *bunderan* HI forms the backdrop - and provides the context - for these performances, I will investigate in detail its symbolic and historical importance in Jakarta's 'imagined environment' (Donald 1992). I will argue that, for various reasons, the *bunderan* HI (and the HI itself) has become a site at which the idea of 'Indonesia' itself has been both (re)constructed and contested. I will then look briefly at what was perhaps the largest scale performance to be held in Indonesia and at the *bunderan* HI since the fall of Suharto: the 1999 election campaigns. Finally, I will argue that in some respects, *reformasi* itself has existed at a performative rather than 'real' level, and that an understanding of political communication in Indonesia depends very much on taking into account the 'performance' of politics.

Writing about 'other' types of performance

The idea that 'everyday life' is 'performed' and that performances take place beyond the context of stage and screen is not especially new. Luminaries such as performance studies scholar Richard Schechner (1985; 1995), anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) and sociologist Erving Goffman (1959; 1963) have investigated new ways of reading and looking at performance and/in everyday life. Schechner, for example, expands previous notions of what might constitute 'performance', by arguing that it includes 'entertainments, arts, rituals, politics, economics, and person to person interactions'. Essentially, he argues, 'performance' can be characterised as 'behaviour heightened, if ever so slightly, and publicly displayed: twice-behaved behaviour' (1985:118). In the introduction to his recent collection *Radical Street Performance*, Jan Cohen-Cruz likewise writes that 'performance' is

expressive behaviour intended for public viewing. It includes but is not limited to theatre, which typically keeps actors and spectators in their

respective places through presentational conventions supporting a pre-set script. (1998:1)

Since the 1970s, accounts of the 'politics' of performance have started to include analyses of demonstrations as well as state-sanctioned rituals as performative acts. The use of performative forms such as parades and processions for political purposes is well documented. As Cohen-Cruz points out, some of the most 'successful' regimes (both left and right wing) have been those who have actively exploited the power of performance. He writes, for example, 'Broadcasting the Aryan ideal to the masses...the 1934 Nuremberg Party rally is a paradigm of street theatre as media opportunity' (1998:169). In his analysis of the 1982 General Elections in Solo, John Pemberton shows how the New Order's control over the population was not only about controlling public space but also about defining the way in which identities and ideological positions could be 'performed' (1986). As soon as unofficial identities are expressed through performances in public spaces, official culture's claims to 'authority, stability, sobriety, immutability and immortality' (Schechner 1993:46) come into question and different sorts of futures and political spaces are imaginable.



PDI -P Birthday Celebrations, Jakarta, January 2002
Photo : Kompas



PPP Birthday Celebrations, Senayan Stadium Jakarta 2002
Photo : Kompas

While to an extent there are rules and unwritten 'scripts' which help to shape the performance of demonstrations, what makes them *dangerous* - at least from the state's perspective - is often that the outcome is unknown. The inherent danger (and drama) of demonstrations and other public performances exists perhaps in the *tension* between the known patterns of behaviour (Schechner

1993:71) and the possibility for surprise, for the extreme uncertainty that often accompanies the subversion of dominant orders (whether symbolic or spatial) and the re-writing of existing codes of power .

Much of the literature on demonstrations and protest movements discusses the ways in which protests engage with the built environment and involves the occupation of spaces which have often been encoded in different ways by the state. The Brandenburg Gate, Tianemen Square and the Hotel Indonesia are all significant sites which represent aspects of the way their respective States constructed nationhood. Part of the attraction of demonstrating in these spaces is also that they are used also for the purposes of state sanctioned rituals. In the case of the Hotel Indonesia, as I will argue later, the site's role in the construction of Indonesian postcolonial modernity and identity makes it all the more powerful in the local symbolic economy. In spaces like the *bunderan* HI, protest actions deliberately challenge some of the dominant, stable narratives of national identity. Looking at the relationship between human action and the built environment makes sense because both involve representational practices that draw upon each-other. As Anthony King points out,

Spatial, building and architectural practices are representations, as also are the material, physical and spatial forms that result. Human action, behaviour, protests, celebrations and contestations are likewise representational practices making manifest the attitudes, values and priorities which inform them. (King 1996:5)

It has been argued that in New Order Indonesia, the streets were 'the preferred canvas for reaching the public' (Berman 1999). Indeed, most people who have spent any time living in Indonesian cities will be familiar with billboards advertising not only government policies (family planning or 'clean up your *kampung*' campaigns for example) but also appropriate personal qualities such as discipline, hard work, obedience and orderliness. The New Order's control of public space is exemplified by John Pemberton's observation that,

With these five themes⁸⁸ its standard proclamations on the good of Development (*Pembangunan*) and the need for Security (*Keamanan*), its regal emblem of the protective banyan tree, and its invitation to join the *Pesta Demokrasi* (elections), Golkar controlled most of Solo's visible space. (1986:4)

Demonstrations in the post-New Order era, then, were very much about claiming back some of the space that had been so tightly controlled by the state. Performance was an important aspect of this process of 'claiming back', as I will argue in this chapter.

The power of demonstrations as political performance is, of course, significantly heightened by the mediatization of cultures. Baz Kershaw argues that in the West, as 'theatre' becomes increasingly commodified and loses some of its political edge and radical potential, the increasing power of visual media and communication means that regimes, resistance and hegemonies are increasingly 'performed' as they are broadcast to audiences of millions. As Kershaw writes,

...while theatre mostly has become a marginal commodity in the capitalist cultural market-place, *performance* has emerged as central to the production of new world disorder, a key process in virtually every socio-political domain of a mediatised globe. The performative quality of power is shaping the global future as it never has before. (1999:1).

In writing about the 1989 protest movement in China, Schechner points out that demonstrations were staged with the explicit intention of gaining media attention - it was no accident that these protests coincided with a state visit by then President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev. Schechner argues that in several instances it seemed as if the protest events only 'became real' when a

⁸⁸ These five themes are cited on Golkar placards which read: 'The Victory of Golkar guarantees material and spiritual happiness. The Golkar family deeply respects Religion and a belief in God. The Golkar family is always disciplined, orderly and polite. The Form that best fits workers, businessmen, and people of culture is Golkar. Golkar honours the sacrifices of national Heroes.' (Cited in Pemberton 1986: 3)

TV crew appeared. Chris Brown's article on the *Semanggi I* incident in Jakarta in November 1999⁸⁹ likewise describes various performative elements of the protest and its tragic consequences. He writes, for example, 'Cameras waited in the gap between opposing lines. The sound of gunfire was literally the cue to switch on the spotlights' (1999:9). Brown however plays down the media impact on the way protests are staged and made into spectacle in Indonesia, arguing that the influence of news cameras in a country in which the powers of the media have been so severely limited should not be overemphasised. Brown's piece is insightful and instructive, but we should perhaps not be so quick to assume that limits on media freedom during the New Order have led young Indonesians to be less media savvy because they are not 'in the habit of being represented' (1999:9). The protesters in Tienamen Square in 1989 were likewise unused to being represented in their local media, but this would seem not to have diminished their understanding of the power of global media attention.

Studies of demonstrations and direct political action in many contexts (including Yugoslavia, East Germany, China and Great Britain), have used Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of 'carnival' to describe the performance strategies used in protests to create spectacle and a 'carnivale' atmosphere. Bakhtin writes

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time, life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. (1984:7)

As well as being attractive to the media, spectacle and carnival also play an important role in subverting the dominant meanings of symbols and in making peaceful protests *fun* (Jordan 1998, Jasper 1997, Cohen-Cruz 1998, McKay 1998, Vujović 1997). As James Jasper has pointed out, we should not ignore

⁸⁹ *Semanggi I* was one of two incidents in which police used violence against demonstrators at protests held around the Semanggi interchange in Jakarta. These protests took place after the fall of the New Order, during the Presidency of BJ Habbibie.

the *pleasure* that many derive from participating in demonstrations and political actions (Jasper 1997, especially chapter 9). By looking at the 'artfulness' and 'creativity' of protest, Jasper writes, we might find an image of dissent that suggests a combination of 'strategic purpose, pleasures and pains in the doing, and a variety of emotions that both motivate and accompany action.' (1997:215).

Several of the ideas discussed above are reflected in Sreten Vujovic's writing on the student 'walks' movement in 1990s Yugoslavia. Vujovic writes, for example, that

The social, political and media effects of the walks were huge. The students clearly understood that their protest, if it developed only in the halls of their faculties would soon die out. Public revolt was manifested in outdoor spaces, befitting its nature....The carnivalisation of political demonstrations, with condensed times of festivity, plays, laughter and noise, was one of the main characteristics of the civil, and especially the student, protest. A culture of 'laughter and carnival' a feeling of the world as a carnival, established itself. (1997:200)

There are several parallels between this description and many of the demonstrations and actions which took place in Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia, especially during the lead-up to the 1999 elections.

As a number of observers have pointed out, however, it is important to avoid characterising carnival as inherently progressive. Sales writes, for example, thatalthough the world might appear to be turned upside down during the carnival season, the fact that Kings and Queens were chosen and crowned actually reaffirmed the *status quo*. (cited in Stallybrass and White 1986:13).

Umberto Eco likewise has noted that

Carnival, in order to be enjoyed, requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognised and

respected. One must know to what degree certain behaviours are forbidden, and must feel the majesty of the forbidding norm, to appreciate their transgression. Without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible. (1984:6)

Drawing on these ideas, later in this chapter, I will argue that perhaps there is a sense in the context of the *reformasi* era that 'performance' has (at least in some respects) supplanted more substantive, 'real' change. Are demonstrations in contemporary Indonesia really, as Chris Brown has suggested, an 'empty formality'? Perhaps, as Berman hinted (albeit only shortly after the fall of the New Order), there have been few changes 'beyond basic symbolism' (1999:77). A sense of carnival is fun, the appropriation of public space by millions of election campaigners in 1999 was clearly extraordinarily exhilarating. But several years later this kind of protest no longer had the same kind of impact, nor was it necessarily 'radical'. As Yuli Ismartono, a former *Tempo* reporter, wrote shortly before the 1999 elections

As a journalist I witnessed all this in Cambodia in 1992, Russia in 1993 and South Africa in 1994. It's like watching a variation of the same play. The stage, the props and the actors are different but many of the scenes and much of the script is uncannily similar. The common thread is an attempt to break with the past and begin a new more democratic life.... (*Jakarta Post* 4 June 1999).

Ismartono went on to make the point that the biggest challenges would be faced after the euphoria and spectacle was over.

Ismartono's observations lead to my next point, which is about the well established use of theatrical metaphors to describe political culture around the world and specifically in Indonesia. In developing their study of the 'political theatre' of the protest movement in China in the late 1980s, Esherick and Wasserstrom discuss the use of theatrical metaphor in Chinese political culture. They write that

In their (the Chinese public's) view, politics is a performance; and public political acts are often interpreted in that way. Thus, for example, a typical reaction to Li Peng's speech announcing the martial law was to evaluate it as a performance, and the reviews were uniformly bad: words were mis-pronounced, the tone was too shrill etc. As one Beijing intellectual put it: 'He should have been wearing a patch of white above his nose' - the standard makeup of the bufoon in Beijing opera. Similarly protesters at times represented Li as the clown or villain in propaganda skits based on traditional theatre forms.Metaphors from the world of the theatre are so much part of the language of politics in modern China (as elsewhere) that protesters and observers continually adopted theatrical turns of speech. (1990:843)

Observers of Indonesian politics will immediately be able to draw parallels with Esherick and Wasserstrom's formulation, as phrases or terms such as '*siapa dalangnya*' (literally meaning 'who is the *dalang*', ie. who is pulling the strings?) and '*aktor demokrasi*' (actor of democracy) remain ever-popular in contemporary political analysis. As Ward Keeler has noted

In political discourse, any important political official is liable to be labelled as a puppet manipulated by an unseen *dhalang*. Much discussion about the current regime has centred on who at any given moment the real *dhalang* is. (1987:15)

Writings on Indonesian politics are also often characterised by the viewing of events as a kind of *sandiwara* (play) which plays itself out with seemingly pre-ordained elements of ritual, comedy, tragedy as if there is in fact some sort of 'script' guiding proceedings. The tradition of linking specific presidents and/or political figures with *wayang* characters and the use of *wayang* for ideological purposes has also been well documented (Sears 1996b). During the 1999 election campaigns, *Kompas* ran a regular column entitled *Pentas Pemilu* (Election Stage), while in 2002, a search on the key word 'theatre' in the electronic archives of *Tempo* magazine threw up more articles about demonstrations and politics than it did about conventional theatre

performances. The various ways in which the Indonesian media wrote about the 1999 elections as if they were entertainment underlines the centrality of performance to Indonesian political communication, an idea which I will explore further later in this chapter.

In using theatrical metaphors to describe the dynamics of Indonesian political culture there is of course a risk that the analysis becomes clichéd. As Chris Brown asks, 'what is the point of noting a touch of melodrama in a legitimate tragedy (the *Semanggi* Incident)? Calling attention to aspects of stagecraft in Indonesian politics risks coming off as yet another analysis of how Java is like a shadow play.' (1999:9). In writing on the ways in which politics is performed, I hope to engage with more than the idea 'theatre as metaphor'. As this chapter will illustrate, the performance of politics in Indonesia goes further than metaphor. Not only do government and activists alike engage dramatic strategies to achieve their goals, the very 'reality' of *reformasi* and of political life lies perhaps in its *performativity*. In using ideas about performance and its manifestations in a variety of contexts it is hoped that new understandings about *reformasi* and about politics and performance in Indonesia will be enabled.

Bunderan Hotel Indonesia

Once likened to 'a luxury liner mid-ocean' (Koch 1978:15), and proclaimed 'one of the Sukarno regime's supreme achievements' (*Golden Guide to South East Asia* 1971, cited in Simpson 1972:82), the HI is in the centre of Jakarta - in both a physical and imaginative sense. To borrow a phrase from city-theorist James Donald, the hotel occupies an important place in Jakarta's 'imagined environment' (Donald 1992:427). It is central in memories about the building of modern, post-colonial Jakarta, when HI could be seen 'from any direction in Jakarta, looking strong and courageous (*gagah*), reaching to the sky' (*Kompas* 4 August 1996).

The *bunderan* HI is arguably the most significant backdrop against which *reformasi* has been performed. Geographically, it is a useful mid-point, on the axis between the Presidential Palace and *Monas* to the North, the Salemba campus of the University of Indonesia campus to the East, Atma Jaya University and the Indonesian Parliament Buildings to the South. It is one of the few open spaces in central Jakarta with such high profile and is a natural 'amphitheatre', complete with a 24 hour audience of motorists, street traders, *becak* drivers, city workers and of course the resident *polisi* (police) and *preman* (thugs) who are variously occupied on the edge of a dubious looking canal on the Menteng side of the street. Five-star hotels face onto the *bunderan* from three sides. One of these hotels, the Mandarin Oriental, has a CNN satellite feed on its roof, a feature that no doubt adds to the attraction of the *bunderan* as a site for protest. In the early post-New Order era, the HI itself was the hotel of choice for the Indonesian government (because they owned it), which meant that visiting members of parliament would usually be accommodated there. When parliament was sitting, therefore, the *bunderan* became a good alternative to demonstrating outside the parliament buildings, where tight security would mean less proximity to the nation's decision makers. By 2001, the *bunderan*'s strategic importance as a site for demonstrations was so widely acknowledged that local TV station Metro TV stationed a film crew permanently in the small street that runs between the Hotel Indonesia and its neighbour, the Plaza Indonesia.

Importantly, the design of the *bunderan*, at least up until 2002, when it underwent a major renovation, meant that relatively few people were needed in order to cause major disruption to city traffic. The *bunderan* itself is large, perhaps around 50 metres in diameter, but this space is mostly taken up by a pond, in the middle of which stands the *Tugu Selamat Datang* (Welcome Monument), built to welcome visitors to the 4th Asian Games in 1962. The area on which demonstrators could stand without getting wet, therefore, was only around 4 metres wide. Large signs discourage pedestrians from crossing the

road at street level (there is a bridge nearby) and declare that the pool in the middle of the *bunderan* is for decoration, not bathing.

Since the fall of the New Order, the *bunderan* has come to symbolise, in many respects, the process of contestation inherent in *reformasi*. Since 1998, the activities carried out at the *bunderan* have included demonstrations, strikes, competitions to place political parties' flags on top of the Welcome Monument, the distribution of flowers, pamphlets, meals of *nasi bungkus*, and all manner of noise-making devices to demonstrators and passers by, street theatre - also known as 'happening art', and of course the display of banners of almost all political and social persuasions. Street vendors have also from time to time taken over parts of the space in response to market demand: as a *Kompas* journalist noted, 'the *bunderan* HI is like a *pasar kaget* (temporary market): all types of street vendors arrive there the moment a demo is happening' (*Kompas* 13 October 1999). In the period 1998 to 2001, demonstrations were constant, with up to three or four taking place at the *bunderan* each day. Some involved thousands of protesters, others just a few lonely activists. Whether protesting about the price of petrol, the need to bring Suharto to justice, or the dangers of 'latent communism', the *bunderan* was without question the first stop on any demonstrator's itinerary.

Kevin O'Rourke has noted that

After more than three decades of tightly controlled public discourse, the advent of *reformasi* gave rise to countless seminars, forums and conferences in which political and economic issues were debated with unprecedented fervour. (2002:245)

Inside the Hotel Indonesia - thanks to the comparatively cheap meeting-room rental - a lot of these seminars, forums and conferences took place, contributing to the symbolism of protesting at a venue which not only had an historical legacy but was also a space where contemporary debates about the future

direction of Indonesia were taking place on a daily basis. There are many layers, therefore, to the possible readings of the HI site in the *reformasi* era.

The performances that happen around the *bunderan* are in deliberate dialogue with the built environment, with the media, and with each other. Although it would be possible to outline specific demonstrations or parades and discuss them individually as performances, in this chapter, I am more interested in the performance of *reformasi* as it has taken place in and through this space over time. As John Urry has argued, 'landscapes are not only visible in space but are narratively visible in time' (1992:21). The aim of this chapter therefore is not to record each and every action that has taken place at the *bunderan* HI since 1998 (although I will discuss some events in detail), but rather to use the HI site as a case study for the discussion of the complex relationships between public space, performance and political communication in post-New Order Indonesia. What is it about the HI and its *bunderan* that make it such a potent site for the performance of political demands? In what ways has the *bunderan* been most successfully transformed into a stage? What can we learn about contemporary political dynamics and *reformasi* from the ways in which they are played out and symbolised at this site? In order to answer these questions this chapter will now look at the way the image of the HI has been constructed and remembered over the last forty years.

Memories of the Hotel Indonesia

In order to understand fully the symbolic interest in the HI as a site for political protest in the contemporary era, it is important to chart some of the site's history. I will argue that it is the HI's importance as a symbol of postcolonial identity, modernity and nationhood that has made it such an appropriate and important site at which to register one's aspirations and discontent.

When it was opened, just prior to the 1962 Asian Games, the HI, at fourteen storeys, was the tallest hotel in Southeast Asia. The HI's own publicity material

recalls that at this time, the glass and concrete building was 'surrounded by *kampung* communities and 'jungle, overgrown with *kangkung* (water spinach), *eceng gondok* (water hyacinth) and wild water creatures' (Hotel Indonesia 1989:3). With its own water and electricity supplies and exclusive top-floor nightclub, inner-sanctum-like Wayang Bar and swimming pool, the HI was in the 1960s a favoured hang-out for wealthy Indonesians and expatriates. It was a 'world complete' (Koch 1978:14-18) which also offered guests a taste of the 'authentic Indonesia' through the art works displayed throughout the building and grounds, regular cultural performances and by the local Indonesian dishes served in its Ramayana Restaurant.⁹⁰ Such 'authenticity' came at a price, however, with several newspaper reports in 1962 wondering at the audacity of the HI to charge 1000 Rupiah (at that time around \$6US) for a plate of *nasi goreng* (*Indonesian Observer* July 21 1962, and *Merdeka* August 30 1962).

Early photographs show the HI towering over a brand new street-scape, an excellent example of modernist architectural utopia and an essential part of architect Sukarno's *Djakarta Raya* strategy (Kusno 2000; Leclerc 1993; Abeysekere 1987).⁹¹ In a speech delivered on Jakarta's birthday in 1962, Sukarno implored his fellow Indonesian citizens to

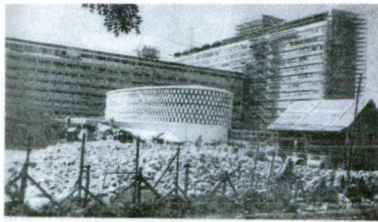
Build up Djakarta as beautifully as possible, build it as spectacularly as possible, so that this city, which has become the centre of the struggle of the Indonesian people, will be an inspiration and beacon to the whole of struggling mankind and to all the emerging forces. If Egypt was able to

⁹⁰ I have discussed elsewhere (Bain 2002) in more detail the way in which the HI used its cultural programs to (re)construct a particular kind of 'authentic Indonesia'. The centrepiece of the HI's cultural program in 1962 was a dance revue called '*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*' (Unity in Diversity) a 'non-stop 80 minute' performance of 12 regional dances, shortened and simplified so that tourists could understand Indonesian culture better and, most interestingly, so that *modern Jakartans* could reacquire themselves with their Javanese cultural roots (see also *Bintang Timur* 4 September 1962).

⁹¹ The *Djakarta Raya* strategy also included the construction of Jalan Thamrin/ Sudirman, the Semanggi overpass, the national monument *Monas*, and the Senayan Stadium. Despite Sukarno's flowery rhetoric about the importance of urban development, the strategy was not without its critics, many of whom claimed that ambitious architectural projects came at the expense of public welfare and the provision of basic services. For personal reflections on the contradictions inherent in Jakarta's development at this time, see Anderson 1990:4, Hughes 1968:5, and Jellinek 1991.

construct Cairo as its capital, Italy its Rome, France its Paris and Brazil its Brasilia, then Indonesia must also proudly present Djakarta as the portal of the country. (cited in Republic of Indonesia 1962:131)

Sukarno's rhetoric about the HI was likewise full of imagery of a prosperous, modern and independent Indonesia. Stressing that the HI should be 'the pride of all Indonesian people' (*kebanggaan seluruh rakyat Indonesia*), in typical flamboyant style he declared the HI's opening to be as significant as the arrival of the *Ramayana* epic in Indonesia, the discovery of America by Christopher Colombus and the eruption of Krakatau! In the Indonesian government's official *Yearbook* for 1962, the opening of the HI (and the arrival of its first guests) was presented as being as important to the nation's future as 'the problem of internal security' and the commencement of negotiations over the future of what was then West Irian (Republic of Indonesia 1962:174). The opening of the HI was one of the achievements that led Sukarno to declare 1962 a 'Year of Triumph' (*Tahun Kemenangan*) in his Independence Day speech of that year (Sukarno 1962).



Hotel Indonesia in 1962

Photo: *Indonesia 1962*: Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Jalan Thamrin from the *bunderan* HI, 1962

Photo: *Indonesia 1962*: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Leading up to and around the time of its opening, the HI, 'luxury liner mid-ocean', was making headlines like few had before. Long before the hotel was actually opened there was regular mention of it in the Indonesian media. An *Antara* Bulletin of 5 July 1962 declared, for example,

The 14 storey Hotel Indonesia, a gigantic building of national pride is also nearing its completion. Work at this hotel is being done in shifts, day and night (*Antara* 5 July 1962).

Articles noted, for example, the training of staff overseas, and described in detail the roles and outfits of bellboys and lift hostesses, the hotel's world class dry cleaning service, the specific make of the air conditioning system and of course the price of the rooms and the food in the Ramayana restaurant. Needless to say, the arrival of the HI's first guest, a Mr Allen Atwell of the Rockefeller Foundation, received front page coverage in several papers (*Indonesian Observer* 17 July 1962). The HI was 'the talk of the town', according to one paper, in an article that went on to add that 'the exorbitant price of fried rice at the hotel notwithstanding, the man in the street still looks with awe at the majestic, modern building.' (*Indonesian Observer* 21 July 1962).

Funded by the Japanese and managed (until the 1970s) by an international hotel chain (Abeyasekera 1987), the HI was designed by an American architect, Abel Sorensen. The HI's spin doctors took care, therefore, to make it clear that foreign expertise had been invited on the grounds that it didn't involve 'contractual agreements that would disadvantage us' and that Indonesian hotel managers would be trained so that eventually the hotel could 'stand on its own feet' (*berdikari*) (Hotel Indonesia 1989:1). At the same time, Jakarta was signalling to the world its new found modernity by opening itself up to the world: the Asian Games, and the building of major tourism infrastructure, represented the beginning of Indonesia's engagement - on its own terms - with the rest of the world, so that by 1962 passengers could 'Fly to the Old World the New World Way', according to a Thai International Airlines' advertising campaign.⁹²

All of this hype contributed to the construction of the image of the HI as a world class facility that - along with the hosting of the 4th Asian Games, and the completion of other significant building projects - would help to put Jakarta on the map as the leading modern city of the 'New World'. The building of the HI

⁹² See *Indonesian Observer* 6 July 1962 for more on the early development of the tourist industry in Indonesia. For an interesting discussion of the development of tourism as a key feature of twentieth century modernity see Ramusak (1995).

and the *Djakarta Raya* project signalled, therefore, the beginning of the Indonesian experience of modernity, at least in terms of its architecture and built environment. Spatially, the construction of the new city also signified an important move away from the old colonial centre of Jakarta. As Abidin Kusno (2000) points out in his excellent account of architecture and politics in Indonesia, it is important to note that Sukarno chose to develop this new city in what is internationally known as the 'modern' style. Perhaps, Kusno argues, this style encapsulated something of the new vision for nationhood that neither old colonial nor traditional (Javanese for example) styles could do. Kusno's discussion points to the tensions and contradictions implicit in the experience of modernity in the postcolonial world - that is, that the encounter with modernity is often simultaneously a rejection *and* an acceptance of it - an encounter characterised by the desire to be modern but at the same time not to be western. The HI exemplifies therefore, in style as well as in rhetoric, Indonesia's path to modern nationhood.

Unsurprisingly, as Jakarta's tallest building and as a landmark closely associated with Sukarno, and with the elite, the HI quickly became a destination for protests and demonstrations in 1960s Indonesia. One of the earliest such events was a demonstration held in early September 1962, at which protesters called for the resignation of a character named Sondhi who was then the Senior Vice-President of the Asian Games Federation, and who had reportedly 'insulted' Indonesia by trying to withdraw their right to host the Games. According to newspaper reports, an angry crowd of several thousand people went to the Indian Embassy in Jalan Kebon Sirih, caused some damage to property there and then headed for the *bunderan* HI (*Bintang Timur* 4 September 1962). By the time the *Angkatan 66* (Generation of 1966) student movement was underway, the HI was clearly established on the demonstration circuit. Photos from the era show students standing on the *bunderan* with banners reading '*Adili dan Periksa Sukarno*', ('Investigate and Bring Sukarno

to Justice') and a crush of people occupying the area around the *bunderan*, stretching down towards Senayan Stadium.

In looking at the ways contemporary groups have used and interacted with the *bunderan* it is important to remember, therefore, that they are drawing on 'scripts' that have their origins in pre-New Order protest movements. Indeed the language '*Adili dan Periksa Sukarno*' used by the *Angkatan 66* protesters was identical to that used in the *reformasi* era, except that it referred of course to a different leader. As one observer of the demonstrations leading up to the Presidential Elections in 1999 noted, the use of slogans such as '*Megawati atau Mati*' (Megawati or Death) appeared to be inspired by the language of 1945, when revolutionaries would declare '*Merdeka atau Mati*' (Independence or Death) (*Kompas* 21 October 1999).

The Hotel Indonesia, then, is an excellent example of the attempt to construct a uniquely 'Indonesian' modernity. In rhetoric as well as architectural style, it has been and continues to be a powerful symbol of Indonesian independence, nationhood and modernity. For these reasons it continues to be a site at and through which images of and ideas about post-New Order Indonesia are expressed and contested.

Skyscrapers, slogans and *spanduk*: Hotel Indonesia in the post-New Order

In more recent times, the HI has come to occupy a rather different position in Jakarta's imagination. By 1998, the hotel's days as a 'luxury liner' were long gone. Rather than being a luxurious sanctuary for the rich and famous, the HI is instead a spectacular, unreconstructed monument to the nationalist symbolism of the Sukarno era. Upon entering the lobby one immediately encounters five giant ceramic red and white flags, made to look as if they are fluttering in the wind of revolution, as they sit atop towering steel poles. Below the flags sits a lonely gamelan, waiting for its players. Apart from the ceramic flags, the lobby is filled with unironic nostalgia. Photos of the HI's opening, and of other

important events (such as a concert by the Bee Gees and a site visit by Sukarno and Senator Robert Kennedy), are carefully exhibited. Glass cabinets in the downstairs concourse display treasures such as the utensils and crockery used at the Hotel's first ever dinner party, along with an extensive menagerie of Indonesian government awards for five star service and facilities.

In the *reformasi* era, the HI's advanced air-conditioning system may no longer have been newsworthy. But demonstrating the hotel's symbolic importance to Jakarta, its profile in the press nevertheless remained high. Media reports emphasised, for example, the inertia of the government in regard to long overdue renovations of the hotel, the Jakarta City government's plans to renovate the *bunderan* to make it more difficult for demonstrators to occupy, the Hotel's poor state of repair, and the cancellation of a planned extension in 1997, due to the economic crisis. The physical infrastructure of the HI today is gloriously frozen in its 1962 modernity: tiles are cracked, carpets need replacing, pot plants are half-alive, there are cobwebs in the lobby and staff uniforms are dated (see *Kompas* 4 August 1996 for a litany of complaints about the hotel's physical shortcomings). The Wayang Bar, immortalised in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, has now been replaced by the hotel's Ganesha Bar, where the hotel promotes the talents of the 'Famous Entertainer Ebet Kadarusman', a sixty-five year old crooner who wears a 1980s red suit decorated with military medals. In the Hotel's Public Relations office, which I visited several times during my fieldwork, there are over one hundred awards and trophies (mostly awarded by government tourism authorities, for honours such as 'best service', 'best nasi goreng' etc) but not one computer.

These days the HI is dwarfed by its neighbours. It is surrounded by skyscrapers and luxury department stores, and what the authors of the classic text on postmodern architecture, *Learning from Las Vegas*, might describe as an 'autoscape' of flashing advertising billboards, designed to be seen from a passing vehicle rather than a pedestrian vantage point (Venturi, Scott-Brown

and Izenour 1977). A giant RCTI TV screen, framed by the giant words 'SATU INDONESIA SATU' ('One Indonesia One') sits opposite the HI, broadcasting an endless cycle of sports clips and ads for Nike basketball shoes. We see short scenes of boxing and basketball, of all American basketballers shooting hoops in their Nikes, made in Indonesia. The pond in the middle of the *bunderan*, when it is still at night, reflects the slogans of surrounding billboards: from 'AXA Go Ahead!' to 'Citibank: *Dompét Tipis* No Way!' (Slim Wallet, No Way!).

These days, the HI is not the only building on the *bunderan* to claim the name 'Indonesia'. If the HI was an old 'luxury liner', its neighbour, the *Plaza Indonesia* is a 747-400, and represents an 'Indonesia' of the era perhaps best described as 'late capitalism' (Jameson 1984). With its Japanese department store, Grand Hyatt Hotel and luxury designer clothing stores, the *Plaza Indonesia* is an exemplary piece of postmodern architecture (Jameson 1984; Docker 1994: chapter 2; Dear and Flusty 1999). While the HI is strongly and nostalgically grounded in place and history, the *Plaza Indonesia* and its Grand Hyatt form a perfect example of the aesthetic of global capital: they are spectacularly similar to other Hyatt hotels and malls around the world. Oasis-like atriums are filled with the murmur of cascading water fountains and the click of women's high-heels on marble floors, familiar *white noise* for the 'global soul' (Iyer 2000). The *Plaza Indonesia* has been built for an era in which global capital (in theory) has no nationality or home-town.

The Grand Hyatt, unlike the neighbouring HI, tries hard to keep what is happening outside in its place. In thinking about the *Plaza Indonesia* and the Hyatt, it may be useful to recall Timothy Mitchell's account of the city in his book *Colonizing Egypt*, in which he writes that

The identity of the modern city is created by what it keeps out. The modernity is contingent upon the exclusion of its own opposite. In order to determine itself as the place of order, reason, propriety, cleanliness,

civilization and power, it must represent outside itself what is irrational, disordered, dirty, libidinous, barbarian...(Mitchell 1988:165)

Likewise Sharon Zukin has noted that 'nearly all cities use spatial strategies to separate, segregate and isolate the Other.' (1996:49, see also Davis 1990).

Indeed there is little chance that the Grand Hyatt's guests would experience a close encounter with the 'Other', as it is almost impossible to find the hotel's entrance without a car. From the street, the pedestrian must climb a steep drive way filled with Silverbird Executive taxis (there is no side walk) and barbed wire barriers, or find a way through to the hotel from the shopping mall at its rear. Entrances are not signposted. The lobby is designed so as to maximise the distance between the outside world and the newly arrived guest (who from the main entrance must ride an escalator just to get to the concierge), and the calm, sanctuary-like feeling of the lobby is perhaps accentuated by the 'chaos' of the Jakarta *macet* (traffic jam) thankfully left outside. After checking in however, the weary worldly guest can relax in the Hyatt's café or lounge bar and if lucky, enjoy a box seat for some of the most interesting performances in Indonesia, three storeys below at the *bunderan* HI.

Ideas about the 'Other' and public space become important in the context of this discussion of performances at the *bunderan* HI precisely because the staging of demonstrations, strikes, actions and street theatre in this space has in part been about claiming back some of the space for people who would normally be positioned as 'Other'. The *bunderan* HI of the post-New Order era is surrounded by buildings that are owned by corporations or government. Aside from buildings, the space is crowded by advertising which towers above the street demanding that we think not about the coming revolution or plans to *bubarkan Golkar* (disband Golkar) but about LUCKY STRIKE: AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL, Citibank ATM cards and AXA life insurance. When a homemade *spanduk* (banner) enters into dialogue with these images it is making an attempt (consciously or not) to disrupt the postmodern images and

aesthetic of global capitalism as well as the meanings ascribed to the HI site by Indonesian governments past and present. Banners and the people who display them threaten, therefore, to (temporarily) re-code a space in which ideas and images of Indonesian nationhood and modernity (and post-modernity) have been and are powerfully imagined, represented and played out.



JAGA Negeri — Pribadi memegang foto gergas mendemonstrasikan Jakarta. Bantu Jakarta merupakan dari peranti dari rakyat rakyat Indonesia (INRI) di bendera yang digunakan, Jakarta, 16 Mei 2001. Pribadi memegang foto gergas mendemonstrasikan Jakarta, 16 Mei 2001. Pribadi memegang foto gergas mendemonstrasikan Jakarta, 16 Mei 2001.

Demo warning of the potential disintegration of Indonesia, *bunderan* HI, photo published in *Kompas* 16 May 2001



SEBUAH MAHASISWA — Siswa di mahasiswa Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ). Siswa di mahasiswa Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ). Siswa di mahasiswa Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ). Siswa di mahasiswa Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ).

Distribution of flowers for peace, *bunderan* HI, photo published in *Kompas* 3 May 2001

Performance and election campaigns in Indonesia

Without question the biggest show on offer at the *bunderan* HI since the fall of Suharto was the 1999 general election campaigns. While the *bunderan* was by no means the only location at which election campaigns were staged⁹³, it remained one of the most visible and most frequently photographed sites of campaigning. Before discussing the performative aspects of these campaigns, however, I will provide a brief overview of the use of performance in elections during the New Order. I will argue that while the 1999 campaigns drew on many of the performative aspects and unwritten ‘scripts’ of New Order era elections, they also vastly extended the range of identities and roles that could be performed.

Parades and mass convoys of party supporters were central to election campaigns during the New Order. These convoys usually involved party supporters parading through city streets using all types of vehicles (although the transport-of-choice was unquestionably the motorbike), on their way to

⁹³ According to government officials, as many as 97 open air spaces and 85 buildings in Jakarta alone were designated venues for election campaign events (*Kompas* 13 May 1999)

campaign venues, where there would usually be speeches by senior party officials and leaders, and often also music performances. In an unpublished work (1996), Helen Lette describes in detail the ways in which young men participated in campaign events in the 1992 General Elections in Yogyakarta. Lette highlights how there were a range of performative elements at work in the election campaigns: while the election itself was essential to the Indonesian state's own 'performance of democracy' (1996:62), campaigners themselves also actively performed their political loyalties, by joining rallies and riding motorbikes in convoys around the city. Importantly, democracy remained at the level of performance: while supporters of political parties may not have been able to explain what precisely their party stood for, they adopted outwardly their party's symbols, clothing and various other *atribut* (literally 'attributes', but in this context I will translate it as 'paraphernalia') during the campaigns (Lette 1996:68). John Pemberton has likewise noted that despite the fanfare and excitement in the weeks prior to the 1982 elections, in Solo (where he observed the campaigns) there were few attempts to discuss possible campaign issues or even to recruit new party members (in the case of PPP and PDI). Pemberton recalls, in fact, that

After following the (PDI) parade to its destination...one found no inspiring political speakers, no speakers at all, just tired marchers about to head off home through the back streets. (1986:8)

Election campaigns, as Lette argues, did however provide young people (young men in particular) with an opportunity to express themselves in public in ways that were not usually permissible in the tightly controlled environment of the New Order. Campaign rallies, staged in the streets and involving large numbers of vehicles, served as short-lived opportunities for officially sanctioned rebellion and the release of pent-up frustrations with the state. Due to the scale of the crowds, rallies also provided participants with anonymity, which in turn brought opportunities for them to take revenge against state authorities. Beatings of policemen, destruction of property and other lawless behaviour

were therefore standard features of election campaigns, as were violent clashes between groups of different parties' supporters. At the same time, however, the campaigns were closely controlled by the authorities, who determined the rallies' timing, location and duration, and ensured that such behaviour would not be tolerated at any other time. As Lette notes, the lawlessness of election campaigns was in fact 'licensed revolt', the license itself demonstrating 'how much the carnival is still based in normal law and order' (1996:72).

Aside from the performative aspects of the rallies themselves (in which ordinary people became performers in large scale spectacles), elections during the New Order were also characterised by the participation of 'real' performers in campaign events. In his detailed case study of the 1971 elections, the first to be staged in the New Order era, Ken Ward describes the centrality of artists and performers in Golkar's campaign, through what the party billed as its 'Safari Tour'. Popular singers and musicians, he writes, were despatched to provincial capitals around Indonesia, to provide entertainment at Golkar campaign events. (1974:85-86). Implicit in Ward's analysis is the idea that the scale of this performative 'Safari' was related to the extent to which Golkar attempted to 'de-politicise' the election campaigns. Earlier in his case study, Ward notes that the state's regulations associated with 'de-politicisation' meant that

...the campaign would be held in an absolutely security-guaranteed, indeed antiseptic atmosphere, devoid of political content, of political or ideological dispute, and even of social or political differences.

(1974:14).

The use of the Golkar Safari, therefore, was not only about creating spectacle that reflected positively the images and messages of Golkar, but also was about filling public space in ways that ensured that public order, and the interests of the party, were upheld.

As noted earlier, the use of *wayang* for political purposes since Indonesian independence has been well documented, and parties across the political

spectrum have used *wayang* as an important tool for communication (Sears 1996b), including in election campaigns. During the New Order, Golkar unsurprisingly attempted to claim a monopoly on *wayang*, and co-opted the most famous *dalangs* not only into its election-related activities but also into ongoing campaigns, in order to promote specific social messages and government programs. Citing Hersi (1995), Jennifer Lindsay notes that in the 1977 general elections even leftist *dalangs* imprisoned on the island of Buru were made to compose *wayang* performances celebrating, for example, the 'Revelation of the Golden Banyan Tree' (Lindsay 2004: pages not numbered). But *wayang* was not the only performance form exploited by political parties. 'Lower-class' popular music forms including *dangdut* - and more recently *campursari* - have also been mobilised for ideological purposes. The extent to which these performance forms *mattered* as a form of political communication during the New Order was underlined by the furore created by *dangdut* star Rhoma Irama's 1992 defection to Golkar, after he had supported PPP in campaigns from 1977 to 1987.⁹⁴

Performance, then, was an important part of election campaigns in the New Order era. Not only did political parties use performance in their campaigns, and co-opt famous performers into their cause, campaign events themselves took the form of large scale public spectacles in which individual citizens also 'performed' their political allegiances. It is this latter aspect of the performance of elections with which I am most concerned in this chapter, and in the following discussion of the performance of the 1999 elections at the *bunderan HI*.

The 1999 election campaigns

Unlike elections during the New Order, the 1999 general elections were relatively democratic. Voters had a choice of 48, rather than 3, political parties.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of Rhoma Irama's involvement in PPP election campaigns see Hatley (1994b:242-243). Lindsay discusses Rhoma's defection to Golkar, noting that it 'was surely a factor in the decline in his popularity' (2004: pages not numbered).

Election observers, by and large, concluded that the process was relatively free and fair, albeit with some notable exceptions (in particular North and Central Sulawesi and Aceh)⁹⁵. In many respects, therefore, the 1999 elections were putting into practice the 'democracy' that had existed only at a performative level during the New Order. But although electoral democracy had been legislated - and the terms under which the elections took place were radically different from those of the New Order - performative strategies still remained central to parties' election campaigns in the post-New Order era. The unwritten 'scripts' on which these performative strategies drew in many cases had their origins in the New Order era style of campaigning described earlier.

Parties' attempts to outdo each-other in campaigning in 1999 often related not to issues of policy substance but to the number of supporters present at a rally, the number of flags visible in a *kampung* or the entertainment value of campaign events. Media reporting on the launch of reformist party PAN on 1 February 1999, for example, focused not on the detail of PAN's 'pro-reformasi' position, nor even on the formal rhetoric of leader Amien Rais, but on aspects of the show put on at Senayan Stadium. The main features of this event included the unfurling of Indonesia's largest ever *spanduk* (banner), which measured 60 by 40 metres, on which was printed an enormous picture of Amien. The unfurling of the banner was followed by the presentation to Amien of a certificate for 'Indonesia's largest ever *spanduk*' and a 'colossal performance' (*peentas kolosal*) of a PAN-devised play called '*Runtuhnya Rezim Gurita*' (The Collapse of the Octopus Regime) that involved over 5000 Muhammadiyah students (*Republika* 1 February 1999). The point here is not the absurdity of a political party devoting so much energy to making a *spanduk* that it would presumably rarely have the space nor opportunity to use again, but rather that in the 1999 election campaigns, performance and spectacle remained a critical (if not the *only*) mode of political communication.

⁹⁵ According to O'Rourke there were 350 international observer groups and tens of thousands of local student volunteers (2002: 242).

Similarly, Golkar, in its official launch on 7 March 1999, staged an enormous event at Senayan Stadium, which was attended by over 400,000 people (only 150,000 of whom could actually sit inside the stadium). The audience reportedly began arriving for the event at 6am in order to secure the best seats. Involving over 100 singers and a substantial dose of rhetoric about Golkar's reinvention as a party of the people, party leader Akbar Tanjung's performance was assessed in the vein of theatrical criticism. As rain, thunder and lightning threatened to ruin the performance, party organisers decided that the show must go on: Tanjung's dramatic entry into the stadium, in a yellow open-topped jeep, and his speech, which was delivered in a 'clear voice' (*suara lantang*) were stand-out moments for one reviewer (*Kompas* 8 March 1999c).

Participants in the 1999 elections were highly aware of the fact that their performances were being scrutinised by audiences, both local and international. While campaigners in New Order era elections had mostly engaged with their street-side audiences, in 1999 they also constructed their performances with an awareness that they were being photographed and televised. Journalists from all over the world descended on Jakarta to document and report on what was widely billed as 'the world's most populous Muslim nation's first democratic election since 1955'. Election observers - both local and international - were also of course important invited guests, their KPU passes giving them box-seats not only for the public spectacle but for vote counting procedures as well. The extent to which the 1999 elections had become an international spectacle was underlined by the fact that travel agents in the Netherlands took the rather curious step of offering especially tailored election-watching tourist packages, which for \$US200 a day would enable the adventurous traveller to experience Indonesia's new democracy first hand. The head of the Indonesian Association of Tourism Operators even went so far as to say that, for a price, home-stays in the houses of political party leaders could also be organised! (*Kompas* 4 March 1999).

Costumes and *atribut*

An essential feature of the 1999 election campaigns, as in previous years, was the costuming and decoration of both campaigners (performers) and the spaces in which they performed. In the lead-up to the 1999 elections, the Indonesian media gave widespread attention to the appearance of political parties' *atribut* (paraphernalia). The implication of much of this media coverage seemed to be that Indonesian citizens would know that an election was about to be staged specifically because of the appearance of a variety of recognisable visual codes. The election campaign was therefore constructed in the public imagination as something that had to do with its *visible* and *performative* aspects (flags, banners, parades, for example) rather than explicitly with ideological contest.

The staging of election campaigns during the New Order had involved a significant number of flags, banners and other displays of parties' official colours and insignia. The need to market party symbols in 1999 was further heightened, however, by the way the election ballots were designed. Because Indonesia was at the time using a system of proportional representation, voters chose a party, rather than a candidate. In order to vote, they simply punched a hole in the ballot paper, next to the symbol of the party of their choice. Aside from the daunting size of the ballot paper (it resembled a poster), voters also had to contend with the fact that several parties had similar symbols. While the PDI-P symbol, a menacing looking black bull on a red background, is now well known, in 1999 the party had to distinguish itself from five other parties who also used bull symbols, including Megawati's old party, PDI, whose symbol was a white bull in a triangle (O'Rourke 2002:215). Increasing the public's recognition of party symbols, therefore, was a major aim of campaign events, and helps to explain why party paraphernalia and costuming became so important.

In the lead up to the 1999 elections, therefore, authorities sensibly made detailed preparations for a large scale program of public decoration. In Jakarta alone, local authorities erected 5400 flag poles, on which would be displayed 5184 officially sanctioned political party flags and 216 Indonesian national flags. These flag poles were erected in a total of 108 different locations around the city (*Kompas* 24 April 1999), including in the streets surrounding the *bunderan* HI. Aside from official displays, however, party supporters themselves actively plastered the streets and alleyways with flags, banners and posters. An important aspect of campaigning, therefore, was about claiming public space with a particular party's colours and symbols. As one newspaper journalist noted, 'they (political parties) make use of any available space in order to attract support' (*Kompas* 8 March 1999a). Normally neutral spaces, including (but not limited to) walls, bridges, people's houses and electricity poles, were covered with political *atribut*. At the same time, the *atribut* competed for this public space with voter-education billboards and slogans about the importance of an election process that was honest and just (*jurdil* - abbreviated from *jujur dan adil*).

While the display of party iconography in unofficial locations was tolerated by the authorities, the ritual of putting up posters, flags and banners generally would happen under cover of darkness in the middle of the night. Part of the thrill for the performers in this ritual, therefore, was related to the idea that to be involved in campaigning was slightly disobedient, a legacy surely of the 'de-politicisation' agenda of the New Order. Also reflecting this legacy of de-politicisation were comments made by an election official in Central Java, Abdul Halim, who said in relation to inevitable disputes over the placement of party banners and other *atribut* that

All participants in the general elections should consult with each other (*berembuk*), and should not allow *political sentiment* (*sentimen politik*) to emerge. This would be dangerous. We understand that all political parties want to get publicity and recognition for their party symbols, but

they must do this with mutual respect. (cited in *Kompas* 22 March 1999b, emphasis added)

The idea that the expression of 'political sentiment' was something that would 'be dangerous' in the context of an election campaign betrays the lingering nature of New Order era discourses about public security and order and their dependence upon the maintenance of political 'neutrality', particularly as they related to use of public space.

Public spaces were transformed in other ways during the election campaigns. Some areas were temporarily signposted and marked in order to display loyalty to a particular party, for example a banner might declare that 'You are entering a PDI-P area' at the main entrance way to a *kampung*.⁹⁶ The built environment was further transformed by the establishment of makeshift street-side *posko* (*pos komunikasi* - communication posts) which provided a base for campaign coordination at the most local level. In Solo and other parts of Central Java, not only were PDI-P's *posko* boldly decorated in party colours and surrounded by the obligatory flags and posters, sometimes they were also embellished with large murals depicting Megawati smiling serenely behind sunglasses, against a backdrop of rural workers toiling under large loads of agricultural produce. Officially, the only spaces in which the symbols of the campaign were not allowed were places of worship, government offices and at bus and train stations (*Kompas* 10 May 1999).

The use of party colours, both as costume for campaigners and as backdrop decoration, was so widespread in the 1999 election campaign that the production and distribution of *atribut* became a booming (albeit very seasonal) industry. Best selling items of *atribut* reportedly were t-shirts, flags and stickers. But political party iconography also appeared on items as diverse as

⁹⁶ Interestingly, some regions, such as the town of Cirebon, officially banned political parties from marking out territory in this way, on the grounds that it represented a continuation of New Order style political tactics. See for example *Kompas* 22 March 1999.

ashtrays, pens, calendars, cigarette lighters and cases, headbands and wristbands, hats, pins, ornate objects crafted in glass, capes and vests. According to one *atribut* manufacturer, during the 1999 election campaign there was a strong new trend towards a style of round fabric hat, for which he received an order for 4000 in PKB colours (*Kompas* 19 March 1999). *Atribut* manufacturers who had been restricted to making flags in only 3 party colours, now had 48 parties to cater for: the 1999 campaigns therefore saw these manufacturers become more promiscuous in their party 'affiliations' as they opted to produce costumes for numerous parties rather than stick with one party as they had done in the past. Democratisation - and its performance - was indeed, as one *atribut* manufacturer put it, a 'golden opportunity' (*peluang emas*) (*Kompas* 19 March 1999).

Commercially available paraphernalia was, however, not the only feature of campaigners' costuming. Most political parties also offered their supporters the use of free screen-printing facilities, with which they could incorporate party insignia into their own home-made designs (*Kompas* 22 March 1999a). Supporters' resources were pooled to purchase paint, ribbons, streamers and scraps of material with which to transform ordinary cars, motorbikes, trucks, buses and *becak* into powerful signifiers of political affiliation.⁹⁷ Make-up, face paint and temporary hair colour were also widely used to complete the transformation of campaigners' bodies into human manifestations of political identity.

Controlling public space

Various stakeholders - including the Indonesian Elections Commission (KPU) and the Governor of Jakarta - attempted in the lead up to the 1999 elections to outlaw road convoys and outdoor street-based campaigning. In late March,

⁹⁷ Lette describes the process of decorating vehicles prior to campaign rallies in Yogyakarta in 1992 and notes that in the community she observed, this was one aspect of campaigning in which women were involved. Women were usually not allowed by their families to join the actual convoys due to real and perceived dangers of being caught up in election-related violence (1996:65).

there was a strong suggestion from the KPU that election campaigning would be curtailed: there would be none of the traditional parades associated with campaigning in the New Order, and campaign events would take place in enclosed buildings with a maximum capacity of 10,000 people (*Merdeka* 30 March 1999; *Republika* 17 March 1999). Part of the rationale for eliminating the convoys was that they were dangerous, as indeed the figures from past election campaigns had demonstrated. In the 1997 election campaign period, 327 people lost their lives, mostly as a result of inter-party violence and convoy accidents (frequently involving campaigners falling from the roofs of moving vehicles) (*Kompas* 4 June 1999a; *Suara Pembaruan* 23 May 1999). In 1999, there was also widespread anxiety about parties' mobilisation of 'quasi-militant youth brigades' who would provide 'security' during the campaigns (O'Rourke 2002:238).⁹⁸

Despite attempts to restrict the nature of the campaigning, regular convoys and ad hoc parades were already taking place in many cities several months before the official campaigning was due to begin (*Kompas* 8 March 1999a). Faced, therefore, with the impossible task of preventing spontaneous and unregulated parades taking place across the country, authorities backed down and decreed instead that parades could happen but that their location and timing would be pre-determined. In April 1999, the KPU announced that a maximum of 10 parties would be allowed to campaign on each day, and that their parades would be carefully stage-managed in order to prevent them from meeting up and clashing in the streets. The routes to be travelled, and the times at which convoys were meant to arrive at certain landmark destinations (including, of course, the *bunderan* HI) would be publicised in advance, both to encourage orderly behaviour and to enable supporters not involved in the rally itself to assemble as a road-side audience. The parties deemed likely to have the most support (PDI-P, PKB, PAN, PPP and Golkar) would not be allowed to stage

⁹⁸ O'Rourke notes, for example, that in the lead up to the elections, there was a series of clashes between youth wings of PKB, PPP and PDI-P in Central Java. While seen to auger badly for the campaigns elsewhere, these clashes did not spread and were not repeated (2002: 238).

rallies on the same day. Each party would have three opportunities to parade, and there would be a multi-party convoy on the first day of campaigning. In another example of the way the language of performance was used to describe the election campaigns, the head of the body responsible for running the elections in Jakarta, Djafar Badjeber, also announced that parties would be able to choose between three possible forms of election campaign event, 'monologue, dialogue (question and answer) or a public meeting in an enclosed stadium' (*Kompas* 24 April 1999).

The lead-up to the 1999 elections was characterised by dire warnings about possible violence and economic upheaval, from both political analysts and senior figures of the New Order regime. The 'paraphernalia war' (*perang atribut*) was making the public anxious (*mencemaskan masyarakat*), one article reported, while by March 1999 there had already been attacks on election officials and public property (*Kompas* 22 March 1999b). New Order figures including General Wiranto and Suharto unsurprisingly predicted election-related chaos⁹⁹, with Wiranto declaring on 11 May that 'I get the impression that the election is unlikely to be safe' (*Rakyat Merdeka* 12 May 1999). Media reporting regularly drew attention to the scale of election-related security operations, one newspaper for example noting that as many as 23568 security personnel would be deployed in Jakarta alone (*Media Indonesia* 20 April 1999). There were also reports of comments made by the police that there were elements in society who wanted to bring about the failure of the election process (*menggagalkan pemilu*) by engaging in violent inter-party clashes (*Media Indonesia* 14 April 1999). These reports rarely noted, however, that if anyone hoped the elections would fail, it was in fact Suharto and Wiranto, and not the campaigners involved in election parades. Again underlining the importance of performance as a mode of political communication, community concern over possible election-related violence was mobilised for the staging of

⁹⁹ See for example reporting in *Jakarta Post*, *Merdeka* and *Republika* on 15 April 1999.

a concert and rally at Senayan Stadium on 16 May, by a group calling themselves 'Indonesian Families for a Peaceful General Election' (*Keluarga Indonesia untuk Pemilu Damai*) (*Republika* 17 May).

Despite these warnings, however, the election campaigns were relatively peaceful. Political parties with different platforms appeared to co-exist comfortably, even when they accidentally ended up parading in the same place at the same time. On 27 May, for example, when supporters of reformist PAN and pro-status quo *Partai Republik* (Republic Party) found themselves heading towards the *bunderan* HI at exactly the same time, they smiled and waved for the camera instead of demonstrating any outward animosity. The media went so far as to congratulate them for the 'familial atmosphere' (*suasana persaudaraan*) in which their parade down Jalan Thamrin took place (see for example *Media Indonesia* 28 May 1999). In most places, the few reported violent incidents involved damage to Golkar property and *atribut*: in the Central Javanese towns of Tegal and Semarang, for example, there were reports of 'mysterious' disappearance of large numbers of Golkar flags (*Kompas* 8 March 1999b; 22 March 1999b), while on the first day of campaigning in Jakarta, Golkar was effectively prevented from joining a multi-party carnival after several of its vehicles were damaged (*Kompas* 20 May 1999). In an article published shortly before the official campaigning began, Ulil Abshar-Abdalla noted that while there had been predictions of rioting, looting and general public disorder, the pre-election period had been 'relaxed' (*santai-santai saja*) rather than 'tense' (*tegang*) and that flags and a carnival-like atmosphere were the main characteristics of the so-called 'dangerous' unofficial Sunday convoys around Jakarta (Abshar-Abdalla 1999).

'Carnival' and 'festival' became words widely used to describe the election campaigns, as they unfolded in late May and early June of 1999. Describing PDI-P's final day of campaigning on 3 June, O'Rourke wrote, for example:

The city was awash in a sea of red. It was estimated that over a million people took to the streets, which were so choked that the only way to move about was to walk. But despite the heat, smog and crowds, Jakarta was a seamless mass of smiles and laughter. Campaigners sang, waved banners and pounded on drums way into the night. Supporters of other anti-Golkar parties joined in the revelry - which was, in essence, a mass celebration of political freedom. (2002:239)

And Berman has likewise noted that

...there were carnivals as people flocked to the streets in whatever means they could afford - private cars, rented city buses or trucks, on scooters, or on foot. (1999:77)

Implicit in these descriptions is the pleasure that both performers and audience members (themselves also performers in the spectacle), derived from the campaigns. It is clear that there were elements of this enjoyment too in election campaigns during the New Order - but importantly, the enjoyment was derived largely from the fact that the campaigners were transgressing usually accepted modes of behaviour, by riding on the roofs of vehicles¹⁰⁰, by riding motorbikes without helmets, by expressing publicly an affiliation to a party other than Golkar. In the lead-up to the 1999 elections, when it seemed possible that authorities would ban outdoor campaigning, one PPP supporter was quoted in a media interview saying, 'It'd be a real shame if there were no parades. It'd mean we'd never again be able to sit on the roof of a car', while the experience of participating in a parade itself was described as an 'opiate' (*candu*). (*Merdeka* 30 March 1999). It is useful to recall here Umberto Eco's idea, cited earlier in this chapter, that 'Without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible.' (1984:6). The enjoyment derived from breaking laws - or even

¹⁰⁰ The practice of riding on vehicles' roofs was caused great anxiety for election and security officials, with good reason due to the number of vehicle related accidents that had happened previously. Criticism of the practice was widespread in the lead up to the 1999 elections, with one newspaper asking why it was that campaigners would persist with standing on top of buses with their banners when there were 'plenty of empty seats inside' (*Suara Pembaruan* 23 May 1999)

breaking out of ordinary patterns of behaviour - was therefore common to the election campaigns of both the New Order and post-New Order eras. But while election campaign parades during the New Order era frequently resulted in violent clashes and could 'very quickly become ugly if the participants did not receive appropriate responses from bystanders to their hand-waves and catch-cries' (Lette 1996:69), the 1999 elections seemed to transcend this. To an extent, then, the pleasure derived from campaigning in the post-New Order era was not only about transgressing the boundaries of socially accepted public behaviour, but also about genuinely celebrating something that had not existed before: the right to choose freely which political party to support. The 1999 elections drew upon elements of carnival, and upon the 'unwritten scripts' of New Order era campaigns, but they also moved beyond them.

Performances of democratisation at the *bunderan* HI

The *bunderan* HI was the centrepiece of the performance of democratisation in the 1999 elections. While sheer numbers meant that parades usually could not actually 'stop', as smaller demonstrations and rallies often do, at the *bunderan*, it remained an important site for their performances. It was one of the most important vantage points from which to watch the campaign convoys, and a key landmark which all parades would pass, often on their way to Senayan Stadium from the National Monument *Monas*. While individual parties could use the *bunderan* on their assigned campaigning days, they were not allowed to occupy it on a constant basis. Reflecting the site's symbolic importance, and the notion that it was a space 'owned' by the public, it was not possible for any one party, no matter how large or popular, to claim permanently the *bunderan* HI.

Campaign rallies passing through the *bunderan* HI shared many features of campaign rallies elsewhere in Indonesia. *Atribut*, naturally, played an important role, and the performance of the convoys often revolved around making effective use of flags, banners, noise making devices and musical instruments. Car horns, drums and portable *dangdut* beatboxes joined more official party

sound systems, which were often rigged up on the backs of trucks. Busses, often with plenty of empty seats inside, would drive slowly, carrying a full roof-top of campaigners, each wearing their own interpretation of party costume. It was difficult, often, to distinguish between participants in the convoy and bystanders, who also often wore party *atribut* and carried flags. Parties in many cases developed hand gestures, which would be performed by the campaigners, and imitated by the 'audience'. At the *bunderan* HI, campaigners' performances often appeared to come to a peak, perhaps because of the camera crews perched at every possible vantage point, perhaps because of the symbolic significance of the site. Massive tides of colourful voters' bodies filled public space in ways that perhaps had never before been imagined.

The activities of global capital that usually dominate the area surrounding the *bunderan* HI were inevitably disrupted by the election campaigns. Some of the surrounding buildings, including the shopping mall part of the Plaza Indonesia, closed down for most of the campaign period, not wanting to risk possible looting and rioting by campaigners. But although international business may have temporarily closed, the campaigns offered new commercial opportunities for local street traders, who flocked to the area to sell food, drinks and of course election *atribut* to campaigners. While the electronic billboard declaring 'LUCKY STRIKE: AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL' remained a permanent fixture of the *bunderan*, the giant RCTI TV screen was converted temporarily from Nike advertisement into a medium for broadcasting voter education messages. The Hotel Indonesia, meanwhile, remained steadfastly open for business, providing a geographically strategic location where political party officials and leaders could meet, organise and, of course, stay.

The Welcome Monument, which stands several storeys high in the centre of the *bunderan* HI, provided a particularly compelling opportunity for campaign spectacle. Fearless party supporters participated in unofficial competitions to see which party could be the first to climb to the top of the monument and

unfurl a flag. After several attempts, campaigners for PPP were the first to reach the top, but before the campaign period ended, PKB, PND, PK, PBB and PAN had also achieved the distinction of seeing their *atribut* flying high, beside the monument's statue of a waving boy and girl. The dangers involved in attempting such a feat were underscored when an activist for PARI (*Partai Rakyat Indonesia*) fell off the monument before reaching the top and had to be rushed to hospital (*Kompas* 3 June 1999).

PARI's attempt to climb the Welcome Monument was not, however, notable only for the injuries sustained by this unfortunate supporter. Having attempted the monument climb in the middle of the night (at around 1am) on the morning before their final campaigning day, PARI had evidently also broken election regulations. Over one thousand PARI supporters had been present for the monument climb, which had taken place shortly after party leader Agus Miftach delivered a lengthy speech from the back of a truck, urging supporters to remain true to the principles of *reformasi*. One media report described the atmosphere around the *bunderan* HI that night as being 'like a night market, with the sounds of *dangdut* songs playing from a ten thousand watt sound system that had been set up there' (*Kompas* 3 June 1999). PDI-P supporters also hung around the *bunderan* and periodically drove in convoys around the city. Part of PARI's rationale for staging the event in the middle of the night was that they shared their final day of campaigning with the hugely popular PDI-P: they had no chance, party leaders argued, of gaining any attention should they attempt to compete with PDI-P. But police and election officials were unsympathetic: PARI had broken the rules, and as a result, their *atribut* were taken down before their final parade.

The then head of POLRI, General Roesmanhadi said in an interview, 'They broke the rules.... is this that thing they call *reformasi*?' Meanwhile, a senior election official, Satya Arinanto noted that PARI had broken election regulations because they had 'organised a blockade of a public place'

(*mengadakan pemblokiran terhadap tempat umum*), while other officials said that PARI's main offence was to stage an event outside of official campaigning hours. (*Kompas* 3 June 1999). Whatever the grounds on which PARI's flags and banners were removed, the reaction of officials to their staging of an unsanctioned campaign event at the *bunderan* HI highlighted several important things. Firstly, the authorities were clearly selective in making an example of a less popular party, like PARI. After all, PDI-P supporters were also conducting convoys and other activities well into the night and in public spaces, including the *bunderan* HI. By cracking-down on PARI, however, they could demonstrate to others that despite all the fun being had, the authorities were still 'in control'. Secondly, the crack-down on PARI's illicit election campaigning drew attention to the fact that while the campaigns may have taken place in a 'carnival' like atmosphere, the limits of this carnival were still very much defined by the state. It is useful, at this juncture, to recall Bakhtin's observation that 'During carnival time, life is subject only to its own laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom' (1984:7). What Bakhtin does not point out, however, is that the laws of freedom are inevitably always constructed within a system that has the power to revoke these laws when its interests are challenged.

The second example of election campaign related performance, to which I will now turn, is quite a different one. The political parties themselves were not the only groups using performance as part of their election programs. NGOs and government funded voter education groups, for example, often incorporated performative elements into their own campaigns, perhaps to compete for public attention with the performance of electioneering. The demonstrations and rallies of 1998-2001 often saw NGO groups exploiting a genre called 'happening art'.¹⁰¹ 'Happening art' is usually improvised, staged in a public space and usually designed to highlight a particular political cause. I have argued elsewhere (Bain 2004) that while 'happening art' is largely associated with progressive movements in Indonesia, its symbols and choreography

¹⁰¹ Indonesian activists and performers themselves use the English term 'happening art'.

quickly became a clichéd component of many protests and rallies. 'Happening art' in fact, rarely moves beyond the image of the semi-naked male body writing around in pain, often entwined in red and white Indonesian flags. Military boots and anguished facial expressions are usually deployed, as are slightly uncomfortable patriotic phrases such as 'my country is bleeding' (*negeriku berdarah*). I want to argue here that activist street performance is most successful when it transcends these clichés, as was the case in a performance called '*manusia uang*' (money people) staged in the lead-up to the 1999 elections.

Manusia uang took place outside the KPU office in Menteng and then around the nearby *bunderan* HI. The performance, devised by activists from *Forum Komunikasi Senat Mahasiswa se-Jakarta* (the Jakarta Student Senate's Communication Forum - FKSMJ), involved the deployment of several giant '*manusia uang*' in the streets. Spectacularly covered from head to toe in hundreds of photocopies of 50,000Rp notes, they proceeded to stop passing cars while handing out photocopied (but very realistic looking) 50,000Rp notes. Large hats made out of fake currency fanned out from their foreheads, while their movements were business like and pushy, as they thrust bank notes into the faces of anyone who would stop. Moving across streets like giant robots made out of money, the *manusia uang* were a visually striking, creative and funny intervention in the performance of the election campaigns. Unlike the election campaigners who were starting to fill the streets, *manusia uang* did not wear party colours, they did not ride motorbikes, their bodies were not marked with political affiliations. In steering clear of what were then the dominant and orthodox aesthetics of protest and election campaigning, therefore, *manusia uang* also achieved what many other less creative protesters could: they caught people's attention.

The '*manusia uang*' gained front page news coverage in *Kompas* (11 May 1999), not, I would argue, because the media was particularly concerned about

money politics (although it may have been sympathetic to the protesters' point of view), but because the activists' costumes and performance were so visually impressive. Likewise, passing cars, which may not have looked twice at the activists' protest had they been more conventionally attired, interacted with the performance (and indeed became part of it) when they accepted the fake money handed to them. Activists, like artists, face the continual challenge of transcending clichés and inventing new ways of challenging dominant codes of power and meaning. *Manusia uang* was a simple, yet effective, example of how this can be done.

As I have suggested earlier in this chapter, the performances of the 1999 election campaigns did draw to some extent on the 'unwritten scripts' of New Order era campaign rallies. Costumes, convoys, empty speeches and an extreme fascination with *atribut* and visual markers of political identity remained. Performances - not only by supporters, but also by politicians and 'real' performers - were also retained as important features of parties' campaign events. A sense of carnival, which had characterised some New Order campaigns, also prevailed. Without much substance to parties' rhetoric, democracy remained, at least on the surface, about 'performance'.

Notwithstanding the continuities between the performance of elections in the New Order and post-New Order eras, the dramaturgy of the 1999 elections did reflect, however, some of the substantial *reformasi* era changes. The election campaigns of 1981 and 1992 were, according to Pemberton (1986) and Lette (1996) respectively, vehicles for the performance of very constrained political identities. Not only were there a limited number of parties to support, a very narrow cross-section of the community actually participated in campaigns. Actors in the performance of New Order era election convoys were almost always young men. They wore *atribut*, rode loud and large motorbikes, they sometimes had tattoos, they probably were drunk during the parades. They looked - and in all likelihood probably were - angry and dangerous. While these

young men remained important actors in the 1999 elections, they were joined - perhaps even outnumbered - in day-time parades by a great many other people. Women, families, transvestites, former political-prisoners, *becak* drivers, stockbrokers, artists and intellectuals were among those who joined parades.

Election campaigning in 1999 temporarily transformed the *bunderan* HI. During the elections, the commercial interests that usually dominate the space as well as the nationalist memories that have become attached to it over time, were overwhelmed by something else. The performances of protesters and campaigners transformed the *bunderan* into a space that represented not the interests of global capital, nor those of the Indonesian state. Instead it became a site temporarily controlled by Indonesian voters, positioned as 'Other' throughout the New Order. Uses of the *bunderan* HI - throughout the *reformasi* era, but particularly during the 1999 election campaigns - have therefore challenged what Schechner refers to as official culture's claims to 'authority, stability, sobriety, immutability and immortality' (Schechner 1993:46). By using the *bunderan* HI to express political identities, protesters and campaigners have shown that the transformation of public space can be a critical part of the project of questioning and imagining different kinds of futures. The *bunderan* HI therefore continues to be, in the post-New Order era, a space in which the nature of 'Indonesian-ness' is contested and defined.

the end of the carnival

To borrow again from Richard Schechner, 'the carnival can only last so long - every Mardi Gras meets its Ash Wednesday' (1993:71). The celebratory, carnival-like environment of the 1999 election campaigns was never going to last: people had jobs to go back to, shops needed to re-open and Jakarta's fleet of *Metromini* busses needed to be returned so that they could again drive their normal routes. The *bunderan* HI, which after all was a heritage listed site, needed to be cleaned. Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso had made a commitment to rid the city of *atribut* by 5 June, the day after official campaigning came to an end

and two days before polling day. There would be a two day ban on campaigning in these final days. As noted earlier, voting took place without notable violence, and the elections were assessed to be largely free and fair.

The election campaigns were widely celebrated as an expression of the broad based support for democratisation and the opening up of political space in the post-New Order. But this would not, of course, convince the authorities that such political performances were a good idea. Numerous attempts would be made over the following years to prevent protesters from gathering at the *bunderan*. Governor Sutiyoso even implemented long-stalled plans to renovate the *bunderan*: he ensured that a fountain would operate in its centre, making the Welcome Monument much more difficult to climb, and he redesigned the concrete area around the *bunderan*'s circumference so that it was constantly covered in running water and therefore less comfortable to occupy. In October 1999, in the lead up to the Presidential elections, authorities announced a ban on demonstrations at the *bunderan*, which was resolutely ignored when the following day over two thousand PDI-P supporters arrived to voice their support for Megawati's bid for the presidency (*Kompas* 19 October 1999).

Early in this chapter I borrowed a quote from British performance scholar Baz Kershaw, about the way 'the performative quality of power' is 'shaping the global future as it never has before' (1999:1). This chapter has demonstrated the performative quality of power - and made clear the importance of performance as a mode of political communication - in contemporary Indonesia. The mass participation in the 1999 election campaigns demonstrated that the performance of political allegiance was not something that mattered only to a small number of activists. The scripts of New Order era election campaigns may have provided a basis from which the 1999 campaigners worked, but like the most successful avant garde theatre artists, these campaigners sought to transcend and re-write these scripts for a new democratic era, in which a wider variety of political identities were possible. The fact that these performances were taking

place in a space which had been so powerfully remembered and reified as a symbol of Indonesian nationhood, made them all the more powerful and threatening to the state. Attempts by the authorities to constrain and prevent performances from happening at the *bunderan* HI indicated the extent to which these performances threatened the state's conception of stability and public order.¹⁰²

A few years after the fall of Suharto, the novelty of public protest and the simple pleasure of occupying spaces like the *bunderan* HI had - for many Indonesians - worn off. Demonstrations, in many cases, became a disruptive, rather than an interesting, intervention in public space. But not only did the carnival-like atmosphere of the 1999 elections come to an end: the very strategies, words and symbols of *reformasi*, and the language of democratisation, were in many cases appropriated in ways that seemed to mirror New Order state discourse. Government sponsored billboards in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, for example, proclaimed in grand (post) New Order linguistic style '*Disiplin Mengantar Reformasi: Untuk Hari Esok Yang Lebih Baik*' (Discipline Brings *Reformasi*: For a Better Tomorrow) and '*Sukses Reformasi Tergantung Persatuan dan Kesatuan Bangsa*' (The Success of *Reformasi* Depends on the Unity and Integrity of the Nation), while the military adopted the slogan '*Damai itu Indah*' (Peace is Beautiful).

In an earlier version of this chapter, presented as a conference paper in 2002, I argued that *reformasi* itself was perhaps more about *performance* than about 'real change'. Disillusionment with the slow progress of the reform agenda, and frustration with what seemed the imminent return of New Order style politics led me to assess negatively the prospects for longer-term, 'more serious'

¹⁰² It is worth noting that the authorities' attempts to prevent protest at the *bunderan* HI contrasted starkly with their general indifference towards performances being staged inside theatres during the same period.

official election observer delegation), cheering or booing when it was announced which party had won a vote.

So while while the carnival may have ended, performance both by political leaders and by citizens at the local level, remains a critical part of Indonesia's political culture. The *bunderan* HI, for its part, may be relatively and momentarily quiet but will no doubt feature again in the contest over the post-New Order future.



Washing the *bunderan* HI, 1999

Performances of the post-New Order: Conclusion

This thesis began by asking questions about the nature of *reformasi*, its possible meanings for theatre and performance cultures in Indonesia and the relationship between performance and politics. One of the major points the thesis has made is that the fall of the New Order has meant that power has become more diffuse: oppositional politics no longer entails 'merely' opposition to the state or to authoritarianism, partly because the post-New Order era has been characterised by a proliferation of struggles for power. One of the challenges for artists in the post-New Order era, therefore, has been to find new ways through which to engage with this new political terrain, and to remain relevant.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that *reformasi* is not a singular or stable entity but rather that it is a long term and highly contested process. Although the period usually described as 'the *reformasi* era' may be over, the processes of reform and transition to post-authoritarian politics are far from complete. This thesis has described the important role that artists have played in these processes, and the variety of ways in which theatre artists have engaged with the political and social issues of their time. While artistic and cultural expression may be positioned by some analyses of Indonesian politics as peripheral to political change, I have argued that performance is an important mode of political communication in its own right. By paying attention to performance and performativity, we might develop more complex and nuanced understandings of the contested, unstable, long term process of transition to post-authoritarianism. Heryanto and Mandal have argued that 'what is missing from many conventional politico-economic analyses is a consideration of the complex and dynamic workings of power beyond formal institutions - especially the state apparatus' (2003:16). By positioning performance and performativity as important sites through which to study ideological change, this thesis has attempted to address some of the gaps that Heryanto and Mandal identify in conventional political science scholarship on Indonesia.

Reflecting the complexity of post-New Order era politics, this thesis has adopted a structure that enables multiple frames of analysis. As I argued in the introduction, I have used this inter-disciplinary approach because it was necessary to tell several different stories in order to capture the diversity of ideological contests in the post-New Order. Inevitably, I could have written a whole thesis under each of the four chapter headings, but by using all four in the one work, I hope to have portrayed *reformasi* as something that has involved the interaction of a range of forces, actors and ideologies. Each of the four chapters has therefore investigated a different aspect of the politics of performance in the post-New Order. The frames of regional and national identities, representations of violence and pain, gender ideologies, and performativity in public space each provide a very different window through which to view the performance of politics in post-New Order Indonesia. Explorations of performance, like analyses of political transitions, are always full of uncertainties: the structure and inter-disciplinary approach of this thesis reflects this.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I looked at theatrical expression in three different regions of Indonesia: West Sumatra, South Sulawesi and Central Java, against the background of the transition to regional autonomy. The chapter described attempts by cultural workers in these regions to problematise the ways in which mainstream arts discourse privileges cultural production in a select few 'centres', at the expense of cultural production in regional areas. Through case studies, this chapter investigated in detail the ways in which three theatre groups have negotiated and represented different regional identities as part of their engagement with 'national' theatre practice and politics. Some of these case studies showed how diverse regional identities have in some cases been celebrated in the post-New Order era, for example in the *Forum Teater Se-Sumatera* and the work of Teater Noktah. In other cases, however, the celebration of national identity becomes a trigger for the exploration of

complex questions about issues such as political instability and about the narratives upon which national identity is founded. In Teater Garasi's *Waktu Batu*, the project of 'Indonesia' itself comes into question while Javanese identity, exploited and deployed so often by the New Order, is a source of deep existential anxiety and guilt. Taken together, the three case studies in this chapter attempt to open up space for further interrogation of the ways in which contemporary theatre participates in the complex contest over defining national and regional identities.

In chapter 2, I investigated representations of violence and bodies in pain in the work of three theatre groups. In so doing, I argued that representations of violence and of military atrocity in performances have played an important and progressive role in making violence in Indonesia less of an 'abstract spectacle'. The post-New Order era, itself a significantly violent period in Indonesia's history, saw a proliferation of theatre groups using violent imagery as part of their political critique. *Reformasi* may have made it more possible to represent certain kinds of violence in Indonesian society, and such representations are intended by those who produce them to prevent the use of violence in the future. The extent to which violent images can transcend New Order paradigms, however, is questionable: as several of the performance case studies demonstrate, violence is represented as cyclical, inescapable, something which is almost impossible to subvert. The case studies used in this chapter also demonstrated how the human (usually male) body in pain has become one of the dominant symbols of crisis, conflict, confusion and change in contemporary performance. In these works, performers' distressed bodies become the main performance text: and they come to symbolise not only the suffering of individuals and of communities, but of the Indonesian nation as a whole. The case studies discussed in this chapter demonstrate, however, the ways in which theatrical narratives of the post-New Order era have continued to privilege the male body as the primary site of resistance and experience. Women's bodies are

conspicuously absent from most of these representations of violence and pain, and this has implications for the ways in which we might read these narratives. The third chapter of this thesis investigated representations of women in theatre more broadly, in the context of post-New Order shifts in gender ideologies. This chapter described an opening up of space in the *reformasi* era, in which dominant gender ideologies were contested and space for the expression of a more diverse range of gender identities was created. Some of the case studies in this chapter demonstrated how little gender ideology had changed since the fall of the New Order, for example by drawing on widely recognized stereotypes of women, by presenting feminism as a threatening and illogical discourse and by equating women's empowerment with political instability. But other case studies used in this chapter showed how some women artists have subverted these sorts of representations and used theatre as a medium for women's empowerment and for public education about gender issues. In some cases, the politics of gender can be seen to dovetail with the politics of regional identity: it is no coincidence, perhaps, that there seem to be greater possibilities for women artists in regional centres as opposed to in Jakarta. Finally, and in contrast to much previous critical commentary on theatre in Indonesia, this chapter argued that gender is an important category of political analysis, and that 'paying attention to women' and the ways they are (or are not) represented is critical to understanding the politics of performance.

The final chapter looked at a different kind of performance. It used as its main case study the performance of the 1999 election campaigns at the *bunderan* Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta. This case study described the ways in which Indonesian citizens have participated in the performance of democratisation itself, by expressing a wide range of political identities in highly symbolic public spaces, often in ways that subverted the meanings ascribed to these public spaces by the state and by global capital. The public performances staged as part of the 1999 election campaigns demonstrated the centrality of performance to political communication in Indonesia, while authorities'

attempts to control these performances indicated the seriousness with which these performances were treated by the state. The carnival-like atmosphere of the 1999 elections has now come to an end, and many of the strategies and slogans of *reformasi* were appropriated by pro-status quo actors. Nevertheless, while the spectacle and euphoria of *reformasi* may have come to an end, gradual change continues to be manifested in low-key ways at the local level. The carnival may have moved on to be replaced by new kinds of political performance.

Performances of the post-New Order, then, has used contemporary performance as a lens through which to describe and question various aspects of post-New Order politics and society. In the introduction to this thesis I borrowed a quote from the writer Afrizal Malna, who characterised the impact of end of the New Order on Indonesian theatre as being 'like the electricity had been suddenly turned off'. When Malna made this comment, Indonesian artists and citizens were perhaps only just beginning the long-term project of re-negotiating the post-New Order political terrain. Throughout this thesis I have described the 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 ongoing contest over defining and imagining post-New Order futures.

This thesis comes to an end at the beginning of another new era in Indonesian politics. A new President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has been directly elected by the Indonesian people, and is charged with a popular mandate to improve Indonesia's economic prospects and internal security. As a beneficiary of both New Order political patronage and the post-New Order system of direct election, Yudhoyono represents, perhaps, some of the contradictions of contemporary political life. And so, 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.

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