

School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages

**People, Poets, Puppets:
Popular Performance and the *Wong Cilik* in Contemporary Java**

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have analysed the ways in which the dominant forces of state and capital are shaping contemporary Indonesian political economy, social relations and cultural production. More and more of such studies have evaluated the significance of the “middle class(es)” as a burgeoning social force. Few studies specifically address the social agency of the subordinated classes, the bulk of Indonesia’s population, identified as the *wong cilik* in this study. Only recently have some scholars begun to take seriously the rapid formation of an urban working class as an increasingly important component in Indonesian social dynamics. An underlying assumption of this study is that cultural production, in particular, popular performance, is an important window on, and component of, *wong cilik* social agency. This assumption is pursued by observing three principal sites of cultural contestation, poetry, the shadow play, *wayang kulit*, and “modern” theatre. These three, often overlapping sites, are set within a broad survey of popular performance in Java, followed by a regional focus on Tegal, located on the north west coast of Central Java.

A bias in analysis towards the more formal and visible aspects of cultural production, such as performance text and conventions, has led to a distortion and insufficient recognition of *wong cilik* social agency. The first task of this study, therefore, is to develop a better approach to identifying and evaluating *wong cilik* cultural agency. The approach for which we are looking demands attention be given to the less formal aspects and social context of popular performance. Here, the relationship between performance and audience is central to identifying the cultural agency of the *wong cilik*. Depending on the surrounding social relations which constitute the performance, space can exist for *wong cilik* control over cultural production and meaning through audience participation.

During the course of a performance the social significance of its changing nature is closely associated with changes in audience composition and involvement. An absent, indifferent, sometimes hostile, *wong cilik* audience can undermine the potential of formal moments to reinforce dominant ideologies and social relations. Conversely, heightened audience participation often characterises the informal moments of a performance. The possibility of social potency is greatest in these moments of close affinity between *wong cilik* audience and performance. This is apparent in the relationship between audience and *dalang* (puppeteer) in many local performances of *wayang kulit*. The informal 'comic interlude', in particular, can provide opportunity for the articulation of shared meanings and concerns between the predominantly *wong cilik* audience and sympathetic *dalang*, dependent on their patronage and coming from a similar socio-economic background.

As part of the intelligentsia, the *dalang*, as with other cultural workers, has an important, often ambiguous, role in determining the significance of cultural production for the *wong cilik*. Here, it is important to recognise that the cultural workers, themselves, and their performances are socially constituted. In a study on

theatre in Tegal observations of audience participation assist greatly in evaluating the effectiveness or sincerity in representing or asserting *wong cilik* sentiment in “modern” theatre and populist *wayang mbeling*. In general, this focus on audience participation helps situate popular performances in their surrounding social relations. This approach helps avoid elitist or essentialist tendencies that may occur from an over emphasis on the idealised characteristics and conventions of cultural forms or genres.

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GLOSSARY

This glossary is a selection of Indonesian words, phrases and abbreviations of significance, or frequently used, in the thesis. (Jav) appears next to words or word phrases of Javanese origin not commonly used in Indonesian language. In general, translations follow Echols and Shadily 's (1994) Indonesian-English dictionary and E. C. Horne 's (1974) Javanese-English dictionary. Simple translations of these words appear in the glossary. Further explanation is provided in the body of the thesis where any Indonesian or Javanese terms do not translate readily into English, or where they have particular situational meanings relevant to the present study.

ABRI or *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* – Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia

adegan – scene in a play

alun-alun - town square

Bahasa - Language, eg. *Bahasa Indonesia* is Indonesian language

BAHRI: *Bersih, Aman, Sehat, Rapi, Beriman* – Maritime (Arabic). Acronym for Clean, Safe, Healthy, Neat and Spiritual

Banteng Loreng Binoncengan (Jav) – Wild bison ridden by boy symbol

becak – pedicab

Bupati – Regent

buto (Jav) – ogre

cerpen or *ceritera pendek* – short story

daerah pasisir (Jav) – outlying areas on the periphery of influence from the Central Javanese courts

dalang – *wayang* puppeteer

dalang edan (Jav) – crazy puppeteer

dangdut – genre of indigenous rock music

danyang (Jav) – village guardian spirit

DepDikBud now *P dan K* or *Departmen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* – Department of Education and Culture

eling (Jav) – aware/mindful

gamelan – percussion orchestra which accompanies *wayang* and other performances

gara-gara – great disturbance preceding the main comic interlude in *wayang*

GOLKAR or *Golongan Karya* – Functional Group, the Indonesian Government's political party

gotong royong – mutual aid

gunungan or *kayon* (Jav) – 'tree of life' puppet in *wayang*

halus – refined

Jabotabek – Greater Jakarta region, which includes Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang and Bekasi

jaipongan - originally folk dance music popular in Sundanese West Java
Kamtib – Civil security and order officers
kasar – coarse, rough, unrefined
kawi – old Javanese language/poetic and ritual language
kethoprak – a genre of people’s theatre which dramatises Javanese ‘historical’ legends
Kodim or *Komando distrik militer* – Military district command
kotor – dirty
kromo (Jav) – high Javanese
ksatria or *satria* – warrior/knight
lakon (Jav) – play/story which is usually dramatised
lali (Jav) - forget, forgetting
lenggaong (Jav) – village tough/bandit
ludruk – genre of people’s theatre involving transvestites and clowns
lurah (Jav) – village head
Mahabharata – Indian and Javanese epic. The story of contest between the Pandawa and Kurawa brothers over the kingdom of Astina leading to the Barata Yuda war
ngoko (Jav) – low Javanese
pakem (Jav) – stock character traits from the Mahabharata or Ramayana epics
Pancasila - State philosophy: belief in one God, national unity, humanitarianism, rule by consultation with the people, and social justice for all
pasar – market
pasemon (Jav) - allusion
PDI or *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* – Indonesian Democratic Party
PDMN or *Pasinaon Dhalang ing Mangku-Nagaran* (Jav) – Mangkunagaran Dalang School
pembangunan - (economic) development
Peristiwa Tiga Daerah – Three Areas Affair, a social revolution involving the districts of Pematang, Tegal, and Brebes on the north west coast of Central Java
pesindhen (Jav) – female singers in the *gamelan* orchestra
Piala Adipura – cleanest city trophy
PKI or *Partai Komunis Indonesia* – Indonesian Communist Party
PPP or *Partai Pesatuan Pembangunan* – United Development Party
priyayi (Jav) – Javanese court nobility or bureaucratic elite
Punakawan – comic servants in *wayang*, in particular Semar and his adopted sons Petruk, Gareng and Bagong
rakyat – the people
rame (Jav) – lively atmosphere
reog (Jav) – trance dance popular in East Java
ronggeng or *sintren* (Jav) – itinerant folk performance with female dancer-singers, popular in western Java
sanggar – artist’s workshop/base
sawah – wet rice field
Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia or *STSI* (previously *Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia* or *ASKI*) – Indonesian Arts Academy, Solo

selamatan – communal celebratory feast
seniman – literally artist, but usually includes most cultural workers
Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah di Surakarta or *TBS* – Surakarta Cultural Centre
Taman Ismail Marzuki or *TIM* – Ismail Marzuki Cultural Centre in Jakarta
tayuban (Jav) – itinerant folk performance with female dancer, popular in Central Java
teater rakyat – people's theatre
Tujuhbelasan – Indonesian Independence Day celebrations
Wali songo – The nine Islamic saints said to have spread Islam throughout Java from the 13th century
warteg (*warung Tegal*) – Tegal style cheap food stall
warung – cheap food stall
wayang – used here as a general term for performance and symbolism using Indian epic characters and Javanese mythology
wayang beber – *wayang* performance using painted scrolls
wayang becak – pedicab *wayang*
wayang golek – wooden puppet performance without shadow screen
wayang kulit – leather puppet performance using shadow screen
wayang mbeling (Jav) – mischievous/disobedient *wayang*
wayang purwa (Jav) – an alternative name for the Javanese *wayang kulit*
wayang wong (Jav) or *wayang orang* – *wayang* ballet performed by people
wong cilik (Jav) – subordinate classes (literally >little people)

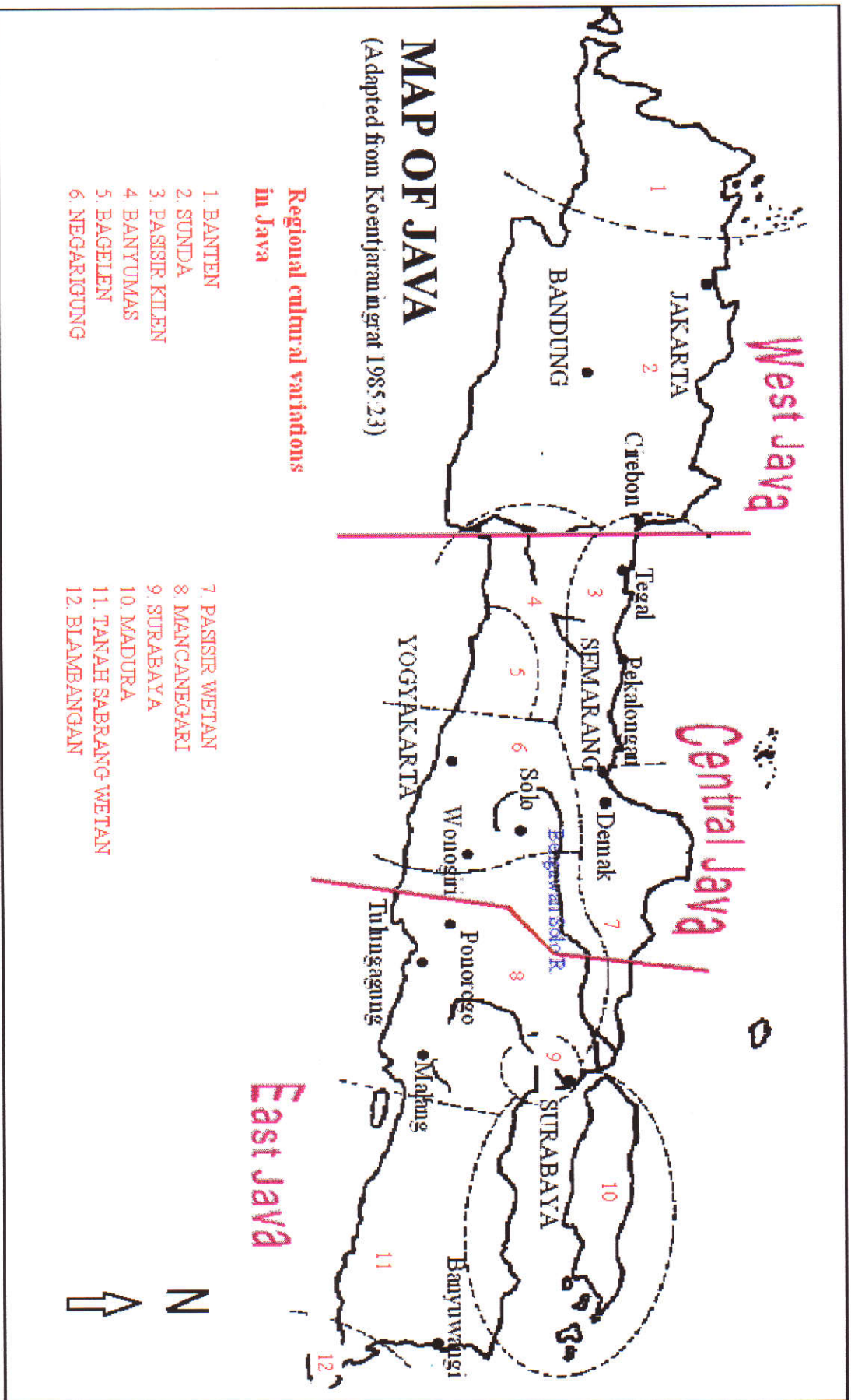
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PART A: BACKGROUND

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis explores popular performance as a medium for identifying the social agency of the subordinated classes (*wong cilik*) in contemporary Java. This involves analysing how, within specific social contexts, the *wong cilik* are represented and participate in popular cultural production. In general, I am concerned with how popular performance, in which the *wong cilik* participate, affects, and is affected by, social change. There is a focus on the three overlapping sites of poetry, the shadow play, *wayang kulit*, and ‘modern’ theatre. These three sites are like nodal points in a survey of popular cultural production in Java. The survey begins broadly then finishes with a regional focus on ‘popular’ performance in Tegal.

1. Key Themes and Contexts

People

The *wong cilik* (literally, ‘little people’) is low Javanese for people in the lower social order, the bulk of Indonesia’s population. The *wong cilik* can be characterised as the poor and marginalised. As shall become evident, the *wong cilik* are a broad, heterogeneous category that cannot be portrayed as simply small rural peasant and urban industrial worker.

A similar term to *wong cilik* in Indonesian language is *rakyat*. As stated by John Sullivan (1992:108), concepts such as *wong cilik* and *rakyat* ‘can appear quite reasonable as an empirical generalisation’, but are ‘well-polished stereotypes, wielded in and around the *kampung* for ideological affirmation rather than sociological elucidation’. In paternalistic state discourse the *wong cilik* are the

‘ignorant’ ones who must be shepherded by those in authority (Murray 1991b:7). *Rakyat* for the urban ‘middle classes’ may represent the ‘other’, the uneducated masses. By contrast, the subordinate classes and their sympathisers have also used *wong cilik* or *rakyat* in rally cries of solidarity and protest. The term *wong cilik* is admittedly subjective. *Wong cilik* is also problematic as a general reference for the subordinated classes in Indonesia, given its association with Javanese ethnicity. However, I have chosen the term *wong cilik* as a convenient gloss for the heterogenous subordinated classes because *wong cilik* is a familiar construct in local Javanese societies and popular performance, such as the shadow play.

A variety of common sense and scholarly perspectives on poverty, social inequality and class relations are used in describing the characteristics and social position of the *wong cilik*. It is necessary to disentangle some of these perspectives before using the term for social analysis in this study.

Elite indigenous exegesis is imbued with an ideology that obscures social division with an idealised view of harmonious social cohesion. Some scholars have adopted uncritically elite exegesis to help explain social stratification and dynamics in Java. White (1983:28) criticises Geertz for assuming the ‘world view’ of the village elite accurately describes the local social relations of a ‘harmonious peaceful village community characterised by solidarity and mutual aid’. The slight variation of economic status amongst the people is, Geertz (1963:67) claims, represented by the use of the expressions *tjukupan* (those who have ‘just enough’) and *kekurangan* (those with ‘not-quite-enough’). However, *tjukupan* (now spelt *cukupan*) in the discourse of the well-off can be a form of polite self-effacement that also works to underplay social inequity. In contrast, White (1983:26,28) claims the rural poor have a different perspective on socio-economic inequality, distinguishing themselves as the *wong ora duwe* (the have nots) from the wealthy or *wong duwe* (the haves).

Quantifying the *wong cilik* according to the symptoms of poverty is also fraught with subjectivity. Based on questionable statistics from Indonesia’s National Socio-Economic Survey (*SUSENAS*), the World Bank claims there has been a remarkable turnaround in the percentage of people living in absolute poverty in Indonesia. In 1970, 60 per cent of Indonesia’s population were said to be in absolute

poverty, reduced to 17 per cent in 1987 and 13.5 per cent in 1993 (Hill 1996:194; World Bank 1990).

Both the Indonesian government and the World Bank use such conservative poverty estimates to legitimate top down economic development based on capitalist modernisation theory, including recent structural adjustment policies associated with economic liberalism. It is, however, reasonable to conclude that through the processes of rural development and industrialisation abject poverty has substantially diminished over the last thirty years.

Hill's (1996:197) position on social inequality in Indonesia is similar to that of officials and commentators in the Indonesian mass media who trivialise public perceptions of social inequality as *kecemburuan sosial* (or social envy). However, most scholarly studies on local societies add credence to common perceptions of increasingly visible social inequality. Processes of 'urbanisation', particularly the shift from agricultural to manufacturing and service sector work, are radically affecting *wong cilik* living conditions. In particular the livelihood of many *wong cilik* living in rural locations is being affected negatively by changes in agricultural work practices that reflect the extension of capitalist social relations. Several studies indicate that the percentage of rural village and urban neighbourhood populations who are *wong cilik* as defined by their social position is substantially higher than the poverty estimates of the World Bank. Breman (1995:42-3), uses the World Bank's own 'near poor' criterion of subsistence living and acute vulnerability to economic adversity, to reach a very different conclusion. Breman concludes that all landless peasants in a village in Krawang, West Java, he investigated could be said to be living in poverty. Breman estimates landless peasants to constitute not less than 50 per cent of the local population.

The social position and agency of the *wong cilik* is better understood through observing the causes rather than the characteristics or symptoms of social inequality. This entails looking at the relations that reproduce and transform the *wong cilik*'s position at the lowest level of a stratified society. In a society rapidly being transformed by capitalism, social analysis based on class relations provides a useful framework for locating the *wong cilik*. That is, we define the *wong cilik* in terms of

their position within the relations of production and, in connection with this, their relationship with the dominant classes.

The subordinate classes, according to class analysis theory, are those who do not own or control the means of production and have only their labour to sell to capital. In the unequal exchange of labour for wages, a certain amount of unpaid labour is expropriated by capital as surplus value. In order to maximise profit, subordinate class wages are ideally kept to the minimum necessary to reproduce a surplus of cheap, compliant, healthy labour. As detailed in Chapter Three, a nexus of power and privilege with unequal relations of economic production reproduces social inequality. The dominant classes have greater access to the means of production, particularly land and capital. Through political and economic power they are able to accumulate wealth at the expense of the *wong cilik*.

The *wong cilik* have limited access to, or are excluded from, such wealth generating resources, offering their largely unskilled labour in a struggle to survive. Their essential commonality in this respect does not imply homogeneity. *Wong cilik* livelihoods vary greatly in terms of income and security, and position within the local hierarchy of social relations. For example, in urban localities the conditions of existence are different for the non-wage earners within the amorphous ‘informal sector’ (beggars, transport workers, and petty traders) as compared to direct wage earners (ranging from construction and factory workers and shop assistants to low paid clerical workers).¹ Similarly, the daily struggle for survival in rural localities differs for small land owning or land renting peasants as compared to landless wage labourers.

Class analysis assumes a dialectic relationship between labour and capital. An apparently intractable difficulty with this method of analysis is how to delineate dominant and subordinated classes. Many people within the *wong cilik* or

¹ Numerous scholars have had particular difficulty in locating ‘informal sector’ workers according to class relations. Murray (1991b:21), for example, sees the term lumpen proletariat as inadequate in describing a range of occupations, incomes and values from ‘maintenance level’ kampung vegetable sellers, to relatively well-off prostitutes, with petty bourgeoisie values. In the context of understanding working class consciousness, Hull (1994) also sees difficulty in distinguishing ‘informal sector’ workers from wage earners where the self, or family employed, are indirectly connected to, and dependent on, industry.

subordinated classes act as capitalists in owning or controlling part of the means of production or act in the interests of capital in the surveillance and control of labour. Minor civil servants, clerks, sales and service personnel, for instance, earn a meagre wage. Similarly, the capital of petty traders and small land owning or land renting peasants is so limited that they often need to engage in waged labour to maintain subsistence living. Increased dependence on wage labour and declining working conditions suggest that these people belong to transient lower intermediate strata that are undergoing proletarianisation. For the purpose of this study, the lower intermediate strata are incorporated into the heterogenous category of the *wong cilik* or subordinated classes. Nevertheless, it is important to remember the ambiguous social position of this diverse abstract category, both in terms of their position in the relations of economic production and their ideological outlook.

Many scholars are currently concerned with the issue of identifying Indonesia's 'middle class' or 'middle classes'.² A central issue to this is the extent to which the so called burgeoning 'middle class' is becoming a force of social change, particularly in relation to the prospects of democratisation in Indonesia. However, the theoretical construction of a 'middle class' as a relatively unified third social force, between labour and capital, seems unrealistic. A more plausible theoretical construct suggests the 'middle classes' are unconsolidated intermediate strata drifting between the main social forces of capital and labour.

Adopting Abercrombie and Urry's (1983:67-85) discussion on locating the 'middle classes', the upper level of the intermediate strata include executives and directors who act as capitalists making decisions about the ownership and control of capital even though they are salaried employees of the real owners or shareholders. Below them, the upper intermediate strata also include middle level managers, accountants, engineers, technicians, foremen, lecturers, teachers, doctors and other professionals. This group, sometimes referred to as the *salariat*, serve the interests of capital in controlling, overseeing, and maintaining labour and its reproduction.

² *The Politics of Middle Class Indonesia* (edited by Tanter and Young 1990) provides a range of early scholarly perspectives on the formation and social agency of the 'middle class(es)' in Indonesia. However, there still remains a dearth of empirical research on the 'middle classes'.

However, like the subordinate classes, a portion of their labour value is expropriated. Robison, who has provided the most rigorous analysis of the intermediate strata in Indonesia, divides the intermediate strata at the managerial white collar worker level. Those belonging to the 'upper middle classes' include 'professionals, managers and skilled technicians', whilst the 'lower middle classes' include 'clerks, teachers and lower-level civil servants' (Robison 1995:14; 1996: 84,88).

Indigenous exegesis, both commonsense and scholarly, also recognises that the 'middle class' is not a unified whole, but is split between those that have more in common with the subordinate classes and those that are closer to the capitalist classes. Members of the urban intelligentsia frequently refer to a social division between the *kelas menengah ke atas* or '[from] the middle class up', and *kelas menengah ke bawah*, '[from] the middle class down'. Which side of the fence a 'middle class' person is judged to fall seems to depend on empirical criteria such as occupation, education level, power or authority, income and wealth, and life style. The family of a professional or government official residing in Jakarta who owns several properties, an expensive car, subscribes to glossy magazines, often eats at fast food restaurants and occasionally travels overseas is seen as belonging to the 'middle class up' group. On the other hand, the family of a young journalist or school teacher living in regional Java who are paying off a small house, with refrigerator and electric water pump, and a late model motor cycle and regularly read a national newspaper is seen as fitting the 'middle class down' category.³

This understanding of the intermediate strata is important to this thesis in two respects. First, the *wong cilik*, or subordinated classes, is heterogenous, overlapping the lower intermediate strata. Second, relationships between people within the subordinate classes and urban intellectuals primarily within the intermediate strata are, as shall become evident in subsequent chapters, important in the production of meaning and identity in popular performance in Java. Chapter Three will, in detail, examine the *wong cilik* according to Indonesia's changing macro political economy and local social relations.

³ J. Sullivan (1992:118) and N. Sullivan (1989:7) describe similar local perceptions of the 'middle class'.

Popular Performance

Victor Turner's broad understanding of 'theatre' or 'cultural performance' embedded in social relations best describes the overall approach taken in this study of popular performance in Java. Performance is not merely a mirror that 'reflects' or 'expresses' 'social systems', it has a 'reciprocal and reflexive' relationship with the 'social life it grows out of' (Turner 1986:22). Not only is theatre inseparable from social life, it is also a creative agency in reproducing and, indeed, transforming society (Turner 1986:24). Performance is capable of critically examining, rejecting and providing 'more apt or interesting' alternatives to existing social norms and relations (Turner 1986:24).

Popular performance in Java variously combines a number of cultural practices, of which dance, song, music, drama, martial arts and comedy are the most common. Literature is also subsumed into performance. Local societies in Java have a strong oral tradition in which any literature has been written to be performed.⁴ 'Modern' theatre performances of poetry, monologues and short stories demonstrate this intimate relationship between literature and performance. In particular, the performance of poetry, encouraged from early secondary schooling, continues to be a popular medium of cultural expression amongst the urban intelligentsia.

In Java, as elsewhere in Indonesia, theatrical performance continues to be important in local rites of passage, such as weddings and circumcision, as well as in exorcism and purification ceremonies. However, the significance of performance is not confined to such occasions. Even in the growing 'secular' arena, theatrical performance is popular. It is found in local productions for national celebrations, political and social movements, educational institutions, tourism and commercial entertainment. A significant proportion of television and radio programming also involves theatre and other forms of cultural performance, whether broadcast live or produced specifically for the mass media.

⁴ As such, Day (1995:127) asserts that 'Javanese texts are themselves "performances"', and should be understood according to the local socio-historical contexts in which they were performed.

The 'popular' in popular performance refers to performances that are open to the populace or public as spectators or participants. Popular performance has a wider definition than people's theatre or *teater rakyat* in Java. *Teater rakyat* is often identified as 'traditional' theatre, or sometimes programatic theatre, performed in the communal setting. However, in this study popular performance includes both *teater rakyat* and 'modern' theatre whose audiences derive from a broader amorphous public. Popular performance also includes performances that may not normally be ascribed to a narrow understanding of theatre, such as itinerant folk dance or rock music performances.

My study is particularly concerned with popular performance in which the *wong cilik* are represented or represent themselves. Performances connected to the state or dominant classes, without significant *wong cilik* involvement in the process of production, represent the *wong cilik* as the 'other'. Such representations clearly differ from those where the *wong cilik* are more directly involved in the production process. As discussed in subsequent chapters, in order to consider the relationship between the *wong cilik* and popular performance, a broad understanding of the process of cultural production is required. The line between the performance and its surrounding social relations is blurred, taking into account inception and preparations, through to audience-performance relations, and post performance ramifications.

It is from this understanding of popular performance, its ties with surrounding social relations and the involvement of the *wong cilik*, that, as well as poetry and 'modern' theatre, this study devotes special attention to the Javanese shadow puppet play or *wayang kulit* performance. Here, a major concern is the interrelationship between the *wayang* puppeteer (*dalang*) and audience (of which the majority are *wong cilik*), and the extension of that relationship between *wayang kulit* and contemporary society.

Java, Javanese Culture and the Indonesian Nation-state

The locus of my research on the *wong cilik* and popular performance is Central Java (see map). The two largest ethnic groups on the island of Java are the Javanese in the

provinces of Central and East Java and the Sundanese in the province of West Java. Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, lies on the north west coast of Java.

The Javanese (120 million people in 1996) are the majority ethnic group in Indonesia. They comprise almost two-thirds of Indonesia's estimated population of 200 million. The Javanese elite dominates Indonesia's political and administrative structure, sharing economic power with Indonesians of Chinese descent (a small minority of the population). Speaking in terms of geography, rather than ethnicity, 60 per cent of Indonesia's non-oil GDP stems from Java, with over half coming from Jakarta and its industrial extensions into West Java (Hill 1996:226). Since the Dutch trading and colonial presence in Indonesia, Jakarta (then Batavia) has had strong international links and has attracted migrants from throughout the Indonesian archipelago. In the eyes of its inhabitants, Jakarta's cosmopolitan modernity distinguishes it from 'Java'. It is still true, however, that a substantial majority of Jakarta's population is of Javanese descent. Jakarta and its new outer industrial regions, known as *Jabotabek* (Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang and Bekasi), have approximately 14 million inhabitants. Most of the *wong cilik*, including Jakarta's original inhabitants, the Betawi, have been displaced to Jakarta's outer limits by industrial and commercial development.

Social inequality is most pronounced in Jakarta. Greater Jakarta has the largest concentration of wealth, and a larger industrial labour force, than any region in Indonesia. As the international business, industrial, political and administrative centre of Indonesia, greater Jakarta has a dynamic of its own, which both draws on and influences the regions of Java and the outer islands of Indonesia. Contemporary socio-economic relations and cultural production in Javanese Central Java are set within the context of growing linkages between the Indonesian nation-state and a global economy in which Jakarta is the epicentre.

There is a dynamic interrelationship between the Indonesian nation-state, Jakarta, and the sub-regions in Java. There is not one Java, but 'many Javas', reflecting regional and class differences. Javanese dominance of the Indonesian nation-state is supported and legitimised through appeal to invented Javanese traditions. However, neither the historical or contemporary facts of Javanese society

surrender fully to this viewpoint. Invocations of a monolithic Javanese political and cultural system are strained, and becoming more so, particularly because of the mismatch between Jakarta's current dominance and the dominance asserted by earlier centres of Javanese power and influence. Never absolute, the authority of the Central Javanese kingdoms, now located in Solo and Yogyakarta (see map), as the 'exemplary centre' of a feudalistic Javanese society, continues to erode. That erosion commenced with the establishment of north coast Islamic trading kingdoms during the 15th to 16th centuries. It was accentuated by Dutch cash crop exports and supporting colonial administration at its peak in the 19th century, and intensified by the expansion of an internationalised capitalist economy after 1965.

As specific examples in Chapters Five to Seven show, there is both diversity and standardisation of meaning and identity in 'Javanese culture'. Previously, an ideal 'Javanese culture' was propagated by the Central Javanese courts to reinforce and legitimise their power and authority. Now 'Javanese culture' is standardised, often elevated as pan-Indonesian culture, in order to legitimise the authority of the Indonesian state and reinforce the position of the dominant classes. 'Javanese culture' is also rarefied as it is packaged for consumption, such as in the tourist industry and mass media.

On the other hand, class interests and cross-cutting regional differences ensure diversity, indeed contestation, in meaning and identity. In Central Java, to take one example, varied local socio-economic relations and patterns of cultural production have long been associated with differing land use systems and differential integration into centres of economic and political power. As evident in Chapter Eleven, the region of Tegal on the north west border of Central Java (see map) shows that alternative identities and meanings rising out of severe hardships experienced by the *wong cilik* can develop to the extent that they seriously challenge dominant cultural norms. *Wayang kulit*, considered to exemplify 'traditional' Javanese culture and society, has a meaningfulness for the *wong cilik* of Tegal that contrasts sharply with *wayang* conventions espoused by either the Central Javanese courts or the modern Indonesian state.

Therefore, although this study of the *wong cilik* and popular performance is

located in Central Java, it is not confined to a singular understanding of Javanese culture and politics. Many elements of local social and cultural dynamics are not unique to the Javanese, but are similarly found in Sundanese West Java, and even throughout Indonesia. On the other hand, class relations and other cross-cutting social divisions ensure a multiplicity of competing meanings and interpretations involved in cultural production whether orientated locally or nationally. Furthermore, as local societies in Indonesia are increasingly integrated into a global economy there is more cause to find a universal resonance in understandings of the relationship between the *wong cilik* and popular performance in Java.

Language Usage

The diversity of meanings and interpretations associated with social relations and change in Java is particularly evident in language use. This is also reflected in the choice of indigenous terms and English glosses used in this study.

The mother tongue of most *wong cilik* born in Central and East Java is Javanese or *Basa Jawa*. The most ‘refined’, or *halus*, form of Javanese emanates from the Central Javanese courts in Solo and Yogyakarta. Refined Javanese requires mastery of up to six speech levels ranging from low Javanese (*ngoko*) through to high Javanese (*krama* and *krama inggil*). These speech levels indicate the relationship according to hierarchical social status between the speaker and those being spoken to or about. Interrelated determinants of social status are family lineage (commoner or nobility), class (identifiable through wealth and occupation), education level, age (young defer to old) and gender (female defer to male). As a basic rule, those of lower status, such as the *wong cilik*, speak high Javanese to or about those of higher status, such as a village official. In turn, those of higher status, such as a district head, speak in low Javanese to those of lower status, for example, the village official. Limited formal education and similar social standing means that everyday conversation amongst the *wong cilik* is mostly in low Javanese or *ngoko*.⁵

Regional dialects add to the linguistic complexity. These dialects differ from

⁵ Geertz (1960) and Keeler (1984) provide more detailed socio-cultural explanations on the use of Javanese language.

each other in their vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation and spelling. In general, the further away from the court cities of Solo and Yogyakarta, the rougher or less refined Javanese is considered to be in both style of speech and use of speech levels. Acknowledgment of status difference through language is less detailed and lower speech levels are used in wider contexts.

The differential usage of Javanese language is particularly evident in ‘traditional’ forms of popular performance such as *wayang kulit*. During a performance in Tegal, for instance, a variety of languages will be used. As the *wayang kulit* performance is in a local communal setting, and is based on mythical characters known for centuries, Javanese is the predominant language. But which Javanese language?

A palace performance of *wayang kulit* in Solo or Yogyakarta will delight its elite audience with subtle use of high Javanese *Krama inggil* and *Krama*. Formal court scenes will be embellished by the flowery and archaic Sanskritised *kawi* language, of which only the *priyayi* or traditional Javanese elite may be familiar. *Ngoko*, or low Javanese, will be used to reinforce a feudal hierarchy. Those of low social standing, such as the *wong cilik* clown servants, with a marginal role in such performances, speak high Javanese to their royal masters out of respect. Their masters, in turn, need only speak to the *wong cilik* in low Javanese.

In Tegal, located on the periphery of the traditional cultural realm of the Central Javanese courts, low Javanese and coarse expressions are common in everyday communication. In local *wayang kulit* performances orientated to the *wong cilik*, the rough Tegal dialect is preferred to the refined and archaic high Javanese from the central courts. As Tegal is near the border of West Java, these performances are also influenced by Sundanese and Cirebonese language.

In addition, popular *wayang kulit* performances aimed at encouraging patronage from the urban educated youth, whether in Solo or Tegal, make greater use of the national language, Indonesian. They also play more with foreign words such as English during informal moments in the performance. Indonesian language is also used to espouse government policy. Arabic expressions are used as well by puppeteers wishing to incorporate Islamic teachings.

In Central and East Java, Javanese is used in everyday situations amongst family and friends and in the markets. However, the national language, Indonesian or *Bahasa Indonesia*, is the official medium of communication used in government administration, business, education and the mass media. As might be expected in Jakarta, a Jakartanese dialect of Indonesian is the everyday language of most inhabitants, notwithstanding Jakarta's status as national capital.

The Indonesian language was promoted as the unifying 'national' language of all islands in the archipelago under Dutch rule in the famous 'Youth Pledge' of 28 October 1928 which declared one land, one nation and one language (Pabottingi 1990:20). Recognition of Indonesian as the national language was based on the need to draw together the various ethnic groups of the archipelago as an important means of 'nation building' (Foulcher 1990:304) in the nationalist struggle against Dutch colonialism. Indonesian is intentionally 'democratic' in the sense that it is not the language of the dominant ethnic group, the Javanese. It is also comparatively more democratic than Javanese. Status differentiation is not central to the overall language structure. Nevertheless, social context, for example power relations, does influence the way Indonesian is used. For example, the generally unconscious choice of pronouns, and use of active or passive sentence constructions, conveys dominant-subordinate social relations, as in the subordination of women (K. Budiman 1992:72-9).

The language base for Indonesian is Malay, previously the language of sea trade around the coast that is now peninsula Malaysia and the Indonesian archipelago. As a new language in a culturally diverse nation Indonesian is continually enriched by other regional and foreign languages, particularly English as the language of international business and communication and Javanese as the language of the dominant ethnic group. At one level the social contexts in which Indonesian is used means that discourse in refined Javanese is gradually being displaced or eroded. However, many Javanese words continue to be incorporated into the Indonesian language through the dominance of the Javanese elite in Indonesian society. In addition, the Indonesian state's discourse of legitimacy has a penchant for elitist Javanese words, such as those of Sanskrit origin (Foulcher 1990:305).

The social contexts governing usage of Indonesian language in Java often highlight horizontal social divisions. As the language of the nation-state and dominant social and economic institutions, its usage often conveys authority, power and position. It is the language of government officialdom and is the language which the educated urban elite are most proficient. The *wong cilik* are exposed to Indonesian, when facing officialdom or watching television programs that articulate dominant interests, but generally speaking use it much less frequently than their more educated, nationally orientated, counterparts. The social contexts in which Indonesian is used reinforce the low social status and perceived ignorance of the *wong cilik*, though less overtly than is the case for high Javanese

A clear example of how the national language is used to the exclusion or domestication of ordinary people is in the prolific use of acronyms in official communication and the mass media. Most *wong cilik* do not know what such acronyms stand for unless they are directly connected to the social institution in question. Besides hiding meanings, acronyms are also used to manipulate meanings. For example, *senyum* (smile) has been used as an innocuous acronym for a family planning program and *Gestapu* is the menacing acronym for the date of the so-called communist coup of 1965.

As discussed by Foulcher (1990) and Hatley (1990), ambiguity in the democratic potential of Indonesian as the language of national communication is a contentious issue in popular performance, particularly 'modern' theatre. The *wong cilik* more naturally identify with low Javanese, which on its own is more egalitarian. On the other hand, Indonesian language itself is devoid of feudal remnants and is supposed to be inclusive. It also gives access to a national audience. Chapter Eleven explores the dilemma facing Tegal's 'modern' theatre on what language to use.

2. Chapter Synopses

In this introductory section, Part A, Chapter Two describes how the study came about; the motivating forces and practicalities that shaped the study. It argues that the literature on the *wong cilik* tends to undervalue and underestimate the social agency

of the *wong cilik*, particularly in terms of cultural production. *Wong cilik* experiences, concerns and involvement in society are usually ephemeral and unofficial and thus difficult to grasp. The view taken in this thesis is that popular performance can provide a window through which *wong cilik* perspectives on life and their position as social agents can be explored. In this regard, particular emphasis has been given to observing the composition and responses of audiences as opposed to a narrow focus on textual analysis of performance content.

Chapter Three surveys the literature on change in Indonesia's broad political economy and local social relations, looking especially at what that literature says about the social position and agency of the *wong cilik*. A conclusion drawn is that the political and economic subjugation of the *wong cilik* is mirrored, if not reinforced, in most scholarly analyses of the *wong cilik*. Recent years, with rapid industrialisation and internationalisation of the Indonesian economy, have seen growing class consciousness and a broader push for democratic reform. More visible social contradictions, greater popular political awareness, and an expanding urban working class have combined to produce a more assertive *wong cilik* with a greater potentiality for influencing social transformation.

Chapter Four links the social position of the *wong cilik* with the concern of this thesis in identifying *wong cilik* cultural agency in popular performance. The chapter provides specific examples which illustrate the intimacy between *wong cilik* cultural expression, in this case poetry, and the daily circumstances in which the *wong cilik* struggle with and confront oppressive socio-economic conditions. The chapter then locates the thesis within the broad literature on popular culture in Indonesia as addressing the social significance of popular performance from the perspective of the *wong cilik*.

Part B presents a survey of 'popular culture' addressing its significance for the *wong cilik*. The overall objective is to muster the analytical tools, and develop an approach, suitable for evaluating popular performance as a site of cultural contestation in which the *wong cilik* are represented and/or participate. Chapter Five sets the scene for this analysis. It elaborates on how the dominant social forces of state and capital control the processes of cultural production, including the generation

of cultural meaning. Often, capitalist relations are competing with or superseding direct state control of cultural production. The commodification of cultural practices further excludes or marginalises the *wong cilik* in the processes of cultural production, including the production of cultural meaning. There is some limited negotiation with popular sentiment as the dominant forces of state and capital attempt to appropriate popular cultural traditions to serve their own political and economic interests.

Chapters Six and Seven are concerned with how to identify and evaluate *wong cilik* cultural expression in relation to the specific social contexts of performances. This entails exploring the spaces for *wong cilik* cultural agency which exist despite the hegemonising tendencies of state and capital in cultural production. Chapter Six surveys cultural activist advocacy of empowering the *wong cilik* to bring about grassroots democratic change. The chapter focuses on the relationship between cultural activists, such as intellectuals and artists, and the *wong cilik* populace. In general, the degree to which the *wong cilik* participate in the processes of cultural production is indicative of the sincerity and success of cultural action orientated to the concerns of the *wong cilik*. Chapter Seven identifies the space in which the *wong cilik* participate, and contest meanings, in non-programatic cultural production. Specifically, we look at the often neglected, informal elements such as the relationship between audience composition and the social context of *wong cilik* orientated performances. Such performances are not necessarily overtly programatic or political. Local Independence Day celebrations, *dangdut* dancing at the *Sekaten* festival and an all-Java poets' convention in Solo shows how spaces becomes available for *wong cilik* participation and control over cultural meaning.

In line with the analytical approach to popular performance developed in the previous section, the chapters in Part C re-examine the significance of the Javanese shadow play for the *wong cilik*. Chapter Eight critiques conventional and elitist understandings of the social significance of *wayang kulit*. Such understandings, it is contended, are usually based on the classical court model of *wayang* which is not representative of the diversity of contemporary *wayang* performances. Conventional understandings fail to explain the continuing popularity of *wayang* amongst the *wong*

cilik and the relationship between *wayang* and specific or changing social relations. In Chapter Nine an alternative approach focusing on the relationship between audience and performance is developed to account for *wong cilik* participation in the local *wayang* performance. Observations on changes in audience involvement show that *wong cilik* cultural traditions are central to the performance. This is contrary to the *wayang* stereotype as elitist high art. In fact, *wayang*'s main function as entertainment is greatest during the comic interlude when the predominantly *wong cilik* audience is most involved in the performance. Chapter Ten identifies *wayang kulit* as a site of cultural contestation where the *wong cilik* have potential to control the processes of cultural production and meaning. Continuing with the thread developed in the prior chapter, close attention is given to the role of the comic interlude in both the historical development, and contemporary performances, of *wayang kulit*. It is asserted that the comic interlude in the *wayang kulit* performance not only provides space for *wong cilik* cultural expression, but is central to the performance. Specific examples show that the comic interlude can be a vehicle through which the *wong cilik* have control over the meaningfulness of the entire performance. Pedicab drivers in Jakarta showed that the *wong cilik* can also control the entire production process, arranging the performance themselves. However, as a public site of cultural contestation cultural meaning in the pedicab *wayang* was also subject to negotiation with dominant social forces.

Part D re-situates popular *wayang kulit* performances into the broader discussion on popular cultural production. Specifically this section evaluates the changeable and ambiguous relationship between artist/performance and audience/society in determining the significance of popular performance for the *wong cilik*. Chapter Eleven revisits questions raised over conventional understandings of the relationship between the *wong cilik* and *wayang kulit* performances as compared to other forms of popular theatre. Central to this chapter is a regional study of Tegal theatre. By way of background the chapter provides observations of contested meaning between official culture and popular consciousness in Tegal. Populist *wayang kulit* performances and 'modern' theatre in Tegal are then compared. Tegal's 'modern' theatre is shown to be situated within the intermediate socio-economic

strata and mindful of a national as well as local audience. On the other hand, the *wayang kulit* performances of a popular young puppeteer have been orientated towards the local *wong cilik* audiences. This was before the expansion of his performance as a capitalist enterprise serving the interests of the New Order state. These differences and changes in audience orientation profoundly affect the *wong cilik* as objects and agents in Tegal's theatre. The emphasis on performances as embedded in changing social relations allows us to dispense with the modern/traditional dichotomy and other stereotypes that distort our understanding of the significance of popular performance for the *wong cilik*.

The concluding chapter (Twelve) reiterates the argument that critical insight into the agency of the *wong cilik* and role of intellectuals – whether they be poet, *dalang* or theatre worker – in cultural production can be gained through studying audience participation as a nexus between performance and surrounding social relations. As an example, the powerful interrelationship between *wong cilik* audience and *dalang* in constructing or contesting cultural meaning is lost in essentialist models that emphasise text and conventions, rather than audience and social context. Analysis that accounts for the social and cultural agency of the *wong cilik* is vital given the growing consolidation of an urban working class and pressing need for democratic structural change in Indonesian society.

Chapter Two: Research Rationale

1. *Reasons Why*

Most studies of Indonesian society, whether historical, economic, political, cultural, anthropological or sociological, either neglect or under play the significance of *wong cilik* (almost by definition the majority of the population) social agency. These studies concentrate on the dominant, more visible, forces and protagonists of social change, such as the interests and ideology of the state and state apparatus, capitalism and capitalists, and, of recent, the so called middle class(es). Although important, such studies either misappropriate, ignore or relegate as insignificant the agency of the *wong cilik* in social transformation. Wittingly or unwittingly these studies further suppress *wong cilik* social agency, either indirectly in the realm of scholarly debate or by being used as instruments of, or justification for, continued social inequality. With the premise that anticipating a better future for society requires recognition of potential *wong cilik* social agency, an objective of this study is to help rectify what I see as a scholarly neglect of the *wong cilik*. However, this study is not prescriptive. Rather, it is motivated by a desire to open up space in the debate and discussion on social relations and change in Indonesia to include more the concerns and agency of the *wong cilik*.

There are two reasons for my particular focus on urbanised Java. First, as discussed in Chapter Three, a dominant trend in contemporary Indonesia is the process of urbanisation where the distinction between rural and urban societies is increasingly blurred. Along with this process of urbanisation is a consolidation of *wong cilik* consciousness and assertiveness. I believe that urbanisation is, therefore, a central process influencing the contemporary conditions of existence and greater social agency of the *wong cilik*. Second, although the majority of Indonesia's subordinate classes reside in urbanising Java, it was mainly personal circumstances, discussed under research practicalities, that influenced my decision to undertake research focusing on the *wong cilik* in Java.

The majority of studies over emphasise the hegemonic dominance of the

ruling bloc or significance of the invented 'middle class' as a cultural force and/or highlight the lack of access *wong cilik* have to cultural production. However, as I argue below, *wong cilik* participation in cultural production is a very significant avenue of *wong cilik* social agency.

In contemporary 'Western' society theatrical performance is largely restricted to a form of commercial entertainment enjoyed by a small proportion of those within the bourgeoisie or upper intermediate strata.⁶ There is also some street theatre, usually busking, in public spaces, such as shopping malls or popular leisure/tourist spots within the city. In general, however, theatrical performance, except perhaps in the altered state of sports events, is not intimately tied to the daily lives of most people in 'Western' societies. By contrast, in Indonesia, as in other 'developing' nations in the Americas, Asia and Africa, theatrical performance has a ubiquitous presence in most levels and sectors of society. Many scholars have thus commented that as a significant social phenomenon in Indonesia theatrical performance is deserving of serious scholarly attention.

Through the process of urbanisation there is a trend towards the detachment of theatre, now competing with other forms of entertainment and leisure activities, from daily social relations.⁷ However, in comparison to 'Western' societies, theatrical performance is still a frequent occurrence intimately connected to daily social relations through its association with rites and celebrations in local societies. As the *wong cilik* make up the majority in local societies they are also the majority participant spectators at such theatrical performances. Theatrical performances arising out of local social relations are a useful window on these social relations, and in particular, social change. Through appropriate observation, the public nature of theatrical performance makes visible the consciousness and social agency of the *wong cilik* in relation to the surrounding social context from which the performance

⁶ As a qualification, the touring 'Broadway' productions, such as 'Cats' and 'Phantom of the Opera' have some popular appeal. There is also some theatre by specific interest groups or small professional teams directed at youth or children, much of which has a social education agenda.

⁷ Peacock (1968) terms this process of separation 'rites of modernisation' (Hatley 1982:55). Nevertheless, even more commercialised theatre with a largely amorphous public audience tells a story about surrounding social relations.

was constituted.

One major subject of attention in this study is the *wayang kulit* performance as a part of its surrounding social relations. Conventional analysis based on the idealised elitist conventions of *wayang*, largely unmodified by the specific social context of the performance, denies potential agency of the *wong cilik* in the performance. However, as demonstrated in Part B, it is the intimacy of the performance with its surrounding social context, in particular the patronage of the *wong cilik* audience, that shapes the social significance or meaningfulness of the performance.

Local performances are more than a window on their surrounding social contexts and the perspectives and agency of the *wong cilik* within. Such performances are also a medium of social action that not only reflects, but works to bring about, social change. Thus, although not usually conscious of their role, the *wong cilik* participate in theatrical performance as agents of social change. Depending on the surrounding social constraints, the theatrical performance can provide one of the rare opportunities for the *wong cilik* to not only articulate, but assert, their perspectives on life.⁸

The extraordinary dynamism and richness of cultural production in Tegal district has inexplicably escaped scholarly attention, although it is worthy of study in its own right. However, the main purpose of my observations of cultural performance in Tegal is to provide a detailed social context in a comparison of *wong cilik* cultural agency in *wayang kulit* and 'modern' theatre. By stressing the social context in this comparison, I can move beyond a reliance on ideal cultural forms and conventions that I believe have distorted and frozen the understanding of *wayang kulit*'s social significance, particularly for the *wong cilik*. Usually this is a classical model based on the interpretations of court-centred traditions for *wayang* performances. Largely, the *wayang* and 'modern' theatre performances I observed

⁸. 'As Sylvia Moore notes, "especially in politically repressive regimes, where modern media are owned and controlled by [the ruling bloc], live performance is one of the few channels open for political expression, historical consciousness, the assertion of group identity and the source of alternative information" (Moore 1982:13 cited in Srampickal and White 1988:21)'.
'

around Tegal are a product of their location on the periphery of the traditional cultural influence from the central courts, but well within the orbit of ‘modernisation’ in which Jakarta is the locus. Theatre production in Tegal also explores important issues on the dynamics of cultural production between centre and region, such as the extent to which the centre incorporates the region or the region resists or challenges the centre’s dominance.

In general, a comparison of *wayang* with ‘modern’ theatre in Tegal in relation to surrounding social relations, rather than relying on ideal models and conventions, requires an alternative approach to studying the cultural and social agency of the *wong cilik*. Thus, another objective of my research is to develop alternative theoretical and methodological approaches in studying the *wong cilik* and popular performance, such as *wayang kulit*.

2. Theory, Method and the Silent Forces of Social Change

Influential Theoretical Approaches

In the majority of conventional analyses the confluence of the *wong cilik* and cultural production is assigned a passive or marginal role in social formation. Whether culturalist or materialist perspectives on Indonesian society, the lack of significance given to *wong cilik* social agency is even less when accounting for the agency of the *wong cilik* in cultural production.

Variations of the culturalist perspective, which assumes primacy of culture or shared meanings over economic structure and class relations in shaping social behaviour have dominated studies on Indonesian society. According to Anderson (1982), and Keesing (1991), Clifford Geertz’s assumptions about the social determinateness of coherent belief systems shared within communities has been a central influence not only in anthropology but more broadly through the social science disciplines. Whether political scientist or cultural anthropologist, the shared meanings ascribed as shaping social relations are invariably based on elite cultural perspectives, those of the dominant classes. Often this is not acknowledged as an elite culture but as homogenous archetypal traits which permeate society regardless of

class differentiation. Here, *wong cilik* experience and perspectives on life are obscured by, or subsumed into, neat cultural models derived from a fusion of dominant indigenous worldviews and the scholar's own ideological baggage.

One of the most enduring cultural models, until sustained criticisms of it during the 1970s and 1980s, has been Geertz's concept of *aliran* or vertical cultural streams (Geertz 1960:4-5). *Aliran*, *abangan*, *santri* and *priyayi*, are discrete belief systems that permeate local through to national social consciousness and institutions without regard to horizontal social cleavages. The *abangan* ideal type is most characteristic of the village peasant whose religious beliefs incorporate syncretic layers of animism and Hinduism under an Islamic veneer. Rural and urban market traders (with the exception of those of Chinese descent) who embrace an orthodox form of Islam best typify the *santri*. The *priyayi*, once an hereditary aristocracy, now represent a bureaucratic elite, whose 'worldview' centres on Hindu-Buddhist mysticism rather than *abangan* animism or orthodox *santri* Islam (Geertz 1960:5-6).

The vertical structure of these *aliran* is reflected in their respective social organisations that flow from village up to national level. Thus for example, the conservative political science analysis of the 1960s and 1970s held that, in the period of post independence political competition, each cultural stream dominated a political party. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was predominantly *abangan*; the Masumi party was a fusion of conservative (Nadatul Ulama) and Modernist (Muhamadiyah) Islamic *santri*; whilst the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) represented the interests of the *priyayi* element. These political parties gained support through their articulation of the 'worldview' of the various *aliran* (Feith and Castles 1970:8,14-5; Utrecht 1973:43).

According to Bachtiar (1973:88-9), there are problems with Geertz's separation of *priyayi* and *abangan* into separate cultural streams. The term *priyayi* actually refers to social status deriving from traditional court customs. This group shares a 'worldview' with the *abangan* group, a 'worldview' which distinguishes them from the *santri*. In light of this, assertions by political scientists, such as Feith and Castles (1970:14), that the PKI derived its support from articulating the *abangan* world view seem wanting (Utrecht 1973:43-4). This analysis ignores the class basis

of politics in the 1950s and 1960s. The PKI gained support by articulating the needs of poor rural farmers, against the interests of the landlords, often identified with the group represented as *santri* (Utrecht 1973). In general, essentialist cultural models hide the historically specific 'internal structures and cleavages of "society"' (Keesing 1990:56).

Unlike culturalists such as Geertz (1960) and Keeler (1987) who explain social behaviour through systems of shared meanings, political economists such as Richard Robison see the macro socio-economic structure as determining any significant social trends. Culture is portrayed as reflecting or giving variation in style to underlying economic forces. This is despite Robison's (1981:14) proposal that:

state and society in contemporary Indonesia can best be analysed by means of a construct that explains change as a process of continuous and mutually conditioning interactions of culture, politics and economics where the dominance of any one factor is determined by the specific historical context in which it is situated.⁹

However, in the same article and his important book, *Indonesia: the Rise of Capital* (1986), Robison signals that the mechanisms of social formation are the horizontal alliances and conflicts of various capital interest groups that alter with the transformation (expansion) of capitalism as the dominant mode of production. In Robison's analysis the dominant socio-economic forces of state and capital underpin social transformation and, as with culture, the agency and perspective of the *wong cilik* are insignificant and marginal.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, materialism, as a precursor to the much over blown post modernist/post structuralist theory of present, attempted to develop a more balanced Marxist based theory which accounts for the social agency of culture, particularly subordinate class culture. However, unlike their counterparts studying other developing nations, such as in Latin America, I believe few scholars

⁹ Robison's attempt to portray culture, politics and economics as 'mutually conditioning' is a refinement of Kahn's (1978:117) earlier understanding of discrete vertical cultural streams and horizontal class structures that can interact, or one become determinant over the other, at specific historical moments.

of Indonesia have considered the revisionist work of materialists in the field of cultural studies. With the dominance of a North American culturalist approach many scholars have leapfrogged into more recent post modernist/post structuralist theories aligned with a culturalist perspective. Keesing (1991:45) notes that the materialist (his term is 'political economy of knowledge') interest in 'who produces cultural meanings, and how they are contested, constructed, resisted and recast – or sustained – by those more marginal in terms of class/gender/power/advantage ... has been cross-cut but reinforced by a post modernist critique that sees the construction of meaning as multiple, perspectival, ambiguous and contested'. However, as mentioned in Chapter Four, I believe that in Indonesian studies the materialist perspective is substantially undermined by the pluralist approach of culturalist analysis, now incorporating a post modernist discourse, that denies or ignores underlying hierarchical social structures based on class relations.

A starting point in the materialist revision of economic structuralism was a critique of the influential theories of Louis Althusser. Althusser saw human consciousness as being acted on by ideologies produced, for example, through the state apparatus, to represent and maintain the dominant relations of production (Althusser 1971; Larrain 1979: 159,163; and Hall et al. 1977:58). According to Larrain (1979:159), Althusser portrays the human consciousness as passive, shaped by an ideological superstructure functionally produced by the economic base.

Materialists, however, criticise the base/superstructure metaphor used by economic structuralists as ossifying the interrelationship between the economic and cultural, left ambiguous in Marx's writings. Johnson (1979:217-9), describing a similarity in perspective between Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, says:

Relations of production are not only economic but also 'human' relationships. Production *involves* culture. 'Economics' and 'culture' are 'two sides of the same coin', or are in a dialectic of interaction. ... Relations of production are simultaneously expressed in all areas of life (1979b:219).

Materialists focus on social relations as the motor of broader social transformation. Social relations are based on class struggle characterised by the contradictions and

tensions inherent in the expansion of the capitalist mode of production. However, based on their reworking of Antonio Gramsci's theories, materialists emphasise that the cultural is inseparable from the economic, with neither being determinant over the other. Social relations as the motor of social transformation, are based on class struggle in which the subordinate class is engaged and in which culture is an important element. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge and identify the creative agency of subordinate class cultural production in social transformation.

Imbalance Between Formal and Informal Research

An important reason why most scholars have not sufficiently recognised the social and cultural agency of the *wong cilik* is their over reliance on formal, at the expense of informal, research sources. This is the result of three interrelating biases found in the relationship between researcher and that being researched. First, *wong cilik* social and cultural agency is silent, hidden or neglected because it is marginalised or obscured from view by the dominant socio-economic and cultural forces in society. Second, it is, in this respect, difficult to grasp, understand and analyse because of its often ephemeral, informal 'nature'. Third, *wong cilik* experience and consciousness is often foreign to, or at odds with, the interests, including social position, of the observer.

Most formal source material for research is part of a production process controlled by dominant social forces in which the agency or voice of the *wong cilik* is largely absent or coopted to serve dominant interests. The *wong cilik* have little access to the formal processes of cultural production and distribution and so their cultural agency is seldom recorded with any degree of formality and permanence. When *wong cilik* cultural agency is recorded it is done on their behalf from the perspective of the dominant classes further obscuring or disempowering their social agency. Where under special conditions the *wong cilik* perspective surfaces and becomes visible to mainstream society it is quickly repressed as threatening to, or discordant with, dominant 'norms', or it is neutralised or sanitised as it is appropriated for the socio-economic benefit of the dominant classes. *Wong cilik* identity grounded in their conditions of existence, though partially subsumed by the dominant ideology of the state and social elite, is also fundamentally different. However, due to the

socio-economic powerlessness of the *wong cilik* the visible representation of their identity is suppressed, subsumed, obscured or coopted by dominant social 'norms' or 'worldviews' in line with the interests of the state and dominant classes. In this way *wong cilik* cultural agency is kept silent or invisible to mainstream society and much scholarly attention.

Marginalised or repressed in society, *wong cilik* cultural agency is characteristically diverse, ephemeral and informal. By contrast the cultural products and practices controlled by the dominant social forces have been rarefied or distilled into a more formal and relatively permanent nature. Researchers have tended to observe, collect or document that which is most visible, tangible and enduring in Indonesian society for two main reasons. First, the assumption is that these formal characteristics signify their importance or centrality in society and social inquiry. Second, these formal characteristics are seen as more reliable and easier to work with over time – to identify and observe, document and categorise, test, evaluate, compare and critique. By contrast, most informal sources, those which are less visible, intangible, fluid and ephemeral, are neglected. Informal sources are seen as being of marginal significance in the processes of social transformation. Furthermore, because of their ephemeral nature informal sources are viewed as less credible as they are much more difficult to subject to scholarly inquiry and analysis, and so are usually subordinated by formal sources. However, it is within these informal elements that *wong cilik* cultural and social agency is most present.

My assertions regarding the bias of scholars towards formal rather than informal sources follow Anderson's (1978:283-4) critical observations of the dependency of political scientists in the 1970s on formal printed documents rather than direct speech. Anderson refers to a scholarly distortion, where the part is made to represent the whole, through a reliance on '*kramatised*' (refined) political communication. Here, the ephemeral direct speech of *ngoko*, the bulk of every day political discourse, debate and intrigue, is made absent or transmuted into rarefied, 'moralistic' and 'undifferentiated' formal discourse which is much easier for the academic to handle. Anderson laments that a more visible but less representative *krama* (or formal high Javanese) gains scholarly preference over the ephemeral but

more real and complex *ngoko* (or low Javanese). *Ngoko* is the everyday language of the *wong cilik* and its ephemeral, informal nature is also characteristic of *wong cilik* participation in popular performances.

Parallel to Anderson's example of a scholarly over emphasis of *kramatised* political communication to the neglect of every day political discourse in *ngoko*, and of central concern in my research, is that of audience participation. Unlike the often detached and well behaved audiences in 'Western' bourgeois theatre (Attali 1985), *wong cilik* audiences can be very involved in a performance (Peacock 1968). Shouts, loud comments, laughs, and more physical gestures such as throwing money and cigarettes (or alternatively rocks and bottles), as well as other behaviour, such as drinking, gambling, prostitution, thieving, socialising, sleeping or leaving during the performance, indicate that the *wong cilik* audience can be involved in a performance to the extent that they control its direction and meaningfulness. However, scholarly analysis often subordinates, even neglects, audience participation in favour of analysis based on the formal text or conventions of the performance.

Heider's (1991) analysis of Indonesian cinema clearly shows that scholarly preference for a tangible, formal cultural form or product, which is durable and easier to analyse than ephemeral audience participation, is a major reason for neglecting the *wong cilik*. In his introduction, Heider states that it was too difficult for him to listen to, and understand, the films at the cheap movie houses because of all the noise from the audience. In the end he had to resort to video tapes of the films which he played and analysed in the privacy of his own home.

Movies shown on ancient projection systems in echoing halls to noisy audiences tried my command of Indonesian beyond its limits. As a result I did most of my viewing alone at home, and in this book I hardly touch on the fascinating topic of cinema audiences (Heider 1991:8).

Heider's theoretical analysis is forced to ignore or marginalise specific social contexts in which the films are shown, in particular audience participation, which would bring to light greater social heterogeneity in the agency of class, ethnicity,

gender and age on the production of cultural meanings outside the text.¹⁰ His analysis on the social significance of cinema in Indonesia is almost solely reliant on the texts and conventions in the films. These are predominantly informed by a Jakarta centred conservative male 'middle class' perspective on culture which stresses order and harmony in an homogenous, pan-Indonesian culture. Through neglecting the audience input, the dominant 'worldview' becomes an all powerful hegemonic force. This is 'proven' by a theoretical bias towards seeing films as fixed cultural products that communicate messages in one direction to the audience (Heider 1991:2-10, 138).

However, as Heider's difficulties with audience commotion, and my observations of a cinema audience in Tegal (Chapter Eleven) illustrate, even cinema audiences, more removed than those at live performances, participate in cultural production and the generation of meanings and identities. Audience understandings do not necessarily accord with those conveyed in the formal text and conventions.¹¹ For example, on the 13th of December 1991, one month after the Dili massacre in East Timor, I witnessed the screening in Denpasar, Bali of a new film *Langit Kembali Biru* (The Sky is Blue Again). The central theme of the film, set in East Timor, was a love affair between a poor rural boy swept into the Fretelin independence movement with an urban 'middle class' girl caught up with her family's allegiance to the United pro-Indonesian parties. In essence the film was blatant propaganda portraying the 'cruel treachery' of the Fretelin independence movement and the humane sensitivity of the Indonesian forces in upholding East Timor's 'desire' to integrate with Indonesia. The predominantly youthful audience of 50-70 people included several people who originated from the islands east of Bali, possibly including Timor. Rather than receiving passively the dominant, or most prominent,

¹⁰ This is acknowledged by Heider (1991:88) by reference to Fiske (1989a:24 and 1989b:26) on the reading and reinterpretation of texts by people to fit their local experiences in the ongoing production of cultural practices and meaning.

¹¹ Sen's (1994) analysis of Indonesian films is also centred on the text and predominantly 'middle-class' representations of society. However, she does recognise that the *wong cilik*, the bulk of Indonesia's cinemagoers, can interpret differently, or even reject, these representations (Sen 1994:13-4). In explaining the greater popularity of the film 'Perawan Desa' compared with 'Si Mamad', Sen (1994:120) suggests that there is a correlation between the level of *wong cilik* agency/perspective in their representation in the film and the film's popularity with *wong cilik* audiences.

perspective on the integration of East Timor, several people in the audience jeered loudly and scoffed, unbelieving, at the negative portrayal of the Fretelin movement and the benign sensitivity of the Indonesian armed forces.

It may often be true (although not always) that the relationship between formal and informal elements of social and cultural production signifies the overall subordination of alternative perspectives, including *wong cilik* social agency, by dominant social forces. However, social analysis which relies essentially on formal sources to the neglect of informal sources will over emphasise the degree of social and cultural hegemony, and the associated degree of *wong cilik* subjugation, by dominant interests.

Contributing to the absence or under recognition of *wong cilik* social and cultural agency in scholarly analysis is the socially constituted subjectivity of the observer. Anderson asserts that scholarly analysis can be heavily influenced by the interrelationship between the scholar's own class based interests and position and dominant socio-economic forces in which the scholar is situated (1982:69):

academics are not simply specialists in particular fields of knowledge but also members of specific cultures and social orders ... academics invariably share the dominant assumptions and values of their societies ... academics as a group tend to be bound more or less tightly to the power structure in their society, partly because of their class origins, but also because of the technological and institutional order within which most of their work is carried out [through reliance on the] heavily capitalised infrastructure ... which only large and powerful institutions can furnish ... [there is] an unprecedented dependence on, and sensitivity to, the interests of the custodians of state and private corporate power.

Returning to the examples of cultural determinism, introduced earlier, we can see that scholarly accounts of social relations and change often reveal more about the social make up of the observer than those being observed. According to Anderson, Feith's extrapolation of Geertz's *abangan* and *santri* worldviews to explain the *Decline of Constitutional Democracy* (1962) in Indonesia during the 1950s in terms of competition between representatives of two different worldviews is most revealing about dominant American ideology and regional interests at the time. The rise of

Indonesian nationalism from the mid 1950s was attributed to the victory of *abangan* 'solidarity makers' over *santri* 'administrators' (Anderson 1982:77-8). This suggests that society could be broken down to conflicting 'skill groups' representing *aliran*, exemplified by the charismatic president Sukarno (*abangan*) and the pragmatic Vice-President Hatta (*santri*) (Anderson 1982:78).

According to Anderson (1982:77), Feith's ideal types illustrate biases representative of 'Western' (or more precisely, American) capitalist based interests and ideologies similar to those inherent in dualism and modernisation theories. These theories assumed 'a natural and inextricable interconnection between private property (capitalism), constitutional democracy, personal liberty and progress' (Anderson 1982:75). The perceived desirability of expanding American interests in Indonesia came in conflict with an increasing Indonesian nationalist antagonism towards foreign capitalist investment (Anderson 1982:73).

This value orientation presented in an ostensibly scholarly approach greatly influenced the analysis of Feith and others. Negative-positive divisions between the troublesome solidarity makers and economic pragmatists, or irrational political idealism and traditional cultural barriers versus modern objective or rational economic development (Anderson 1982:77) informed analyses. Here the social agency of the *wong cilik* as a horizontal class is lost in a cultural model that divides Indonesian society into two competing vertical streams that are more illuminating about the ideological prejudices of the scholarly observer than the dynamics of social relations and transformation in Indonesia.¹²

As we have begun to see with reference to Anderson's critique of *kramatised* political discourse, 'Western' theoretical traditions also disempower *wong cilik* social agency through their superimposition on and/or highly selective engagement with a usually elitist or formal local exegesis. As mentioned in latter chapters in reference to *wayang*, Sears (1996) has shown that the silencing of less dominant indigenous voices through scholarly biases is also compounded when it relies on, or is taken up

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Although Keesing (1991) notes the continuing dominance of cultural determinism in the social sciences in North America, Stange (1991) warns of a growing hegemony of political economists in Australian Asian studies research as a more marketable product, particularly in terms of government research grants.

by, compatible dominant indigenous exegesis. This can develop into an ongoing tautological symbiosis between scholarly observations and dominant indigenous discourse that omits the agency of alternative, especially *wong cilik*, discourses. Sears shows how Dutch colonial and indigenous Javanist interpretations fed off each other for their own political advantages, particularly in suppressing Islamic voices in *wayang*.

Like Sears's (1996) example of the interchange between Dutch scholars and indigenous Javanists eager to minimise an Islamic voice in *wayang*, this scholarly pacification of subordinate discourse can then feed back into society as an instrument of repression employed by the ruling bloc. Nationalist discourses invoking populist sentiment about common roots or shared traditions find legitimation in essentialist cultural models to assert the values and interests of a ruling bloc and quell opposing voices (Keesing 1991:47).

Stange (1990:89) supports the use of the tool, now claimed as deconstruction by postmodernists, that breaks down essentialist theoretical and epistemological models to uncover the conditioning processes that colonise or privilege local knowledge systems and meanings. However, he also identifies the irony in many of these scholars raising deconstruction to a theoretical orthodoxy to which local exegesis is made to fit. In their zeal to uncover the disempowering effect conditioning from external and indigenous dominant forces has on local exegesis these scholars either ignore or subordinate lived practices that contradict or oppose such processes. According to Stange (1990:99), Sears (1986), for example, is more concerned with the conditioning on formal interpretations of *wayang* than looking at what *wayang* means for people in contemporary lives. Stange (1990:99-102) lists a number of other scholars, both indigenous and international, with a bias towards 'Western' instrumentalist theoretical perspectives that inflate the importance of selected formal indigenous exegesis whilst neglecting or subordinating lived practices. An example dear to Stange's heart is how the continuing significance of indigenous mysticism for the Javanese as lived experience is avoided (Keeler 1987) or emptied, as a reflection of socio-economic factors (Kartodijjo 1972), or as a cultural artefact (Koentjaraningrat 1985). The intentions of these scholars may have been to uncover conditioning

processes that colonise or disempower local exegesis. However, a theoretical bias that favours more formal discourses can result in further neglect or disempowerment of less formal, or less dominant, indigenous discourses.

In general, there is an overly negative scholarly perspective on the social agency of *wong cilik* as passive or unimportant under a flawless dominant social order. Major areas of subordinate class identity, meanings and social action are neglected, or too readily designated as passive, coopted or inconsequential in their potential to shape society. Here, there is real danger of collusion, be it voluntary or involuntary, between intellectuals observing or participating in Indonesian society and the dominant forces of Indonesian society whose interests it is to constrain, domesticate and dilute the social agency of the subordinate classes.

Finding a Balanced Research Approach

No research is immune from the subjectivity of the researcher's own class based perspective and interests. However, efforts can be made to minimise, negate and possibly oppose some of the tendencies that produce an elitist bias through a study that not only recognises, but encourages the cultural and social agency of the *wong cilik*. I believe academics have the resources to not only 'stretch' (Anderson 1982:69), but break out of the 'fields of doxa' (Bourdieu 1977:166) they have inherited or created for themselves.

Having argued the necessity of including informal sources in an inquiry on *wong cilik* social agency, the difficulties in observing and documenting them still exist. (In 'Research practicalities' I discuss in greater detail my approach to informal research sources). Furthermore, there is the opposite risk, with potentially similar consequences, of over emphasising the importance of informal sources and *wong cilik* social and cultural agency. That is, an over emphasis on the social and cultural agency of the *wong cilik* may not only distort or romanticise the true picture, but serve merely to legitimise dominant social forces as already functional in ensuring democratic space for *wong cilik* participation in society. In order to minimise this risk, the social agency of the *wong cilik* must be analysed in perspective with broader social parameters. Put simply, the difficulty is in determining the balance between

wong cilik social agency and broader socio-economic constraints.

Scholars who do attempt to portray an 'authentic' subordinate class experience are still blocked by the same invisibility of subordinate class agency within society. That is, the dominant socio-economic forces and interrelated ideologies which work to subsume, obscure or marginalise the perspective of the subordinate classes. These scholars identify subordinate class meanings and identities that challenge the all-pervasive hegemonic order of the dominant forces in society. However, usually the subordinate class perspective is understood as either effectively repressed or coopted by the hegemonic sphere, or left as marginal to it, as a threat of no consequence. Often the alternative or resistant traditions of the subordinate classes are considered functional to, or intrinsically incorporated within the hegemonic sphere. Alternative traditions are seen as safety valves, useful in legitimising and expanding the effectiveness of hegemonic control by consensus and cooption rather than coercion. It often seems that the 'acknowledgment' of subordinate class agency is little different to its neglect when it is subordinated by a greater concern to sustain neat theoretical models.

James Scott in his highly acclaimed ethnography *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) gives the impression that he respects and admires the dignity of the poor, which he has uncovered in everyday forms of subordinate class consciousness and action. However, he is pessimistic about the nature, extent and consequences of subordinate class social agency. The poor of Sadaka, a rural wet rice village in Malaysia, are limited in the reactionary way they can rework old dominant ideologies to stave off the whittling away of their humanity. Inevitably, however, their 'every day forms of resistance' are little more than irritation to an increasingly inhumane evolution of capitalism that attempts to more efficiently exploit them as objects. Any variation in the effectiveness of capitalism from community to community only reflects its uneven, and initially incomplete, and imperfect, penetration. Contradictions between old and new forms of dominant ideologies are but rough spots as capitalism changes gears and transforms itself.

We might accept the closure in Scott's theoretical model as accurately representing the reality for the poor Sadaka peasant, and with modifications, as

helping to explain other peasant communities. Whether politically left or right, scholars often meet this apparent chasm between the experiential/reactionary consciousness of the subordinate classes and the more refined, reflective/abstract consciousness of the dominant classes. Coming from that group, dominant consciousness and its institutional manifestations are intricately analysed by social scientists, and subordinate class consciousness is seen as some crude response to the dominant. The conclusion seems invariably that poor consciousness is restricted by, and parallel to, their despairing conditions of existence; just like the poor picking out the discarded refuse of capitalist goods and reselling them in order to survive. Following this, Scott is resigned to the belief that socialism is a 'middle class' concept and the poor, even if proletarianised, will need input from them to organise their directionless anger. If the poor had the opportunity to articulate their consciousness to us as outside observers and we were able to understand it without encoding it into our own ideological discourse would Scott's pessimistic summary of poor consciousness be true about how the poor think, act and perceive themselves?

It seems to me we have explained over and again in various styles who we think the subordinate classes, the poor and marginalised, are, but we are rarely able to account for any creativity in the way they perceive themselves and their relationship with dominant forces. It is easy to identify the ways in which dominant culture/ideologies are able to pervade society and to show how an alternative or opposing consciousness associated with the subordinate classes is ignored, trivialised, kept silent, repressed, subverted and sanitised. The difficulty, however, is, just because of the above, identifying and understanding such alternative consciousness. It is also difficult because such consciousness is neither pure, unified or static in forms of expression. Subordinate class consciousness and action arise out of their perceived interests (based on their experienced conditions of existence) that are at once subjugated by, and contradict, the interests of dominant social forces.

How do we then identify and understand subordinate class consciousness hidden in the village or factory or street life of the poor and marginalised? Like James Warren (1986:7-11), I am driven by the need for a social history of 'alternative memory', that of the powerless and invisible – whether it be prostitutes, pedicab

drivers, street hawkers, factory workers or landless peasants. They, too, have a life story that is more than passive grovelling under the weighty socio-economic machinations of the powerful and educated classes.

When looking at Japanese and Chinese prostitutes in Singapore, James Warren, in *Rickshaw Coolie* (1986), investigates at two levels the historical significance of the subordinate classes. First, he looks at how the prostitutes fit into the 'macro processes' or top down socio-economic forces. Here, his chief concern is to show Japanese and Chinese prostitutes as essential in the new industrialisation of 19th century Singapore, servicing the working class indentured Chinese of the go-downs and coal mines, and the merchant sailors. Second, he explores what he terms 'micro-dynamisms', the drama of life as lived by the prostitutes, as perceived by them. One way to do this was to interview the old women who were prostitutes and old men who were part of that working class environment. The other method was to look through a keyhole where their invisible world meets the 'real' world of the powerful. That is, in court records of testimonies by friends, acquaintances, clients and colleagues of prostitutes murdered or who have committed suicide.

It seems that Warren has given himself a fair amount of liberty in weaving a life story out of court records and it is not clear to me how the extraordinary event of a coronial inquest distorts the true picture of life as a prostitute. However, the public stages for the normally invisible 'alternative meaning' is a starting point. Nevertheless, there is still an imaginary gulf between the rational, dominating 'macro processes' and the emotional turbulent and despairing world of 'micro dynamism'. Some dignity is afforded the prostitutes in their solidarity of shared fate. Except, however, for this, and a rather tenuous example of power inversion where the Japanese prostitute examines the client's genitalia before deciding whether the client is acceptable, there seems to be little dignity, or free thought ascribed to the prostitutes.

Both Scott and Warren have tried to give their impression of how life is lived by the poor and marginalised, but have they been able to give an undistorted description of the poor's own self perception? In both cases I believe their theories don't permeate from, or weave within, the ethnographic data, but are tacked to the end

or used as fancy wrapping paper. Scott, for example, leaves his theoretical discussion on hegemony to the final chapter. Issues raised on revolution, millenarian movements and the base/superstructure debate feel larger than his ethnographic data. My starting intentions are similar to Scott's and Warren's – to give voice to the invisible/alternative memories of the subordinate classes. However, to identify and understand a narrative of the *wong cilik* requires an integrated theoretical and methodological approach responsive to this narrative, not, as I believe Scott has done, a theory smothering or coming down on top of it.

Warren, through his investigation of subordinate class testimonies at coronial inquests, has illustrated a good starting point in finding a keyhole or window, the public opening in the curtain artificially separating the visible mainstream and invisible subordinate class worlds. This window on to subordinate class consciousness and action helps us identify and begin to explore subordinate class experiences, meanings and agency in society. Similarly, occasions of popular performance provide a public common ground where the visible and invisible meet, where space for *wong cilik* participation is a window on to their social perspective. The need is for a theoretical approach that takes advantage of this window onto social relations from the perspective of the *wong cilik*.

By stressing that the 'people' in popular performance are rooted in specific social relations we avoid restrictive theoretical and methodological models (and their ideological baggage) which often rely on dichotomies between high and low culture, modern and traditional culture, or narrowly focus on the cultural form, its conventions, and content. This is important in two respects. First, theory is not allowed to artificially freeze the ever changing, dynamic and fluid processes of popular cultural production tied to changing social relations. Second, and more crucially, by stressing social context, the area of research is expanded outside the formal aspects of the cultural production process to include less formal elements that nevertheless directly tie the cultural practice to its social context. Furthermore, as Anderson (1978:285) notes in reference to political symbolism, it is imperative that informal research sources which are ephemeral or fluid in their social meaningfulness are analysed in terms of their specific socio-historical context.

For example, a common method of analysis might concentrate on a text of a play script, together with the conventions of a particular form of theatre used in a performance, in determining its significance to, or providing insight on, its surrounding social context. However, much of the surrounding social context should be considered integral to, rather than separate from, the cultural production process. A more complete and well proportioned picture of the nature of cultural production and its relationship to its social context can be achieved by directly including from the outset elements that are normally considered less formal or peripheral. Such elements include preparations for the performance, audience participation during the performances and post performance interpretations and internalisation. This is crucial in searching for subordinate class involvement which often occurs in that which is commonly perceived as less formal or less central in the cultural production process, such as audience participation and influence on performer improvisations outside the formal text and conventions.

The agency of the *wong cilik* during those informal moments of cultural production should, however, be kept in perspective. In not properly recognising the surrounding constraints of dominant social and cultural forces there is risk of delusion, in ascribing the perceived narrative and agency of the *wong cilik* an unrealistic degree of social autonomy and power. This is a valid criticism levelled by structuralists at analysis indiscriminately employing post modernist theory on multiple interpretations. For example, excessive 'populism' in cultural studies often does little more than legitimise free market ideology by overstating the power of the audience or consumers to subvert dominant ideologies in choosing and reinterpreting cultural products to suit their local experiences. Often such audience and consumer studies are not placed in perspective. They often ignore the consumer's lack of direct participation in the ownership and control of cultural production, or the influence of wider social and economic constraints experienced by these consumers. Notions of consumer autonomy must be weighed up against lack of access and choice in the cultural production process. Thus, in identifying subordinate class identities and meanings in popular cultural practices and assessing their social agency one has to walk an analytical tightrope between under recognising and over stating the

significance of the subordinate classes as a creative social force. To lose one's balance either way would be to fall into the clutches of the very elitist ideology involved in domesticating the subordinate classes. I do not subscribe to the post modernist tendency in refusing to recognise social hierarchies and structures. Rather, I wish to reveal the agency of the subordinate classes within their socio-economic constraints without distorting the balance between *wong cilik* agency and surrounding social constraints for the sake of theory.

The expanded definition of popular cultural production, incorporating the social context from which it is constituted, also serves as a check against the pitfalls of populism. Analysis must also incorporate the local and wider socio-economic relations and forces informing participants in the cultural production process. For example, the level of subordinate class participation in a particular cultural event is heavily shaped by the day to day social relations within local society and the position of the subordinate classes in these social relations. 'External' social forces, such as the linkages with wider capitalist relations and state intervention, heavily inform these local social relations.

It would, for example, be dangerous to ascribe the same level of agency and autonomy of direct participants in the cultural production process to cultural consumers. In fact one tendency of wider social forces, such as centralisation and intervention by the state and cultural commodification through the expansion of capitalism into cultural production is to reduce cultural producers to cultural consumers. The ability of cultural consumers to reinterpret or subvert the intended meaning of a cultural product to suit their own circumstances is less than being directly involved in the initial production process of the cultural product.

3. *Research Practicalities*

I came to find that an informal approach to undertaking research in Indonesia was usually the most effective and fruitful in the long term. My research interests concerned the daily lives and cultural involvement of the *wong cilik*, and those who empathise with them. More formal/official methods of research would have been

difficult, if not impossible, due to the ephemeral, hidden and politically sensitive nature of much of my subject matter. Thus, from choice of research sites to method of collecting research data, my field work activities were coloured by the informal.

Field work was conducted over five months from August to December 1991, six months from August to January 1993, and finally one month in June 1996. The months of the year were selected in order to cover a good part of the dry season, between April and October, when the frequency of outdoor performances is greatest and also to observe the Independence Day celebrations, an important occasion for performances, in late August.

Although, I have drawn on examples from throughout Java to explore various issues pertaining to the *wong cilik* and popular performance, most of my empirical research originates from Solo, Tegal, Jakarta and, to a lesser extent, Samarata. Choice of these locations was through either personal or fortuitous circumstance rather than systematic planning. Solo is one of the two court cities located in the middle of Central Java, considered the hub of Javanese culture. The antecedents of my current research were my experiences living in Solo throughout 1986. Under the auspices of an Indonesian government scholarship, I also attended lectures in the Faculty of Arts at the state university, Sebelas Maret. During this period I observed a variety of *wayang kulit* performances in and around Solo, as well as attended the Mangkunagaran Dalang School (PDMN). I also made it a point to assimilate as much as possible into local society and a fortuitous outcome was a friendship developed with my future wife, Endah Pancaningsih. Our marriage in Solo in 1990 cemented my personal attachment to the city.

The house and neighbourhood of my in-laws, located on the northern outskirts of Solo city, became a familiar base from which I conducted my PhD research. Apart from Solo, I undertook research over six weeks in the rural village of Samarata, near Ponorogo, East Java (see map) and a similar time in the urban neighbourhood of Pondok Labu, South Jakarta. Research in these locations was also made easier through familiarity in living with family relatives. The small city of Tegal on the north west coast of Central Java became the location for a regional study, to which I made frequent trips for several days at a time over a period of six months. The

choice of Tegal was also fortuitous. By chance I attended a literary performance (poetry, short stories and monologues) by some of Tegal's cultural workers invited to perform at the Surakarta Cultural Centre (Taman Budaya Surakarta) in Solo. The brash, mischievous nature of the performances caught my interest, particularly that of a radical young artist whose normal profession is as a *wayang* puppeteer. On taking up an offer to stay with these artists I was introduced to the rich vitality of theatrical performance in Tegal.

I sought no formal research visa or affiliation with an official research institution for these periods of field work in Indonesia. Field work was conducted in an informal manner as participant observer (see below) using either a tourist or visitor's visa. There are a number of reasons for this decision. I had little need to specifically canvass official sources, institutions, personnel or documents beyond that which was openly accessible or obtainable through personal observation and contacts. Instead, my interest was chiefly in the unofficial world often hidden from, or antagonistic to, the official world. The true nature of much of my research would have made it difficult to gain official permission. Furthermore, the requirements of official research visas and institutions would, I believe, only have hampered or restricted my access to informal sources. The issue of conducting research in an official or unofficial status is vexed ethically. Though widespread, scholars seldom acknowledge conducting unofficial research. However, strategies of informal research are often necessary in a society under heavy control and surveillance by an authoritarian state with arbitrary sanctions and punishment.

In such a climate that can generate fear and paranoia in society, it was difficult to distinguish between the real and imagined risks which shadowed, and, to some extent, also restricted my unofficial research activities. On one occasion I had arranged with a *kethoprak* troupe to video record their performance at a celebration marking the close of compulsory student social work activities in a village near Samarata.¹³ I assumed my presence with a video camera would be accepted as that of a tourist. However, a district head, an official at the celebrations, was suspicious

¹³. Usually for a period of three months in their final semester, students undertake *KKN* (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata*) or 'obligatory (rural) social action internship for advanced university students' (Echols and Shadily 1989:300).

insisting I must have permission from local security in order to video. After a few worrying moments, however, I found out that his underlying motive was to make sure I included footage of himself and family at the performance. On another occasion I attended an art exhibition and seminar by radical cultural activists in Yogyakarta in which Wiji Thukul presented a critical paper. In the evening on leaving with a journalist/poet my identity and motives for attending the performance were questioned by two intelligence officers who witnessed the proceedings. Although nothing eventuated from this incident, it may have been more serious at another time. In the more tense period of 1996 leading up to the general elections the outspoken poet/journalist who drove myself and others back to Solo was demoted from his position of authority in the newspaper. Wiji Thukul, also, has been in hiding because of his affiliation with the outlawed pro-democracy political party, Partai Rakyat Indonesia (PRD).

I did not make an informed decision to choose 'participant observation' as the most suitable methodological approach for conducting my field work. Rather, 'participant observation' best describes the informal interaction that evolved with my sources. This can be characterised by developing friendships, and, out of genuine interest and empathy, but sometimes through obligation and ambush, getting involved in what they were doing. This involved much give and take, and being prepared to go with the flow of prevailing circumstances. Often this involved temporarily sharing circumstances of inconvenience or discomfort concerning daily matters of food, ablutions, sleep, and transport or leaving oneself slightly vulnerable. For example, growing tired of a *wayang* performance at 2:30 in the morning I was cautious, but grateful of someone in the audience, a poor market tailor, who offered to put me up for the night. As a result, I was able to learn a little of his world, his favourite haunts in town, his status in the neighbourhood, and his home life. He lives in a small home with his first wife, who has a crippling disease, and his young second wife (superseding the first), as well as an educated son who, through lack of job opportunities, has been forced to take night shifts at a local factory.

I found cultivating familiarity and friendship over time led to a flow of knowledge and understanding beyond expectations. In most instances I had friends rather than informants. I did not use formal survey forms or tape structured

interviews. Although once familiar with you most people would not object to your taking notes or using a tape recorder, it seems their use inhibited the free flow and openness of conversation. I found, however, that as friendships developed we would discuss issues or exchange ideas in an increasingly free and open atmosphere. It was at this stage that I could direct discussion more towards my research interests. During some discussions I might jot down specific details that were difficult to remember. On most occasions, however, I would wait until I was alone to write down the important matters that came up in such discussions. If I had forgotten something important or was unsure of the accuracy of some details I would check them in subsequent discussions or with other sources.

I have been careful to separate my own ideas from those of my indigenous friends and faithfully identify and reproduce their voices in this study. However, I take Stange and Keesing's concerns that participant observation will inevitably result in a mutual conditioning of knowledge, potentially biased towards the more powerful observer, that will influence analysis. I trust, however, that the sensitivity and empathy engendered through developing friendships has to a significant extent neutralised any potential biases. It must be admitted also, however, that I did sometimes enjoy certain privileges as a foreign 'expert'.

Through developing familiarity and friendship with individuals and at performances I became wittingly, and sometimes unwittingly, involved in their activities. During *wayang* performance I would usually mingle with the audience, shuffling between both sides of the screen, and sometimes sit on the raised platform amongst the *gamelan* musicians behind the *dalang*. Already familiar with the *dalang* and sticking out as the only foreigner at the performance, my presence would invariably be incorporated into the performance. Sometimes this would involve asking me to request a popular song during the comic interlude or asking me to climb on stage and make some simple comments in Javanese or Indonesian on the hospitality of the people or the richness of their culture. My stumbling or the *dalang*'s quips would usually bring raucous, but good natured, laughter from the audience (see, for example, Appendix Two). Besides providing the audience with a treat the incorporation of an international 'expert' into the performance also enhanced

the sponsor's and *dalang*'s prestige. The celebrity status often worked to my advantage as well, getting to meet the sponsor and other distinguished guests that would help me better understand the overall context of the performance. In modern theatre performance held on stage in halls there are usually post performance discussions between performers and audience where it was often expected that I give comment or ask questions. Sometimes during the promotion of such performances I would be asked to assist by, for example, meeting prospective sponsors or joining in on a radio interview discussing the theatre troupe and forthcoming performance. During my association with Wiji Thukul I gave the children regular English lessons and on one occasion organised for a Perth based theatre group touring Indonesia to hold a workshop with the children.

There were, however, limits to this 'participant observation'. On one occasion Thukul suggested he, the children, and I invade an up market department store where the children with masks on would ask me in loud voices about things beyond their means, what they were, and how much they cost. This would be the stimulus that Thukul could use to involve the unsuspecting public in protest theatre. In the conservative persona of Solo, however, these shock tactics might have created something more than I could handle so I put off agreeing to his suggestion.

As the above examples show, the benefits of 'participant observation' are two fold. Not only is it a fruitful and enjoyable way of conducting research, but it is also fulfilling in that it allows the researcher an opportunity to give back something in exchange for what has been taken from the sources. Frequently, however, more direct forms of compensation were appropriate. Sometimes I provided financial compensation where there were direct interviews or where people helped collect information for me. A pedicab *dalang* I interviewed in Jakarta, and in his home village north of Solo was in such obvious financial hardship at the time that payment in cash was the most practical thing to do. In other instances where close friendships had developed it was more appropriate to be circumspect, such as giving gifts or money to family members in general appreciation for hospitality.

In other important ways my research approach was orientated to the informal rather than formal. At performances my observations focussed on improvisations and

audience composition and response rather than formal play text and conventions.¹⁴ I have also lifted to a similar weight to formal written documentation that which was produced less formally. Much written research material was locally produced, some underground, on small budgets with limited distribution. Newsletters, invitations, brochures, booklets and books were often produced or reproduced using local photocopy machines and printing services.¹⁵ Reference to newspapers has also been fruitful. Unlike many studies, I found it important to mention the authors of most articles. Many of these journalists are also cultural workers who have direct connections with, or interest in, that which they are reporting on.

^{14.}

As the following modified extract from my Honours thesis (Curtis 1988:i-ii) describes, from my first observations of *wayang* performances I discovered the irrelevance of focusing on the play text. At first understanding little Javanese, I would urgently look for someone my own age, a student perhaps, to provide me with a running commentary in Indonesian as the story (*lakon*) unfolded. However, I discovered that many lacked interest, or themselves had difficulty, in following the story of the play. They seldom knew the title or the main outline of the *lakon*, nor recognised any except the main characters, and found difficulty understanding the old and flowery Javanese used in descriptive narrative.

Disappointed, I ventured to the shadow side of the screen where the audience, including the sponsor and invited guests, were generally older and fewer in number. They were better informed, describing to me the character traits and relations between the characters and what they symbolised in socio-religious terms. However, they were less inclined to keep me up to date on the story line.

Still thinking the story line of central importance, I tried to discover the title of the *lakon* and research the story a few days before the performance. However, frequently, the *lakon* was obscure or unfamiliar to many, or its title unknown even by the sponsor. Moreover, the *lakon* to be presented was often not decided upon until the night of the performance. I began to form the impression that to focus on the story line was not only problematic but also myopic. The significance of the *wayang kulit* performance for the audience seemed to go well beyond the text.

¹⁵ The widespread availability of small commercial photocopy and printing services at relatively cheap prices has greatly assisted 'grassroots' democratising activities. The minimum charge to photocopy one page, for example, was rp 10 or less than \$A 0.01 in 1996.

Chapter Three: Social Transformation and the *Wong Cilik*

This chapter locates the *wong cilik* in terms of the broad political economy and local social relations in New Order Indonesia. First, there is an overview of the major social forces and trends associated with a centralised authoritarian state that has largely nurtured the expansion of internationalised capitalist relations. Within these larger parameters we then look at the *wong cilik* experiences of, and position within, social transformation in local societies.

This chapter is particularly concerned with identifying *wong cilik* experiences and agency during an era of rapid social change. A general understanding of the social location and agency of the *wong cilik* in respect to dominant social forces is also required for the more specific analysis of popular performance rooted in surrounding social relations.

1. *The Wong Cilik and Broad Social Change*

De-politicisation of the Masses

The annihilation of communism and suppression of other leftist and 'divisive' social movements after 1965 is unquestionably a watershed in Indonesian history. The rise of President Suharto's New Order regime marks the triumph of the state and the military on behalf of the social elite over mass political participation. It also marks resurgence in the evolution of a capitalist economy with strengthening international links.

After independence in 1945, and particularly during Sukarno's 'Guided Democracy' from 1959, nationalist-socialist sovereignty was guarded through the nationalisation of Dutch enterprises and tight restrictions on foreign investment from capitalist economies such as the United States. However, in a divisive political climate, the Indonesian economy continued to deteriorate due to the weakness of small scale indigenous entrepreneurs, an inefficient and corrupt military control of large nationalised industries and lack of foreign investment (Lane 1991:24). Economic instability proved uncondusive to the powerful Communist Party's (Partai

Komunis Indonesia or PKI) attempts to force rural land reform in 1964. An equally powerful military that generally supported the economic interests of the dominant classes found justification for crushing the PKI in a counter offensive to the so-called attempted communist coup on the 30th of September 1965.

Under the banner of economic development (*pembangunan*), the New Order government has since embraced large foreign capital in the form of aid and investment, adhering to the strictures of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Through authoritarian policies and overt coercion the New Order regime has prioritised social stability as the mainstay of its centralised control and capitalist led economic development.

Up to the mid-1980s in particular, the consolidation in the 'relative autonomy' of Indonesia's centralised state was based on a symbiotic relationship with client-elites and capital (discussed later with reference to local social relations).¹⁶ State power and legitimacy was assisted by substantial economic growth based on foreign investment and huge oil revenues and a ubiquitous presence of the armed forces in society. The institutionalised exclusion of the majority of ordinary people from the benefits of economic development and political participation maintain the economic and political power of the state and dominant classes.

Dominant ideology, generated in particular through the armed forces, has fostered a stigma of economic and political chaos associated with attempted liberal and socialist democracies during Sukarno's Old Order. In particular, is the spectre of communism, encapsulated in the sinister acronym, GESTAPU, for the date of the 1965 'communist coup', and the subsequent terror of indiscriminate mass killings led by army-elite supported Muslim groups.¹⁷ The threat of social disorder, particularly by 'extremist' left wing and religious movements is the corner stone of the New Order regime's de-politicisation strategies (Lane 1991:4; van Langenberg 1990:126-

¹⁶ In a study of the Jepara region on the north coast of Central Java, Jim Schiller (1990) describes the web of interdependence and self-interest amongst regional bureaucrats, village heads, religious and political leaders and local merchants centring on the distribution of project funds from the central state.

¹⁷ Reprisals against people 'suspected' of PKI affiliation were particularly fierce in Central and East Java. Although Muslim vigilante youth groups were responsible for many of the killings, the circumstances surrounding the killings varied greatly according to local manifestations of class, communal, religious and ethnic tensions (Cribb 1990; Hefner 1990).

7). These closely interconnected strategies include the destruction or cooptation of social and political organisations, the armed forces entrenchment in society, and the sanctification of the state ideology, *Pancasila*.

During the period of 'Guided Democracy' Sukarno reduced the number of political parties, justifying this by pointed reference to the earlier chaotic 'experiment' with constitutional democracy. Banning the Communist Party, General Suharto's New Order regime continued the process of rationalisation, later forcing disparate opposition parties into either the Muslim United Development Party (Partai Pesatuan Pembangunan or PPP) and the essentially non-Muslim Indonesian Democratic Party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or PDI). The political interests of the military government were in turn represented by the formalisation of GOLKAR (Golongan Karya or Functional Groups). As well as the armed forces, all state employees are compulsory members, and anyone in an official or public capacity is morally obliged to support GOLKAR.

Government and military interference in the internal organisation of the PDI and PPP is pervasive. The state attempts to ensure that opposition party cadres and local leaders are sympathetic to Suharto and the New Order regime, or, at the very least, not a threat. Furthermore, the semi-official doctrine of a 'floating mass' (*massa mengambang*) insists the ordinary people who are *masih bodoh* (still ignorant) and therefore in danger of being manipulated by 'divisive' and 'extremist' political interests are excluded from political participation (Amal 1994:218). The 'floating mass' doctrine has been institutionalised in a ban on all political activity in villages and kampungs except during the four weeks leading up to the general elections. However, unlike the 'opposition' parties, GOLKAR has a pervasive presence in local societies through a variety of social organisations. Financial incentives, indoctrination, surveillance and coercion through village/kampung administrations maintain GOLKAR's 'popularity'.

Thus, the general populace, including the two supposedly oppositional parties, PPP and PDI, have, over the years, been thoroughly domesticated. The five-yearly general elections, now known as the '*Pesta demokrasi*' (Democracy festival) guarantees GOLKAR victory and is merely a legitimisation of the 'democratic' re-

election of the New Order regime. Extraordinary political manipulation and coercion by the state apparatus confirms concerns that GOLKAR, despite the rhetoric, does not address the interests and aspirations of the *wong cilik* majority of Indonesians.

The strong arm of de-politicisation has been the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia or ABRI) with its 'mandate' for social involvement through the doctrine of *dwi fungsi* (dual functions). That is, a responsibility for the defence of Indonesia, in particular the state, from both external and internal threats. ABRI perceives threats to Indonesian security as potentially emerging and spreading from anywhere along a continuum from petty crime through to insurgency and invasion (Lowry 1996:2). As such, '[e]very anti-social or political act in society becomes a matter of concern for the armed forces, the more so because they are also responsible for the police' (Lowry 1996:2).

ABRI has continued to extend its participation in all social institutions and penetration of all levels of society. ABRI dominates both houses of parliament and the state bureaucracy with ABRI representation right down to the village administration. Since the nationalisation of Dutch enterprises, ABRI has also had a large presence in the private sector, although more recently control of companies has shifted to retired ABRI officers and large Chinese Indonesian investors (Lane 1991:5; Reeve 1990:169).

The main function of ABRI's presence in the social fabric is to prevent, frequently through the use of surveillance, intimidation and violence, any threats to the New Order regime. Usually this is conflated with protecting the rule of President Suharto, the family dynasty, and ruling clique. The July 1996 ABRI instigated dismantling of a populist PDI leadership under Megawati Sukarnoputri was not to protect the sovereignty of the Indonesian state, but protect Suharto and the ruling party from a potentially viable opposition. ABRI intimidation and force is also frequently used to further the business interests, often proclaimed as 'development projects', of the social elite with political or ABRI connections. A recent example was the alleged brutal destruction of Rowok village, Lombok on behalf of resort developers (IRIP News Service 1996:8).

In the triad of de-politicisation strategies the malleable *Pancasila* state

philosophy has been the most insidious. *Pancasila's* five principles are virtuous enough: belief in one God, national unity, humanitarianism, rule by consultation with the people, and social justice for all. The state has sanctified *Pancasila* as an encapsulation of the Indonesian psyche, the foundation principle of the nation-state, and the ultimate source of all law (Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Pelaksanaan Pedomaan Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila, Propinsi Daerah Tingkat 1 Jawa Tengah.:1993:2). To be anti-*Pancasila*, the parameters of which are interpreted by the state, is to be anti-Indonesian, both 'seditious' and 'heretical' (van Langenberg, 1990:132).

Pancasila has become little more than an emblem behind which an organic corporatist ideology legitimates and reinforces authoritarian rule, whilst denying the reality of social division and suppressing alternative interests. Despite its rhetoric, *Pancasila* ideology is hardly a manifestation of Indonesia's unique 'natural order'. Whether *Pancasila* ideology has elite indigenous origins associated with Javanese customary law (*adat*) (Reeve 1990:160), or has a more universal affinity with other totalitarian ideologies in Europe and Asia (Bourchier 1993:1-5), its main function is to safeguard the interests of the ruling bloc.

Pancasila 'upgrading' courses, mandatory in most sectors of society, are designed to reinforce the ideology that all Indonesians are part of a unified organic body or family. Individual and group identity, rights and obligations are framed within the well-being of the whole populace. 'Prosperity' and 'happiness' for all are ensured through working together and dissolving differences in the 'spirit of social harmony and togetherness' (Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Pelaksanaan Pedomaan Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila, Propinsi Daerah Tingkat 1 Jawa Tengah 1993:4). Both a Marxist understanding of class struggle or 'dialectic materialism' and 'western liberalism', focussing on individual rights and competitiveness, are considered hostile ideologies (Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Pelaksanaan Pedomaan Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila, Propinsi Daerah Tingkat 1 Jawa Tengah 1993: 8,11-12). Using the model of a patriarchal family or village, decisions for the 'common good' are based on complementarity of interests and consensus between the ruler and ruled. Ultimately, however, the ruler – father, village head, state or

president - determines these common interests (Bourchier 1993:2). For example, there should be no conflicting interest between employers and employees (Bourchier 1993:11; Leclerc 1972:9). Thus, in the spirit of state corporatism, the single legal trade union, the All Indonesia Workers Union (Sarekat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia or SPSI) has a leadership dominated by government, military and employer representatives. In general, there is no separation between state, including ABRI and GOLKAR, and society (Bourchier 1993; van Langenberg 1990).

Overall, these strategies of de-politicisation have been effective in consolidating centralised state control during the first twenty years of the New Order period. Substantial oil reserves and foreign investment have financed the necessary infrastructure for state control, its administrative, military and political components. Massive revenue and investment has also enabled the state to develop the infrastructure for top down economic development and patronage relations with client-elites guaranteeing the allegiance of the dominant classes.

Ironically, nurtured by the past twenty years of authoritarian state sponsored capitalist development, the dominant classes are showing signs of becoming more independent of state patronage. The expansion of capitalist relations of production has meant that dominant classes in local societies through to large conglomerates have the potential to be less reliant on state patronage and privilege in the accumulation of wealth. This shift also means that patron-client relations between employers and employees is one being displaced by formalised recruitment and work practices involving waged labour (discussed in more detail below). These trends, shaped by the continuing internationalisation of the Indonesian economy, underlie a tendency for the importance of narrow political relations to be subsumed by broader economic relations of domination and subordination in Indonesian society. Many scholars have recently been concerned with the issue of democratic reform as the relationship between state and capital changes.¹⁸ The following sections discuss the challenge to centralised state control and the significance of class formation and

¹⁸ See, in particular, Robison's extensive writings since his seminal book *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital* (1986) and individual contributions, many cited in this chapter, in Bourchier and Legge (eds) *Democracy in Indonesia: 1950s and 1990s* (1994).

related tensions in respect to *wong cilik* social agency.

Structural Adjustment and 'Democratisation'

The mid-1980s mark another watershed, or transition point, in the Indonesian political economy as it becomes further enmeshed in the global market forces of international capitalism. This was precipitated, between 1982-1986, by a substantial drop in oil prices, the main source of government revenue for social infrastructure and economic development programs. In response to a decline in national revenue sources the Indonesian economy, coaxed by the IMF and World Bank, underwent bold 'structural adjustment' to boost, in particular, non-oil/gas revenue. Economic development is now more reliant on private sector and foreign investment in export orientated industries such as plywood, garments and textiles, and electronic goods. Hadiz (1994b:191) says the 'labour intensive, low wage, light manufacturing sector [is] ... crucial in the current campaign to raise non-oil export revenues'. Companies in Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs) such as South Korea and Taiwan are encouraged to relocate in order to take advantage of Indonesia's cheaper labour market (Hadiz 1994b:68).

There are two main challenges to centralised state control increasingly dependent on the global economy in order to sustain economic development. There is pressure for the state and its clients to share economic control, and by association, political power, with a broader elite. In addition, the state must negotiate more with an expanding, increasingly assertive urban working class.

The growing importance of international and private domestic capital in the Indonesian economy is challenging the political and economic power of the central state and the autonomy of its privileged politico-bureaucrats. There is demand for open access to markets and investment opportunities and provision of a stable, more predictable, environment with efficient investment infrastructure. The push for economic deregulation and privatisation, along with greater accountability and 'fair' competition, is gradually eroding the 'autonomy' of the centralised state. A reduction in oil tax revenue coupled with a dependency on foreign capitalist investment requiring economic liberalisation is making it increasingly more difficult for the state

to maintain patronage relations based on privileged access to resources. This is reflected, for example, in moves to make state banks more accountable in lending credit following a number of recent scandals (Robison 1996: 83, 92)

Accelerated industrialisation since the late 1980s produced a rapidly expanding private sector supporting a burgeoning domestic bourgeois class and upper intermediate strata. Along with the expanded manufacturing share of the GDP, from 8.4 per cent in 1960 to 21.3 per cent in 1991, is a growth in domestic capitalists, such as export manufacturers.¹⁹ Capitalist enterprises require technicians, managers, professionals and administrators. These categories of the upper intermediate strata grew from 2.6 per cent of the population in 1971 to 3.9 per cent in 1990 (Robison 1996:79, 84).

The expansion of the private sector is producing more assertive bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie capitalist classes and upper intermediate strata salariat. However, Robison (1996:91-3) demonstrates the fractured nature of these dominant classes, and the ambiguities in their relationships with the state that also constrains their potential as independent forces of economic and political reform. Within the bourgeoisie, for example, ethnic Chinese minorities controlling strong internationalised conglomerates are vulnerable to any rise in nationalist populism. By establishing close links with key political figures the Chinese conglomerates reduce political vulnerability whilst gaining preferential access to large credit. Although having greater political freedom, indigenous big business and petty bourgeoisie, competing with international investors and Chinese conglomerates, still rely heavily on access to project funds and interventionist state policies that favour these weaker enterprises (Crouch 1994:117; Robison 1996:91-3).

Some analysts, such as Chalmers (1994), are optimistic that more politically aware upper-intermediate strata with access to greater information have potential to pressure the state for gradual democratic change. In general, however, demand for economic reform from the upper intermediate strata and sections of the capitalist

¹⁹ Lane (1994) observes that in Jakarta's Tangerang industrial region the number of companies registered, most of them light manufacturing, had grown from 528 in 1978 to over 900 by the late 1990s.

classes is in order to gain a greater share of the economy through promotion of free market competition and an end to monopolies and privileged access to government contracts and funds. Although they may call for a democratisation of the political system, less authoritarian control and broader political participation, they are not interested in transforming the structures of economic power that exclude the *wong cilik* (Lane 1991:31-47 and 1994; Uhlin 1993:12).

The early 1990s witnessed a short-lived glasnost or *keterbukaan* ('openness') with surprisingly frank debate amongst the dominant classes concerning the democratisation of the state. Debate coalesced around the 'monopoly of power of the Suharto faction' (Lane 1991:74). According to Lane, the motivation underlying most of this debate was about 'greater power-sharing and accountability within the elite' (1991:74). Crouch also asserts that the 'openness' debate was more about a contest of power between the military and government (particularly Suharto) than genuine interests in liberal democracy (1994:121).

In general, domestic-international capitalism has benefited from the authoritarian regime's commitment to economic development aided by a pathological obsession for order and stability, but with the practical objective of maintaining a cheap and docile labour force. According to Robison (1996), it is also feasible that international-domestic capital, as well as the 'upper middle classes', can continue to tolerate and operate within the constraints of an authoritarian regime. Rather than risk their economic interests they will resist radical reform and support an authoritarian regime that can largely accommodate changing capitalist relations and be perceived to protect the economic interests of the dominant classes. Crouch concurs, adding the dominant classes would not risk a return to the violent social upheavals accompanying political transitions in the past (1994:124). What, therefore, is the potential for a democratic process sustained from below that will further the interests of the *wong cilik* in the nation's political economy?

A composite picture from a number of analysts (Bourchier 1994a, 1994b; Crouch 1994, Hadiz 1994a, 1994b; Lane 1991; Uhlin 1993) indicates that prospects of radical democratic reform from the 'grassroots' depends on the interrelationship between four variables. The essential factor is the political mobilisation of the *wong*

cilik through mass organisations. Another critical factor is the nature of alliances between radical sections of the lower-intermediate strata and the working class. The nature of 'grassroots' driven social change will also be shaped by its interaction with contradictions and cleavages generated from within the ruling bloc, including capitalist factions, and the army and political elite. Currently, this manifests around uncertainty over presidential succession and growing resentment over the Suharto faction's perverted monopoly over political and economic power. Finally, internationalised political and economic forces that both constrain and encourage domestic reforms also heavily shape these variables.

Most analysts have been pessimistic about the prospects of radical social reform in Indonesia. They have been resigned to the successful domestication, de-politicisation and cooptation of society, through the powerful state apparatus, unrivalled due to the continuing weakness of class formation. Analysts of Indonesia's macro political economy, such as Crouch (1994), have been dismissive of the fractured and unconsolidated working class consciousness, given the small urban working class in comparison to Indonesia's large peasant population.

However, some analysts, for example, Hadiz (1994) and Lane (1991), have become heartened by signs, visible around 1989-1990, of increasingly assertive and organised alliances between progressive sections of the lower intermediate strata and working class groups. They cite a dynamic hub of grassroots democracy developing in alliances amongst a radical intelligentsia, particularly university students, NGO's (non-government organisations), and peasant and worker groups.

Accelerated industrialisation, particularly in the manufacturing and services sectors, has, since the late 1980s, produced a rapid growth and consolidation of urbanised wage labour. A parallel growth in working class consciousness is reflected in the rapid increase in the frequency and size of worker strikes and dogged attempts to establish independent trade unions.²⁰ In the mid 1990s, some strikes have involved twenty to twenty-five thousand workers (Bourchier 1994a:ii-iii; Hadiz 1994b:193; and Lane 1991:71). The size and organisational requirements of these strikes are

²⁰ Hadiz (1994b:197) and Lane (1994) also recognise the input of rural sourced factory labour and increased education levels on the expansion of working class consciousness.

indicative of strengthening independent worker organisations. The most successful trade union, established in 1992 but declared illegal by the state, is SBSI (Sarekat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia or Indonesian Labourer Welfare Union). In 1992 it claimed membership of 37,000 workers in 79 branches throughout Indonesia (Bourchier 1994a:ii).

Bourchier (1994b) has shown how local industrial action working in conjunction with international pressure have forced the state to grant minimum wage rises and relax repressive labour laws sanctioning military intervention. He also notes, however, that these advances have been contained by the requirements of the global market economy. In wishing to avoid political tension with Indonesia, which is harmful to trade, the US allowed trade preferences despite its demands not being fully met. Furthermore, in ensuring Indonesia is attractive to foreign investment, the state continues to be lax in policing minimum wages and the military continues to intervene in labour disputes (Bourchier 1994a:iii-v).

Consolidation of working class consciousness is developing in tandem with a growing politicisation of the lower intermediate strata. Robison notes how sections of the lower intermediate strata, experiencing a decline in economic opportunities despite Indonesia's sustained economic growth, have demonstrated a populist consciousness. As with the subordinate classes this consciousness can be reactionary or progressive, focusing on a range of concerns from nationalism, and ethnicity to issues of equity over growth (1996:88-9). An example of this growing populist consciousness is the mass support for Sukarno's daughter, Megawati, the recently ousted leader of PDI.

A swelling in the number of tertiary students, as a subset of expanding intermediate strata, is another consequence of recent rapid industrialisation. However, there is disaffection amongst tertiary students from the 'lower middle classes' (Robison 1995:14). Many of the students and potential students from less privileged backgrounds are experiencing financial difficulties in enrolling or continuing their education, or, as graduates, in finding employment. A 1978 prohibition against political activities on campus along with difficulties in continuing education or finding employment has fostered numerous informal study groups and greater student

involvement in community organisations during the 1980s. As a result students have become more socially conscious. The 1980s has seen a proliferation of grassroots NGOs, many organised by students, that are concerned with worker and peasant rights as well as women's and environmental issues (Eldridge 1990:504, 510; Hadiz 1994b:198).

Widespread involvement and interest over the struggle for land rights and appropriate compensation for peasants displaced by the Kedung Ombo dam in Central Java during the early 1990s represents somewhat of a climax in the strength and consolidation of the NGO movement. However, because of tight funds for development projects, the government, rather than taking a confrontational stance, has begun to work together with many of the larger NGOs since Kedung Ombo. Many internationally funded NGOs are taking over the state's role in developing social infrastructure. Some NGOs are little more than opportunistic businesses more interested in a market share of project funding rather than improving the lot of the *wong cilik*. NGOs to varying degrees cooperate with government authorities for project approval and funding. Often their ability or interest in politicising or mobilising the *wong cilik* is seriously compromised by connections with government or business. Nevertheless, NGOs have contributed much to raising within society, as well as the state, issues of social equity and justice for the *wong cilik*. There are also a number of smaller more fiercely independent grassroots NGOs committed to 'empowering' the *wong cilik*.²¹

The middle of 1996 produced the most concrete manifestation of popular consciousness and alliances between radical student groups, NGOs and worker/peasant groups as a potential social force. The Jakarta riots on the 27th July 1996, the largest in New Order history, were incited by an armed military-police assault on the alternative PDI headquarters of Megawati's supporters. Caught up in the riots were PDI supporters, and students, many of who were from high school. In general, however, most of the 10,000 rioters were local *wong cilik* residents. The illegal PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik or Democratic People's Party) became a

²¹. Eldridge (1990) provides a brief survey on the diversity of NGOs comparing their relationship with the state and commitment to grassroots social action.

scapegoat when the state apparatus accused them of inciting the riots. Although a small, relatively unknown, organisation before the July riots, the PRD represents the first occurrence under the New Order regime where radical activists and worker groups have become organised nationally (Lane 1994).²²

Social inequity is increasingly visible and political repression a daily experience for the *wong cilik* (see the later discussion on local social relations). Tighter political controls and military repression have only exacerbated feelings and there has been a spate of unrelated incidents of mass rioting in several cities both inside and out of Java since the Jakarta riots. The state apparatus has blamed the riots on the 'communist' PRD or religious and ethnic intolerance, avoiding issues of corruption and social inequity and as legitimisation for even greater state control and repression. However, the current situation seems to indicate that the state is less able to clamp down on a broadening dissent amongst the more politically aware and angry lower classes.

In the long term it will become increasingly difficult for the ruling bloc to suppress the growing visibility of class contradictions of Indonesia's expanding capitalist relations. The corporatist state must undergo metamorphosis. For example, some government ministers are beginning to acknowledge conflict between the rapacious tendencies of international capital and basic needs of labour. In order to forestall conflict leading to instability and disincentive to foreign investment, the minister for manpower, Batubara, had acknowledged in 1992 the necessity for more independent union activity and better policing of employer compliance with labour regulations (Hadiz 1994b:198-9). There is a greater dependency of the Indonesian economy on foreign aid and investment, and a greater free flow of domestic-international information beyond the control of the state. As such, the state is forced to become 'more reliant on international negotiation and agreement' concerning issues of human rights and labour relations (Robison 1993:71). There are according to Robison, Hewison and Rodan (1993:29) 'significant contradictions between authoritarianism and market capitalism'.

²² The PRD is an umbrella group of five mass organisations for workers, students, peasants, cultural workers and the urban poor with branches mainly in Java (ASIET 1996:34-6).

Perhaps for the foreseeable future, the state will persist with the violent repression of labour unrest. However, in the long term it seems inevitable that with continued industrialisation and working class formation the subordination of the *wong cilik* must be through incorporation into, rather than exclusion from, the formal mechanisms of the political economy. Although greater participation for the *wong cilik*, for example through independent trade unions, may lead to greater social and income security at the basic level, incorporation into the international capitalist economy will also ensure their structural subordination. State intervention will become more diffused into civil society as international market forces increasingly dictate employment opportunities, wage rates and working conditions.²³

Increasingly, the agency of the Indonesian state and state apparatus as a dominant social force must be seen within the dynamics of internationalised capitalist relations and class formation in Indonesia. Within these parameters, the *wong cilik* will have a more significant role in broad social change through the growing consolidation of a working class or political mobilisation of the masses in alliance with either the ruling bloc or radical sections of the lower intermediate strata. The following section will take a closer look at how the *wong cilik* are being affected by, and respond to, state intervention and the expansion of capitalist relations of production in local societies.

2. The Wong Cilik and Changing Local Social Relations

The urban kampung and rural village have never been completely closed communities. Local societies are increasingly subject to wider social forces associated with the continuing expansion of internationalised capitalist relations of production and integration with the state. Furthermore, with industrialisation (including greater spatial mobility in the workforce, rapidly improving transport and communication networks, and improved general education) a dualistic understanding

²³ Meiksins Wood (1990:73), for example, asserts that the state as well as civil society can become subordinate to the hegemonic control of international capitalism. Furthermore, the coercive role of the state is insidiously relocated into civil society through market forces.

of 'traditional' rural and 'modern' urban societies is increasingly untenable. For example, the total agricultural labour force in Java has dropped from around 69 per cent in 1961 to 43 per cent in 1990 (Hill 1996:22). Those *wong cilik* still residing in rural localities are increasingly undertaking non-agricultural work. In what Young (1988:250) terms the 'urbanisation of the rural', 'the social, economic and political concerns' of urban life are increasingly shared by a broader populace. *Wong cilik* experiences in contemporary rural and urban localities are similar, often interconnected. As highlighted in the following discussion, it is often difficult to distinguish between rural and urban societies.²⁴

Social Change In Rural Localities

The following discussion concerns villages where lowland wet rice (*sawah*) cultivation is practiced. These are the most significant rural societies in Java in terms of land area and population and integration with the wider political economy of Indonesia (Hefner 1990:16). A major socio-economic division based on capital, particularly land ownership, and work separates the rural *wong cilik* majority from the wealthier minority.²⁵ Roughly 10-30 per cent of village populations range from middle peasants to village elite. This heterogenous group comprise those who own more than 0.5 hectares of land (able to generate a surplus income after basic needs are met), do most of the labour hiring and include village officials, higher civil servants, large traders, shop owners and teachers.

The *wong cilik* comprise 70 to 90 per cent of village populations and can be subdivided into a rough hierarchy of small, marginal and landless peasants. Small peasants operate (either own and/or rent) 0.5 or less hectares and more than 0.3 hectares. In order to subsist small peasants supplement household income with some wage labour. In this group are also small traders with limited capital, such as *warung*

²⁴ Despite these broad similarities there is also a large diversity of *wong cilik* experience associated with local variations in social transformation influenced, for example, by differences in geographic location and land use systems.

²⁵ This data on rural social stratification is an aggregate of studies by Alexander 1987; Antlov 1995:78; Breman 1995:3-4; Cenderroth 1995:50-3; Hart 1986:84-5; Nurdien and Kustanto 1991:293; Hefner 1987:13; Newsletter of International Labour studies, 1983:22; Stoler 1988:113; and Wolf 1992:85.

or stall owners and menial civil servants, such as security guards. Marginal peasants operate (usually rent rather than own) less than 0.3 hectares. This is not enough land to subsist on and they derive most of their household income from unskilled wage labour. Agricultural labour is mainly harvesting, but also includes planting and weeding. Amongst non-agricultural wage labour are transport workers who don't own their own vehicles, domestic servants and food hawkers. According to Breman (1995:38) the landless 'rural proletariat' make up 'at least half the population of Javanese villages'. By comparing access to, and security of, income earning opportunities, Breman (1995:38) distinguishes between small and marginal peasants who are concerned with remaining economically viable and the landless peasants who are preoccupied with daily survival.

The so-called green revolution, beginning in the early 1970s, brought rapid socio-economic transformation that has accentuated social inequality in rural societies. The major objective of the 'green revolution' was to increase national rice production through the development of high yield rice strains, use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and introduction of more efficient technologies, work practices, administrative systems and transportation infrastructure.

An overall improvement in rice production belies the dramatic rise in social inequalities as a consequence of new capitalist relations of production exploiting 'green revolution' technologies and infrastructure. This is most noticeable in greater concentration of land ownership and unequal access to income earning activities (Alexander and Alexander 1982; Stoler 1977; White 1983).

Many studies in the mid-1970s to early 1980s were observing the early adverse consequences of 'green revolution' technologies and associated changes in work practices. Wealthier large landowners were able to benefit more from credit schemes and capital intensive labour saving technologies in competing with and buying out small land owners. The *wong cilik* were forced to compete for increasingly scarce agricultural work. Labour displacement and competitive advantage through economies of scale resulted in increased land concentration amongst the wealthy few and landlessness amongst the poor majority.

Social stratification, including landlessness, was a feature of rural societies

before the mobilisation of client village elites by the colonial administration (Alexander and Alexander 1982). Stoler (1979) demonstrated that behind dominant ideologies of 'balanced reciprocity', what Geertz referred to as 'shared poverty', lay socio-economic relations of inequality. A prime example is the reciprocal distribution of harvesting jobs amongst women. The largest of shares in the harvested crop is given to close relatives of the land-holder whilst neighbouring households and then distant villagers receive lower shares. Poor, largely landless, households have little economic flexibility and are dependent on harvesting and other lowly paid jobs for survival. Such jobs typically are not offered by relatives and neighbours, but by outsiders whose overriding aim is to maximise returns by minimising labour rates. In contrast, women from larger land holdings with higher capital returns have greater economic flexibility. They can, for instance, choose only to harvest with the higher shares obtained through reciprocal invitations with relatives and neighbours and, if they wish, choose more profitable capital demanding occupations such as middle traders or creditors (Stoler 1977: 81-3).

Keeler (1985:111-38) argues that dominant ideologies of balanced reciprocity may, to a limited extent, have cushioned inequality in pre-existing patron-client relations. In partially fulfilling the expectations they create dominant ideologies may also work to suppress awareness of contradictions and inequalities. Nevertheless, like Stoler, Yulfita Raharjo (1985) shows that unequal relations of economic power and vulnerability, not closed moral systems of balanced interdependence, maintain the cohesiveness of patron-client relations.

As an example, Y. Raharjo (1985:285-8) described the plight of a poor landless woman named Iyah in a hamlet near Blitar, East Java. Iyah was dependent on Ibu Mur for income through share cropping her land and rice husking in her rice mill and for credit when necessary. According to Y. Raharjo, Iyah's extreme loyalty to Ibu Mur was due to her fear of endangering the 'privileges' she gained in access to credit and as a guest share-cropper for Ibu Mur. To openly challenge Ibu Mur for being cheated or belittled or to seek employment in a competitor's rice mill would, in respect to the competition for employment amongst the poor and landless, jeopardise the fragile security of her position (1985:281).

From Y. Raharjo's observations the strength of patron-client relations in villages means the poor and landless identify more with their employers than with each other. There is no sense of *wong cilik* solidarity or awareness of the relationship between their collective degradation and exploitation at the hands of those that own and control the means of production. Roharjo (nd:2) claims there is a 'silent culture' amongst the *wong cilik* in villages that had undergone little social change, where pre-existing patron-client relations still continued. Here, a grudging *wong cilik* acceptance of their lot with feelings of inferiority and fatalism stems from their powerless socio-economic position justified by dominant ideologies 'offering' social harmony and collective security and prosperity.

Currently, moral obligations for the village elite to find work opportunities for the poor, as enshrined in ideologies of balanced reciprocity or shared poverty are being over-ridden by economic considerations. Studies by Keeler (1985) and Antlov (1995), for example, show the village elite is more concerned about wealth accumulation than fostering relations of dependency with poorer constituents. Village heads are able to accumulate immense wealth through the monopolisation of village resources and state development funding. Village land is rented to wealthier tenants, or worked by cost efficient wage labour, rather than allowing the poor share cropping rights (Keeler 1985:123). Rather than fostering dependency relations which obscure as far as possible the contradictions between 'idealised image and action' (Keeler 1985:115) village heads now rely more heavily on conspicuous, coercive measures in maintaining power. For example, the threat of being labelled a communist sympathiser 'encourages' people to support the village head's re-election (Keeler 1985:118). Both Keeler (1985:128) and Antlov ((1995:204) assert that villager response to the increasingly visible socio-economic gap, and the replacement of pre-existing legitimising strategies with coercion is limited to feelings of alienation and indirect covert resentment.

Recent studies, such as Antlov (1995), fail to find evidence that suggests rural class struggle is an increasingly tangible outcome of new capitalist relations of production. Olle Tornquist (1990), citing Hart's observations (1987), contends that class divisions are obscured or broken down by powerful state intervention. The state

has fostered lines of patronage for funds and privileges through a client elite down to smaller peasants dependent on this client elite. A coercive state apparatus that prohibits the *wong cilik* from political participation also works to exclude the majority of *wong cilik* from the benefits of state patronage and capitalist agricultural practices.

The central state has created large village administrations and incorporated the village head. Through sub-district offices, village administration receives directives on state economic and social programs. Incentive to implement state policies and reinforce state control and ideologies comes through opportunity to manipulate for personal gain access to development project funding. As privileged clients of the state, village elites also benefit in the control of village resources, involving land acquisition, credit facilities and labour arrangements. Privileged access thus allows local elites to take greater advantage of new capitalist relations of production and associated technologies, such as contract labour, mechanisation and fertilisers. According to Antlov (1995) the disproportionate access of local elites to economic resources accords with government strategy based on modernisation theory that emphasises economic growth over equity, where benefits are supposed to eventually trickle down to the *wong cilik*.

In summary, most rural studies point to continuing or increased social inequality, measured by a polarisation between concentration of land ownership and landlessness. Some attribute new capitalist relations of production, particularly the transition to wage labour, as the major cause. Others contend that state intervention through the maintenance of state-client elite relations and domestication of the *wong cilik* contributes most to the reproduction of social inequality. In general, however, all studies portray the *wong cilik* as victims intentionally disadvantaged by capitalist led social transformation controlled by, and benefiting, a general alliance between the state and the local elite.

These studies emphasise the comprehensive subjugation of the rural *wong cilik*. Fractured and powerless, the *wong cilik* are portrayed as passive actors in the continuation of their own economic and political oppression. *Wong cilik* social agency in rural transformation has been restricted to new strategies of survival.

Resistance to subjugation is constrained to grudging acquiescence or nominal protest. How then does the social position and agency of the *wong cilik* compare in urban centres or local societies undergoing rapid 'urbanisation'?

Social Change in Urban Localities

Initially, land and labour displacement accentuated by the 'green revolution' meant the rural *wong cilik* had to increasingly turn to other sources of non-agricultural income, particularly in urban locations. However, during the 1970s to mid-1980s the small manufacturing and service sectors were unable to absorb the rural labour surplus. Many seasonal and semi-permanent migrants had to eke out a living in the urban informal sector as petty traders, domestic servants and pedicab drivers.

However, more recent observations by a number of scholars such as Hill (1996), Breman (1995), and Evers (1994) suggest that the predicted harsh consequences of the 'green revolution' have largely been obviated by, for example, the rapid expansion of the manufacturing and services sector since the mid 1980s (1996:196-8). Evers (1994:261) also contends that both rural and urban societies have benefited by a formalisation and expansion of the labour market through industrialisation and continued growth in the civil service. He asserts that, overall, the swollen informal sector (self employed and family workers) of the 1970s is now contracting in direct proportion to a growing formal sector (waged and salaried employees).

Rapid industrialisation is making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between rural and urban societies. In Antlov's study a large majority of the landless villagers are involved in non-agricultural work. About half of these people commute to the nearby urban centre, working predominantly as labourers in the textile factories (1995:78-80). Despite this, Antlov (1995:48), admittedly with reservation, classifies Sariendah as rural rather than urban. He reasons that Sariendah has a rural feel with close communal ties and surrounding rice fields

Others, such as Hull (1994:5) in reference to the accuracy of census material on the working class, contend that rather than place of residence, circumstances of occupation are more important in deciding the rural/urban divide. For Hull, many

non-agricultural wage labourers from rural villages who commute daily to urban centres, or board in and around factory sites, develop an 'increasing realisation of their role in the urban or urbane world' (1994:5). Thus, although administratively classified as a village, Sariendah's *wong cilik* may, as Hadiz (1994b:197) asserts elsewhere, develop a more 'urbane' working class consciousness. Antlov has noted that many of the factory labourers who work together are neighbours and have formed close social ties centred on their occupation (1995:115).

Breman's findings, however, highlight the unevenness and inconsistency within what most researchers believe is a broad trend towards rural urbanisation and non-agricultural wage labour. Breman indicates that income earning opportunities for landless peasants continue to be greater in agricultural wage labour, rather than in non-agricultural work (1995:9-10). Furthermore, despite reasonable proximity, few villagers have opted to work as migrant workers in the *Jabotabek* industrial region. The onerous living conditions for agricultural labourers, constantly on the move in search of work in neighbouring villages, is still preferable to the precarious life of migrant workers in Jakarta. According to Breman, access to, and income from, agricultural wage labour compares favourably to 'informal' or 'formal' sector work in Jakarta (1995:22-5).

These observations are supported by Jelinek (1991) and Murray's (1991b:94) studies on the disintegration of poor kampungs in Central Jakarta. From the 1950s up to the mid- 1970s these kampungs flourished. With government facilities and large private enterprises still underdeveloped and inefficient, early industrial growth relied heavily on a large informal sector supply of goods and services, such as transport and petty trade (Jelinek 1991:92). In the 1970s the informal sector was conservatively estimated to contain over half the urban work force. However, Central Jakarta's growth as a commercial and financial centre, employing and catering for a burgeoning upper intermediate strata populace, has resulted in the displacement of many informal sector occupations. Office buildings, cars, shopping plazas, supermarkets and refrigerators have replaced slums, pedicabs, markets and petty traders (Jelinek 1991:92-3; Murray 1991b:88,90). In Central Jakarta, at least, any growth in formal sector occupations is to the exclusion of the *wong cilik* who have

limited capital, education and skills. In conjunction with the industrial transformation of Central Jakarta, leading to the displacement of the *wong cilik*, is the coercive implementation of state policies, such as the outlawing of petty traders and pedicabs and tight restrictions on migrant residency (Jelinek 1991:94-5).

The expansion of formal sector employment for the *wong cilik* in manufacturing and services is occurring in newly industrialising regions, such as the outskirts of Jakarta, smaller urban centres and rural-urban fringes. Here, resources, in particular wage labour, are comparatively cheaper. However, these areas, experiencing slower or later industrial development, still sustain a large informal sector comprising at least 50 per cent (Guinness 1989) to 80 per cent (Sullivan 1992:113) of the work force. Where industrial change is less dramatic the urban *wong cilik* are more able to cope with, and even to a limited extent resist, the coercive tendencies of dominant social forces.

As with Jelinek's and Murray's studies in Jakarta, Guinness (1989), J. Sullivan (1992) and N. Sullivan (1989), undertaking research in neighbouring kampungs in the smaller provincial city of Yogyakarta, are concerned with how the predominantly *wong cilik* urban 'community' is maintained.²⁶ These urban kampung studies emphasise 'community' cohesion, through neighbourhood level social networks, in which women's cell groups are central, as important to *wong cilik* survival strategies (Murray 1991b; N. Sullivan 1989). Communal ties are important for the distribution of resources, in particular labour and food. For example, neighbours will band together to help someone repair or build a house or provide food and assistance to a sick neighbour.

Guinness and Murray show how communal ties and a sense of shared belonging, despite inherent power relations and self-interest, have worked to protect *wong cilik* households from the harshest extremes of their socio-economic subordination. In Jakarta, for example, Murray (1991b:84) recalls how a ward leader, who rents out pedicabs, assisted a pedicab driver hide his vehicle from police raids.

²⁶.

In general these studies distinguish the inner *wong cilik* 'community', defined by its regular communal activities, from wealthier kampung residents whose interests are orientated outwards towards the wider society

In Yogyakarta, Guinness gives the example of kampung residents supporting squatters' (beggars, vagrants and prostitutes) moral claims to state owned land. The squatters also function as a buffer against adverse changes to the kampung, such as attempts by the state to use the land they occupy as a municipal rubbish dump (1989: 67-9).

These studies present an ambiguity concerning the general relationship between communal ties that foster a sense of 'community' and penetration by, or integration with, the dominant forces of state and capital. Antlov (1995:116), agreeing with J. Sullivan's (1992:198, 200) conclusions, states that these communities will be preserved by the New Order state as 'self-regulating' mechanisms of social control. Through the ideology of harmony and control, guided by local functionaries orientated towards the state, the community serves to reproduce a docile *wong cilik* work force (Antlov 1995:116).

For Murray, however, the dialectic relationship between the kampung 'community' and 'external' forces is one of fundamental opposition. It is clearly evident in her research that the *wong cilik* community is politically and economically subjugated and the people have little control over the 'directions of change'. However, Murray also sees the 'matrifocality' in women's cell groups of the kampung informal sector as inherently anti-capitalist in their egalitarian and anarchist character (1991b:83-4). This can transform into defiant solidarity against harsh state intervention on behalf of capital and bourgeois values. Unlike Antlov, Murray sees the self-regulatory dynamics of *wong cilik* kampungs as a basis of resistance to, rather than integration by, the state. She supports her assertions with observations by Jelinek (1991:53) on kampung self-sufficiency and antipathy towards destructive state intervention on their livelihoods, and Guinness (1989:69-71) on kampung acceptance of social outcasts and preference for self policing over involving officialdom.

Antlov and J. Sullivan's analyses suggest that the 'relative autonomy' of communal ties involving the *wong cilik* is tolerated by the state so long as they remain functional to its overall strategy of social control. By contrast, analyses by Murray and Guinness indicate that the degree of 'relative autonomy' in communal ties is an outcome of contest and negotiation between the interests of the *wong cilik*

and dominant external forces.

These differences between the studies are not only a product of divergent theoretical perspectives, but difference in experiences of social change. As Jelinek concludes, the relationship between the *kampung* in her study and the 'city' had changed from symbiosis to antagonism as dominant socio-economic forces that once nurtured the *wong cilik* livelihood now threatened their existence (1991:180). The studies on *kampungs* in Jakarta and Yogyakarta suggest that life for the urban *wong cilik* will become increasingly precarious as both income earning opportunities and 'community' life become increasingly subjected to the broader interests of state sponsored capitalist development. Those forced to eke out an existence in the informal sector will suffer most as their market contracts and social support dries up with a break down in 'community' cohesion. As we shall see, it is questionable whether those *wong cilik* 'fortunate' enough to obtain work in the urban formal sector as waged labour are any better off than their counterparts in the informal sector.

During the 1980s state sponsored capitalist development thoroughly subordinated the urban working class. Bouchier notes that in the 1980s fifty per cent of factory workers were paid below minimum wages and many suffered from malnutrition. After mounting domestic and international pressure the government increased the minimum wage for workers in Jakarta to only rp 3,800 (\$A1.80) per day (Bouchier 1994a:v and 1994b:53-5). Although workers receive a regular wage or salary, often less than the official minimum wage, this wage barely covers their basic needs. Hadiz (1994b:199), citing official calculations, suggests the minimum wage itself only supports 60 per cent of the 'minimum physical needs of workers'. Working conditions are often unhealthy and dangerous with the use of old equipment and lack of safety precautions. Worker discipline and control can be inhumane with arbitrarily threats of wage cuts, violence or dismissal towards inefficient workers or 'trouble makers'.

Wages and working conditions have remained miserable where SPSI, the only legal, government backed, trade union, supports management and employers. Without freedom to effectively negotiate their interests with employers and the government the urban working class are heavily exploited. Exploitation is not

tempered by eroded community or family ties. According to Hull (1994:1) workers have become doubly dependent on their employers and the market for work and daily necessities. For the sake of cost efficiency and labour control their employers, for example, provide many factory workers, accommodation and food.

Under such oppressive conditions, maintained by the state through apathetic policing of employer obligations, interference in union activities and military intervention in labour unrest, worker resistance has been sporadic. Within the factory *wong cilik* resistance is limited, described as strategies for survival and even self-exploitation (Saptari 1994:41). For example, women in a cigarette factory in East Java often scrape up tobacco from the floor or borrow it from each other in order to ensure they don't suffer a pay cut if they don't reach their daily targets (Saptari 1994:41). Saptari (1994:42) and Razif (1994:25) also note that without effective independent trade unions worker strikes are usually spontaneous, short lived and unorganised, affording at best delayed and piecemeal responses by individual companies.

Over the last ten years there has been a rapid expansion of urban wage labour in the manufacturing and services sector. According to Indonesian census statistics, the total number of wage labourers employed in the manufacturing sector has risen from 4.7 million in 1980 to 8.2 million in 1990 (Hull 1994:5). The number of wage labourers in the broad category of the services sector, defined by Hull (1994:6) as 'trade, tourism, hotels and restaurants, government administration, community and social services, banking, financial services, and personal services' is much more difficult to determine. According to Hull roughly 75 per cent of 33 million people working in the service sector are wage earners whilst the rest are self employed or part of family enterprises. Based on these estimates, but noting the under-representation of child, female and illegal resident workers in the statistics, Hull conservatively estimates that in 1990 the number of working class wage earners in Indonesia was between 20 and 33 million (1994:1, 8).

Along with the expansion of wage labour in the manufacturing and services sector, is, according to some commentators, a nascent growth and consolidation of an extra communal working class consciousness (Bourchier 1994; Evers 1994:269;

Hadiz 1994a and 1994b; Lane 1996). As outlined previously, there is a huge jump in frequency of strikes since 1989 and dogged attempts to establish independent worker trade unions since 1990.

Conclusion

In general, *wong cilik* social agency is portrayed as having an indirect, minimal affect on local and broader socio-economic transformation. At the local level observations of *wong cilik* experiences and responses to social change usually reinforce the analyst's convictions of the extent to which the *wong cilik* are subjugated by dominant social forces. *Wong cilik* resistance is limited to 'strategies for survival', where the coercive effects of the dominant forces of social change are held temporarily at bay. Local social change is a part of larger forces of socio-economic transformation dominated by the interests of international capitalism in conjunction with the interests of the state and dominant classes. In most macro studies the *wong cilik*, even as a burgeoning urban working class, are dismissed as not central to an understanding of the mechanics of socio-economic transformation. The social agency of the *wong cilik* in adjusting to, or attempting to resist, the detrimental effects of their subjugation are mentioned as a by product, of limited influence to the overall process of social transformation. As such, most studies on socio-economic transformation in Indonesia do not dwell long on the creative agency of the *wong cilik*. However, a few studies, such as those by Jelinek and Murray, remind us not to accept the closure of an hegemonic subordination of the *wong cilik*. Spaces continue to be created from within which the *wong cilik* are able to resist or negotiate with coercive dominant forces.

Consideration of *wong cilik* agency in social transformation is increasingly pertinent with the formation of a consolidated urban working class. In reference to more organised worker militancy, Bouchier (1994a:v) makes a statement not possible in the 1980s: '[t]he experience of the past few years suggests that the urban working classes are not simply observers to the larger struggle [international and domestic intermediate strata push for legal reform and labour rights] but are, in some cases spear heading it'. Such a perspective, mirrored by Hadiz (1994a: 64) and Evers

(1994:269), serves as a reminder to the majority of analysts who continue to either pessimistically or optimistically look to the bourgeoisie or ‘middle classes’ as the major social forces and agents of democratic reform. It appears that Indonesia’s changing political and economic circumstances during the 1990s demand a more serious look at the social agency of the *wong cilik*.

Most studies concerning cultural production in Java similarly emphasise subjugation of *wong cilik* agency. However, as the following chapters demonstrate, the hegemonic control of dominant forces in cultural production has been over emphasised through neglect in recognising the creative agency of the *wong cilik*. The next chapter provides vivid anecdotes of the creativity of *wong cilik* cultural production despite socio-economic and political adversity. This chapter then sets the tenor of the thesis in understanding the social significance of (popular) cultural production from the perspective of the *wong cilik*.

Chapter Four: Popular Cultural Production from a *Wong Cilik* Perspective

1. *Wong Cilik* Lives and Poetry

A simple poem by a poor kampung resident, with a working class family background, speaks loudly about the socio-economic circumstances, consciousness and social agency of many *wong cilik* in urban Java today. The cultural activist Wiji Thukul assists Sipon (his spouse) as outworkers in the garment industry. The majority of people in kampung Kalangan, in Solo, Central Java, where Thukul's family resides, are *wong cilik*. Most residents are wage labourers: factory, construction, and transport workers (drivers and conductors). However, there are also those working in the 'informal sector', such as food hawkers, pedicab drivers and scavengers of recyclable materials (plastic bags and wrappings). Thus, in urban kampungs, such as Kalangan, there is a diversity of *wong cilik* occupations, affording a variety in income levels, social status and security. This diversity ranges from beggars and prostitutes, sometimes categorised as lumpen proletariat, through to small traders, low level sales and service personnel and clerks, from the lower intermediate strata. What the *wong cilik* have in common, however, is a precarious subsistence existence with low income, low job security and an inability to accumulate wealth.

The cultural practices in which Wiji Thukul is engaged arise from the socio-economic relations that constitute the daily lives of himself and other *wong cilik* residents in kampung Kalangan. His activities demonstrate that cultural practices can nurture and articulate *wong cilik* consciousness. Furthermore, Thukul's poem, 'An odd puzzle' (*Teka-teki yang ganjil*), written in September 1993, reveals that the *wong cilik* do not accept fatalistically their oppressive circumstances.²⁷

²⁷.

The poem text presented below is the original version given to me by Thukul. Subsequent published versions have a couple of minor refinements. During Indonesia's short fated *keterbukaan* or 'openness', 'An odd puzzle' was published in November 1993 in the provincial afternoon daily *Wawasan* through the efforts of a sympathetic journalist-poet Beno Siang Parmukas. It has also been published in an anthology of Indonesian poetry edited by Rahardi (1994:374-5) entitled *Dari Negeri Poci 2: 45 Penyair Indonesia*. This
(continued...)

'An odd puzzle' articulates the every day experiences and concerns of single labourers from the Sritex textile factory in Sukoharjo just south of Solo and the working class families of Kalangan. Actual and unpretentious, the poem makes visible a *wong cilik* consciousness where human dignity is upheld and a spirit of defiance grows. They are resentful of the social contradictions and de-humanising consequences of their economic and political oppression. Through the irony of bewilderment the labourers understand the contemporary political system supports socio-economic relations that guarantee their exploitation rather than their needs and interests.

An odd puzzle

That night we got together and talked
From our mouths were not matters of great significance
Each of us talked about our own wishes
which were simple and understandable

There were those who had for a long time wished to make a kitchen
in the houses they rent
And this reminded others
that they also didn't yet own a saucepan, kerosene stove,
drinking glasses and fry pan
This made them remember that they had once
wished to buy those things
But those wishes were quickly buried
by our weariness
And our wages so quickly changed
to become toothpaste-shampoo-and house rent
and bills at the stall which we had to pay back

In fact many amongst us still found it difficult
to enjoy warm tea
Because we are still busy trying to find ways where
to put our beds and hang our clothing

There are those who had for ages wanted to have their own bathrooms

(...continued)

anthology was in part the product of a controversial poetry performance held on 24 August 1994 in Tegal (see footnote 28 in Chapter Eleven).

From this the discussion jumped to the price of cement
and also wall paint, the price of which never falls

We also spoke about the general election campaign
which had just passed
Of the three parties that exist we concluded
They bear no relation what so ever with us: labourers
They only exploit our vote²⁸
for their own positions

We laugh because we realise
For many years we are deceived
and treated like buffalo

In the end we ask
Why is it so difficult for a labourer to buy a can of paint
even though (s)he works no less than 8 hours a day
Why is it so difficult for a labourer
to send the children to school
Even though each day (s)he produces
tons of goods

Then one amongst us stood up
Looked at each of us one by one and then asked:
'Are there things that you use
that aren't made by labourers?'
That question made us consider
the things around us:
neon lights, televisions, radios, clothes, books...

Since then we always feel like
we are faced with an odd puzzle
And that puzzle always arises
when we talk about saucepans-kerosene stoves-
drinking glasses-fry pans
Also at times when we count our wages
which so quickly changed
to tooth paste-shampoo-house rent
and bills at the stall which we must pay back

We are always surprised and ask ourselves
What is this power that sucks up
our energy and the fruits of our labour.

^{28.} *Suara*, literally 'voice' in this context, means 'vote'.

(21/9/93-Solo Kalangan)

(for the Indonesian transcript Appendix One, A)

The *warung*, a small roadside food stall, is a place where factory workers can go to get a cheap meal. It is also a space to talk freely about everyday matters, where the regime of factory work and the din of machinery which restricts communication to a few shouted remarks, are absent. It is a space relatively free from the constraints of control and surveillance by local officialdom. It may be a little more economical to prepare one's own food at home. However, weary after a hard, often dangerous and dirty work shift, it is easier to relax with friends at the local *warung*. In any case, there is no space in their tiny rented homes for a kitchen. The single men working at the nearby Sritex textile factory in Sukoharjo sleep five or six to a small room. They have nowhere to hang their clothes and must take it in turns to invite their girlfriends round on Saturday nights. For workers' families in Kalangan, Solo, the story is similar. A single room must be constantly rearranged to fit the changing daily needs as bedroom, dining room or place to entertain guests. Those that have space would love to have a kitchen. However, pots and fry pans, for some even drinking glasses, are unaffordable. Wages less than A\$2.00 per day (in 1996) barely cover daily necessities and even simple ambitions, such as keeping the children at school past elementary level, remain unrealised.

The people in Kalangan toil all day in a variety of nearby light manufacturing industries, producing books, electronic goods, construction materials and textiles, most of which they can never hope to own themselves. Any desire to improve their own living conditions evaporates when they realise they can't even afford the paint to decorate the drab walls of their rented homes. It remains little more than a dream to buy cement to build a bathroom, rather than queue up at the public bath and two squat toilets used by two hundred other families.

An understanding of the irony of being unable to afford the simple commodities they work so hard to produce transforms despair into dissatisfaction and anger, not passive acceptance and fatalism. There is a realisation that the formal political system does not represent their concerns, but is deception aligned with the

interests of the factory owners in an insatiable exploitation of the *wong cilik*.

The consistency of Thukul's radical creativity and courage as a *wong cilik* activist is exceptional (dangerously obsessive for some). Undoubtedly an agent of social change, he is, however, a product of history. 'An odd puzzle' is situated within a growing sophistication in awareness amongst the urban working class as a consequence of the restructuring of Indonesia's economy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, with a substantial drop in oil prices since 1985, the Indonesian state is relying increasingly on foreign and domestic investment in non-oil/gas export industries as an alternative revenue source. Apart from encouraging value-added industries such as wood products, in particular plywood, there has been a rapid expansion of light manufacturing labour intensive industries, including textiles and clothing, food processing, and electrical goods.²⁹

The growth in light manufacturing over the last ten years has resulted in an expansion and consolidation of the working class, not just in Greater Jakarta but in regional and rural centres as well. Surakarta, incorporating the city of Solo and its outer region, is a major site in the central Javanese province for light manufacturing industries taking advantage of a cheap urban and rural labour force. Early each morning in front of my father-in-law's house on the northern outskirts of Solo is a steady torrent of factory workers on bicycles, many living more than twenty kilometres away, that makes it virtually impossible to walk across the road. The 'urbanisation' of rural Java is much more than a spatial phenomenon. An increasing proportion of income for *wong cilik* from rural areas is obtained from non-agricultural work in urban areas. Those from rural localities either commute daily or reside permanently or semi-permanently in urban areas.

A large number of the growing landless and underemployed rural *wong cilik* also find work in urban centres in the 'informal sector' as pedicab drivers, house servants and food hawkers. Begog, another *wong cilik* poet, sells traditional medicine on the streets of Salatiga, an hour and a half by bus north east of Solo. His precarious

²⁹.

On the state's growing reliance on, and expansion of, labour intensive export orientated industries see Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (1995) and Robison (1996).

circumstances, poverty and oppression, have necessitated, rather than stamped out, his creativity and sense of dignity.³⁰

Begog sells ointment from scorpions to stem loss of hair or to stimulate hair growth. Most of the people who buy his ointments are from what he terms the 'middle class', civil servants, university students and lecturers. Seldom do *wong cilik* such as pedicab drivers buy his products. Selling scorpion ointment was his father's trade until he died when Begog was in fifth grade primary school. In order for his mother and younger siblings to survive, Begog left school and took up his father's trade. Ever since, he has been selling scorpion ointment in Solo and Yogyakarta and for the last four years in Salatiga. He usually operates in busy places, such as markets, town squares and public transport points. Usually, Begog earns between rp 5,000-10,000 a day (about A\$ 3.50-7.00 in 1993). An earnings of Rp 10,000 less goods and transport expenses leaves rp 6,500 which is barely enough to feed his family. He considers his work better than in a factory as it pays more and he is not constrained by the factory regime, such as work hours, determined by the employer.

Begog doesn't have enough money to buy the various licences from the Health Department and public order authorities. He is often expelled from his place of selling by the law and order enforcement officers. It is not uncommon for him to be beaten and his goods kicked over. Sometimes he is taken to court and threatened with the confiscation of his goods of trade. He pleads them not to take his livelihood away and argues how then can he feed his wife (of over four years) and his two children (two and a half and seven months).³¹ In the poem 'Human rights' (*Hak Asasi Manusia*) (Tungku 1993:31) Begog conveys the precarious and oppressed existence of the side walk hawker maintained by the arbitrary injustice of local authorities. At the same time he has a dig at the 'human rights' rhetoric of the radical intelligentsia which fails to identify with the daily realities of the *wong cilik*.

³⁰ The following discussion on Begog is based on personal communications in Solo in December 1993.

³¹ Begog met his wife in Solo. She was a friend, like a younger sister, rather than lover. When Begog felt he was old and ready to start a family he simply asked her if she wanted to share life together. She agreed. She previously worked in a factory in Bogor. However, now Begog prefers she stay at home with the young children as he earns enough on his own to feed them. When the children are a bit older she may work again as a trader where there are fewer constraints on personal freedom than the factory.

Human Rights

The right to live peacefully without stress
without feeling anxious
The right as an individual who is equal in the eyes of the law
free from forced labour and slavery.

Noble indeed it sounds
in our ears, the ignorant ones
who don't understand what it is.....?
Human Rights

Because what we know
is only simple
work, wages, food and a normal life
like people out there.....
Human Rights
what word is that?
something new to us
people beside the streets.

We who each day display our goods on the side of the streets
who are frequently chased by public order
dragged out, scratched out!
we don't know, what our fault is.

Is this human rights
being free to do anything, to us
side walk people, hawkers, pedicab drivers
are we wild people [illegals/non-citizens].....?

We don't know, human rights
human rights, is not for us
human rights, is for the people out there.....
we are just here, beside the street, at shop fronts

We are aware,
We are marginal people.

(for the Indonesian transcript see Appendix One, B)

Before marrying, Begog slept on the footpath with other hawkers. Now he returns home to his family who live with his parents-in-law in a rural village in Boyolali district between Solo and Salatiga. If someone in the family is sick and needs

medication or hospitalisation his life becomes frantic in a panic to find the money. Three months after bearing a child his wife required prolonged medication and check ups. In order to pay for the treatment he simply had to work longer hours. Where he normally worked from early morning until four in the afternoon he then had to work at night as well.

Begog says there is a spirit of solidarity rather than competition amongst the street sellers. Sometimes, a fellow seller of the same wares has nowhere to sell and comes along to Begog's regular place. Here, they may take it in turns to sell, Begog in the morning and the other at night. Alternatively, the other seller will join with him and at the end of the day they will split equally the profits. Also, if one of the street sellers has a bad day the others will chip in so he has at least enough money for food and transport costs. However, because of the itinerant nature of the work this loose solidarity has not extended to any formal association or organisation.³² Side walk sellers constantly move on from one place to the next, either forced to by the authorities or in need of a better market. Also, the sidewalk sellers live far apart, coming from different villages. It is often only by coincidence that they meet up again at a future time.

Like Thukul, Begog is very articulate. He says most of the side walk sellers are, because they must make the customers interested, and convince them to buy something. His poem 'Beside the road on the pavement' (*Pinggir jalan di atas trotoar*) (Tungku 1993:32) conveys the humorous banter that both tempts and goads the potential customer of higher social status.

Beside the Road on the Pavement

Sir and Madam
when sir-madam take a stroll
is sir-madam annoyed
by all the street side traders

³².

Begog says there is a Salatiga branch of the organisation Pesatuan Penjual Obat Seluruh Indonesia or The All Indonesia Medicine Sellers Association. However, he saw it as a GOLKAR front. According to Begog the association's membership fees were rp 25,000 (A\$ 17.00) per annum for which one got an official certificate, but no protection from harassment by public authorities.

Are not you entertained sir
by the chit-chat and boasting
that perhaps has no value
in the eyes of sir-madam

On the side of the street
set up on the side walk

From soybean cake to ox tail soup
filling cigarette lighters to filling stomachs
magazines posters to stickers
sir can look or amuse yourself

Fortune telling
sold by the paranormal, [from] charms to all purpose capsules
everything is there on the sidewalk

On the side of the street
on the pave walk

There are condoms, there is medicine for impotence
medicine for skin fungus and also medicine for hair growth
is sir having difficulty being aroused
if sir's missile is weak please come to the pavement

Do you want it long
or long lasting
sir you may try crocodile penis.
its effectiveness – sir can try

(for the Indonesian transcript see Appendix One, C)

Begog acknowledges that although he has shared experiences with fellow side walk sellers there is some distance between his thinking and conceptual ideas and the others. Since 1988 Begog has enjoyed writing poetry whilst resting after work and during quiet times. Since Begog was young he always liked reading and when he could, before he was married, bought newspapers and books. Also, originating from the same neighbourhood as Thukul, Begog heard of Thukul's good library and frequently borrows books from him. Begog is also involved with Thukul's network of friends who include student activists.

Begog's life circumstances and experiences are the same as the other *wong*

cilik sellers around him. However, he is self-educated and has a network of educated friends. Very few side walk sellers are involved in cultural activities such as poetry. This makes him somewhat of a leader in the loose ‘community’ of sidewalk sellers. Begog says that when he and his sidewalk friends get together over a problem his opinion or advice is often listened to or sought after.

Begog has seen his poetry as nothing more than for his own amusement. Thus many of his poems are gone, lost or misplaced. He has never thought of reading his poetry formally and his first public performance was the ‘Tungku’ alternative poets’ convention organised by Thukul (see Chapter Six). For Begog his poetry is an exercise in self-reflection rather than, as in Thukul’s case, a political instrument. However, Begog’s poetry is intimately connected with his life as a *wong cilik*. Furthermore, his poetry is one aspect of his educated consciousness that has equipped him to provide a leadership and foster greater solidarity and dignity within the loose ‘community’ of side walk sellers in spite of their oppressive conditions.

2. *The Wong Cilik as a Locus in Exploring Popular Culture*

The above accounts of the lived experiences of Thukul and Begog, expressed through their poetry, introduce the central concern of this thesis: how to identify the significance for, and social agency of, the *wong cilik* in popular culture understood as sites of social struggle and change. Chapters Five to Seven in part B will synthesise the amorphous construct of popular culture in Indonesia, unravelling and clarifying it according to contemporary socio-economic relations. These social relations of struggle and change imbue popular culture.

First, I make a distinction between two streams of study, which in reality intermingle and merge, as they carve through the seemingly diverse, shapeless plain of popular culture in Indonesia.³³ An ‘older’ stream, running through earlier studies, such as those by Geertz (1960) and, in particular Peacock (1968) in *Rites of Modernisation*, looks at ‘popular culture’ as it pertains to the *wong cilik*. The more

³³ These studies may use terms parallel to, or subsumed within the concept of, ‘popular culture’, such as popular or people’s art/music/theatre or mass/public/low culture.

recent stream often locates its observations of 'popular culture' within the broad category of mass culture in which the new interests and aspirations of the burgeoning urban 'middle class' appear prominent.

Since the late 1980s scholarly observations concerning urban/modern 'popular culture' in Indonesia have become increasingly 'popular'.³⁴ This interest coincides with recent rapid urbanisation/industrialisation, with the perceived growing significance of an expanded urban 'middle class' and, to a lesser extent, working class (discussed in the previous chapter). Many of these studies of urban/modern popular culture fall within the broad milieu of the mass media, urban 'middle class' consumer tastes and youth sub cultures. Usually, 'popular' here refers to a mass or public culture. Examples are Heider (1991) and Sen (1987, 1994) on cinema, Kitley (1992) on television, and Hatch (1989) and Henschkel (1994) on popular music. Most of these studies are either explicitly (Sen 1987:374) or more vaguely (Frederick 1997:74-5) centred on the cultural production and consumption of the urban 'middle class', mostly within the upper intermediate strata.

The other broad stream of studies has a more 'populist' interest in popular culture more directly concerned with the *wong cilik*, either as objects or subjects.³⁵ Many of these studies are concerned with how popular cultural production represents

³⁴ In parallel, there has been a flourish of moral debates and interest articles on specific forms of popular culture in the print media. Some examples from newspapers available in Central Java between November 1993 and January 1994 include: 'Kritik Terhadap Populisme' [Criticism of Populism] (*Kedaulatan Rakyat*, November, 1993:8); 'Pers, Bioskop, TV dan Demoralisasi?' [The Press, Cinema, TV, and De-moralisation?] (*Suara Merdeka*, December, 1993:6); 'Gelombang Cuci Otak lewat TV' [The Wave of Brain Washing via TV] and other articles on 'Budaya Tanding' [Counter Culture] (*Detik*, September, 1993); 'Musik Dangdut dan Budaya Masa' [Dangdut Music and Mass Culture] (*Wawasan*, January, 1994:9); 'Kalau Sopir Truk "Berpuisi"' [When Truck Drivers Create Poetry] (*Suara Merdeka*, November, 1993:7); 'Komik Lokal vs Globalisasi Komik' [Local Comics vs the Globalisation of Comics] (*Kompas*, November, 1993:9); 'Pelukis Jalanan Terancam Punah?' [Are Street Artists Threatened with Extinction?] (*Suara Merdeka*, November, 1993:7); '"Video Games": Santai tapi Serius' ['"Video Games": Leisurely but Serious] (*Kompas*, January, 1994:12). See also Mariana Henschkel's (1994) article 'Perceptions of Popular Culture in Indonesia: Five Articles from Tempo, 1980-1990.

³⁵ By 'populist' I begin with McGuigan's (1992:14) succinct definition as 'a sense of commitment to "the people" and their struggles'. In this sense my own research interests are populist. However, for much populist cultural production 'commitment' is watered down to 'concern' or 'interest', including self-interest and commercial interest, in 'the people', and their struggles. Murray (1991a:6), for example, remarks that Jakarta's Teater Koma. is 'caught in a contradiction between presenting social protest or only exploiting the problems of the oppressed for the entertainment of the wealthy'.

or engages with the *wong cilik*. Much of this popular culture is considered to be instigated from within the 'middle class' and to have an overt programmatic or political concern with the *wong cilik*. This is evident in the analyses of van Erven (1992) on liberation theatre in Indonesia and Wright (1991) on the New Art Movement. These cultural movements are instigated by the radical intelligentsia from the lower intermediate strata with a commitment to labourers and peasants within the *wong cilik* and interrelated with environmental issues. Nevertheless, 'Populist' cultural production from the progressive intelligentsia is ambiguous in how it represents, and whether it furthers the interests of, the *wong cilik*. Compare, for example, Murray (1991a) and Cahyono (1992), in respect to the 'radical' pop music of Iwan Fals, mentioned in Chapter Six.

Other studies in what I call the 'populist' stream are interested in popular cultural production and consumption more directly sourced within the daily life and concerns of the *wong cilik* that have important, though usually less overt, political and sociological implications. Such studies include Hughes-Freeland (1990) and Widodo (1995) on *tayuban* dance; Hatley (1982) on *kethoprak* theatre; Susanto (1992) and Pioquinto (1995) on *dangdut Sekaten*; and Clara van Groenendael (1985) and Foley (1987) on *wayang* shadow play.

I have begun to distinguish between two streams of study on popular culture, either centred on mass consumer culture and the 'middle classes', or specifically pertaining to the *wong cilik*. In reality, however, most studies from which these streams are drawn are vague or uninterested in locating the production and consumption of popular culture according to precise class structures and interests. Often the 'people' involved in popular culture are a generalised 'middle mass' milieu, which sometimes conflate all from the *wong cilik*, intermediate strata and even bourgeoisie.³⁶

Often popular culture is distinguishable only in its contrast with the dominant, traditional, established or official culture of a dominant elite or the state. Sears

³⁶ A refreshing early exception is Murray's (1991a) article 'Kampung culture and radical chic in Jakarta'. She sketches broadly some of the socio-economic and political relations surrounding the alternative cultural practices of the progressive 'middle class' intelligentsia or *wong cilik* kampung residents that lead to either their domestication by or resistance to dominant interests.

(1996:71-3), for example, refers to the pre-independence suppression of ‘subaltern’ Islamic *wayang* traditions by a general alliance of indigenous Javanist and colonial elite interpretations of *wayang*. However, these so called subaltern (a term originally equated with the subordinate classes in India) *wayang* traditions were, themselves, propagated by Islamic elites. A similar confusion appears in the eminent cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s early testing of the waters of ‘modern’ popular culture in ‘”Popular art” and the Javanese tradition’ (1990). In the late 1980s Geertz returns to the village where, 30 years before, he had done research culminating in the seminal study *Religion of Java* (1960) in which he chronicled distinct categories of ‘classic’ and ‘popular art’. In his recent visit Geertz experienced a ‘clatter’ of confused ‘low’ and ‘high’ cultural practices. Although this cacophony of public culture is acknowledged as a social and political force imbued with relations of power and struggle, it is made sense of only in its generalised contrast with ideal ‘officialized’, ‘academicized’ and ‘commercialized’ tourist culture (Geertz 1990: 93-4).

The common characteristic in all these studies of ‘popular culture’ is in distinguishing it as a deviation, an alternative, or in opposition to high, traditional or official culture. For example, the popular culture which scholars tend to associate with the urban ‘middle class’ youth articulates a sense of alienation, vulnerability, frustration and uncertainty in an era of authoritarian modernisation. This is a central understanding of the outlandish theatre of students graduates of a private Muslim English school in East Java (Geertz 1990:86-7), alternative Balinese rock music (Baulch 1996:23-5) and the old style bicycle counter culture in Yogyakarta and Solo (Budiman 1993:29). On the other hand, popular culture pertaining to the *wong cilik*, subjugated economically and politically, may, as we shall see, be characterised as radical protest against, vulgar mimicry of, or an unhegemonised, but marginalised alternative to, idealised dominant culture.

However, as Geertz (1990) alludes to also, popular culture should not be distinguished as diametrically opposed to, or separate from, high, dominant or official culture. Rather, popular culture is engaged with dominant culture. That is, the central characteristic of both streams of popular culture is as sites or arenas of cultural contestation where, as Hall (1981:239) defines, a ‘struggle for and against a culture

of the powerful is engaged'. Here, high and low, old and new, elite and popular, and dominant and subordinate cultural traditions meet and compete producing outcomes different from, even challenging, idealised dominant culture. Thus, as Frederick (1997:76,80) in his contemporising of the 1930s writer, Armijn Pane, warns, we must be wary of using essentialist/formalist cultural categories such as modern/traditional dichotomies that in popular culture often coexist in a complementary rather than opposing manner.³⁷

This is not, however, to take the essentially pluralist position of many of these students of popular culture in Indonesia, who seem to have rejected, or shifted away from, tying cultural production to a materialist analysis of socio-economic relations and class. There is a tendency in these studies to reduce class differences to just one of a number of 'identities' along with gender, ethnicity, religion and age, in the relations of dominant-subordinate struggle articulated through popular cultural production. The de-emphasising of hierarchical power structures is explicit in Day (1996) on 'identity formation' in *wayang* and Hefner (1990:225) on 'consumption communities'. However, the powerful, and extremely useful, tools of deconstruction in post modern/poststructuralist theory should not be used to the extent that we underestimate the importance of socio-economic inequality based on unequal class relations and state dominance discussed in Chapter Three.

Overall, popular cultures are potential sites of democratic change where dominant and subordinate cultural traditions contest.³⁸ However, these sites of cultural contestations are constituted and constrained by a socio-economic structure informed by unequal relations of class struggle.³⁹ Rowe and Schelling (1991:10) point out that sites of cultural contestation do not consist of a plurality of alternative traditions coexisting as equal forces mediated by the state. Rather, popular culture

³⁷ Frow (1995) provides a good critique on essentialism and formalism.

³⁸ Understanding popular culture as sites of cultural contestation also breaks down the inference in many studies of popular culture as a singular, organised and coherent entity, or 'worldview'. Rowe and Schelling (1991:10), for example, see popular cultures in Latin America as projects for the future, forming in 'a series of dispersed sites' or spaces as democratising forces rather than ideal utopian models.

³⁹ Siriyuvasak (1991:45) in his article on mass media in Thailand, for example, follows the processes of popular cultural production as they are situated in and 'constrained by the dynamics of the economy and the power structure, in which the constituents of social stratification are represented, reproduced and challenged'.

highlights a hegemonic battle of unequal forces, of which the state is a dominant one, where there are winners, losers and stalemates in territorial negotiation with outcomes that further transform the shape of this field of struggle.

The stream of popular culture which identifies most with 'middle class' (upper intermediate strata) and/or commercial mass culture at best describes a democratising force within dominant interests that often has little to do with *wong cilik* concerns.⁴⁰ Thus, in the following discussion, this stream of popular culture, along with a 'popular culture' manufactured to legitimise the ruling bloc's construction of the nation-state and their domination within it, is hived off and placed under the general category of dominant cultural forces. Here we detail the dominant cultural forces associated with the state and capitalism that inform the parameters for cultural production in Java. Popular culture pertaining more directly, yet often ambiguously, to *wong cilik* concerns becomes the focus of discussion in the following chapters.⁴¹ These chapters hone the analytical tools required for evaluating the significance for, and/or agency of, the *wong cilik* in different cultural practices as sites of contestation. More broadly, however, the *wong cilik* become the locus for a survey in part B on popular culture in Java.⁴² I am particularly interested in cultural practices which 'represent' or 'affirm' the interests of the *wong cilik* and/ or in which the *wong cilik* participate. Overall, part B develops the theoretical debate on how we analyse the significance of popular culture (performance) for the *wong cilik*.

⁴⁰ Frederick (1997:75-6, 87-8) says that popular culture associated with the broad 'middle classes' tends to be more commercially slick and self-indulgent. There are signs, he suggests, that popular culture associated with the 'middle classes' is increasingly indifferent or cynical towards populism and the *wong cilik*, except when *wong cilik* cultural traditions can be appropriated gainfully.

⁴¹ Foulcher (1990:309-16) similarly distinguishes between two broad categories of opposition by progressive 'middle class' intellectuals and artists to state cultural hegemony. Some forms of oppositional cultural expression are populist in an attempt to invoke, or speak on behalf of, *wong cilik* or '*rakyat*' sentiment. Other forms of critical cultural expression are couched within the state dominated national discourse. Foulcher illustrates that both categories have potential to either challenge or be incorporated into the dominant construction of national culture.

⁴² There is an enormous, ever changing diversity of popular culture. By necessity, my survey is restricted to examples that have received reasonable scholarly and general interest. Furthermore, because of the informal nature of what I consider central elements of popular culture pertaining to the *wong cilik*, most of the examples I have chosen are those that I have been able to observe directly myself.

PART B THE *WONG CILIK* AND CULTURAL CONTESTATION

Chapter Five: The *Wong Cilik* and Dominant Cultural Production

Culture may be considered determined by, dominant over, or, as I prefer, concomitant with economic production as the motor of social dynamics. Although theoretical perspectives differ, most analysts point to the culture of the ruling bloc, including the dominant classes and state, as that which is most closely associated with the major forces of social reproduction and change. Cultural production controlled by the state and dominant classes, and informed by capitalist relations of production, is seen as imposed on the *wong cilik*. According to most studies, the *wong cilik*, with little alternative, understand their world through the parameters of this amalgam of dominant culture.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to provide an exhaustive survey of dominant cultural forces. A number of scholars, including van Langenburg (1986) and Pemberton (1994), have, for example, already provided thorough documentation on the hegemonic conjuncture between state ideology and an elite Javanese 'worldview' that permeates cultural institutions and socio-cultural practices. Undeniably important, there has been, however, a general tendency to over emphasise the hegemonic closure of this conjuncture. This is the basis of Hatley's (1996:159-60) criticisms of Pemberton's *On the Subject of "Java"* (1994) when she states, first,

dichotomising "Javanese culture" and progressive politics, seems simplistically monolithic in its exclusion of variation and contestation within understandings of Javanese "tradition".

Then, in reference to local theatre, Hatley (1996:160) reminds us that whilst some

theatre groups are benefiting from state patronage others 'contest the state's construction of "tradition" in alternative renditions of Javanese history and legend'. Hatley's second criticism, again refers to local theatre production which is 'affected most crucially not by the culture effect of the state but by economic transformation and the impact of global mass media'.

In continuity with Chapter Three, this section highlights some of the important complementary and contradictory conjunctures between state and dominant capitalist relations as the main forces involved in dominant cultural production. The characteristics of an elite Javanese 'worldview', which I would suggest is more a product of state and capital than an entity on its own, are discussed in greater detail in part C with particular reference to *wayang*. In fact, this section illustrates the increasing significance of capitalist relations of production, vis-à-vis state ideology and elite Javanese 'worldview', which, if anything, point to the inconsistencies and weaknesses of a hegemonic dominant culture.

1. Official Culture

'Unity in Diversity'

Within the milieu of dominant culture, official culture, as propagated by the state apparatus, articulates, legitimates and reinforces the general interests of the state and dominant classes. These interests are in introducing social change that most benefits the ruling bloc whilst maintaining the general social structure of power relations that subjugates the *wong cilik*. It is true that contradictions within dominant culture manifest from conflicting interests of various factions within the state, international capital and dominant classes. Despite this, however, official culture, as maintained by the state, continues to represent and serve the overall interests of the ruling bloc. Nevertheless, when dominant interests appropriate popular cultural tastes and expressions for political or commercial advantage some compromise or influence of alternative meanings on dominant culture is inevitable.

The flexible spatial and temporal parameters of 'Unity in diversity' encompass state cultural policy. The spatial parameters are an acknowledgment of the regional and ethnic diversity of interests in the Indonesian archipelago. Yet, only to the extent

that these interests are subordinate to an harmonious pan-Indonesian or national culture. It is important to the state to acknowledge regional diversity as this justifies the necessity of centralised state control in holding the nation together.

The temporal parameters of 'Unity in diversity' recognise the impact of modernisation and development on 'traditional' social relations. The state's role is to promote and preserve acceptable cultural practices commensurate with Indonesia's cultural heritage. It must also establish the right balance of 'continuity and change' by sifting out any negative influences from modernisation (Foulcher 1990:301). In industries such as tourism and mass media, however, these ideals are compromised in the convergence of interests, as well as contradictions between, state and capital.

State cultural policy is part of a legitimising discourse that portrays the state as guardian of the well being of its people. Centralised state control in maintaining order and stability is necessary not only to ensure an harmonious cohesive nation-state, but in guaranteeing economic prosperity through top down capitalist investment (*pembangunan*). State legitimacy is locked into the needs of industrial capitalism, whose preconditions are order and stability. A semblance of social stability requires denying or, when necessary, domesticating that which articulates social cleavages. In the official culture of the 'corporatist' state social contradictions underlying class, regional, ethnic, religious and gender differences are reduced to a kaleidoscope of styles in the spirit of 'Unity in diversity' and 'continuity and change'.

Bowen (1991:126) indicates the process by which state cultural policy under the banner of *Pancasila* and the concept of 'Unity in diversity' in pan-Indonesianess is implemented to legitimate the nation-state, acknowledge diversity, and, yet, suppress division and dissent:

The supremacy of the Pancasila is also invoked to suppress any discourse that the government considers socially divisive. In particular, public comment on ethnic, racial, or religious differences is discouraged. Yet the poetry, dance and plastic arts specific to each ethnic group do form an important part to Indonesia's cultural richness. To highlight the richness whilst omitting mention of ethnicity, the government has constructed a hybrid cultural type for each of Indonesia's twenty-seven provinces. It draws on these provincial types to standardise the representation of culture. Indonesia can thus be said to have a National Culture, consistent with the Pancasila, and yet to have Balinese dance, Javanese gamelan, and Irian Jaya monumental carved

statuary.

On a national level and international stage regional cultural differences are recognised as subordinate components of a pan-Indonesian official culture. Bowen (1991:127) explains how divergent regional cultures are meshed into a safe pan-Indonesian national culture, which necessitates emptying any local meaning of divisive ethnic and religious (and I would add class based) elements.

The two central messages of Indonesia's cultural representations are that culture is a function of region, not ethnicity or religion, and that it is eminently translatable across regional boundaries ... Other functions (religious or political) of these and other cultural forms are removed. Forms that are part of rituals or longer ceremonies are either not shown or are depicted without their ritual context.

There are numerous examples of political, convergent with commercial, appropriation, sanitisation and de-politicisation of local cultures, such as school books, calendars, and posters showing different traditional wedding dress and weaponry. Posters in the late 1980s promoting the national airline, Garuda, for instance, present one of each region's most renowned tourist locations with an insert of a beautiful woman in traditional dress. Shorts on state owned television show regional dances and songs in isolation from their social surrounding. As Bowen (1991:126-7) observes:

The dancers and singers perform distinct compositions three to five minutes in length, usually with guitar accompaniment and often at the culture park in front of their provincial house. In many cases ... these songs have little to do with indigenous song forms but are composed with the medium of television (and in many cases with cassette recording) in mind. Television thus shapes artistic composition and reinforces the impression of a uniform Indonesian culture.

Bowen (1991:126) reminds us of the New Order state's 'politics of cultural representation', exemplified in the popular cultural park in Jakarta, Taman Mini Indonesia, with traditional houses, containing artefacts and wedding dresses from each major ethnic group:

These objects can all be seen, understood, and enjoyed by other Indonesians as regional variations on recognisable pan-Indonesian themes. The houses, taken together form a discourse about culture in which art and such cross-culturally translatable elements as weddings and cloth are highlighted and from which politics is absent.

Control and surveillance

State owned or sponsored cultural institutions, such as public schools, arts academies, cultural centres and cultural associations, also work towards emptying cultural practices of all politics except that of the state, through surveillance, control and domination. For example, on the role of the arts academies in influencing Javanese shadow theatre Sears asserts:

The government has greater control over the shadow puppet tradition than ever before through monitoring what stories are performed, channelling the tradition into the government sponsored fine arts academies, and having the academies take an increasing role in the development of the tradition outside the academies. Wayang competitions are frequently sponsored by city and village government organisations and the judges for these events are inevitably drawn from the fine arts academy (Sears 1986: 181).

State surveillance and control of cultural production are also achieved through censorship. Sen (1994), for example, outlines the protracted censorship procedures for film scripts. Modern theatre also must jump a number of bureaucratic censorship hurdles. Once the performance is permitted, those cultural workers with any reputation for mild social criticism can expect intimidation from army intelligence officers present amongst the audience.

It should be noted, however, that state control through censorship and surveillance is in practice not watertight. Permission to perform, that on the surface appears inconsistent and arbitrary, is the result of complex socio-economic and political interrelationships between individuals and institutions. In reference to the Kantata Takwa concert series with the artists of conscience Iwan Fals and Rendra (discussed in Chapter Six) Murray (1991a:14) notes that in gaining permission to perform:

'censorship' as such is generally less important than conflicting financial

interests, and corruption and incompetence are just as influential as strategic decisions in shaping what is performed and what is allowed to be performed.

There are many other examples. The premature curtailment of Slamet Raharjo's internationally acclaimed film *Rumahku, Langitku* contrasting the life circumstances of two boys, one wealthy, one poor, who befriend each other was due more to unfavourable market forces than political intervention or censorship. According to Raharjo, cinemas have a monopoly on cheaper imported movies that bring larger audiences than Indonesian auteur films.⁴³ The government cultural centre in Surakarta, Taman Budaya Surakarta (TBS), also exemplifies the uneven nature of government censorship. TBS management are employees of the state, but have close involvement with the performing arts in Surakarta. One of the managers, for example, is the older brother of Bambang Widoyo, the late writer-director of Solo's radical Teater Gapit theatre company. In 1993-1994 around the time of my research TBS consistently allowed performances and exhibitions banned elsewhere. Such performances include: poetry readings by the outspoken Wiji Thukul, Emha Ainun Najib's play, *Pak Kanjeng* (banned in Yogyakarta and Bandung), Moelyono's installation protesting lack of compensation in the displacement of poor villagers in the Wonorejo dam development, Tulung Agung, East Java (unlikely to be allowed in Surabaya), and the first solo exhibition of paintings by Djoko Pekik, accused of being a communist sympathiser (unlikely to be allowed in Yogyakarta).

Although TBS is comparatively more lenient than other places, permission for Moelyono's and Djoko Pekik's exhibition is more feasible given Solo's distance from their home cities of Surabaya and Yogyakarta, respectively, where the artists and their work have greater meaning and would attract greater interest. A factor of state censorship is thus consideration of the likely impact of alternative cultural production. Similarly, apart from any political and 'business' connections, state permission for 'modern' theatre performances can be made in the comfortable knowledge that their small audiences are mainly comprised of an urban intelligentsia. Those who can afford the comparatively high ticket costs of most 'modern' theatre

⁴³ Public discussion with Slamet Raharjo at the screening of his film at the Film and Television Institute, Fremantle on 6 June 1991.

in general benefit from the economic and political conditions they critique, as noted by Murray (1991a:2,8) in relation to Jakarta's Teater Koma.

It is difficult to generalise about the state's censorship attitudes towards what Sen terms the 'cultural periphery'. From her communications with me, Sen asserts the state is more worried about the 'middle-class' youth, not the *wong cilik*, and about what is performed in the cultural centres of Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bandung rather than on the periphery, such as at TBS in Solo. This perspective is supported somewhat by Feistein. Feinstein (1995:631) believes Teater Gapit's ability to continually challenge without sanction dominant cultural discourses, particularly through using coarse Javanese instead of the national language, is because of the 'invisibility' to the state of the everyday language of the *wong cilik*. On the other hand, the cultural activists, Wiji Thukul and Moelyono, have described to me how the local state apparatus has suspected, even confiscated as subversive, the art works of *wong cilik* children. It seems that at the local level the state continues to feel threatened by, and over react to, the politicisation of the *wong cilik*. However, localised political relations and strategies are also significant in influencing whether or not cultural production engaged with the concerns of the *wong cilik* becomes subject to censorship.

De-politicisation of cultural practices is also facilitated by an internalised fear in society, cultivated by the state through its mechanisms of control and surveillance, despite, or perhaps because of, their arbitrary nature. Furthermore, as outlined in Chapter Three, any opposition or dissent by an individual or group at the local or national level can lead to a communist tag sanctioning reprisal. In general, the internalised fear of divisiveness fostered by the state colours the workings of all institutions involved in the production of culture, as Geertz (1990:79) notes concerning the diffusion of 'electoral politics':

driven, or frightened away from partisan expression, it [electoral politics] has entrenched itself in institutions (schools, churches, cults, welfare organisations, professional groups, cultural associations) that can be represented as non-political; moral, aesthetic, or recreational enterprises, merely functional and indifferent to power ... *where the contest of interests cannot be directly expressed and ideology must be made to look like art without art being made to look like ideology* [my emphasis].

The idea that suppressed electoral politics have been diffused into cultural institutions parallels the process noted in Chapter Three where the suppression of campus politics channelled student energies into community organisations, such as NGOs. The irony, I would argue, is that suppression of formal political debate is fostering an initially defused and informal, yet fundamental, re-politicisation of society.

Contradictions Within Official Culture

As illustrated above, state control over cultural production is by no means stable and watertight. For example, there is always tension in the state policy of 'unity and diversity', and between making ideology look like art without art being made to look like ideology. This was revealed, for example, in controversy over part of a major state sponsored exhibition called 'Indonesia Culture in America 1990-1991 or KIAS. The exhibition was promoting Visit Indonesia Year and was during the period of 'openness' discussed in Chapter Three. When Djoko Pekik's paintings (along with the works of other painters supposedly associated with the previous communist cultural organisation Lekra) were chosen for the 'Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990' section, many well-known artists threatened to withdraw from the exhibition in protest.⁴⁴ However, the issue was silenced when the chairperson of the Indonesian sponsoring committee, the former Indonesian Foreign Minister, Professor Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, said to the press:

If all the artists thought to have been involved in Lekra are removed from the list of participants, this will weaken the ability of the KIAS exhibition to represent the widest spectrum of painting in Indonesia (*Inside Indonesia* 1992:27).

Although allowing paintings of social conscience in the US exhibition is functional in promoting an aura of state tolerance or 'openness', and favourable for tourism, there is also some compromise to populist sentiment that challenges the

⁴⁴ This discussion is based on articles by Astri Wright and Djoko Pekik in *Inside Indonesia* (1992) March.

understandings of official and dominant culture.⁴⁵ In another example, whilst preparing for his first exhibition in Jakarta 1990, which was made possible by large corporate sponsorship, Djoko Pekik was unable to accommodate the gallery's wishes. The gallery owner asked, 'Don't show these big paintings, with themes of the sufferings of the people in dull colours' (Pekik 1992b:29). Djoko said he tried to paint differently, but couldn't, 'so in the end he had to show them'. He could only paint in the 'language' of his poor upbringing:

People are not just objects. I don't see people as an onlooker, I am also one of the people. I was formed by the same environment they were (Pekik 1992b:29).

The hegemonic appropriation of populist cultural identities by dominant interests, motivated both politically and commercially, is not always entirely complete. As will become evident in the section on commodified culture, dominant interests appropriating popular consciousness, are to a limited extent compromised by alternate meanings through the act of engagement with them. In general, however, the commercialisation or commodification of culture works to further domesticate cultural production to the overall economic and political benefit of the dominant classes.

Exhibitions by Djoko Pekik, such as at TBS, 12-19 December 1993, have no direct involvement by the *wong cilik*. Those who viewed the exhibition were mainly intellectuals and wealthy people who bought the paintings for sizeable amounts (as much as 19 million rupiah or about \$A 12,000).⁴⁶ As much as the every day life and struggles of the *wong cilik* in the pictures were social criticism it was constrained to the dominant classes and the *wong cilik* representations were appropriated as

⁴⁵ Wallis (1994:276) reports on a similar contradiction where according to the then Indonesian foreign minister, Mochtar Kusumatmadja, the objectives of the 'Festival of Indonesia exhibition' in America to promote 'understanding and friendship' were compromised. He inferred that a series of accompanying university seminars, funded by an exhibition sponsor, that discussed contemporary social contradictions in Indonesia, focused on 'conflict' or 'politics' instead of 'art'.

⁴⁶ This information is from informal discussions I had with Djoko Pekik on his TBS exhibition and on *tayuban* in general whilst attending a performance-exhibition-seminar organised by radical young artists at Seni Sono, Yogyakarta on 29 December 1993.

commodities bought and sold for profit.

There is an ambiguity here in that Djoko Pekik sees his role as providing a testimony to those in power of the world of the *wong cilik* and their struggles. His hope is that it will force them to consider the perspective of the *wong cilik*. For example, the prominence of orange in his paintings is not only because of its familiarity in daily village life, but because it is an assertive or striking colour that confronts or demands attention from the viewer. A central objective in the following discussion on cultural commodification is to weigh up such ambiguities in the commodification of popular culture.

2. Cultural Commodification

Cultural Consumption and Standardisation

Complementing the de-politicisation of cultural production by the state on behalf of the dominant classes is the logic of capitalism itself. The expansion of capitalist relations of production leads to the commodification of culture that has the effect of domesticating and suppressing alternative cultural practices in a series of significant ways. First, local or alternative cultural practices are coopted as cultural products, sanitised of specific meaning, as they are homogenised to become commodities of broad mass appeal. Second, homogenised cultural commodities, emptied of significant meaning, dominate cultural space. This is done not only by coopting creative cultural practices, but also, as powerful competitors, by inhibiting the growth of local or alternative cultural practices. Finally, as the discussion on Iwan Fals in Chapter Six reveals, cultural commodities that have packaged an aura of 'authenticity' can appeal to, or appease, resistance to dominant cultural forces whilst obscuring actual conformity with deeper alienating structures of capitalist production and consumption.⁴⁷ The combined trend in these processes is that the participation of *wong cilik* members in local societies in cultural production is further attenuated.

⁴⁷ Bloomfield (1990) discusses the 'superficial authenticity' of world music, as part of the 'global light-entertainment industry'. The world music industry appropriates local non-commercial music and rock music with politically progressive lyrics incorporating them as commodities within its capitalist relations of production.

Instead of having some involvement, and control in, local cultural production they are reduced to receivers or consumers alienated from standardised and rarefied cultural products. Cultural consumers are left with only limited secondary control over these cultural products through their status as the market for which these cultural commodities are produced and their ability to rework these cultural products to suit their experiences.

The transformation from cultural producer to cultural consumer must be located in the broader context of socio-economic transformation discussed in Chapter Three. This is Hefner's (1990:182-92) approach concerning radical changes in social relations experienced by local societies in the Tengger mountains of East Java. He demonstrates that displacement of cultural production with commodity consumption in local societies is only part of the broader trend of localised social relations being replaced by wider national, increasingly globalised, capitalist relations of production. It should also be remembered that the level of involvement and control in pre-existing local cultural practices has always been subject to, and characterised by, hierarchical social relations within local societies.

The expansion of television in local societies, and the production of *wayang* in different forms for mass consumption, provide useful examples of the erosion of pre-existing cultural practices and the domesticating force of cultural commodification (Fig. 1).

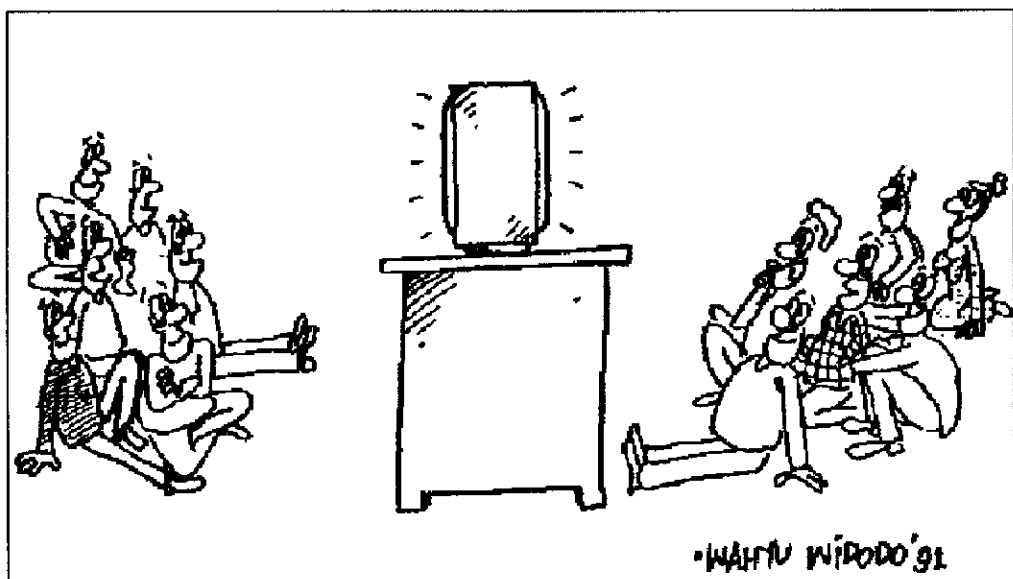


Figure 1 Could a double sided television provide a semblance of the communal *wayang* performance? *Nyata*, 1 December 1991.

Hefner details how the introduction of television has been accommodated by upland societies where local social relations are being displaced by an orientation towards the wider forces of state and capitalism. When first introduced in the mid 1970s, the government provided each village one television set as a tool for disseminating information and propaganda. Even later when a wealthy few were able to own their own televisions they remained accessible to the public. By placing their televisions 'on the verandahs of houses facing the street ... the owners were able to fulfil the expectation that, as with the amusements during ritual festivals, neighbours would be able to enjoy the entertainment too (1990:189)'. However, a decade later the television was no longer the 'quasi-public good, on the model of *slametan* festivals' that brought the owner prestige within the community (1990:189). Now, hidden away inside the house, television was a commodity of individual consumption which illustrates a shift in orientation away from the 'authority of village and tradition' to wider relations directed towards capital accumulation and the nation-state (Hefner 1990:189-192).⁴⁸

Television, particularly since satellite access and privatisation, is seen as one of the major causes within the pantheon of 'modernisation' leading to the decline of 'traditional' cultural practices, such as people's theatre. As discussed in Chapter Eleven, cultural workers in Tegal blame television for a reduction in audience attendances at local *kethoprak* performances. However, the process by which existing cultural practices, such as *wayang* performances, become homogenised or commodified is more revealing about the variety of ways cultural practices based on capitalist relations of production come to dominate or domesticate cultural space.

The percentage of *wayang* performances connected with local social relations, in particular weddings, circumcisions and purification ceremonies, is declining. This is in direct proportion to an increase in 'secular' occasions orientated towards the interests of state and capital, such as Independence Day and Armed Forces Day celebrations, and other occasions such as factory and bridge openings. These

⁴⁸ The transformation of television from a public good to private commodity is not unique to 'traditional' communal societies. A similar process occurred in Australia where on the introduction of television in the 1950s people would gather outside the windows of shops selling televisions or converge on the few neighbours able to afford the exorbitant price of a television set.

performances can, however, be also construed as new ritual forms, such as purification ceremonies, on a state level. Clara van Groenendael (1985:124-5) notes the increasing frequency of Independence Day Celebrations in the *dalang's* performance bookings reflects 'the shift in orientation from the local, Javanese centre, to the national Indonesian one'.

Various commentators, such as Ras (1982) and Clara van Groenendael (1985), have also noted that live *wayang* performances for smaller, localised occasions were often displaced by cheaper more accessible alternatives. These may be simpler cultural practices such as *tayuban* dance, or even cassette recordings of *wayang* performances. Sears (1996) suggests that 'traditional' *wayang* performance may be displaced or transformed into other forms more commensurate with the process of urbanisation and demands and interests of modernity. Along with an increase in secular occasions, for instance, successful *dalang* have been those who accommodate contemporary urban tastes. They emphasise entertainment and extravaganza over ritual and philosophical content with the incorporation of comedy, action, and aesthetic affects inspired by film and television. Moreover, in the urban world where work and daily activities impose time constraints, all night performances may be displaced by two to four hour performances. There is even an inference by Sears that comic book *wayang* is a natural progression from two dimensional shadow theatre to the urban individual's desire for the 'private reading' of this contemporised 'dramatic literature' that makes one 'feel a part of the modern nation' (1996:280, 286).

Along with these processes of audience alienation from live communal performances with local meaning to mass or individual consumers of pre-packaged cultural products are other processes of homogenisation or standardisation of *wayang* meanings. A few *dalang* with the capital resources and state patronage have an increasingly wide influence over the shadow play tradition that impacts on smaller *dalang* and regional diversity. *Dalang* with large financial resources and state backing can take greater advantage of resources such as improved mobility/ transportation and the mass media. Government radio stations in Semarang, Solo and Yogyakarta that regularly broadcast *wayang* performances tend to prefer renowned *dalang*, particularly those who generally support the state apparatus. In 1986 I witnessed a

performance at the government radio station in Solo by a *dalang* who was not well known, but happy to perform as a government mouthpiece. In the performance he replaced allegory, a central characteristic of live *wayang* performances, with a read script (*diktat*). The comic interlude, well known for contextualising performance with surrounding social context, was reduced to bland paternalistic and developmentalist propaganda.

Super *dalang*, notably Ki Anom Suroto and Ki Manteb Sudarsono, known to be sympathetic to the government, attain wide influence throughout the provinces in Java. They broadly affect audience tastes and performance styles of smaller regional *dalang* who try to emulate them. The influence of these *dalang* is not only achieved through radio and television broadcasts, but through cassette tapes played for private consumption or in celebrations replacing live performance. Ki Anom Suroto, in particular, who has a virtual monopoly in cassette recordings, has the financial resources for his own recording studio and state assistance in tape distribution (Sears 1996:271-2). The resources and subsequent influences of these super *dalang* compare dramatically with the poor local *dalang* who may not even have the capital to own their own puppets.⁴⁹

Contradictions within Cultural Commodification

The broad trend is thus towards cultural commodification and an homogenisation or standardisation, leading to the domestication of local cultural practices, according to the complementary interests of state and capital. However, this hegemonic alliance is not without contradictions and weaknesses. Continuing with the example of television, and the mass media in general, a greater dependency on market forces, both concerning internationalised capital and audience share, has resulted in contradictions between the interests of state and capital. The importance of market share also means the audience has some agency over the nature of cultural production in the mass media.

Challenge to centralised state control over cultural production through the

⁴⁹ In one unremarkable performance for a wedding celebration in my in-law's kampung in Solo, an impoverished and inexperienced local *dalang* moved the shadow puppets in unison with a cassette recording.

globalisation of the Indonesian economy is particularly noticeable in the internationalisation and deregulation of Indonesian television broadcasting. From 1962 until the mid 1980s the only television broadcaster was the state run TVRI. State control over television content and audiences was enhanced in 1981 when direct advertising was banned (Kitley 1992:77). Many of TVRI's programs simply functioned as one-way conduits to inform and educate a mass audience in line with the state's corporatist and developmentalist ideology.⁵⁰ TVRI, beamed throughout the Indonesian archipelago from its PALAPA satellite, communicated a notion of the nation as a family where regional diversity is subordinate to national unity under the paternalistic care of the central state (Kitley 1992:82-4).

However, since the impact of satellite television, government control on program content has been eroding. Kitley (1992:78) and Sen (1994:122) have noted early government concern over the dissolution of national boundaries with north Sumatran audiences able to pick up Malaysian television with simple UHF aerials. According to Kitley (1992:78), the initial decision to deregulate the television industry in 1987 was motivated by both political and commercial concerns to maintain control over Indonesian audiences in competition with international services. Since the first private television stations RCTI (Jakarta), SCTV (Surabaya) and TPI (national), the first and third of which the president's children have substantial shares, private television broadcasters and home parabola receivers have continued to mushroom throughout Indonesia. As of 1994 there were five main television corporations with subsidiaries broadcasting to outlying regions from Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Solo, and Surabaya.

As well as allowing the development of a private broadcasting industry in Indonesia, state policy permits unrestricted use of private satellite dishes for the reception of international broadcasters. Ever since, state control over the direction of television broadcasting has weakened, as part of adaptation to the changing directions and demands of internationalised commercial broadcasting. The state has less direct control of the mass media according to state ideologies and policies. There is now a

⁵⁰ In the contemporary popular children's puppet comedy, 'Si Unyil', Kitley (1995) observes the state's representation of an ideal village whose well being is enhanced through being receptive to central state intervention.

much greater emphasis on entertainment vis-à-vis information, in which international programs have dominated. For example, in competition for audience share and advertising revenue the so-called educational broadcaster TPI had, as of 1990, allocated 51 per cent of airtime to entertainment and commercials. In 1988, RCTI's programming catered for 55 per cent 'entertainment, sport, music and film' (Kitley 1992:97). 80-90 per cent of these entertainment programs were imported from overseas with cultural values and aesthetics that frequently ran counter to those of the corporatist state. At the time, Kitley (1992:94-5,97) concluded that TVRI no longer dictated cultural content and its monopoly role in educating, shaping and protecting a national audience had weakened to providing, as a specialist alternative, its version of Indonesian culture. Sen and Hill's more recent observations show, however, that domestic content, such as telemovies (*sinetron*) and action films, in both the state run TVRI and private television programming has risen dramatically.⁵¹ Furthermore, these local programs almost invariably call on national, as opposed to regional or marginal, language and cultural norms. Here, Sen and Hill suggest that the centralised state's influence, although less direct, remains strong through local programs that focus on the national or centre, and the self-censorship within the private television hierarchy.

Developments in the privatisation of television broadcasting reflect the growing private sector and a burgeoning 'middle-class' who are no longer just clients of the state but also competing with state dominance of the economy. As we saw in Chapter Three scholars, such as Ian Chalmers, argue that economic liberalisation is also leading to a limited political and cultural liberalisation or 'democratisation'. Borrowing Raymond William's terminology, Chalmers (1992) argues emergent norms and values reflecting 'middle class' interests such as materialism and individualism associated with 'free' competition converge or conflict with old residual norms and values, such as paternalism, reflecting patron-client alliances. However, this nascent 'democratisation' remains within the broad alliance of state and capital interests and is not affecting the whole structure of society. Access to a wide range of television channels, particularly international channels, is still restricted to

⁵¹ 'Chapter 5: National television and trans-border transmission' in Sen and Hill (forthcoming).

major urban centres and those who can afford parabola antennas and receivers (Kitley 1992:93). For example, unlike this minority, the bulk of Indonesia's *wong cilik* would not have seen the uncensored coverage by international broadcasters, such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, of the mid-1996 Jakarta riots over state interference in PDI affairs.⁵²

The greater free flow of international communication accessible mainly to the dominant classes may make it awkward at times for the state to rely on violent forms of repression or coercion. In general, however, the global commodification of culture is illustrative of a transfer in the processes of social and cultural domestication from state coercion to internationalised market forces entrenched in civil society. Indonesia's civil society seems to be strengthening its 'relative autonomy', vis-à-vis the state apparatus, where dominant culture maintains hegemony through consensus ('democracy') amongst a broader, more plural, elite rather than by direct coercion from the state apparatus. Audiences are now domesticated by the imposition of capitalist ideology that broadly complements, more than it contradicts, the objectives of the state. Audiences in the image of an harmonious, unified nation that suited centralised state control are now also in the superimposed image of materialistic, individualistic consumers that suit the 'profit making' of the television corporations and their advertisers (Kitley 1992:105). The cultural values and interests of the dominant capitalist classes either take over, or work with, state ideology in silencing and marginalising the *wong cilik*, who, as Murray (1991a:3) observes, can now watch in their cramped kampungs BMW car commercials on RCTI.

Despite the overall characteristic of globalised mass culture as a domesticating force, consumers do have some agency over cultural production where there is strong competition for audience share/advertising revenue. Although there are some examples in the increasingly competitive print and television industries (Robison 1995:15)⁵³, the best example is local radio, which is comparatively less affected by international and national trends, and where the audience has more direct input. In

⁵²

In general, access to the revolution in telecommunications, whether satellite television, home and mobile telephones, or internet facilities is restricted to a small urban elite.

⁵³

In early 1996 SCTV began broadcasting what was becoming a very popular series of debates on social issues called 'Perspektif' until it was banned after only a few episodes.

fact, Lindsay (1997) asserts that the national profile of television, and the exclusive national role of government radio, forces private radio to develop a 'localised community profile' which ensures its popularity.

Private radio stations must be sensitive to the wishes of local audiences to maintain their popularity in competing for limited commercial sponsorship (Lindsay 1997). This orientation towards local audiences may contradict the interests of state and capital. The localness of radio is not unique to Indonesia. On radio in Thailand, Siriyuvasak (1992:57) comments that disc jockeys act as 'professional mediators' who negotiate the excesses of dominant cultural forces with audience demands and popular taste. Siriyuvasak concludes that rather than being a 'prop for the status quo', professional mediation in the commercial broadcasting industry provides limited reform and access to alternative information, or at least 'a limit to the imposition of "official views" from above'. Furthermore, contradictions can also occur within commercial interests mediating economic rationalism. Siriyuvasak (1992:57) states that '[c]orporate disc jockeys often encounter conflicts in their attempts to negotiate between organisational goals, audience interests, and their own ideology of professionalism'.

Similar findings to Siriyuvasak were contained in a report on radio throughout Southeast and East Asia in the *Far East Economic Review* (1996:22-9). Some Indonesian radio stations admitted that during 'call ins' the nerve of disc jockeys was continually being tested by listeners eager to comment on sensitive social and political issues (Cohen 1996:29). In Jakarta, as well as some smaller cities, competition for audiences has seen a growth in morning talk shows addressing political issues such as the recent PDI leadership crisis discussed in Chapter Three.

In the majority of cases this increase in democratic debate within mass culture is largely contained within the dominant classes. Commenting on one of the morning radio talk shows referred to above, for example, Cohen acknowledges that it is 'aimed at yuppies negotiating the traffic from their suburban enclaves' (1996:29). Lindsay's survey also indicates that most private radio stations are orientated towards the dominant classes, with most radio stations in Greater Jakarta (*Jabotabek*) targeting audiences in the 'mid to upper income range' (1997). However, more research on the proliferation of private radio stations in regional Indonesia may reveal

sites where the imposition of dominant culture is contested by populist and *wong cilik* interests (see, for example, my brief comments on Radio Serenada in Chapter Eleven on Tegal).

Even the print media, suffering under heavy-handed state censorship and increasingly dependent on commercial sponsorship, are not impervious to the *wong cilik* voice. Moelyono, the cultural activist mentioned briefly above, had managed to negotiate a space, called 'Galeri Gambar' (Picture Gallery) in the Surabayan newspaper, *Surya*, where each fortnight ordinary readers were invited to send in drawings that reflected interests or issues relevant to them.⁵⁴ 'Galeri Gambar's' 'invitation for readers' contributions went as follows:

This rubric is open to anyone – without looking at education or status levels – who wants to express what's in their heart or germs of thought. Drawings want be evaluated according to how good they are, but because of the message or concept contained within them [my translation].

Often these drawings offered a *wong cilik* commentary on social issues, which Meolyono elaborated on. One drawing (Fig. 2), sent by a village schoolteacher, Tri Sulistowati, commented on the burden of the 'dual roles' of contemporary working mothers. It was published in conjunction with Indonesian Mothers' Day. Expected to raise and educate their children, poor mothers often have to look after their children whilst at work. The drawing shows the teacher carrying her infant child whilst buying food during recess at a stall outside the school. The food was for the family's dinner she would prepare later that night.

Although the production and consumption of daily newspapers is mainly within the domain of the dominant classes, space can still be contested by populist sentiment, in this case through the intervention of the radical intelligentsia. However, such instances are infrequent, often ephemeral. In 1996 'Galeri Gambar' disappeared from the pages of *Surya*. This was not due to political pressure, but because it took up valuable advertising space.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The following example is drawn from 'Galari Gambar', *Surya*, Sunday, 26 December 1993, p 8.

⁵⁵ Personal communication with Moelyono on 10 October 1997.

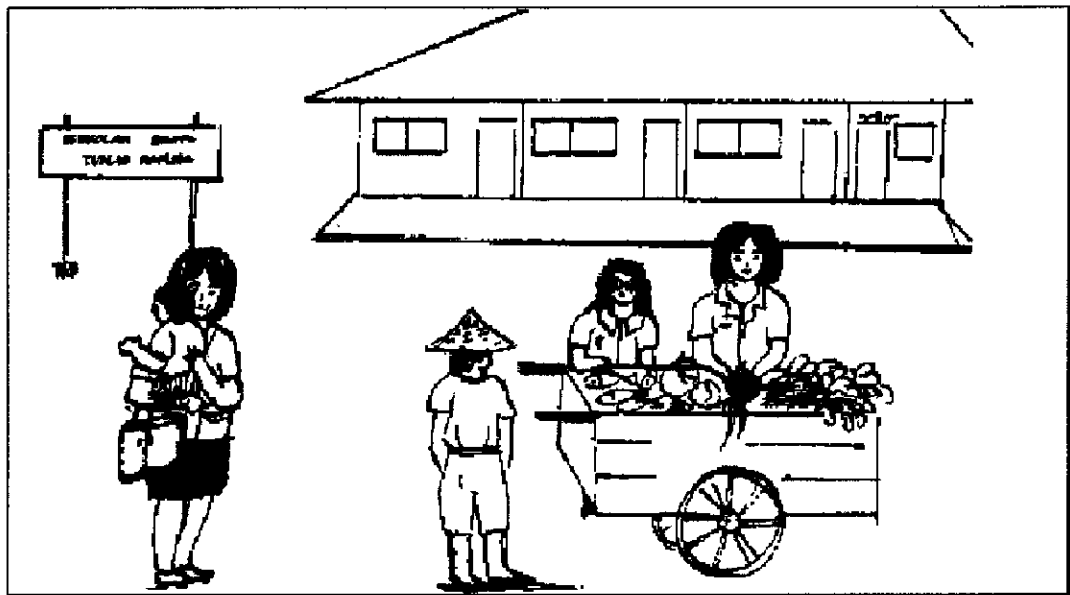


Figure 2 The burden of 'dual roles' of ordinary working mothers (*Surya*, 26 December 1993).

Henschkel (1994) also provides a useful example of how print media such as *Tempo*, with a 'wealthier, middle-class readership', have appropriated and sanitised 'popular culture', satisfying the curiosity of its readers whilst keeping it marginal and subordinate to mainstream values and interests. Brief articles on popular music by 'artists with a conscience', such as Iwan Fals' rock music, are kept to a superficial, descriptive level that does not analyse in detail the social issues articulated in their lyrics. Henschkel further asserts that the artists' popularity and affinity with the concerns of the *wong cilik* are negated by emphasis in the articles on negative factors such as violence during performances or the accumulated wealth or alternative motives of the artists (1994:59). Nevertheless, as my later discussion on Iwan Fals emphasises, it is essential to question the socio-economic, including political, relations surrounding the artist/performance in relation to the audience/those represented in the performance.

In drawing together this section on commodified culture I wish to return now to the example of comic book *wayang*, briefly mentioned at the beginning. I would like to place into perspective the level of 'democratisation' through popularisation that both contradicts and is contained within the domesticating forces of cultural commodification. We can unravel much of the ambiguity between domestication and 'democratisation' in many of the studies on popular culture by measuring the level

of involvement and composition of the audience/consumer. More generally, it is a matter of determining who has greater and lesser control over the processes of cultural production.

Sears states that the comic book *wayang* of R. A. Kosasih liberates the reader in the following ways. '[O]n both a visual and cognitive level, comic book characters have more sensual bodies than the leather puppets' (1996:280). Whereas puppets representing the female body are stylised and well clad, the female *wayang* characters in Kosasih's comics are voluptuous, emulating the Europeanised models of the glossy women's magazines.

[T]hey [Kosasih's comic characters] exude a sensuality that is associated with the bodies of Europeans and Americans, bodies that are free to engage in "free sex" in an imagined modernity that is both part of contemporary Indonesian society and condemned by it (1996:282).

The greater sensuality of the comic book characters frees the reader's imagination, pushing the boundaries of dominant norms otherwise encoded in the leather puppets. According to Sears, Kosasih's comic characters are also free of the gender and class inequalities symbolised in *wayang* puppet dress, gestures, movement and speech: 'The amount of movement allowed comic-book characters represents a true liberation from the class positions encoded in the shadow theatre' (1996:285).

Sears raises a number of qualifications that are not allowed to detract from the main idea that the transformation in sensuality of 'traditional' *wayang* characters in comic books is liberating. The overall inference is that the popularisation and contemporising of *wayang* in comic book form is part of a democratising process releasing the Mahabharata and Ramayana stories from the old elitist and anti-Islamic codes constructed by 'Western' and indigenous Javanists (1996:286). However, I would argue it is her qualifications in terms of the sensuality lost in the transformation from communal live performances to the private consumption of dramatic literature that are of much greater significance.

As argued more strongly in part C, central to *wayang*'s social significance is not the formal story, character traits and iconography, but the space the performance provides for direct audience participation. It is precisely 'the joke-telling and

allegory-creating puppeteer' (Sears 1996:280) and 'the sensuality at a shadow play performance [which] takes place off the screen' (Sears 1996:281) that allows a predominantly *wong cilik* audience some control over meaning in cultural production. In the commodification of *wayang* into comic book form, it is this informal space for audience participation that has been removed. The sensuality of carnivalistic sites, smells, noise and bustle, food stalls, gambling corners, the puppeteer's erotic innuendo, his cheeky banter with audience members, sponsors and female singers, his deliberate violation of puppet conventions, and frequent reference to social and political issues of local relevance is lost (Sears 1996:281-2).

As an alternative to this lively social entertainment, free for all to participate, is the private voyeuristic images of a comic book. A comparison of live *wayang* performance with comic book *wayang* shows *wong cilik* control in the meaningfulness of cultural production has been attenuated in being reduced to cultural consumer, if they can afford the cost of purchase.⁵⁶ In fact, *wong cilik* access to *wayang* comic books is even more problematic given the internationalisation of the comic book industry. In a newspaper article by Bre Redana (1993a:9) indigenous comic books seem all but dead as American and Japanese comic books at several times the price (in 1993 from rp 2,000 up to 10,000 or about A\$ 1.30-6.00) monopolise the markets through utilising large distribution networks.⁵⁷ Thus, the 'transition' from *wong cilik* participation of live *wayang* performances may not stop at the downgraded consumption of *wayang* comics, but exclusion from the consumption of expensive cultural commodities such as international comics.

In analysing *wong cilik* involvement and control of cultural production the issue is not just the 'nature' of the cultural form, but the reality of *wong cilik* access to, or choice of, cultural practices and products. In the village of Samarata, near Ponorogo, East Java, where I stayed for several weeks in 1991, daily newspapers or magazines were not sold in any of the shops, indicating the prices were beyond the reach of the majority of residents. What was available were free communal and

⁵⁶ Access is limited despite the qualification that indigenous comics are cheaper than international comics, and are often shared around or rented cheaply through a kiosk, or bought second hand.

⁵⁷ On average, in 1993, 40,000 copies are made of an international comic book issue compared to 1,000 copies of an indigenous issue (if and when it is produced) (Bre Redana 1993a).

public performances, both in Ponorogo, and less frequently in Samarata. In celebration of Armed Forces Day (actually over several days), for example, local *kethoprak* and *reog* troupes performed in the compound of the army post and, in the case of *reog*, also through the streets in Samarata.⁵⁸ On another evening, the youth of Ponorogo and surrounding villages had a choice of a *dangdut* performance in the front yard of the Armed Forces command, or, as it turned out, the by far more popular *wayang kulit* performance at the nearby bus terminal. In the Jakarta kampung where the poor informal sector workers are fighting a losing battle against the coercive forces of the state and wider capitalist relations, Murray paints a different picture: '[F]olk theatre, which is created of and for the community ... scarcely exists any more, and I conclude from my experience of Manggarai that the people were there to survive and not to play (1991a:9)'.

Nevertheless, Murray does describe some of the alternative cultural practices of the kampung people.

Rather than in extended theatre forms, people entertain and express themselves in other ways, which include *pelawak* comedy (with *ludruk* like intent), busking on the streets and singing around guitars in bench groups, going to kung-fu movies and listening to *dangdut* music (1991a:9).

Although Murray does not fully elaborate, it seems to me there is an interesting mix of cultural practices that relate to the socio-economic reality of the kampung people.⁵⁹ At one level communal ties have broken down in the wake of wider capitalist relations, reflected in the atomisation of consumer orientated cultural practices amongst small groups and individuals, such as going to the movies and listening to music cassettes. At another level, activities, such as comedy and street busking and singing around guitars are creative cultural practices, though marginalised and repressed, that in a sense defy the domesticating forces of state and capital.

⁵⁸ *Reog* is a form of trance dance popular in the Ponorogo region.

⁵⁹ It is not surprising that organised communal folk theatre is less frequent than daily cultural practices such as singing around guitars and going to the movies. The same pattern could be described in Samarata. However, I think Murray's point is that along with the breakdown of communal ties and the great struggle just to survive the number of communal cultural events has been drastically reduced to just the annual Independence Day celebrations (Murray 1991a:9).

The point is that the ‘democratising’ or domesticating potential of a cultural practice or form is less a product of its built-in codes and conventions than the degree to which surrounding circumstances permit the *wong cilik* access to and control over its production and meaning. As argued in Chapter Seven, informal space in live performances allows the *wong cilik* to participate in and to a certain extent control the production of meaning, despite the cultural form’s elitist formal conventions. However, as cultural consumers, *wong cilik* control over cultural meaning is reduced as their participation in its production is attenuated.

Chapter Six: Contesting Culture 'For' the *Wong Cilik*

1. *The Wong Cilik in Contested Cultural Space*

As explored in the previous chapter, in controlling cultural production the dominant forces of state and capital domesticate cultural practices according to the political and economic interests of the ruling bloc. However, the process of dominant interests controlling cultural production is not simply one way domination and subordination. Whether state and capital appropriate or manufacture populist cultural practices, limited concessions are made to populist sentiment. Although subordinated within, these concessions exhibit contradictions to the overall interests of state and capital that show negotiation between dominant and alternative/ populist cultural forces has taken place. Thus, even cultural production controlled by dominant forces, such as through the mass media, or manifest in state sponsored international exhibitions, can be understood as a site of cultural contestation involving populist sentiment.

This chapter is concerned with examining sites of cultural contestation, in which the *wong cilik* interests are, or are claimed to be, of central significance. First, however, the position of a cultural event or form as our focus of observation within a site of cultural contestation needs clarification. This will assist identifying the significance of *wong cilik* agency in cultural production.

The cultural event or form is not a site of cultural contestation per se. Rather, it is like a manifest rupture or nodal point of cultural contestation. We can, thus, use the cultural event or form as a window, however temporary or distorted its view, into the larger site or arena of cultural contestation. Analysis that tends to equate the cultural event, or more narrowly still, the cultural form as encapsulating, rather than being a window on, a site of cultural contestation, results in misconception over the significance of *wong cilik* cultural agency. In the previous chapter we saw how a narrow focus on the symbolic meanings behind the portrayal of *wayang* characters in 'traditional' *wayang* performances and comic book *wayang* could result in the respective under and over emphasis of *wong cilik* control in cultural production. We reached a more balanced understanding of *wong cilik* cultural agency only after

analysing the cultural form or event as part of wider socio-economic relations.

The cultural event or form, therefore, is a manifestation and active ingredient, not determinant, of cultural contestation, its struggles and outcomes. We can understand the characteristics of these struggles and outcomes by seeing the cultural event or form as constituted from, and, nevertheless, potentially affecting, its surrounding macro and micro socio-economic contexts. The interrelationship between the cultural form or event and its social context makes up the site of cultural contestation. It is from the totality of this wider understanding of the site of cultural contestation that we can determine the social significance of, or for, the *wong cilik* in cultural production.

A graphic example of how wider socio-economic, including political, relations constitute a cultural event or form is the recent cooptation by dominant interests of the rock singer Iwan Fals, whose lyrics earned him popular renown during the 1980s as '*suara hati rakyat*' (voice of people's conscience) (Cahyono 1992:53). The Kantata Takwa concert in Solo, 1991, in which Iwan Fals was the main draw card, is a useful window into this site of cultural contestation whose outcome was the domestication of populist sentiment.

Iwan Fals songs have resonated most with educated urban youth, such as university students. However, his music also articulates the concerns of the working class in general. Blaring cassette players and graffiti on walls in kampungs attest to his popularity amongst the youth in Jakarta and smaller provincial cities such as Solo.⁶⁰ For her survey of Iwan Fals fans who owned his cassettes and went to his concerts, Zachnas (1991:150) saw as representative a group of 17-21 year olds from the cities of Jakarta, Bandung and Lampung. She described these fans as coming from 'lower middle class down' families with monthly incomes between Rp 100,000-150,000 (about A\$ 70.00-100.00). Some of his earlier songs, such as *Oemar Bakri*, about the daily struggles of a low paid teacher, and *Sarjana Muda*, concerning the difficulties in finding employment for new graduates, would particularly resonate with this group (Cahyono 1992:53). Other popular songs, *Bongkar* and *Bento* (at one

⁶⁰ In the rural village of Samarata he was much less known.

stage banned from broadcasting), criticise the uncaring and corrupt practices of the political and business elites who add to the suffering of the people. According to Murray (1991a), '*Bento*' became the rally cry of a taxi strike in Jakarta, which along with other examples supports her assertion that Iwan's songs 'express active involvement, solidarity and resistance, rather than passive consumption of music as a commodity' (1991:13). *PHK*, about the dismissal of a factory worker, and ballads in an album featuring, and called, *Kelompok Penyanyi Jalanan* (Group of Street Buskers), are a commentary on the bitter but dignified, somewhat romanticised, struggles of the urban poor and marginalised. This album was also a favourite of the working class cultural activist Wiji Thukul and the children in his theatre workshop in a poor urban kampung in Solo (discussed later). Although he comes from a reasonably comfortable background, Iwan started off his career skipping class and busking in the streets of Jakarta (Murray 1991a:11).

In 1989, commensurate with his 'superstar' status, Iwan Fals commenced a huge tour with planned performances in 100 cities throughout Indonesia in promotion of his new album, *Mata Dewa*. However, the police promptly banned the tour. This was ostensibly because of violent street riots after his first performance in Jakarta, which being free, had attracted an audience of over 100,000 (Harsono 1989:14). The following year, however, Iwan Fals was allowed to tour again, but this time under the umbrella, literally on stage a golden eagle, of the businessman-promoter Setiawan Djody's *Kantata Takwa*.

My first impressions of the *Kantata Takwa* concert in Solo (14 September 1991) revealed contradictions similar to the 'clatter' of contesting traditions experienced by Geertz (referred to in Chapter Four). The event, perhaps according to a superficial version of pluralist 'post modern' hermeneutics, might be seen as an example of the democratising dynamics of popular culture. Hierarchies of domination and subordination collapse into an arena of ambiguity, a multiplicity of contesting identities and interests reduced to equal value.

An awesome golden eagle with glaring red eyes formed a cover over the dwarfed performers on stage. Identifiable as Setiawan Djody's business emblem, the eagle is also the *Pancasila* symbol and represents the suffering masses, in *burung-*

burung kondor (condors) recited by Rendra during the performance. Along with *burung-burung kondor*, which was written in the 1970s and previously banned, Rendra recited his recent poetry, which Cahyono (1992:53) describes as more self-reflective, abstract and beautiful. The performance also juxtaposed the sharp social comment of Iwan's *Bento* and *Bongkar* and other ballads, with the religious flavour of Djody's 'desert music'. This music, including the experimental improvisations of Setiawan Djody's atrocious guitar playing, Djody says, was 'inspired by Friday prayers at the Demak mosque' (from Henschkel's [1994:78] translation of Yopie Hidayat et al [1990]). Murray (1991a:13), however, labels it 'Islamic chic'. The audience who had come to see Iwan Fals and hear *Bento* were strangely subdued considering the reputation of fans at his previous concerts. This may have been due to a combination of factors: the lower than expected number; the different style of performance, the heavy security present; and the comparatively high ticket costs weeding out the 'riff-raff'. Finally, the state's position was also curious. It obviously assisted in promotions, with TVRI broadcasting a one-hour special on the musical history of Iwan Fals and Sawung Jabo before the concert. The event was another manifestation of state 'tolerance' during the period of 'openness'. The performance was held during the popular *Sekaten* festival of the courts, and with sound equipment more powerful than that used in Jakarta the previous year (Citra 1991:17). The performance and prior rehearsals could be heard from the outskirts of Solo several kilometres away. However, security at the concert was excessive, with audience members carefully scrutinised on entering, and the 1000 or more security personnel (including German Shepherd guard dogs) comprising a visible portion of those witnessing the performance.

Even this cursory description of the event provides a hint of the wider underlying forces that, inferred from rumour within Solo, and stated in broader more concrete terms by Cahyono, were of domestication rather than democratisation. A sore point amongst the youth in Solo was the cost of entrance tickets. An impromptu discussion amongst economics students at a local university protested that the entrance tickets at rp 5,000 (A\$ 3.50) was more than ten times what a pedicab driver or poor student would pay for a meal at a roadside stall. Financially, many *wong cilik*

were denied access and the audience totals, though large, were well short of what the organisers expected.⁶¹

Ticket prices are a powerful determinant of access to, and ultimately the significance performances have for, the *wong cilik*. Afrizal Malna laments a similar transition from the free or very cheap performances of the populist Teater Koma to more lavish performances with large capital outlays requiring high ticket prices to recover costs as it integrates further into capitalist relations of production.

After Teater Koma raised the price of its tickets, for example, not all of the audience that it had previously cultivated could continue to watch ... Here, theatre has been integrated into 'the hands of industry' ... Materially there is a desire for recognition, but on the other hand it impoverishes its people itself by creating a gap [in access] amongst audiences (1992:17) [my translation].

According to Iwan Fals and Setiawan Djody the high ticket cost of the Kantata Takwa performance was regrettably out of their control, as they had to recover some of the costs of the extravaganza. Apparently, also, some of the proceeds went to the local government for flood mitigation work on the Bengawan Solo River (Citra 1991:17). Here the local government's support of the event becomes clearer. By allowing the performance the state appears tolerant towards the needs of a high spirited, somewhat rebellious, youth. The performance was also a useful funding source. Furthermore, the local government used populist sentiment in legitimising its financial gain. The state argued that those who would most benefit from the flood mitigation work would be the poor who tend to live closest to the river.

But what of the benefit for Setiawan Djody as the extravagant production, including spectacular laser show, ran at a loss? Again, according to rumour in Solo and also noted by Cahyono, the event not only enhanced Djody's profile as a business person, but his political ambitions as well. Cahyono states, 'The benefit obtained by Djody from Iwan's fame, was that he gets to share that fame, opening political opportunities for him, an area that, up to now, has been beyond his reach (1992:53)' [my translation].

⁶¹ According to Citra (1991:17) the audience of 70,000 over two nights not only came from Solo, but also from Semarang, Yogyakarta and Surabaya.

Nevertheless, it was Djody's political connections through his business dealings (he is a friend of Suharto's son, Sigit Harjojudanto) that secured permission for the Kantata Takwa tour (Cahyono 1992:53). Although there is no conclusive evidence, Cahyono further asserts that permission for the Kantata Takwa tour is related to the previous banning of Iwan Fals's *Mata Dewa* tour through contest over cassette distribution. Unlike the Kantata Takwa tour, according to Harsono (1989:14) *Mata Dewa's* promoter, Sofyan Ali, attempted to break the 'Glodok Mafia's' stranglehold on the cassette industry by selling the *Mata Dewa* album directly at the free promotional concerts (see also Cahyono 1992:53). For the authorities granting permission for the performance, the threat of violent riots was also minimised through high ticket costs restricting and altering the composition of the audience, heavy security and the changed nature of the performance.

The Kantata Takwa tour also represents the domestication of Iwan Fals's populist sentiment through its main organisers Setiawan Djody and Rendra. According to Harsono (1989:14) another reason for banning the *Mata Dewa* tour may have been the threat 'that a national *Mata Dewa* tour could raise political awareness among the people about things like human rights, poor living conditions, corruption, and militarism'. However, according to Cahyono (1992:53-4), Iwan Fals's lyrics in Kantata Takwa and subsequent albums represent a break from the social realism of previous lyrics to the abstract self-reflective style of Rendra. Iwan acknowledged the influence of his friendship with Rendra in a new album called *Cikal* (1991) whose lyrics Cahyono (1992:53-4) describes as 'too contemplative, not easily grasped by his fans. He has left the people behind and is absorbed in himself' [my translation]. The sanitisation of Iwan's songs is reflected in poor audience turnouts at subsequent concerts. In 1992 only 1,000 people turned up to an opening concert in Bandung forcing the cancellation of a performance planned for the following night (Cahyono 1992:54).

During the period of Iwan Fals's transformation Murray (1991a:14) may be correct in concluding that 'social criticism from Iwan Fals ... has reached a mass audience through sponsorship from the wealthy business class, which songs such as *Bento* satirise'. However, the more lasting effect of his cooption seems to be the

domestication of popular sentiment through increasingly alienating Iwan's songs and performances from his *wong cilik* fans.

Most of the ambiguity of populist cultural production associated with the progressive urban intelligentsia and its commitment to the *wong cilik* can be unravelled by contextualising the cultural workers, form, or event, within the broader social history from which they are constituted. It is, therefore, important not to ossify the cultural worker, form or event, but understand them as phenomenon shaped by social change, both temporal and spatial.

As concerning Iwan Fals and other examples mentioned, a dominant trend in Indonesia is the domestication of popular or populist culture. Like Iwan Fals and Rendra, the level of social commitment by many cultural workers in the fields of music, literature and theatre, and film and fine arts changes, sometimes coopted or weakened, over the years. Similarly, *wong cilik* cultural expression, such as *tayuban*, *jaipongan* and *dangdut*, is regularly appropriated and sanitised to suit the dominant cultural norms it originally contradicted. The reverse is common also, as previously elite cultural practices are popularised. For example, technological advances have assisted in the mass production of previously restricted cultural products. A striking example is the popularisation of *batik* cloth designs since 1850 where industrial competition and the desire for larger markets drove technological change from hand written to block printed wax designs allowing for cheap mass production. Designs previously for exclusive use by court aristocrats became accessible to the general public (Kitley 1987). Over the years cultural practices can also alternate between being meaningful for the *wong cilik* and the elite, their characteristics transforming in the process. Chapter Nine mentions the transformation of the *wayang wong* form and meaning as it alternates in popularity amongst the rural and urban *wong cilik* and Central Javanese courts during the course of the 20th century. In a very different context, Stuart Hall has described this process by which the meaning and identity of cultural products and practices changes over time as it is appropriated by popular and elite forces as a 'cultural escalator',

For, from period to period, the contents of each category changes. Popular

forms become enhanced in cultural value, go up the cultural escalator – and find themselves on the opposite side. Other things cease to have high cultural value, and are appropriated into the popular, becoming transformed in the process (1981:234).

Again, this fits the concept of the cultural event, form and worker as historically specific manifestations of underlying social relations. As Hall asserts,

What matters is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations: to put it bluntly and in an over-simplified form -what counts is the class struggle in and over culture (1981: 234).

The sites of contestation highlighted by these manifestations in event, form or person may fade away or transform. However, new sites will appear. As Budiman (1993:28) states in reference to the ephemeral nature of ‘counter culture’ not supported by dominant social institutions: ‘it easily disappears and changes shape. But actually the [underlying] dynamics are not lost’. Budiman’s strategy in defending ‘counter culture’ against conservative cynicism is to portray it as functional in producing a healthy, self-critical, flexible society, reminiscent of Turner’s functionalist role for theatre and ritual performance. ‘If there was no counter culture then society would become frozen (Budiman 1993:28).’ I, however, see alternative/populist cultural practices, including ‘counter culture’, as manifestations of sites of cultural contestation that will arise as long as there continue underlying social contradictions.

The notion of a cultural escalator and the shifting ephemeral nature of sites of cultural contestation informed by social contradictions and class struggle is just as pertinent to the analysis of cultural production with a more organised or programatic commitment to the *wong cilik*. In attempting to address problems faced by the *wong cilik* as a result of social contradictions, programatic popular cultural production is also subject to the dominant forces of state and capital which have created those social contradictions. The following section compares the ability of some programatic populist cultural activities to maintain a genuine commitment in the interests of the *wong cilik*.

2. Cultural Activism and the *Wong Cilik*

Wong Cilik Advocacy and Empowerment

Previously we illustrated how state and capital can 'use' domesticated or sanitised popular culture to the benefit of dominant interests. However, this section explores the programmatic use of popular culture which, rather than as an instrument of dominant interests, asserts itself as, or claims to represent, the *wong cilik* and their interests, as oppositional or as an alternative to dominant interests. This politicised or radicalised popular culture is often not referred to as 'popular culture' as such, but 'cultural action'. 'Cultural action' more precisely conveys the narrower programmatic or functional meaning of popular culture used as a vehicle for social change.⁶²

The Philippines Educational Theatre Association (PETA), an influential force in the development of radical theatre in Southeast Asia, define 'cultural action' as 'any expression that leads us from a culture of domination to a culture of liberation' (Pillai 1993). However, I would like to broaden the definition of cultural action a little to include any process of cultural production in advocacy of *wong cilik* concerns and/or with the objective of improving their life circumstances.

According to Janet Pillai (1993) and Eugene van Erven (1992), cultural action in Southeast Asia, exemplified narrowly by liberation theatre, emerged from the economic and political upheavals of the late 1960s, such as the Vietnam War. This was part of a broader reaction by radical nationalists to the detrimental affects of a neocolonialist alliance of indigenous elites with foreign capital and cultural imperialism on the newly independent nations. Specifically, progressive theatre is seen as a reaction to, or an antithesis developing out of, newly formed mainstream European centred indigenous theatre. Progressively, radical theatre has incorporated the indigenous culture of the *wong cilik* in opposition to neocolonialism. The Philippines Educational Theatre Association (PETA) is seen as important in inspiring the ideological and methodological development of progressive theatre in Southeast

⁶² In fact, most of the intellectuals and artists associated with popular culture as cultural action in Southeast Asia have been unfamiliar with the term 'popular', as for example in 'popular theatre'. They identify more with the term 'political or alternative theatre' (Pillai 1993), or even, as van Erven (1992:1) suggests, 'Theatre of Liberation'.

Asian countries, with its tour of the region in 1974 and subsequent exchange programs during the 1980s (Pillai 1993).⁶³

As an example, Arena Teater in Yogyakarta developed from producing adaptations of European theatre, such as by Shakespeare, Shaw and Ibsen in the 1960s, to conducting local workshops in poor communities based on the principles of liberation theatre in the 1980s. Transformation occurred in the 1970s when Arena Teater was incorporated into the media unit, Studio Puskat, of a Catholic seminary run by a progressive Jesuit priest, Father Rudi Hoffman in 1971. During the 1970s Hoffman and Arena Teater's director, Fred Wibowo, studied the liberation theology of Paulo Freire. Then, according to van Erven (1992:187-8),

for Fred Wibowo and Teater Arena, the definitive push toward theatre of liberation came in 1979 when PETA's Remmy Rikken visited Yogyakarta and invited him and three other members of the group to come to Manila to participate in a six week community theatre workshop in 1980.

Cultural action is often thought of as an antithesis to the detrimental effects of an authoritarian state embracing capitalism and neocolonialism in newly independent nations. Cultural action, as a creation of urban intellectuals, is often presented as a way of combating complex forms of domination beyond the understanding or scope of the ordinary *wong cilik*. The presumption is that *wong cilik* traditions that would otherwise be ineffective in combating modern and sophisticated forms of domination are discovered and reworked by a modern intelligentsia able to grasp and focus on elusive and abstract systems of domination.

Endro, working for Studio Puskat and previously a member of Arena Teater, discussed with me the relationship and differences between his theatre, which he termed *teater rakyat* or people's theatre, and the 'traditional' or 'folk theatre' of the *wong cilik* in the context of democratic change.⁶⁴ According to Endro, folk theatre such as *kethoprak* or *wayang* is subject to the relations of power in local society.

⁶³ According to my conversations with Fred Wibowo, Wiji Thukul and Moelyono, whose activities are discussed below, they have all at different times been directly exposed to the PETA approach.

⁶⁴ The discussion took place on 16 August 1993 at Studio Puskat.

Traditional *wayang*, he asserts, tends to be regulated by elitist religious content whilst more populist *wayang* provides entertainment without a deep understanding of social issues. Usually, elite sponsors control the performance and frequently the *dalang* comes from outside the village in which the performance is held and so is not intimately aware of the specifics of local issues. According to Endro, folk theatre at best expresses some concerns and aspirations of the *wong cilik*. People's theatre, on the other hand, helps people make the leap to bringing about change so these aspirations can be realised. Endro does acknowledge, however, that folk theatre is very important in supplying the familiar ingredients and medium for people's theatre. Folk traditions are adapted in order to address better the concerns and interests of the *wong cilik* in the production of people's theatre.

For example, in an international forum on popular theatre I attended in Sydney 1993, Fred Wibowo described how his community theatre workshops have utilised a meld of the *wayang* theatrical form with the children's folk stories about the crafty mouse deer called *Kancil* and other forest animals.⁶⁵ This comic strip *wayang* is the reverse of comic book *wayang*, discussed by Sears, in that enhanced *wong cilik* participation is claimed to come about not so much from a transformation of the cultural form, although that is a result, but from their direct control over the production process. According to Arena Teater the comic interlude in the *wayang kulit* may raise a general awareness of social issues. However, in the concentrated process of developing and presenting comic strip *wayang* the *wong cilik* can go further in discussing social issues of which *wayang* may only make oblique references. The aim was to encourage the *wong cilik* to critically explore and articulate relevant social issues which could lead to constructive social change as they produced and performed their own stories (*lakon*).

The comic strip characters are used as a thinly veiled front, as protection from accusations of directly criticising or offending anyone. Amongst the comic strip *wayang* puppets, the main character is *Kancil*, the mouse deer, who represents the

⁶⁵ My notes on the International Popular Theatre Exchange Open Forum: Popular Theatre Movements in Australia, The Asia-Pacific and Beyond, 17-19 April 1993, University of Western Sydney.

poor, weak and humble, who are nevertheless clever – what the peasant is and should be. The tiger is also important. It represents a strong, powerful person; for example, a bad village head (*lurah*). Other characters are an ogre, who represents the cause of environmental problems, and a kangaroo, who represents an outsider visiting the local community, such as a journalist or ‘Westerner’.

In one story presented by local villagers Kancil is confronted by a tiger and to avoid being attacked Kancil informs the tiger how lucky he is to see the tiger, he is very hungry and hasn’t eaten tiger for ages. The tiger is shocked by the mouse deer acting out of character and runs away scared. A monkey sees the tiger running and asks him why he is running from a mouse deer. The monkey says the mouse deer can’t eat a tiger and suggests the tiger attach the monkey to his tail in order to give the tiger confidence to attack the mouse deer. However, when the monkey and tiger confront the mouse deer, Kancil says, ‘Oh, thank you monkey for bringing the tiger to me, but usually you bring me two to eat!’. Hearing this the tiger flees in panic his tail swishes everywhere, hitting trees, bashing the monkey till he falls and dies. The demise of the monkey conveys the message that it is not necessarily the best thing to attach yourself opportunistically to the strong and powerful.

Endro and van Erven (1992) in other examples of Arena Teater's community theatre workshops during the 1980s claim the process of production has given the *wong cilik* confidence in asserting their concerns. As a consequence of theatre workshops the *wong cilik* were more confident in working together in lobbying for electricity, or free and democratic village elections, which, in spite of initial fears, are often acquiesced to by those in authority.

In general, Endro sees the only real chance of true democracy through the *rakyat* or people being led by sympathetic ‘middle class’ intellectuals, such as those at Studio Puskat, who are concerned more with the aspirations of the lower class than with their own interests. Contemporary cultural action is often portrayed as the product of a radical urban intelligentsia, giving the impression that they are independent of, and relatively untainted by, dominant interests. However, there is a risk in understanding cultural activists as saviours or, as Hatley (1990:322) puts it, ‘enlightened guides’. In reality the urban intellectual cultural activist is in an

ambiguous position of being both part of the world that separates them from the *wong cilik*, and suffering similar forms of restriction and repression as the *wong cilik* (Hatley 1990:322). In the radical poet Wiji Thukul's opinion, it often comes down to a choice between one and the other. They can remain in relative comfort and safety with an ineffective or unauthentic advocacy of the *wong cilik* as a distant 'other'. Alternatively, they can articulate *wong cilik* concerns through direct experience of their daily struggles and risk exposure to the same violent repression faced by the *wong cilik*.

As an example, Thukul and a few radical activists in Solo organised an alternative poets convention called '*Tungku*' in December 1993 at the premises of the progressive theatre group Gedag-gedig.⁶⁶ Students, cultural workers, journalists and ordinary *wong cilik*, including a street hawker (Begog), pedicab driver, and factory labourers, read poetry. Their poems were scathing of the affects of social inequality, and ideological and political repression towards the *wong cilik* under the New Order regime ('*Tungku*', Forum Solidaritas Seniman: 1993). Predictably, amongst the audience were a number of unamused people associated with local army intelligence. Because of the simple forthright nature of the poetry, Gedag-gedig's unusual understanding of not requiring formal permission from the various authorities to stage their performances was revoked. A number of cultural activists criticised the organisers of *Tungku* for recklessly sacrificing Gedag-gedig's liberty. However, Thukul's response was that the incident was only a taste of the brutal repression faced daily by the *wong cilik* and which those genuinely concerned for the *wong cilik* must also be prepared to face.

Despite an uncompromising, rather dogmatic, stance, Thukul has a point. In fact, it is useful to test the correlation between stated objectives and rhetoric with the praxis of cultural activism. The significance for the *wong cilik* of cultural activists' commitment can often be measured by the ability or willingness of cultural activists to immerse their cultural production in the world of the *wong cilik*. That is, the

⁶⁶ The following information is derived from my observations of the event and discussions with Thukul and others concerning it. According to Sipun (Thukul's spouse) the title '*Tungku*', or fireplace, was chosen as a metaphor for the poets' meeting as a concentrated source of 'hot' anger.

correlation between rhetoric and praxis can be evaluated by observing the level of involvement allowed the *wong cilik* in the cultural practices instigated by cultural activists.

As an example, we will shortly compare cultural activities catering for the *wong cilik* organised by Fred Wibowo and Studio Puskat, Wiji Thukul, and Moelyono (the editor of 'Galeri Gambar' mentioned in Chapter Five). In general, the common objectives of these three are advocacy and empowerment of the *wong cilik*. Advocacy involves articulating the concerns and aspirations of the *wong cilik* in the hope of influencing wider society. Empowerment is about assisting the *wong cilik* to take greater control over their lives by understanding and overcoming relations of social inequality through collective action. A brief summary of the characteristics and consequences of advocacy and empowerment as I see them follows.

The radical politicisation of popular culture is an attempt to make the *wong cilik* visible as a contesting player in the field of hegemonic struggle over cultural production and meaning in civil society. This programmatic use of popular culture makes *wong cilik* culture represent itself. The very act of asserting popular culture as a visible force, or politicising popular culture, transforms it. Popular culture now represents itself through the eyes of those who appropriate it for programmatic or political reasons. Transformation of meanings in popular culture through its politicisation results in a detachment from the defused everyday context as it is refined to suit narrow political (or educational) objectives. In doing this, *wong cilik* culture is transformed according to the perspective of the main protagonists and the new social context it is manifest in. Furthermore, entering the hegemonic field of struggle politicised popular culture will be worked on by the dominant cultural forces it must negotiate with. Popular culture risks further transmutation of meaning as dominant forces try to contain, coopt, or destroy elements that threaten to break the boundaries of consent and contest under hegemonic control. (These processes are explored in detail with the example of pedicab *wayang* in Chapter Ten).

However, cultural action is more than just utilising *wong cilik* culture to challenge dominant cultural definitions. In the process of asserting *wong cilik* identity and meaning cultural action attempts to empower, and therefore transform, the

existing *wong cilik* culture itself. Cultural action has a dual function: making the *wong cilik* visible, or asserting it, as a formal contender in the struggle to shape social relations and cultural identity; and, in order to do so, empowering the *wong cilik* to recognise and participate in that struggle. The empowerment of the *wong cilik* has educational and political dimensions. According to Studio Puskat, the process of empowerment goes through two stages. The first concern is the restoration and revitalisation of local cultural practices in which the *wong cilik* participate. The *wong cilik* are encouraged to work together in developing communal cultural practices that relate to their daily lives, their interests and concerns. Over time, *wong cilik* participation in the processes of cultural production becomes an avenue whereby they, as a collective, develop an understanding of, and confidence in dealing with, social issues pertinent to them.

The sincerity and success of cultural action in representing and asserting *wong cilik* cultural identity, in negotiating space rather than being coopted by dominant interests, can be assessed by how empowering it is within the *wong cilik* it professes to represent. The measure of empowerment central to analysis here is the degree of *wong cilik* participation in the cultural action process. This measure of *wong cilik* participation will assist in understanding the larger issues on the agency of cultural action in shaping society. For example, who ultimately benefits from the exposure of *wong cilik* culture through cultural action as a visible contestant in the dominant cultural field? To what extent does cultural action subvert, reform or conversely extend dominant cultural and social interests? Heryanto (1990:298) acknowledges that in Indonesia cultural resistance led by artists, independent intellectuals and NGOs remain 'part of the existing hegemony'. If so, is this incorporation of the *wong cilik* a process of democratisation or domestication? Are the *wong cilik* better off officially incorporated within, or marginalised outside (invisible to) the consensus of power that is frequently termed 'civil society'?

The activities of Studio Puskat, including Fred Wibowo and members of Arena Teater, have continued to develop since the 1980s. From my limited observations of, and discussions with, the people at Studio Puskat, in mid 1993 there appeared to be a contrast between its official program and the less formal activities

of individuals connected to the organisation. On a formal level Studio Puskat must negotiate with a conservative church hierarchy (van Erven 1992) and cooperate with government and commercial organisations. However, some of the individuals attached to Studio Puskat demonstrate a more radical and idealistic approach.⁶⁷

Endro's explanation of Arena Teater's new role suggests that Studio Puskat can work as a respectable front. Apparently, Arena Teater no longer goes out and conducts surveys and workshops with villagers, but functions as a training centre for cadres. Trainees then go out as individuals not officially tied to any organisation, so as not to be subject to funding obligations, or accused of being part of an organised social movement. This also avoids the problem of a centralised stereotype dictating to the local context. In this way they develop disconnected pockets of cadres and *teater rakyat* that do their own thing, but informally know and help each other, sharing information. Endro sees this informal underground network as the best way to avoid coercive action or cooption from the state. Although not clear on details, Endro is confident that over a number of years the self-spreading sites of *theatre rakyat* will aggregate to bring about broad social transformation. These less tangible activities must be kept in mind when assessing Studio Puskat's visible program.

One of Teater Arena's central activities is establishing village cultural centres or *balai budaya* where the *wong cilik* are able to participate in cultural production free from the usual bureaucratic and social relations, including an insidious consumer culture, that subjugate and domesticate them (Wibowo n.d.). At the root of *wong cilik* subjugation is money or capital which the *wong cilik* do not have and which determines life's chances, such as education and income earning opportunities.

⁶⁷ There is a mixed bag of urban intellectuals/professionals working at Studio Puskat. Endro comes from a poor family where from upper primary school he was forced to work in order to pay for his education. In order to pay university fees he and other students rented a mini bus and worked as drivers and conductors every day outside class times. However, he never completed his studies. He pulled out of a dance course at the arts academy, ASTI when he could not pay his final exam fees. Then, he did Social Sciences (*Sospol*) at Taman Siswa. However, he pulled out again when he was not allowed to write a thesis criticising the formal education system. Another employee, Tatang, works as a graphic artist. His own paintings contain sharp criticism of the effects of the abuses of power, developmentalism and a capitalist consumer culture on the *wong cilik* and their existing forms of cultural expression. He acknowledges that his father, previously jailed for affiliation with Lekra, has become a religious recluse living in constant fear and anxiety.

Wibowo portrays the *balai budaya* as the antithesis of television that is used as a medium of *wong cilik* domestication.⁶⁸ Television assists capital in further exploiting the *wong cilik* by enticing them to buy non-essential consumables that they cannot afford. 'Whatever is given to the people [by capital] is also something that on the other hand can open opportunity to take even more from the people' (Wibowo n.d.: 2).⁶⁹ Television also displaces creative social involvement in real life with the unreal or unattainable pleasure and fantasy for the individual. The *wong cilik* no longer understand or care about the environment and people in their village/kampung and become dependent on dominant powers. Television is used as a medium through which '[m]oney distances people's motivation in becoming "actors and creators"' (Wibowo n.d.:3). This is a de-humanising force where individuals are no longer able to reach their potential as creative social agents and measure the worth of others only in terms of money. Creativity in artistic practices, on the other hand, gives rise to feeling and sensitivity and a desire to be socially involved. Here, creative not financial motives must drive cultural production.⁷⁰ The *balai budaya* is a place where people can meet free from the usual power relations tied to money and authority. Like Wibowo's idealistic understanding of the *banjar* (village meeting place) in Bali, at the *balai budaya* people can express themselves and share their thoughts about social issues and their environment through the creative arts. The collective process of cultural production encourages people to raise questions and find answers that will assist them in improving their quality of life (Wibowo n.d.:5).

In 1993 Wibowo told me that Arena Teater had already established sixteen village *balai budaya*. Apparently the regional government is so impressed that they have asked them to set up more *balai budaya* with government funding, but not government control. Cultural workers at Studio Puskat have an ambiguous

⁶⁸ Ironically, Fred Wibowo and Studio Puskat are also heavily involved in the production of television programs and training of personnel in the television industry.

⁶⁹ This and following quotes from Wibowo (n.d.) Are from my translations of *Balai Budaya Minomartani: Balai budaya peluang bagi masyarakat untuk berkembang (sebuah pemikiran dasar)*. About the Minomartani Cultural Centre: The Cultural Centre as an opportunity for the people to develop (basic considerations).

⁷⁰ A similar, though less extreme, dualism is portrayed in Heryanto's (1992:4-6) account of the de-humanising materialism of capitalism corrupting pre-existing socio-cultural relations that tended to be non-materialistic.

relationship with the state. Endro, for example, asserts that on several occasions his village workshops have been forced to disband after being questioned by village or regional authorities and being accused of criticising the government or being associated with the banned PKI. So far he has avoided serious trouble by arguing along *pembangunan* lines that he is actually assisting the state by helping villages develop and look after themselves. By using his own resources in assisting the villagers to be self-resourceful Endro argues he is reducing the money the state has to use on *pembangunan*. This argument holds water with the state in a climate of declining internal revenue, and is the basis of cooperation with the state in building village *balai budaya* and the wider trend of closer cooperation between NGOs and the state up to the mid 1990s. NGOs are also more closely involved with commercial activities. Studio Puskat, for example, is expanding its involvement in the mass media providing training for staff from commercial television broadcasters, who they hope to influence in the process. The question remains, however, are the NGOs a democratic influence on or simply being coopted by the dominant interests of state and capital?

Balai Budaya Minomartani (BBM), located on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, 9 kilometres to the north, is Studio Puskat's show piece. BBM officially opened on 14 August 1990. The top story of the BBM building can be used as an art gallery and place for rehearsals and houses a complete *gamelan* ensemble. The ground floor is an open pagoda used for rehearsals and performances, of which the audience observes from a naturalistic amphitheatre in front of the pagoda. Before BBM, traditional performing arts in the surrounding villages were virtually non-existent. As of 1993, by contrast, BBM hosted fourteen adult and two primary school *gamelan* groups, nine *dalang*, two *kethoprak* groups, one *wayang orang*, Arena Teater and children's painting and dance workshops.

On 15 August 1993 the lively atmosphere around a *kethoprak* performance entitled *Kethoprak Airlangga Wisuda*, was very much folk theatre, with signs of greater *wong cilik* involvement. Unlike traditional folk theatre associated with rites and celebrations there were no hierarchical seating arrangements. There was no distinction between guests and dignitaries and ordinary people, with everyone

receiving a small snack and drink. A crowd of 1500 overflowed the amphitheatre. Families came with perhaps more women and children than men. The women were very interested in the performance. Whilst the men shouted comments during the comedy scenes, the women smiled and laughed. There was much chatter and socialising, particularly during earlier court scenes. There were many stalls selling snacks, light meals and toys. There was even a secluded gambling area about 100 metres down a lane. Here about 150 serious men bet on average between rp 100-500 (A\$ 0.07-0.35) at half a dozen different types of dice and roulette games.

During the performance I asked one of the managers of Studio Puskat for his opinion on what goals BBM had and had not yet achieved. He said they had managed to get the village people to participate in, and be proud of, their traditional culture. They had not, however, reached a stage where the people were critically aware of and confident in discussing social issues. Tatang, a graphic artist at Studio Puskat currently residing at the BBM complex, confirmed that the main goal at BBM was in promoting harmony, solidarity and compassion in living together. According to Wibowo (n.d.:6) BBM was born out of a need for 'a glue that can fuse together a variety of cultural potentials and social stratum within society'. Here, the emphasis is on harmony and working together between people from different social strata, rather than seriously questioning basic class contradictions. In a later discussion, Hoffman emphasised that Studio Puskat survives government suspicion and intervention with the philosophy of providing alternative cultural products rather than head on confrontation with or resistance to dominant powers.

In fact the way BBM is set up and operated points to a soft idealistic existence of promoting and rehabilitating Javanese culture. During one visit I observed a *gamelan* rehearsal at which many of those practicing were women, neatly dressed children learning traditional dance and an exhibition of beautiful children's paintings depicting themselves happily playing together (Figs. 3, 4 and 5). The rationale behind these activities at BBM is based on an idealised understanding of folk traditions:

Folk theatre is usually a mass phenomenon and this means involving many members of society. This creative sensitivity and solidarity and social involvement will give rise to different social aspects such as mutual concern, working together, *gotong royong* [mutual aid], restoration of ones self

confidence and existential being (Wibowo n.d.: 4).

By revitalising a folk theatre in which the *wong cilik* have free access it is hoped the flow on affect will be their collective empowerment to bring about social change. The connection between cultural practice and social agency is inferred in one of Tatang's paintings of an old man playing a *gamelan* instrument. Tatang explained to me that in the painting the old man looks sad and weary, but he is also enjoying contemplating his life problems as he plays. The *gamelan* is, thus, not a way of drifting off and forgetting ones problems but provides rejuvenation as one contemplates these problems.

The significance of folk performances for the *wong cilik* will be explored in detail in the following chapter. In reality, however, the activities at BBM do not tackle the fundamental social issues of inequality and oppression facing the *wong cilik* in their daily lives. In attempting to bring about social change for the betterment of the *wong cilik* BBM doesn't meet the criteria, adapted from Paulo Freire and similar to Wiji Thukul's concerns above, which Wibowo, himself sets (n.d.:10):

dialogue can only be achieved amongst people who face the same circumstances (together experiencing suffering or solidarity in the suffering of others, together experiencing problems in the village, etc.) and together want to change the situation.

This criterion contrasts with the situation at BBM as a detached pleasant world. The complex is not in adjacent poor villages. Rather, they must walk from their *kampung*s into a prefabricated 'island'. Here, the luxurious performance building, with equipment already supplied, is surrounded on one side by a token rice field and fish pond and on the other by a housing complex for the 'middle class' professionals who commute to Studio Puskat in the city. In BBM the urban intellectuals have set the parameters based on their idealisation of *wong cilik* cultural traditions within which the *wong cilik* are invited to partake. The structure and safe activities of BBM are commensurate with its dependence on support from the church organisation and approval from the state.



Figure 3 *Gamelan* rehearsal, Balai Budaya Minomartani, Yogyakarta. Photo by G. Reeves.



Figure 4 Children's dance practice, Balai Budaya Minomartani, Yogyakarta. Photo by G. Reeves.

Cultural Action Rooted in the Daily Struggles of the *Wong Cilik*

The idealistic atmosphere and activities of BBM are in stark contrast to those at Sanggar Suka Banjir (literally, Workshop Prone to Flood), an alternative arts and education workshop for poor kampung children run by Wiji Thukul.⁷¹ The activities, including many of the staged performances, of the twenty or so children at Sanggar Suka Banjir take over the simple but relatively large rented house of Thukul and family. These children from age three to fifteen are the sons and daughters of factory, construction and transport workers, pedicab drivers, coolies, scavengers and street hawkers. The workshop's name reflects the frequent reality of a tributary of the Bengawan Solo River overflowing and inundating many of the children's, including Thukul's, homes during the wet season. Children's poems, stories and art work describe how the floods usually arrive in the middle of the night forcing residents to evacuate their homes, taking furniture and other belongings to higher ground (Fig. 7). In the morning little children excitedly play in the subsiding water as older people begin mopping up and hanging things out to dry. A magazine called '*Suara Kampung*' (Kampung Voice) produced by the children and distributed in the kampung in photocopy form recounts the children's experiences of the floods and other problems and issues in their daily lives. These include air and water pollution from a nearby textile factory, exploitation of child labour, and the effects of domestic violence, drinking and gambling on them.⁷² A block print produced by one thirteen year old succinctly depicts the harsh working reality of his father as pedicab driver (compare this, Fig. 6, with the joyous children's painting at BBM, Fig. 5).

⁷¹ Unless specifically stated the following discussion is based on my observations and numerous discussions with Wiji Thukul, co-workers, and the children at Sanggar Suka Banjir between August 1993 and January 1994, and in June 1996. For a comprehensive account of Thukul's praxis during the 1980s, as a poor kampung resident, activist and poet, read Rosslyn Marie van der Borch's superb honours thesis *Art and Activism: Some Examples from Contemporary Central Java* (1987).

⁷² Although much of the children's activities express social issues that directly affect them on a daily basis, they also involve ordinary fun and games, such as singing and dancing, making masks, toys and musical instruments.

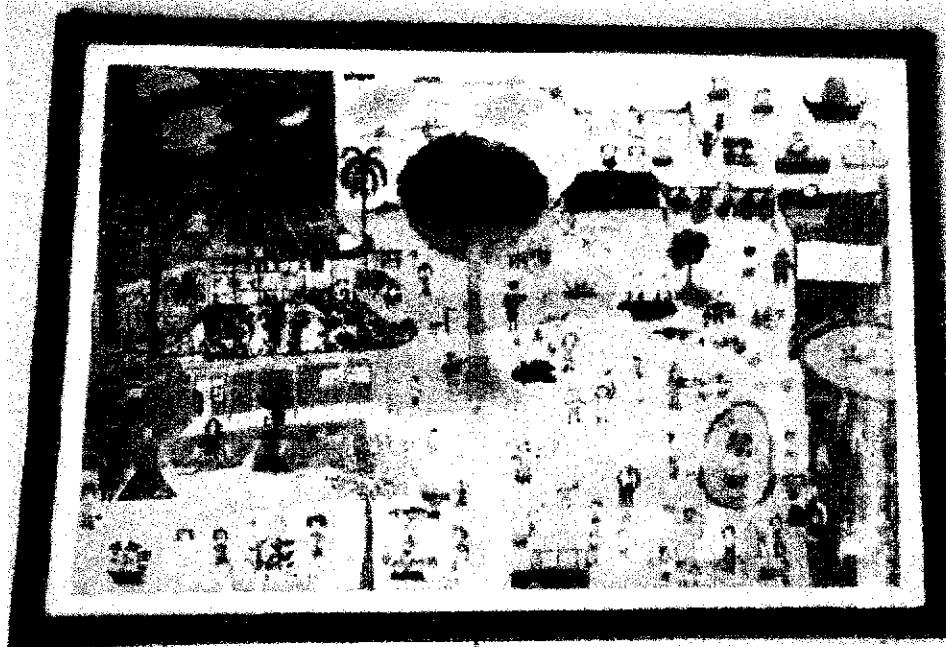


Figure 5 Children's painting of the environment and activities at Balai Budaya Minomartani, Yogyakarta. Photo by G. Reeves.



Figure 6 A pedicab driver's lot: rain, heat and the high cost of vehicle rent. Block print by the son of a pedicab driver, Sanggar Suka Banjir, Kalangan, Solo.

A central activity of Sanggar Suka Banjir is theatrical workshops that assist the children to be more critically aware of their surrounding environment and confident in discussing related issues and concerns and then expressing their thoughts and articulating them to others. Thukul explains the process in a newspaper article (Bernas 1991):

Our activities are just simple. I invite the children to walk around the kampung or another place. After arriving back at the workshop I ask them to think about the noises which they heard earlier, whether that be the sound of a car, the scrape of a bucket being used, people fighting ... Then they mimic the sound again or copy the activities they saw using their own body expressions. ... In small groups they discuss what they saw, felt and thought in regards to these earlier events ... without realising it they learn to be confident in speaking, put forward their opinions and even debate. Because, often they have different interpretations concerning the same thing. And furthermore, the children have learnt to observe the social reality around them ... The topics they select [from this process of crystallisation for theatrical performances] are not divorced from their daily social reality [my translation].

In celebration of Independence Day 1993, I witnessed separate skits performed by four small groups of children resulting from this type of workshop process (Figs. 8, 9 and 10). The backdrop for these performances was the children's paintings illustrating the workshop process that led to the performance. One performance was about their fathers' drinking and gambling, and then being thrown into jail. Two girls swept a mat in preparation for opening a make believe stall. Then three boys came and drank and drank, getting drunk, falling about the place and throwing up. A police officer came using a mop for a rifle then took them to the lock up, leaving them in a drunken stupor. When the boys awoke and realised the guard was still asleep they climbed over the door and escaped. They went back to the kampung and started drinking and gambling again. The police officer returned disguised as a drinker, captured them and threw them back in jail. The boys were very angry and climbed trees in the jail (although the children had never been in a jail they assumed it would have trees). In another skit the children were pretending to wash themselves in the public baths. However, they could never quite finish washing before someone would press a buzzer to tell them their time was up. This was a hilarious skit for the children

based on the daily reality of using a public bath, with time limits for use because so many people needed to use it.



Figure 7 Floods are a frequent nuisance during the rainy season in Kalangan, Solo.
Photo provided by Wiji Thukul.



Figure 8 Music rehearsals by the children of Sanggar Suka Banjir, Kalangan, Solo.
Photo provided by Wiji Thukul.



Figure 9 Discussion workshop in preparation for a performance by the children of Sanggar Suka Banjir, Kalangan, Solo. Photo provided by Wiji Thukul.



Figure 10 A performance by the children of Sanggar Suka Banjir, Kalangan, Solo. Paintings from a workshop in preparation for the performance are used as a backdrop. Photo provided by Wiji Thukul.

Thukul believes that in order to ensure genuine motives, cultural activists must be rooted in the surrounding *wong cilik*. In this way the cultural activist remains accountable to, and controlled by, the *wong cilik*. On the 29th December 1993 Thukul was invited to present a paper to radical students and artists at an exhibition of art installations at Seni Sono, Yogyakarta, entitled *Parade Kesenian Akhir Tahun* (End of Year Arts Parade). During the subsequent discussion a student asked an all too familiar question of Thukul: How is it possible for us to ‘become one with the people’ (*menyatu dengan masyarakat*)? Thukul laughing, replied that for him that was always a very strange question because like it or not Thukul does become one with the people because he is one of the people. ‘His father still drives a pedicab. And his mother continues to be angry because there is never enough money to buy groceries’ (Budiman 1994:xi). Thukul, himself, is self-educated, not finishing primary school, and has been a labourer, street hawker and busker, who now assists Sipon, his wife, a kampung tailor. Thukul’s family (in 1994 they had two small children) live on a budget of rp 3,000 (A\$ 2.00) a day. Thukul says he experiences what the other poor kampung residents experience and is involved in his neighbours problems. In this regard Thukul has organised, or been involved in, a number of protests concerning local environmental and labour issues that on occasion have led to him being interrogated or beaten (Progress 1992:16).

Thukul is often suspicious of, and sees the gap between, the paternalistic urban intelligentsia, whether that is radical student, artist or NGO, and the *wong cilik* they claim to support. Aware of the different agenda and interests of the urban intelligentsia, he is very wary and highly selective in who he works with. With the *Tungku* project, mentioned earlier, for example, Thukul had to persuade the local students, who were eager for wider recognition, to use Gidag-gidig’s premises set in the kampung. Apparently the students preferred a more prestigious venue, such as the grounds of the palace or the government cultural centre, which would be less accessible to local *wong cilik*. Nevertheless, despite potentially different objectives, Thukul acknowledges the necessity of working together with the urban intelligentsia in the struggle for grassroots social change. The activities of Moelyono, also a close friend of Thukul’s, demonstrate that it is possible for the radical intelligentsia to

‘become one with the people’, to be involved in their struggles, as well as champion their concerns and interests in broader forums.

Moelyono was born in the small rural town of Tulung Agung, East Java, (see map) in 1957.⁷³ His parents were poor street hawkers, his father selling cigarettes and his mother selling food. Perhaps fortuitously, Moelyono was born on the same Javanese day as both his parents. According to Javanese belief this meant he could not be raised by his parents and was adopted into his mother’s sister’s family. This family had a more educated background, but was still relatively poor. His adopted mother was an Islamic teacher and her husband a lowly civil servant. Moelyono attributes his intellectual/educational direction to their influence. In the 1980s Moelyono studied in the arts academy in Yogyakarta and was involved in the New Art Movement, which was a reaction against the mainstream art in the academies. According to Wright (1991:456) Moelyono was part of a group of artists who ‘wanted to distance art from the subjective emotions and imagination of the artist, and narrow the gap between the artist as subject and his or her material or themes as object’.

This criticism also applied to much leftist art found in Lekra and, for example, the contemporary artist Semsar. Moelyono states that although this art criticises oppression it also exploits the *wong cilik* subjects as it detaches them from their social context to fit the stereotypes or aesthetics of the artists ‘as thin or under the jack boot of the army’ (Haryono and David 1990:29).

Moelyono calls on artists to become teachers, organisers and researchers as well as art practitioners. "Artists should become involved in social problems and take sides with the poor and oppressed" (Haryono and David 1990:29).

A central activity of Moelyono’s since completing his formal education has been working with poor villagers in the remote fishing and farming villages of Brumbun

⁷³ This discussion is based on conversations I have had with Moelyono in Indonesia and in Australia, where he participated in the Artists Regional Exchange (ARX) – 4 in Perth 1995. Moelyono (1997) and Astri Wright’s PhD thesis, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (1991) provide greater detail on Moelyono as radical artist and social activist as well as the history of the New Art Movement in which he had been involved.

and Nggerangan on the south coast in the Tulung Agung district.⁷⁴ In a similar approach to Thukul, Moelyono provided an alternative education for the local children to help them think critically about their surrounding environment and discuss relevant issues ‘in the process of dialogue on social reality’ (Moelyono 1995). In school the children were taught stereotypical art that lacked meaning, such as drawing a scene of two mountains, with a sun in between, and a road in the foreground with paddy fields on either side. He taught the children to draw what they saw or felt, for example the sense of ‘*gotong royong*’ when their parents work together to pull in a fishing net. Block prints by children in the nearby farming village cover a range of issues. One print retells how local villagers ‘steal’ wood from the teak forests owned by the Department of Forestry. The forestry overseer arrests one farmer confiscating his wood, putting it in a truck, then selling it for his own profit.

In conjunction with Moelyono’s installations, the children’s art work has been exhibited in the villages, Tulung Agung and further afield, such as Surabaya, Solo, Yogyakarta, Salatiga and Jakarta with a multiplicity of affects. The children gain confidence and self esteem knowing that their work is good enough to exhibit. Their work is then sold by auction to sympathetic students and academics. The proceeds are then pooled to get something for the village that they think is appropriate, such as a clean water tank. Exhibitions such as one in Yogyakarta in collaboration with Thukul, also demonstrate the ‘art conscientization’ methodology, running workshops for children from the poor urban kampungs in Yogyakarta.

The activities and exhibitions coordinated by Moelyono have also attracted the attention of local authorities. They have embarrassed the regional government into undertaking superficial village development, such as providing concrete paths and a toilet block. Moelyono, however, suspects the real motive here was in anticipation of tourist development in the area. The risk of making the village visible to the district authorities was realised in an initial proposal to relocate the village and develop the tourist potential of its picturesque setting with a parking bay, tennis

⁷⁴ A description of Moelyono’s activities in these villages is also in Moelyono (1997) and Wright (1991:461-4), Haryono and David (1990:29) and in a talk by FX Harsono at the ARX-3 in Perth, 1992.

court, restaurant and swimming pool (Moelyono 1997:135). The local military has also interrogated Moelyono over his father's political persuasion in 1965 to see if he has communist leanings. This is in the context of the south coast of East Java being perceived as a 'trouble spot' where the communists had an outpost in the teak plantations and had a strong influence on the impoverished local population. Moelyono was able to restore his reputation and to continue to work with the children. In part the strategy of identifying himself as a teacher, generally regarded highly in Indonesian society, rather than a radical cultural activist, has helped him overcome suspicion from local authorities and integrate better into local societies.

Moelyono sees his role as working with, or assisting, the *wong cilik* to regain their 'right' and 'potency' for creative self expression (1995). Fred Wibowo's justification of BBM is paralleled in the principle of 'art concietization' as Moelyono (1995) sees it,

The Visual Art Conscietization based on giving people as Subject position Creator of Culture, not the passive consumer of cultural products. As creator of culture people have potency and the right to manage visual arts as the media of the dialog. It is in non-hierarchical form and completely dominated by people's need for expressing its community aspiration of self-reliance, justice and democraton. All is intended to improve people's fate and rights through art creation [sic].

After going to the Philippines in 1989, and learning about theatre of liberation, Moelyono has shifted his orientation. Although previously employing locally available materials, the workshops with the *wong cilik* mainly relied on his own art knowledge, such as the use of block printing. In parallel to the principle of Studio Puskat, Moelyono now places greater emphasis on developing pre-existing cultural knowledge and media, in particular performance or theatre, as a source for re-politicising or mobilising the *wong cilik*.

Moelyono has recently been working with villagers displaced by the Wonorejo dam, intended to ease flooding in nearby Tulung Agung and provide water for farm irrigation, as well as industry in Surabaya. Moelyono has been helping villagers re-establish their *jaranan* performance troupe that broke up as the villagers

were scattered by their forced removal from the dam site. *Jaranan* is a trance dance to popular songs performed for several hours with an interlude of joke telling. According to Moelyono the troupe, called *Jaranan 'Turonggo Yakso Mudho'*, and its performances have been central in regrouping villages so that as a collective they can discuss, and more effectively fight for, amongst other things, just land compensation. Moelyono (1995) explains,

when the community of *jaranan "Turonggo Yakso Mudho"* perform their art outside community, the members and the people from other village held a meeting and discussing the real problem of the "*Jaranan*" players, especially the problem of the Wonorejo dam project [sic].

Conclusion

Cultural activists such as those in Studio Puskat, Wiji Thukul and Moelyono, attempt to bolster *wong cilik* cultural agency as a means for genuine *wong cilik* advocacy and empowerment and as a crucible for grassroots democratic change. A recurring issue, however, is the character and social agency of pre-existing *wong cilik* cultural expression. These cultural activists have pointed to the overriding tendency of the *wong cilik* to be silenced by, or passive consumers of, dominant political, ideological and commercialised cultural forces imposed from above. Nevertheless, many of these activists also point to a seemingly innate latency within the *wong cilik* of a truly democratic cultural force suppressed or polluted by the interests of state and capital which dominate the processes of cultural production. This contradiction, which tends to be reified in the rhetoric of cultural activists, will be unravelled in the following section exploring the non-programatic cultural agency of the *wong cilik*. This can be achieved by continuing to see the cultural activities in which the *wong cilik* are involved as sites of cultural contestation informed by, and informing, surrounding socio-economic relations.

Chapter Seven: Space for *Wong Cilik* Cultural Expression

1 *Recognising Wong Cilik Cultural Agency*

Social Contradictions and *Wong Cilik* Cultural Agency

It is possible to get the impression that dominant cultural forces have a total hegemony over the *wong cilik*, that *wong cilik* cultural agency is either totally pacified or suppressed, shaped to reinforce dominant interests or marginalised to insignificance. Nevertheless, the persistence of social contradictions means even those cultural forms and practises seen to exemplify the hegemonic processes of state and capital are subject to contestation involving *wong cilik* agency. As an illustration I would like to briefly revisit two examples often used to characterise the hegemonic power of dominant interests, 'traditional' *wayang* and the contemporary process of cultural commodification.

Wayang symbolism is often characterised as exemplifying and reinforcing a social order dominated by the ruling bloc. Wiji Thukul, for example, says that overall *wayang* reinforces the elitist *ksatria* ethic of noble warrior. As discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, scholars often conclude that *wayang* symbolism and performances reinforce hierarchical power relations in which the *wong cilik* are weak and passive. Pemberton (1994:251-2), for example, sees contemporary *wayang* performances as a functional part of New Order rituals that serve to domesticate the populace through legitimising security and harmony over conflict.

However, Raharjo (n.d.) describes how a rural based *wong cilik* millenarian movement used *wayang* symbolism to assert themselves and challenge a dominant ideology produced by what they perceived as a corrupt ruling elite. It is somewhere between the need to explain radically changing socio-economic relations, exacerbating economic deprivation, and the need to just survive or make life tolerable, that millenarian movements, mobilising the *wong cilik*, have sprung up in Java (Adas 1979; Johnson 1979:237; and Raharjo n.d.:221).

The Embah Wali movement in Blitar, East Java, searched for the conditions of existence from within the context presented by the dominant ideology in the form

of *wayang* imagery. Nevertheless, their interpretations of these shadow plays, and of an appropriate response or solution to their present situation, located as they are in a poor part of Java, is in opposition to that promoted by the government and village elite. The present, as seen, is continually projected by the New Order state as a period of harmony and consensus that is once again approaching the glory of the fourteenth century golden age of the Madjapahit kingdom. Yet, to the followers of Embah Wali, a corrupt and detached ruler has created the present era of chaos and disharmony (Raharjo n.d.:3-4; also Liddle 1983:3-4).

Embah Wali, himself, fits what Gramsci termed an 'organic intellectual' (Finn et al 1978:149) who originates from the *wong cilik* sharing a similar socio-economic background and experiences. Gramsci referred to organic intellectuals as propagators of working class party ideologies that largely control the political and cultural articulation of the lower classes. The educative function of the party and its organic intellectuals is explained by Finn et al (1978:149):

It [the party] works within the grain of common-sense conceptions of the world held by worker or peasant but raises them to a higher power of critical self-awareness and coherence. It teaches the classes their place within the social formation and within "history" as a whole. It adopts "global" functions beyond the "economic-corporate", embraces in its programmes the whole range of social issues and develops a particular vision of the future. Such a party forms a state within the state, a state in preparation. Since the state is an "ethical" as well as a coercive agency, the party must possess a "philosophy" of its own, capable of becoming the cement of a new social order.

Although there is no working class party per se, there is a pervasive popular culture or 'common sense' with which Embah Wali can work. Raharjo says, ideals expressed in the culture of the people are of justice, happiness and order. Embah Wali's followers have experienced the opposite – social disharmony and dispossession. They look for answers in the shadow play, which has the resolution of disharmony as a central theme (Raharjo n.d.:5).

In the shadow plays the puppets representing the *wong cilik* have minor roles compared to the warrior rulers (*ksatria*). Yet, none of the puppets is in control of its own destiny and all are indispensable in completing the totality of the play (Raharjo n.d.:16,27). Embah Wali interprets this as encouraging them to accept the reality of

their powerless position. However, Embah Wali is also concerned to rework or break down the pre-existing 'silent culture'; that is, feelings of inferiority and helplessness. He stresses that *Priyayi* (Javanese elite) mystical and religious beliefs, including concepts of heaven and hell, serve as ideological functions in the domination and repression of the people. For Embah Wali, life is reality. There is no need to think about death and the hereafter, about the past and future, what is important, is the here and now (Raharjo n.d.:16,18).

Life is cyclic and full of opposing but complementary elements, and, through an elaborate calculation using Javanese and Muslim calendarical systems, Embah Wali forecasts a new 'golden age' heralded by the imminent coming of the legendary *Ratu Adil* (Just King). In fact, Embah Wali describes himself as the *pandita ratu*, the just king's sage or spiritual adviser (Raharjo n.d.:15,20). Embah Wali, is presently in search of the *Ratu Adil* who will be an incarnation of the master puppeteer, the creator and destroyer, the supreme being (Raharjo n.d.:20).

Embah Wali's millenarian movement represents the creative dynamics of populist popular culture through its expression of resistance within the context of the dominant or elite ideologies. Theirs is a quest to make sense of, or cope with, difficult transformations in their conditions or relations of existence. Raharjo (n.d.:24) concludes:

They [the followers] challenge reality not by fighting against it, but by making their position clear. With this they have succeeded to a certain extent in inverting their powerlessness to powerfulness.

Embah Wali (like Gramsci's 'organic intellectual') has achieved a high level of 'self-awareness and coherence' amongst his followers who are able to understand their collective position within changing socio-economic conditions. They have also constructed a 'vision of the future' in readiness for a 'new social order' – the 'golden age'. From amongst the poor of rural Java, followers of the Embah Wali movement showed they could make sense of their situation and retain their dignity in the face of oppressive conditions. In contrast to most studies that stress the passive weakness of the rural 'mass', Raharjo has identified the significance of a creative power of *wong*

cilik consciousness or 'common sense' within the repressive context of dominant ideologies and radically deteriorating economic circumstances.

Another major hegemonising force of dominant interests is, as we have seen, the commodification of culture through increasingly internationalised capitalist relations. The result is either displacement or transformation of cultural production with cultural consumption, thus further attenuating *wong cilik* cultural agency. Murray (1991a) observed the reduction of participation or access to cultural practices for *wong cilik* with the expansion of capitalist relations into the poor urban kampungs in Jakarta. However, here also, persistent social contradictions mean the denial or domestication of *wong cilik* cultural agency is not a unilateral, unchallenged outcome.

The 1996 riots associated with the PDI political crisis, mentioned in Chapter Three, were considered the largest in Jakarta in decades. However, in 1991 it was internationalised commodified popular culture that sparked the largest street riot for decades.⁷⁵ Thousands of rampaging *wong cilik* youths caused great damage and anxiety in the wealthy suburb of Pondok Indah, South Jakarta, near a football stadium where a concert for the American heavy metal band, Metalica, was held. Shops, houses, and cars, were pelted with rocks or set on fire. People were terrorised, beaten and robbed. The riots were a reaction to exorbitant ticket prices ranging from rp 30,000 to 150,000 (A\$ 20.00-100.00). Expensive tickets and the elite location of the venue reflected the popularity of heavy metal music amongst the youth from more affluent backgrounds. However, many of the 10-20,000 people who milled around the gates to the concert were heavy metal fans from a poor background who could not afford the entrance fee. In frustration they smashed the ticket booth, battled with security guards, then, in roaming packs, vented their anger on the symbols of wealth and people in the surrounding elite suburb. This action forced authorities to respond by allowing the fans into the concert for free when they returned to the stadium. Then, after the concert, the police and army felt compelled to patrol the streets with armoured personnel carriers. As with the PDI riots, *wong cilik* involvement in the Metalica riots was seen by liberal observers in the mass media as symptomatic of a

⁷⁵ The following description of events is taken from Edmund Thomson's article, 'Rock and riots' (1993).

growing visibility or perception of social inequality in Jakarta. Here, an internationalised cultural commodity was reworked as an instrument of local *wong cilik* social action, albeit diffused and destructive.

Both the *wayang* millenarian movement of Embah Wali and the Metalica riots are infrequent and extreme events. Nevertheless, they show that due to underlying social contradictions there is scope even within main domesticating cultural forces for *wong cilik* cultural, indeed social, agency. These examples warn us against the tendency of scholars to neglect the potential for *wong cilik* cultural agency by overstating the hegemonic power of dominant socio-cultural forces to cover over underlying social contradictions. These examples illustrate graphically the need to rethink how we identify *wong cilik* cultural agency.

The *Wong Cilik* and Informal Cultural Elements

The previous chapter on cultural action identified cultural practices that had been largely abstracted from their everyday context as instruments promoting social and political change. This section is concerned with cultural practices, without conscious programmatic objectives, that are essentially part of every day life. For example, forms of communal cultural practices, such as performances relating to ritual expression, celebrations and entertainment, can be analysed in terms of their relevance with the experiences, consciousness and agency of the *wong cilik* in local societies. These forms of cultural practice, though to some degree abstractions of everyday life, are entrenched in the daily social relations and consciousness of local societies. Popular culture here is characterised not by what it is made to represent or 'do', but what it 'is' within the context of local societies and their *wong cilik* constituents. Though abstractions of local daily life communally based cultural performances are also embedded in local social relations, and articulate a local exegesis that has both indistinguishable 'instrumental' and 'expressive' qualities (H. Geertz 1991:190-1).

Organised community cultural practices such as ritual performance have pragmatic functions, such as confirming the social order or attempting to change it for the better. However, this dynamic of social action is derived from a subconscious multifaceted local exegesis, rather than rarefied into a narrow political or social

objective (H. Geertz 1991:190-1). Such cultural practices can contain a multiplicity of social meanings and strategies relating to local social relations. Ritual performances in village purification ceremonies, for example, may attempt to redress issues of conflict and contradiction in the community using a spiritual exegesis, such as exercising malevolent spirits within individuals or the village/neighbourhood. On another level the same ceremony may be used by the sponsor to reinforce social status or as a symbol of prestige. Such occasions also simply provide opportunity for socialising and entertainment in which, as we shall see, *wong cilik* cultural agency is also possible.

These communal based celebrations and performances have indistinguishable 'instrumental' and 'expressive' functions that not only tell a story about local social relations and perceived reality, but also contain the dynamics of social action (H. Geertz 1991:190-1). As mentioned in Chapter One, this is also the view of Turner (1986). Local exegesis abstracted and crystallised in a creative 'reflexive' manner does more than reflect or reinforce social 'norms'. The performance provides an opportunity for 'norms' and contesting ideas and latent issues to be 'aired out', examined and even reworked. New ideas and forces from origins wider than local societies are also introduced and mediated through the performance.

There is a gradient between the 'expressive' character of informal cultural practices indistinguishable from every day life, such as food, gossip, games, sex, drinking and gambling, and formal organised community cultural practices. Formal cultural activities, such as weddings or state celebrations, emphasise the instrumental, such as social status or government propaganda. Nevertheless, organised cultural activities often encompass less formal cultural practices, such as drinking and gambling at *wayang* performances held as part of ritual celebrations.

Informal cultural practices can be almost indistinguishable from everyday life, where the expressive, rather than instrumental features are prominent. However, Scott (1985) has shown that even at this informal level of cultural expression in which the *wong cilik* are involved are strategies that highlight, and act on, the dynamics of local social relations. Roger's (1991) observations of gambling in Sri Lanka, for example, identify the contradictions and contestation between dominant and subordinate

morals/ideologies and related strategies of incorporation and resistance that continually reshape social relations. In general, however, the more popular culture is abstracted from everyday life, the less expressive and more visibly instrumental and overtly politicised its characteristics. On the other hand, the more popular culture is immersed in everyday life, the more covert and diffused its instrumental features are entwined in the expressive or local exegesis.

This shifting emphasis from instrumental to expressive has important implications for the way non-programatic cultural practices in which the *wong cilik* are involved are analysed compared to programatic cultural production (such as that associated with cultural activism). As discussed in Chapter Two, there should be a corresponding hermeneutic shift in analysis. This is particularly important for identifying *wong cilik* cultural identities and meanings that are evident more in informal rather than formal cultural practices. Many scholars have noted, for instance, that expressive qualities such as rhythm and style in music and dance, or laughter and asides in comedy, are important forms of subordinate class cultural expression. These expressive qualities are more relevant to *wong cilik* cultural identity than the formal communicative or message content of lyrics or plays (see, for example, the following discussion on *dangdut Sekaten*). However, in trying to identify *wong cilik* agency in cultural production the majority of analysts overly rely on formal structure and content more relevant to dominant identities and dominant representations of the *wong cilik* which are readily documented and formalised. This leads to a neglect of the less formal outlets for *wong cilik* expression often more evident outside the text or formal conventions in interaction between performers and audience. At best the less formal expressive features more pertinent to *wong cilik* articulation, given the control of dominant interests in the production of the formal text, are analysed through the truths of the text, rather than in their own right. Consequently, there is an over emphasis of passivity and acquiescence attributed to *wong cilik* consciousness and cultural expression.

The aim of this chapter is to identify *wong cilik* cultural agency by being aware of the instrumental/expressive dimensions of non-programatic cultural practices in which the *wong cilik* are present. The objective is to observe how *wong*

cilik identities and meanings are shaped by, and shape, the changing world in which they are situated through the medium of cultural expression. This can be achieved by broadening our understanding of cultural production to include informal elements, such as audience participation during performances, and observing the relationship between cultural production and the surrounding social context from which it is constituted. By broadening our gaze on the cultural production process it is possible to identify the often neglected space which allows *wong cilik* cultural expression within non-programatic cultural practices, be they communal or more publicly orientated.

2 Windows of Opportunity

Independence Day Celebrations

The annual Indonesian Independence Day celebrations, often referred to as *Tujuhbelasan* (derived from the Indonesian word for 'seventeen', *tujuhbelas*), is a nation wide event which commemorates the Sukarno-Hatta proclamation of independence from Dutch colonial rule announced on the 17th August 1945. Preparation and activities associated with the Independence Day celebrations often commence several weeks before the official flag raising ceremony and reading of the proclamation of independence on the morning of the 17th. These activities include kampung cleanup and beautification, and sports and cooking competitions (Hatley 1982:56). After the 17th, within a week or two, sometimes later, is the highlight of *Tujuhbelasan* and culmination of the preceding activities called the *malam kesenian* or cultural evening. Commencing around 8 p.m. there are official speeches, prizes given for the previous competitions and, after a series of small performances of song and dance by women, local children and youths, the highlight of the evening, a larger performance such as *wayang*, *kethoprak*, or *dangdut*. Hatley (1981:38) states this main performance is considered the '*puncak acara*, the final attraction of the night, beginning at 11 p.m. and lasting until 4 a.m., [in this case] the *kethoprak* performance, which involves the most people and draws the biggest crowds'. Hatley (1982:58) in Yogyakarta, in which the main performance was *kethoprak*, and Murray (1991b:9)

in Jakarta, in which *dangdut* was the highlight, provide different descriptions of *malam kesenian* proceedings. However, based on their observations and my own (given below) there appears a general transition of formal to informal elements during the course of the *Tujuhbelasan* events which, as we shall see, is very significant.

With the process of urbanisation and state centralisation, *Tujuhbelasan* has become an increasingly dominant cultural event in local societies. Clara van Groenendael on rural villages (1985:124) and Hatley (1982:56) and Murray (1991a:9) on urban kampungs assert that *Tujuhbelasan* is increasing in significance at the same time pre-existing communal rites and celebrations are becoming less frequent.

As a national, state sponsored event, the Independence Day celebrations appear on the surface as a secular state ritual that reinforces the legitimacy or authority of the New Order rule. Official elements of the Independence Day celebrations are imbued with a nationalist fervour which ties the New Order, particularly its armed forces apparatus, with the heroes of the revolutionary struggle. The official program is also an opportunity to espouse the ‘successes’ of *pembangunan* economic development and reinforces the normative values of order, stability and harmony embodied in *gotong royong* and *Pancasila* ideology.

However, there are also plenty of examples outside the mainstream where the Independence Day anniversary is used as an opportunity to take stock and question the direction society is heading, the ‘successes’ or record of the New Order regime and the very meaning of ‘independence’ or *merdeka* itself. The issues and events in Slamet Raharjo’s film *Langitku Rumahku*, such as the gap between rich and poor, the continuing inability of the poor to gain access to ‘free’ primary education, and the razing of squatter slums, are set within the symbolism and activities of Independence Day celebrations. Cultural activists hold alternative Independence Day celebrations, such as poetry readings, where they protest that ‘true’ independence, freedom of speech, and freedom to organise, are yet to be achieved. As discussed in Chapter Ten, pedicab drivers in Jakarta held a *wayang* performance in celebration of Indonesian independence asserting their right to be treated like everyone else as citizens of the Indonesian nation and not pushed aside like unwanted garbage.

On the surface, as a national event celebrating Indonesian Independence, its

centrality on the cultural calendar denotes a secularising and centralising process of local cultural practices. However, as *Tujuhbelasan* is mainly organised and celebrated in local societies the ideals of the central nation-state are weakened or reworked according to local meaning and identity. According to observations by Hatley (1982:59) and Siegel (1986:59-65) the character of *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations is strongly affected by the politics and structure of local social relations. Siegel relates how in 1981 Independence Day celebrations in a kampung in Solo were both a product of, and used as a tool in, local politics. The celebrations were shaped by a power play fuelled by animosities between kampung officials, and more generally between pious and nominal Muslims. He concludes that, '[w]hat was celebrated was not independence, but the holding of the celebration' (1986:73).

Hatley, on the other hand, relates her observations of *Tujuhbelasan* in Yogyakarta in the late 1970s and early 1980s with Sullivan's understanding of community cohesion (discussed in Chapter Three). According to Hatley, *Tujuhbelasan* can still work as a local ritual where strong communal ties particularly amongst *wong cilik* residents still exist. In such a kampung Hatley concluded that the meaningfulness of the *kethoprak* performance for the *malam kesenian* had little to do with the play's historical text. The potential for the play text to reinforce national sentiment was overshadowed by the social function of the performance for the kampung residents who were predominantly *wong cilik*.

For it is pride in local identity, co-operation among neighbours, and village or *kampung* solidarity, rather than some amorphous, all-embracing Indonesian "nationalism" which is being invoked in contemporary celebrations of Independence Day (1981:39).

According to Hatley this is why *kethoprak* is a common choice of dramatic performance in *malam kesenians* in Yogyakarta. It allows for a large cast of local residents. In reference to such a performance Hatley recounts:

The actors were all ordinary *kampung* folk – an old carpenter, several labourers, a man who repaired radios and gave haircuts, a woman who ran a food stall. [The director], a minor clerk at a near-by government office

complex, explained that he had chosen this story ... because it was lively and provided opportunities for many people to participate (1981:39).

The performance as an opportunity for *wong cilik* participation and affirmation of solidarity continues in the enthusiastic reception by the audience who recognise their relatives and friends in the performance (Hatley 1981:38-9 and 1982:59,61). However, in kampungs with weakened communal ties and orientated to the external world where a substantial proportion of residents are 'affluent middle class', or where kampung functionaries dominate preparations, local participation can be substantially diminished. Events such as the dramatic performance may function as mere entertainment where outside professionals are hired to perform. The performance, here, may function to reinforce the prestige of local elites. However, as Hatley asserts from witnessing poor audience turnouts and enthusiasm, the performance does little to promote communal solidarity. Hatley concludes that lack of local participation in such performances turns local residents into cultural consumers, rather than cultural producers (1982:63-4).

The Independence Day celebrations are important local sites of cultural contestation, not merely a singular event that reinforces the dominant hegemony of the New Order ruling elite and centralised nation-state. As recurring national events in which all the members of rural and urban societies are expected to participate the Independence Day celebrations are ideal for both temporal and spatial socio-historical comparison. This is intimated by Hatley's cursory comparisons of the different degrees of 'political nationalism' expressed in *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations within a kampung from year to year or between different kampungs (1982:63). The *malam kesenian*, particularly with the dramatic performance as a culmination of the Independence Day activities and preparations in which all are involved, is an excellent window onto local social relations and the agency of the *wong cilik* within.

The rich potential of the *malam kesenian* performance as a window of social inquiry, particularly in reference to *wong cilik* agency, is well illustrated in Hatley's articles. The level and make up of community participation in the event, for instance, sheds light on the relationship between community cohesion and incorporation with wider society including issues surrounding changes in cultural production and

consumption practices. From Hatley's observation it is clear *wong cilik* cultural expression in the *malam kesenian* performance is tied fundamentally to local social relations that influence control over formal preparations.

However, an aspect of the *malam kesenian*, as with other cultural events, which is not specifically identified by analysts is the informal space within proceedings which affords potential *wong cilik* cultural agency. This space for *wong cilik* cultural agency can be identified when comparing the temporal developments in the *malam kesenian* itinerary with changing audience composition. Murray (1991a:9) and Hatley (1982) have given audience participation cursory attention in an homogenous sense. That is, whether the audience were enthusiastic or indifferent to a particular performance, judged in terms of audience numbers and interest. They, along with Geertz (1990:93) and others on *wayang*, have also sketched changes in audience composition during the *Tujuhbelasan* proceedings. Hatley (1982) has noted a correlation between the type of performance and audience present. In official proceedings, such as the flag raising ceremony, officials and dignitaries are present and ordinary *wong cilik* absent. During the early stages of the *malam kesenian* mainly affluent parents watch their children perform choreographed dances. However, there is a reversal in audience composition watching *kethoprak* performed by local *wong cilik* as crowds of *wong cilik* spectators replace the departing local elite.

There is, unfortunately, no substantial sociological analysis specific to the correlation between the change in proceedings and change in audience composition. Nevertheless, identifying the change in audience make up in relation to formal and informal elements of the proceedings helps more clearly determine the significance of a cultural event in terms of *wong cilik* agency and identity. As an example is the following description of a 1991 *malam kesenian* I attended in urban Solo. The *malam kesenian* held on Monday, 26 August in my in-law's neighbourhood was organised by RT06 which invited, by handing around written invitations, honoured households from the other RTs 1 to 5 to attend as guests.⁷⁶ We were invited, but our neighbours on either side who are poorer, and subject to rumour about their sexual morality, were

⁷⁶ The *kampung* or *kelurahan* is subdivided into several wards or *Rukun Warga (RW)* which are further subdivided into several groups of neighbours or *Rukun Tetangga (RT)*.

not. They would turn up later as uninvited guests.

The stage was placed at the end of a kampung street in front of an Indonesian army housing complex. Thus, represented are the army heroes, who fought for the people's (the audience's) independence and who are always there in the background to ensure social stability. On top of the stage's canvas roof were three Indonesian flags and a red and white awning hanging down across the front. On the stage backdrop there were the ubiquitous portraits of President Suharto and the Vice President. Light reflecting off the picture frame glass made them appear somewhat distant. In the middle was the Indonesian coat of arms – the *Garuda* eagle with *Pancasila* emblems on its breast shield. Thus, the imposing yet distant nation-state, army, president, and state ideology were all represented.

About eight metres back from the stage was the first row of chairs where the neighbourhood and kampung officials sat. Invited guests filled the rest of the chairs 30-40 rows back. As is custom for mixed gatherings, such as wedding celebrations, most women and children sat on the right and men on the left. The guests were treated to bottled tea and a small snack. During the course of the evening ordinary folk from the kampung and further afield, the uninvited guests, began to filter in at the back and either side of the seated guests. Many children also hung around close to the stage.

To fill in time whilst waiting for the kampung head, *Pak Lurah*, to arrive the inter-RT children's sports and activities awards were presented. There was an opening welcoming of guests which invited everyone to celebrate with festive spirit, but safely. A choir, made up of about twenty older women from all the RTs, led all present in the Indonesian national anthem. A conductor in blue blazer conducted the spectators who were all requested to stand. Then a *Pak Haji*, an Islamic official, was called on stage to lead everyone in prayer, which was mostly an Arabic chant. Next, the *Pak Lurah* was invited to give a speech. He began by welcoming everyone and thanking RT 06 for organising the *malam kesenian* and hoped the RTs in all the kampung would continue to work together cooperatively and maintain village security and the spirit of development for which the city of Solo has been renowned. He linked developmentalism with the hopes of Indonesia's fallen heroes during the

fight for independence. He asked everyone to continue to strive to make Solo a city known as a centre of culture, tourism and sports.

Briefly, after *Pak Lurah* switched topics to the general elections to be held in May the next year, one of the speakers faded away and then both speakers stopped. When the sound technician tried to fix them the stage lights also went out. For a full minute or two *Pak Lurah* had to stand silent and to his credit looked composed while the problem was sorted out. (The incident was a reminder that official control is never totally guaranteed). During his speech on the forthcoming general elections, he asked the community to make it a successful and safe campaign so democracy could continue to work. He stressed the elections were another sign of *Pancasila* democracy at work.

After the official speeches were two different types of awards – first and second place to the healthiest and tidiest houses amongst the *RT* households in *RW IX*, and an award to the young man who collects the garbage for being friendly and diligent in his duties. These winners were from amongst the poorest families in the neighbourhood. The two household heads getting the cleanliness awards were extremely shy to go on stage, one meekly looking down at his feet, whilst the other stared rather frightened out in to the audience with his hands stiffly to the front on either thigh. They both wore simple, old, unfashionable clothing and contrasted greatly with the previous more self-confident prize getters from the sporting competitions. The reaction of the guests around me was a mixture of bemusement, patronising encouragement and slight derision.

Next there was a series of traditional and modern dances to taped music by children and youths from each *RT*. Following this came a very complete and quite good instrumental backing band with lurid purple shirts, but otherwise conservative and neat looking. They accompanied various female soloists from the *RT*'s who sang songs of the struggle for independence and some pop songs.

The formal stereotyped presentations, speeches, prayer and national anthem were a self congratulation and prestige reinforcement for the village dignitaries, *Tujuhbelasan* committee, guests and parents of the prize winning children. After all the formalities were over, including the entertainment contributions from each *RT*,

the performances with the female singers became livelier. Eventually, we were left with one female *dangdut* singer who later changed into more provocative clothes and whose dance gestures became increasingly erotic as the night wore on.

Well into this stage of proceedings ordinary folk, who were mainly from the poorer semi rural kampung fringes, were beginning to pour in on either side of, and behind, the guests. As the solo singers wound up the invited guests slowly began to disperse, especially after the *dangdut* singing began. The usual cue for the respectable people, particularly women, leaving was their registered shock at the tight and revealing clothing of the female *dangdut* singers. By this stage mainly ordinary kampung folk and adolescent men and women were left.

At about 12 p.m. things continued to get raunchier with *dangdut* singers changing into skimpier clothes and more suggestive dancing and with clowns behind them making suggestive advances to them. Now, most of the females had left whilst mainly young men danced excitedly in front of the stage and singer. In the shadows many youths were also drinking alcohol. During the course of the night there has been a decided change in the balance of audience composition from officials and respected guests, to mixed status, age and gender, to finally a predominantly *wong cilik* audience, dominated by young males

In summary, *Tujuhbelasan* is ostensibly to celebrate Indonesia's independence. However, local officials and elite have used nationalism to legitimate their interpretation of the central state's ideology, values and interests expressed in terms of order and security, cleanliness and developmentalism. They also use it to affirm their own power and status within local society. However, the changing composition of the audience in relation to different performances during the *malam kesenian* shows the dominance of the officials and elite over local cultural practices is not nearly complete in terms of achieving consensus over meaning or monopoly over production. Most of the kampung's *wong cilik* had not yet arrived to hear the official speeches. They turned up later, for the entertainment pleasure of the songs and dances, and the male youth even later for the erotic freedom of *dangdut* dancing and drink.

Murray (1991a:9) illustrates an even greater contrast in the atmosphere and

audience composition. The earlier formal proceedings began at 8 p.m. where ‘an ascending scale of children from tiny tots upwards perform a variety of quasi-traditional and disco dances to amplified music’. This was in stark contrast with the later ‘climax’ in celebrations with ‘*jaipongan* dancing and *dangdut* played by a local band until the early hours of the morning’.

In the later stages of the program I watched, most of the VIPs who had been given chairs at the front had left, there was a huge crush in the street with gang fights breaking out sporadically, knives were being brandished and many people were worse off for drugs and alcohol (1991a:9).

During the course of the *Tujuhbelasan malam kesenian* there was a temporal separation between formal proceedings in which control and participation in cultural proceedings were the domain of local elites and informal proceedings in which the *wong cilik* predominated. As the following example of *dangdut Sekaten* illustrates the distinction between formal proceedings and an informal space that affords *wong cilik* cultural expression can be manifested spatially as well as temporally.

Dangdut Sekaten(an)

Unlike Iwan Fals’s lyrics, that along with other ‘pop country’ artists tend to appeal to a ‘more educated’ national identity (Hatch 1989:63-4), the simple, earthy dance beat of *dangdut* music is easily adaptable as an outlet of local *wong cilik* cultural expression. It is also true that recently *dangdut* music has been appropriated commercially and in a sanitised version moved up the cultural escalator gaining greater ‘mainstream’ acceptance, and its popularity exploited by the state as a national culture. Sri Pudyastuti (1992:108) notes how both government and private television has dramatically increased programming time for *dangdut* in response to its rapid rise in popularity. Both Roma Irama as the king of *dangdut*, and Iwan Fals, have huge cassette sales and both artists have reached superstar status. However, alongside the mass commodity market, *dangdut* singing and accompanying erotic dance are still popularly performed in the village and urban neighbourhood, such as during *Tujuhbelasan*. Drawing on Bloomfield’s (1990:76-9) observations of acid house music, perhaps *dangdut*’s deep structure of dance and pleasure, rather than, for

example, the reliance on oppositional lyrics in the songs of Iwan Fals, makes *dangdut* popular in local *wong cilik* cultural production. According to Bloomfield (1990:76-9), dance is difficult to destroy through appropriation as a cultural commodity and it is easily produced outside capitalist relations of production. Nevertheless, as the following example of *dangdut* music performed at the annual *Sekaten* festivals in Solo and Yogyakarta illustrates, the erotic dance pleasure of *dangdut* is a manifestation of *wong cilik* cultural agency that is simultaneously in opposition to, and shaped by dominant interests.

As alluded to above, *wong cilik* cultural expression is not an unadulterated or autonomous antithesis to dominant cultural forces. The identification of space that affords *wong cilik* cultural expression suggests an attenuation of direct influence by dominant social forces. At the same time, however, this space for *wong cilik* cultural expression is constituted from, and therefore shaped by, unequal social relations. *Wong cilik* cultural expression is a part of experienced social relations in which the *wong cilik* both resist and are subjugated by dominant social forces. As such, *wong cilik* consciousness and action, including cultural expression, is not by nature always 'truly' democratic or progressive in the sense of furthering the interests of the *wong cilik*.

This is illustrated in the observations of Murray on the street violence and drug abuse associated with the *dangdut* performance as part of the *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations, and, as we shall see, by Pioquinto (1995:83) who claims *dangdut Sekaten* 'reinforces both class and gender asymmetry'. Although *wong cilik* cultural expression may appear in opposition to dominant ideology, norms, and values, such as harmony, order, security or sexual morality, elements within the relations of cultural production are not necessarily progressive or constructive to the interests of the *wong cilik* themselves.

Gambling is a useful example. In John Rogers' study, *Cultural and Social Resistance: Gambling in Colonial Sri Lanka* (1991), gambling became a site of cultural resistance by the 'underclass' to the British colonial and Sinhalese elites attempting to enforce upon them their capitalist inspired values of order, security, savings and thrift. However, theatrical performances by the *wong cilik* children and

women in kampung Kalangan, Solo, articulate the suffering (financial stress, drinking and domestic violence) associated with gambling. Gambling may become a medium of cultural resistance to capitalist values. However, it is also a destructive force in the lives of many *wong cilik* families.

The contrast between an emphasis on *wong cilik* cultural expression as resistance to, and as reinforcement of, unequal social relations (including gender inequality) and dominant ideology is apparent in a comparison between two wonderful analyses of *dangdut Sekaten* by Budi Susanto (1992) and Ceres Pioquinto (1995). This ambiguity of resistance to, and reinforcement of (or subjugation by), dominant ideologies and unequal social relations is inherent in any space containing *wong cilik* cultural expression. The balance of resistance versus reinforcement can only be evaluated through reference to the surrounding social relations that constitute that space, in particular the relations of cultural production.

The annual *Sekaten* festival in Yogyakarta and Solo is a popular attraction for local residents, including those from nearby villages and towns, as well as domestic and foreign tourists. Officially, *Sekaten* celebrates the birth of the Muslim prophet, Muhammad. However, it is centred on the courts or *kratons*. The formal activities celebrate the courts' socio-cultural authority in the two cities with an impressive display of both the courts' pre-Islamic beliefs and customs and their acceptance of Islam. This is seen from the two most important rituals, *grebegan*, and playing the court *gamelan* in the great mosque (Susanto 1992:201-3). In *grebegan* the courts take out their sacred heirlooms to the northern *alun-alun* or public square in front of the palace, which they parade, and bless with holy water. The climax of this ritual is parading an enormous mountain, or *gunungan*, of rice. In a mass ritual that Susanto says temporarily defies the elite Javanese ideology of order and harmony, thousands of ordinary people scramble to grab a small portion of the *gunungan*, which is said to have the power to bring them blessings. Oversized sacred gamelans are also brought out from the courts and placed in the great mosque on the western side of the *alun-alun* where they are played continuously day and night for one month to

celebrate Muhammad's birthday and the acceptance of Islam.⁷⁷ The formal court itinerary for the month long festivities includes a variety of traditional performances within the compounds of the courts, formal court dances, *wayang* performances using sacred puppets, *gamelan* music, and *kethoprak* plays. Many of the performances are restricted to guests and tourists.⁷⁸

As well known as the court's formal rituals, such as the *grebegan*, and more popular than the traditional performances is the informal *pasar malam* or market which comes alive at night filling the *alun-alun* with a carnival atmosphere. According to Susanto the night market is commensurate with the function of the *alun-alun* as a meeting place outside the boundaries of the palace where the traditional ruling power meets the people or foreign guests. As an ideal the Javanese market is a democratic place where people are free to trade or exchange new and old things, including ideas and traditions. However, the symbolism surrounding the *alun-alun* also reinforces the image of the authority of the *kraton* as ruler over the people and superior to its guests (Susanto 1992:198-9). The *Sekaten* night market in the *alun-alun* is thus a space for *wong cilik* cultural expression that lies on the periphery of the ruling elite's sphere of influence. Whereas the 'separation' between the informal and formal proceedings of *Tujuhbelasan* was temporal, the separation at *Sekaten* is spatial. It is between traditional court performances within the grounds of the *kraton* catering for elites and tourists (often by invitation), and the night market outside in the *alun-alun* frequented by the *wong cilik*.

The night market is a bustling cacophony of sights, sounds, and smells. There are stalls and individuals selling an array of food, souvenirs and children's toys, scorpion juice for hair growth, and rings with magic stones. There are also fun rides

⁷⁷ In Solo, an onlooker in the mosque informed me that playing the *gamelan* also re-enacted a process by which the Javanese were successfully converted to Islam. People from the surrounding area would be drawn to the mosque on hearing the *gamelan* and become Muslim when requested to repeat three times the simple salutation that there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet.

⁷⁸ In 1993, the Surakarta *kraton* had a more populist performance agenda drawing large crowds of ordinary folk to enjoy *kethoprak plesetan* (satirical *kethoprak*), *tayuban* from rural Blora and playful *gamelan* from Sundanese West Java. In general, however, the formal program of *Sekaten* is located within the intimidating compounds of the *kraton* and is orientated towards local elites and tourists.

and games of chance. However, the most prominent and exciting feature of the night market is the row of *dangdut* tents and their amplified music which transcends the other sounds of the night market (Susanto 1992:204). These *dangdut* tents also dominate in media attention concerning *Sekaten*.

Since its introduction in the early 1980s (Susanto 1992:210), *dangdut Sekaten* has become a fervent site of cultural contestation between popular taste, conservative values, commercial interest and control by government and *kraton* officials. The central issue is the erotic gyrations and provocative attire of the female singer dancers that goes well beyond that of other commercial or communal *dangdut* performances in Java. Whereas the focus of pleasure in other *dangdut* performances is the dance music and singing, at *dangdut Sekaten* these are secondary to the erotic images of the female dancer singers. The popularity, and therefore success, of the female artists is determined not by the quality of their voice, but the level of erotic display. The singers create the allusion of sexual abandon by wearing minimal dress with skin coloured stockings and very short skirts that allow the occasional glimpse of ‘the triangle’, actually consisting of several layers of material, between their legs. With encouragement from the audience, the gyrations and facial expressions of the female artists can become increasingly risqué to simulate orgasmic self-indulgence or sexual intercourse (Pioquinto 1995:81). It is at this point that the audience, the female artists, the commercial owners and the ruling elites converge in a contest of control over production.

Susanto’s analysis suggests that the outcome of this contest is that the *wong cilik* have largely succeeded in maintaining a space where they are free to express their ‘natural’ feelings commensurate with their life circumstances through the medium of *dangdut Sekaten*. Susanto’s understanding, a mix of common sense and psychological analysis, is supported by reference to several newspaper articles where both audience members and female artists were observed or interviewed.

Susanto makes little distinction between the interests of the female artists, and the audience. The audience consists of mainly young male dancers who either pay rp 600 (A\$ 0.40) to enter the tent to see the performance, or, if they cannot afford the entrance fee, dance near the loudspeakers outside. There is a shared pleasure of

forgetfulness and symbiosis between the audience of dancers and the female artist, who are both from a poor, uneducated, socio-economic background. According to observers, as the music begins the *dangdut* fans outside the tents start dancing as if hit by an electric shock. Their dancing appears spontaneous and oblivious to the crowd of onlookers from the *alun-alun*. One of these fans is reported as saying that he enjoyed dancing to *dangdut* that was 'loud and pounding' and that feelings of weariness, exhaustion and worry would disappear (Susanto 1992:214).

In reference to the erotic dancing of the female artists, Susanto seems to suggest that the *wong cilik*, concerned with daily survival and not educated in the high morals of the upper classes, are less inclined to control their natural instincts or anticipate the consequences of their actions. This is accentuated by '*naluri panggung*' (stage instinct) where the female artists 'lose control' as they step out of the real world, in which many are wife and mother, into the world of performance. Here, Susanto says the audience heavily influences the female artist. Audience rapture encourages her to let go and become increasingly daring. This encouragement also has a strong material base for a poor cultural worker. The audience are a source of revenue, where popularity produces bonus payments or where individual audience members directly reward her with money (Susanto 1992:212-4).

The female artist's 'loss of control' continues to re-emerge despite the efforts of Muslim conservatives and the *kraton's Sekaten* committee. Sections of the ruling elite seem threatened by the anarchy of the erotic female dancer. It is their responsibility/right as the 'owners' of *Sekaten* and pillars of society, to control or domesticate such activity until it conforms to their normative moral values. However, temporary suspensions and objections through the mass media only titillate and increase the popularity of individual female artists. To be punished or chastised has little effect on the female artists who argue the eroticism is not premeditated but spontaneous due to '*naluri panggung*' or a loss of control spurred on by the audience (Susanto 1992:215-7)⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ Wilson (1997) demonstrates that this indirect *wong cilik* challenge to dominant values and authority can also occur through the state of possession in *jaranan*, a communal trance dance popular in East Java. Wilson recounts that in a 1996 performance near Malang the *jaranan* (continued...)

Thus, again borrowing Hildred Geertz's terminology, *wong cilik* resistance to control from the ruling elite is not through an overt political or 'instrumental' strategy. For Susanto, the unimportance in *dangdut Sekaten* of the inaudible lyrics of the *dangdut* songs, which often do include social criticism, is evidence of 'musical politics "without meaning"' (1992:215). Rather, *wong cilik* 'resistance' or control of cultural production is possible because of the ephemeral, 'expressive' nature of *wong cilik* cultural agency shared almost subconsciously between the audience and female performer. The formal regulations and sanctions, as the ruling elite's instruments of control and containment, are largely ineffective against what the female artists testify to as spontaneous loss of control.

Pioquinto (1995:60) also acknowledges the moral concern Muslim and *kraton* elites have regarding '*dangdut at Sekaten*'. However, in her structural-feminist analysis the central force in this cultural contest is the nature of *dangdut Sekaten* as commodified or commercialised culture. It is commercialised culture that re-contextualises, but continues to reinforce, the dominant social relations and ideologies of inequality in broader society. Although the moral standards of sections of the ruling elite are compromised by *dangdut Sekaten*, Pioquinto insists that the relations of cultural production in *dangdut Sekaten* ultimately reinforce the subjugation of the *wong cilik* and female gender. She sees that underlying the complementarity between the male audiences and female artist is a conflict of interests, not solidarity, that, in contrast to Susanto, is a product of their effective control and containment.

Most of the supporting evidence for Susanto's conclusions came from outside the *dangdut* tents, newspaper articles and audience dancers near the loudspeakers. However, Pioquinto's analysis is supported largely by observations inside the tents

(...continued)

shaman, who was also the government appointed village head, was unable to control local youth (both performers and spectators) who had become possessed during the performance. The shaman's 'social' and 'spiritual' authority was seriously questioned as possessed youth both verbally and physically abused him. Local opinion seemed to be divided as to whether this aggressive challenge to the authority of the despised village head was deliberate or involuntary. However, the youth seem to have avoided reprisal from the village head through the customary belief that, when possessed, one loses control to disturbed or evil spirits.

– of the paying audience and of the female artists performing and at rest or in preparation ‘back stage’. This, I believe, is a crucial difference in understanding the nature and agency of the *dangdut Sekaten* audience. Whereas Susanto illustrates the lack of inhibitions of the audience outside the tents, Pioquinto insists that most of the audience inside the tent is controlled and passive.

Unlike the usual live *dangdut* concerts where audiences stand in front of or around the stage and actively participate in the dancing known as *joged*, *Sekaten* audiences are positioned mainly as viewers (Pioquinto 1995:60).

According to Pioquinto the focus of the male audience is on the sexual allusions of the female artist’s movements and dress. The show is a voyeuristic display of ‘glamour, sexual daring, flirtatiousness, even availability’ (1995:73). In contrast to Susanto, Pioquinto claims it is the female artist who controls the audience. She entices the audience, as the source of her income, with illusionary sexual promises without compromising her own independence. This is achieved through clever costuming, suggestive movements and maintaining ‘the boundary between their[the artists] private selves and their public image (1995:77-8). However, the female artist’s control of the audience is inseparable, and subordinate, to the commercial or commodified nature of *dangdut Sekaten*, and, according to Pioquinto, social control in general.

Audience participation, particularly interaction between performers and audience, is effectively limited. This is achieved through the separation of female artists from audience by a raised stage, and the presence of security guards to ensure proper conduct according to the *Sekaten* organising committee rules, even disallowing loud applause or wolf-whistles (Pioquinto 1995:74). Audience participation is also restricted by containment of the performance in a tent and restriction of performances to half hour shows paid for by an anonymous public. In traditional communal female dance performances, such as *tayuban*, the male audience have greater participation in, and control over, cultural production. They dance with the female performers, touching and flirting with them, and showing their appreciation, status, and control by placing money in the bosom of the dancer

(1995:75).⁸⁰

According to Pioquinto the cultural agency of both the female artist and the male audience is subordinate to dominant ideology and capitalist relations of production. Although the women have some agency in how they represent themselves and have some control over the male audience, over and above this they are still degraded as sex objects. Furthermore, although their income can be substantially more than other more onerous *wong cilik* occupations, it is relatively small compared to the profits for the owner/managers of the *dangdut Sekaten* performances (Pioquinto 1995:82-5).

Pioquinto's observations suggest, along with a comparison with audiences at traditional *tayuban*, the domestication of audiences inside the tents at *dangdut Sekaten* as cultural consumers. Rather than participating in the dance performance they have been restricted to passive receivers of voyeuristic images. This can now be reconciled with Susanto's observations of uninhibited self-expression through dance, even occasional skirmishes, by *dangdut Sekaten* fans outside the tents. The fans outside are not subject to the same relations of cultural production as the audiences within the tents – cultural commodification, control, and surveillance. Those dancing outside the tents are cultural producers, their dancing is informal and free, outside capitalist relations. Those dancing outside the tents are indistinguishable as performers or audience, there being no stage to separate them. Thus, the most significant manifestation of *wong cilik* cultural agency within the *alun-alun*, as a space that affords *wong cilik* cultural expression in the midst of dominant cultural forces, is the audience dancers outside, not inside, the *dangdut Sekaten* tents.

Poets' Convention

Wong cilik cultural agency, identity, and meaning is often most associated with those elements of cultural production which are informal, less visible, less tangible and ephemeral to the mainstream gaze. In *Tujuhbelasan's malam kesenian* and *dangdut Sekaten*, for example, it was the 'expressive' relationship between audience and

⁸⁰ Widodo (1995), however, claims the state has successfully managed to contain most of the 'unacceptable' behaviour at contemporary *tayuban* performances.

performance (camaraderie and body movement) rather than the formal/instrumental elements (speeches, text or conventions) of the cultural event that were significant in understanding the cultural agency of the *wong cilik*.

It is in this space where the *wong cilik* have greatest control over the relations of production by their marginality or elusiveness to dominant interests. A space for *wong cilik* cultural expression allows them to articulate and act on their own experiences and perceptions of social relations in which dominant interests subjugate them. As with the basic opposition between the interests of labour and capital, a space which affords the *wong cilik* some freedom of expression through their control of the cultural production process will also produce meanings and identities in opposition to those held by dominant interests. So far we have emphasised the diffused and expressive nature of *wong cilik* cultural agency. However, this space also provides opportunity for more overt or conscious criticism/challenge to dominant interests and ideology. As an illustration is the participation of Wiji Thukul at a two day convention in November 1993 of poets from Central Java held at Taman Budaya Surakarta (TBS), the government cultural centre in Solo.

TBS is located on the outskirts of town amongst the university student populace who attend two nearby campuses. Most of the poets that attended were from the intermediate strata, either tertiary students or professionals, such as journalists or lecturers. The convention's organising committee also consisted of journalists. Most within the audience were colleagues and students from the surrounding area.

The temporal transition of the poets' convention was reminiscent of the *Tujuhbelasan malam kesenian* in that there was a progression from a respectful formal to mischievous informal atmosphere over the two days. The first night was very conventional – flowery poetry, heavy on symbolic metaphor, reference to the wind and sun, with some veiled social criticism. The second night's performance livened up a little with slightly more open criticism using generalised themes such as the misrepresentation or misuse of the state ideology, *Pancasila*, and state sponsored developmentalism. There was also poetry about some notorious incidents of *wong cilik* repression occupying the press at that time. Some poems referred to the recent Nipah incident where security forces gunned down villagers in Madura as they

protested over forced land acquisition. Other poems were also dedicated to Marsinah, a factory worker, who demanded A\$ 0.50 a day increase in the below minimum wage she was paid. These poems protested the heavy hand of the Indonesian military in industrial relations and its involvement in Marsinah's brutal rape and murder, allegedly orchestrated by the owners of the watch factory where she worked.

In general, the performances were terribly sombre and formal. A spotlight lit up the poets in austere surrounds whilst the well-mannered audience were hidden in darkness dutifully applauding each poet as they left the stage. That was all except for one small group within the audience that, attending the second evening's readings, was increasingly restless and bored with the whole proceedings. They had walked from a poor kampung community a couple of kilometres away. In this group was the well-known poet, Wiji Thukul, a friend, Setya, who was a labourer and unknown poet, and a bunch of mischievous kids. They came to see Wiji and Setya perform, and growing increasingly tired of the airy-fairy pretentious poetry, they began to heckle and cast aspersions at the other performers.

Finally, right at the end of the second night it was Wiji Thukul's turn. As shall become evident in following chapters, his appearance was similar to the much anticipated *adegan Punakawan* (comic interlude) that breaks, even challenges, the formality of *wayang* performances. The atmosphere of the whole event changed totally, shaking its established conventions. First, disliking the false pretences of the dim lighting Wiji demanded that all the lights be turned on so the focus could be shifted from the omni-powerful poet to include the audience. This was obviously a conscious strategy to create a democratic space where by the audience were not just passive witnesses to, but active participants in, the performance. Thukul recited a poem, 'Stage boundary' (*Batas Panggung*), he had written concerning this philosophy which was obviously a reference to the ruling bloc and its developmentalist ideology as much as to the pretensions of serious *seniman* or cultural workers (Thukul 1994:37):

Stage boundary

to all performers

this is our area of power
don't cross that boundary
don't interfere with what happens here
because you are spectators
you are outsiders
don't change the story that we have arranged
don't bend the path of the story that
we have planned
because you are spectators
you are outsiders
you must be silent

this wide stage is just for us
whatever happens here
don't try to negotiate further
this wide stage is just for us
don't try to bring dangerous questions
into this show
this wide stage is just for us
you must pay us
to finance what we are working on here

let us proceed with our power
watch
your place is there

(Solo, 21.11.1991)

(for the Indonesian transcript see Appendix One, D)

Bright lights and frank openness replaced the conservative poetry of frightened, veiled criticism from a distance in dim lighting. Like *wayang's adegan Punakawan*, Thukul's poems invited the audience to join in talking directly about issues relevant to their daily lives. Thukul's performance was full of parody, irony, and simple songs inviting shrieks, yells, laughter, comments and asides from the audience. His performance was like a travelling dance and comedy troupe, and at the end he had the audacity to pass the hat around for money.

One of Thukul's poems, 'Displacing the clever people' (*Mendonkel orang-orang pintar*) (Tungku 1993:21-2), was squarely directed at the lack of praxis evident

in the majority of participants, dependent on the mass media as a measure of their self-worth. In general, it exposes the cynical pretensions of much newspaper journalism.

Displacing the clever people

I throw out
the clever people
from inside my head

I am not shaken any more
by the mouths of the clever people
who are full of zeal when they talk

the world moves not because of words spoken

all the speakers in the seminar room
whose utterances are published
on the pages of the newspaper
maybe the reader is very impressed
but the world doesn't move
after the newspaper is folded

(Kampung grounds Solo, 8.9.93)

(for the Indonesian transcript see Appendix One, E)

There was a stark contrast between Thukul's poetry and that of the majority in their ability to articulate the concerns of the *wong cilik* (a dominant theme at the convention). According to Thukul most poems were self-censored (by what he terms the 'culture police' or *polisi budaya* in their heads) in fearful, abstract language of veiled criticism or escapism from harsh reality. These poems could not close the gap in distance between the poets' own experience and that of the *wong cilik* they attempted to represent. For example, one poem, by a government officer, attempted to give the Nipah incident some sense of familiarity by including the date of the occurrence, and the victim's names, and ages. Nevertheless, as an outside observer the poet remained detached only referring to the victims as 'they' or '*mereka*'. This lacks the authority found in the language of direct experience in Thukul's poems, which stoically refer to '*kami*' or 'us', the labourers or kampung folk.

Again, the interests and identity of the majority of poets at the convention are tied up in mass media exposure (many only knew of each other through reading their poems in the newspaper). They equate their success as poets through how frequently their material is published in the mass media.⁸¹ Thukul's identity, however, is primarily as a kampung resident, whose experiences, the same as those of his fellow kampung residents, he happens to express through poetry.

The structure of the two-day poets' convention mirrored the pattern I have regularly encountered in popular performances, such as in *wayang* and *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations. As the night or time wears on space for *wong cilik* cultural expression becomes available, hidden from view in the lateness or margins of the event – after the officials and elite have gone home. Wiji Thukul was invited to the convention, his name at fifteen on the list of forty-three participants, but he found himself as second last performer. Was this a conscious or unconscious strategy by the organisers? Generally at TBS events government officials and army intelligence officers show up at the beginning and soon get tired of it all and leave. It was thus safer to place Thukul at the end of the program. However, some were still uneasy about Thukul's brash performance. One of the event's organisers quipped that Thukul was obviously brave or foolhardy as he still might get picked up by the authorities as he walked back home to his kampung that night.

Conclusion

Most analyses of cultural practices in which the *wong cilik* are present focus mainly on formal proceedings and conventions, those that are most visible or accessible or considered most important. Dominant interests that subjugate *wong cilik* cultural identity and meaning control these elements of cultural production. A focus on these formal elements and a corresponding neglect of informal elements where *wong cilik* cultural agency may be more significant leads to conclusions that over emphasise the

⁸¹ A booklet published in conjunction with the convention features seven poets (two of whom were university lecturers) who, according to the forward, were chosen because their work was often published in the mass media (Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah di Surakarta 1993). Although his more acceptable writings are published in the mass media, Wiji Thukul was not included in this booklet.

subjugation and passivity of the *wong cilik* in cultural production. Often, however, it is the informal and ephemeral elements of cultural practices where *wong cilik* participation is greatest.⁸² These elements must be included in the analysis of cultural production in order to recognise the importance of *wong cilik* cultural agency, identity and meaning. As an example, focus on the official state meaning of *Tujuhbelasan*, the official speeches at the *malam kesenian* and even the formal text and conventions of the dramatic performance would lead to the conclusion that *wong cilik* cultural identity and agency was thoroughly subordinated by dominant interests and ideology. However, changes in audience composition and involvement during the course of the event can show that the informal aspects of the dramatic performance are the most significant of the *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations in terms of *wong cilik* cultural agency and its meaningfulness for the *wong cilik*. As the highlight of *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations the dominance of *wong cilik* cultural production in the dramatic performance contradicts a notion of cultural hegemony by dominant interests. The nature of this informal space for *wong cilik* cultural expression, determined by the extent to which they control its production and its relationship to surrounding dominant socio-cultural forces, is worthy of greater attention.

Popular performance is a window on cultural contestation. By analysing informal, not just formal, elements of popular performance, such as audience involvement, we have been able to identify *wong cilik* agency in contest over cultural production and meaning. Based on these insights, the following chapters re-examine the significance for the *wong cilik* of the ubiquitous *wayang kulit* performance, usually considered a bastion of dominant interests and ideology.

⁸² Even under extreme constraints, the subjugated find space for cultural expression. Hersri (1995:6-7) recounts the ingenuity of political prisoners to organise within the confines of their cells oral *wayang* (*wayang kandha*) performances with accompanying plastic bucket orchestras.

PART C: WAYANG AND THE WONG CILIK

Chapter Eight: A Critique on Conventional Understandings of *Wayang*

The objectives of this chapter are twofold. First, the reader is made familiar with *wayang* symbolism and performance through a portrayal of conventional understandings of *wayang*'s social meaningfulness.⁸³ At the same time, there is a critique of conventional perspectives on *wayang*'s history, function and relevance in a changing society. This chapter sets out the reasons why a new approach to the study of *wayang* is required when evaluating its significance for the wong cilik.

1. *Wayang's Format, Conventions and Social Function*

Formal accounts of the *wayang* format and conventions tend to be ahistorical and ideologically conservative. However, there is no singularly agreed upon understanding of *wayang* symbolism, even within the state apparatus and dominant classes. There are, for example, clear contrasts between court perspectives on *wayang* and the more progressive and experimental ideas coming out of the performing arts academies. Nevertheless, conservative perspectives on the meaning of *wayang* to varying degrees emphasise the significance of philosophical, supernatural, religious, mystical and psychological interpretations. Here, a central function of *wayang* is in communicating, educating, and reinforcing morality and acceptable modes of behaviour for the individual and society.⁸⁴ The following is not an exclusively class

⁸³ The word *wayang* on its own is used as a general term covering *wayang* symbolism and/or performance.

⁸⁴ In the first paragraph of the introduction to the book *Lordly shades* (Bondan et al 1984:7), *wayang* is characterised as a 'mine of the ethical teaching' and 'a medium of (continued...)

based perspective on *wayang*, as variations of this permeate through all levels of society. Rather, this milieu of Javanese elite understanding generates the most pure and refined versions of *wayang*'s social meaning, that work to exclude alternative or contradictory interpretations.

In the mid 1980s, and to a less provocative extent now, this conservative amalgam of *wayang* symbolism was spearheaded by, and exemplified in, The Institute of Javanology. An internationally well known book that typifies this conglomerate of elite Javanese perspective⁸⁵, titled appropriately *Lordly Shades* (Bondan et al 1984), was sponsored and published by Probosoetedjo, a business person and relative of President Suharto, who has given Javanology a high profile through prominent articles in the print media. The book which will be referred to throughout this chapter is a collaborative effort calling on the resources of government officials, the central Javanese courts in Surakarta and Yogyakarta and established *dalang*, such as the highly acclaimed Haji Anom Suroto.

Most conservative indigenous explanations, such as in Bondan et al (1984:7), somewhat ironically begin with an account of the Hindu-Buddhist Ramayana and Mahabharata Indian epics as the basis from which *wayang* develops. This is despite their insistence on *wayang*'s ancient indigenous origins in ancestor worship. Ras (1976:55-56) tells us that the Ramayana stories were probably amongst the first performed in Javanese *wayang* and that *purwa* or *parwa* are the eighteen books or parts that make up the Javanese paraphrased versions written around the tenth century AD of the Mahabharata epic. These 'original' sequences of stories within the Ramayana and Mahabharata are known as *lakon pokok*. The following is a brief outline, adapted from *Lordly Shades* (Bondan et al 1984:16-7), of the Mahabharata, which, of the two epics, is the most frequently performed in Java today.

The Mahabharata stories in the *wayang* revolve around a quarrel between two sets of cousins over who should rule the kingdom of Astina. The essentially good

(...continued)

communication'. Ras (1982:19) also notes that in the context of national development the government seeks to harness *wayang* performance as a 'medium of national development in the fields of religion, philosophy, aesthetics, morale and leadership'.

⁸⁵ In concluding his review of *Lordly Shades*, Arps (1990:62) states that the 'subject matter is the court *wayang* of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, and as such they give a view of the most conservative and illustrious manifestations of *wayang purwa*'.

Pandawa clan are led by the brothers Yudistira, Bima, Arjuna and the twins Nakula and Sadewa. The Kurawa siblings, who tend towards evil, number one hundred. Through deceit and violence the rightful heirs to the Astina kingdom are usurped by the Kurawas and banished to the forest. The oldest Kurawa brother, Duryudana, is made king. There follows many years of hardship inflicted on the Pandawa brothers by the Kurawas, malevolent gods and marauding ogres. Eventually, attempts by the Pandawa brothers to rest back their kingdom with the assistance of their divine uncle, King Kresna, culminate in the devastating Bharata Yuda war. After its tragic consequences in which brothers and their relatives from both sides fall, the five original Pandawa brothers regain their rightful reign of Astina.

In Javanese *wayang* performances the original stories, or *lakon pokok*, may be expanded upon or deviated from. In fact most *wayang* performances use stories which are at best tangential to the original Mahabharata episodes. Stories that are elaborations of, or use the characters from, *lakon pokok*, or stories that are based on Javanese or Islamic mythology are called *lakon carangan*.⁸⁶ Although these stories have a very tenuous relationship with the original Mahabharata episodes, the majority of the characters used are from the Mahabharata and hold true to their original traits.

It is the original stock character traits from the Mahabharata or Ramayana, referred to as *pakem*, not the *lakon pokok*, that traditionally cannot be altered. The majority of *wayang* performances, therefore, are *lakon carangan* with *pakem* characters. Some typical *pakem* character traits are: 'knightly and courteous, quiet and gentle, firm and brave, rough and coarse, noble and wise, sly and treacherous, merry and gay and so forth' (Bondan et al 1984:10).

The characters of the Mahabharata based stories in Central Java can be divided into a social hierarchy comprising four main groups. The pantheon of gods; the nobility, including kings, queens and *ksatria* warriors; the ogre kings and army; and special characters, in particular the clown servants. Together, the puppets within the four groups of gods, *ksatria*, ogres and special characters represent an idealised feudalistic hierarchy that can be manipulated to suit the perspectives of dominant

⁸⁶ Of 149 *lakon* known to Kats (1923) 117 were *lakon carangan* and only 32 were *lakon pokok* (cited by Magnis-Suseno 1988:164).

interest in contemporary Indonesia. The gods and *ksatria* are concerned with important issues of power and morality of which the Javanese elite most identify. According to Magnis-Suseno (1988:165) the role of the Kurawa in Javanese ethics is to highlight and legitimise the existence of the Pandawa. Here, the dynamics of the Javanese universe requires polarity between good and evil; good cannot exist, cannot have a value, without evil.

The ogres, a recent addition to the *wayang* repertoire, according to Magnis-Suseno (1988:166-7), are also a means of reinforcing a belief in, or reestablishing primacy of, the Javanese 'worldview'. The ogres have been known to attack the Kurawas as well as the Pandawas. However, coming from across the sea and representing all that is foreign to the Javanese 'worldview' and sensibilities they are ritually annihilated at will as if to reinforce the greatness of the Javanese 'worldview'. Again, according to Magnis-Suseno (1988:166-7) killing the ogres symbolically purges the Javanese 'worldview' of that coming from without, that threatens chaos and confusion. As mentioned in Chapter Nine, it is possible that the first ogres were created in response to the disruptive presence of the Dutch colonials.

The clowns, or special characters, represent the marginal ordinary people who are coarse and ignorant in comparison to the refined and noble gentry.⁸⁷ They have a low social status and are subservient to the ideally benign ruling elite. An example of the idealised role and character of the clown servants in the comic interlude of the *wayang kulit* performance is found in the practice transcript of the *lakon Wahyu Makutharama* given to students of the Mangkunagaran *Dalang* School (Pasinaon Dalang ing Mangku-Nagaran or PDMN). PDMN is a traditional school that promotes a classical court interpretation of *wayang*'s mystico-philosophical content (Wignyosoetarno n.d.) [my translation].

⁸⁷ I borrow the term 'special characters' from Foley (1985:89-90) who distinguishes the clowns in Sundanese *wayang golek* from the characteristics of the other puppets. That is, the clowns have a unique character that does not fit the 'class' characterisation of the other puppets measured against norms in accepted Sundanese behaviour. Though I believe the Javanese clowns are classed symbolically within the Javanese social-moral order, I agree with Foley that the clowns are special characters based on their unique role and position within the performance (see Chapter Nine).

[The head clown servant, Semar (Fig. 11), is trying to gain Janaka's (young Arjuna) attention, who broods in silence over his failure to obtain the mandate Wahyu Makutharama. However, Semar becomes the butt of his disrespectful son's antics]

SEMAR: Oh my master, my father, etc., please allow me to speak to you my lord. Why do you punish me with your silence. If I am at fault what is it I have done? If I have wronged terribly then please pull Gareng's nose as punishment. If you need anything, oh master, ...

GARENG: Ah the old man has no scruples. When there is someone who does wrong himself, then goes ahead and suggests his friend takes the punishment ... if that isn't the way of our father?

PETRUK: O, 'Reng [Gareng] you shouldn't take an old man like our father seriously. Let it be, he's always the same. Ignore him, if you have to live with him for another fifty years.

SEMAR: These kids are obviously not my children. You kids are invited to come along and keep your father happy, and what happens? You just mock him.

GARENG: Hey 'Truk [Petruk] stop hassling your father. Do you want to end up cursed?

PETRUK: Oh Reng if father's curses had power I would have been done for long ago. If I'm going to be cursed by Semar what would I become? Do you think anyone suffers in life as much as I now? My life is lower than that of a beggar. What greater curse could there be?

GARENG: You could be changed into anything, a caterpillar perhaps. Any type of hardship.

PETRUK: If not a tiger, I choose to be an ant ... so I can crawl up Semar's nose and make him sneeze.

SEMAR: Hey, stop it you hell monsters, again all you do is mock your father. Gareng, stop talking to Petruk. I don't want to talk to Petruk ever again.

[This dialogue continues with Petruk talking about how much money he will save in not smoking now he doesn't have to talk with Semar (a favourite past time of many Javanese men is to sit and chat whilst sharing a smoke). After these jibes they finally arouse Janaka from his dark thoughts. Semar reminds Janaka to consult him if he has problems, not bottle them up inside. Semar then gives Janaka advice on how to obtain the Wahyu Makutharama.]

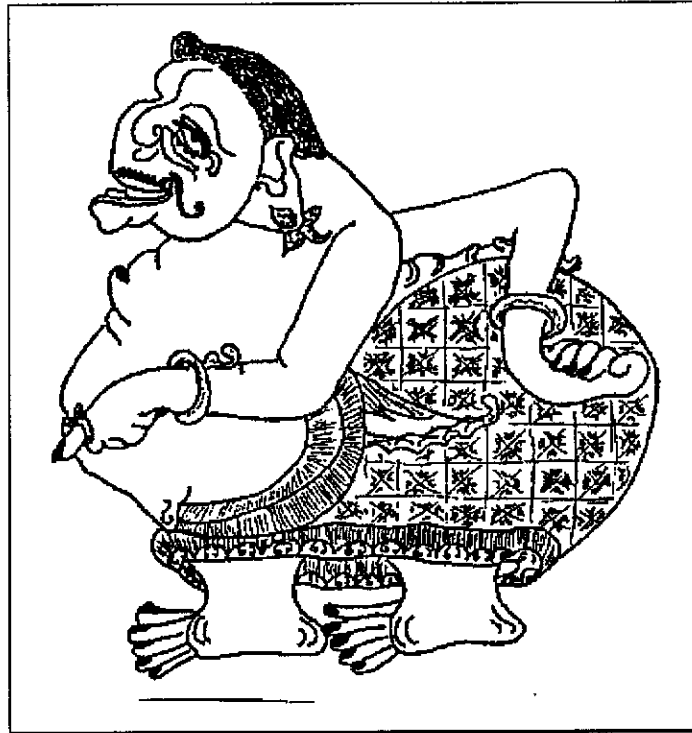


Figure 11 Semar, the main *Punakawan* clown servant (Sri Mulyono 1982a).

In this extract the frivolous antics of the clowns servants are contained to mocking each other, without undermining the authority of their noble master. Nevertheless, as indicated above and discussed further in Chapter Ten, Semar's role is also acknowledged as providing wise council and assistance to his *ksatria* master, particularly when disaster or defeat looms.⁸⁸

In general, the stock *wayang* characters have traits that can be placed along a continuum from rough (*kasar*) to refined (*alus*), where refined traits represent the ideal in Javanese values. This *alus-kasar* continuum can be seen in its full visual splendour during the *wayang kulit* performance where those wayang characters not being used are decoratively arranged according to their iconography, stuck along a banana log which forms the lower border of the *wayang* screen-stage. The roughest 'bad' looking characters to the left of the puppeteer and the more 'good' characters to the right. In general, the roughest characters, to the extent that they are un-

⁸⁸ In a version of Wahyu Makutharama produced by the Department of Education and Culture (Kusumadiningrat 1984) Semar's sons do not mock him. They therefore do not threaten to subvert this version's emphasis on Semar's status as patriarch, wise councillor and god incarnate.

Javanese, are the ogres which have red faces, large bulky frames, bulbous noses, bulging eyes, wide stances, and voice defects. The more acceptable end of the *kasar* scale are the strong characters, symbolised by their deep voice and wide stance. They are usually military type figures who act in a straightforward manner, such as Pandawa's Bima (Wrekudoro) and his son Gatotkoco. On the refined end of the continuum are puppets with smaller slight builds, narrow stances, narrow eyes, heads tilting down and pointed noses, such as the Pandawa brothers, Yudhistira and Arjuna.

As in the real world, no character possesses all traits that are purely refined or purely rough. For example, Yudistira's purity and truthfulness makes him naive and easily deceived, Wrekudoro is brave and forthright, but tends to leap before he looks, the highly moral Karno's great loyalty means he must side with the Kurawa, although they are in the wrong, and the god, Batara Guru, is omnipotent but mischievous and capricious. Thus, it should not be a clear cut dichotomy between good and evil. Nevertheless, the Pandawa tend towards good and the Kurawa tend towards bad (Anderson 1965).

These characters, with their refined-coarse traits combined with the sequence of events in the story represent the diversity of human nature, not only social relations and individual personalities, but also individual, psychological and spiritual development. The formulaic structure of the *wayang* performance, for instance, is frequently explained in terms of the Javanist or Islamic mystical interpretation of an individual's psychological and spiritual development.

At the Mangkunagaran Dalang School (PDMN) the philosophical explanation of life is symbolised in the changing angle of placement of the *kayon* ('tree of life' puppet) between each scene. At the beginning of the performance the *kayon* is placed tilted to the left of the *dalang*. This indicates that as a baby one has animalistic needs and desires, to eat and sleep. As the *lakon* proceeds the child grows up and the *kayon* approaches the upright position. These animalistic desires or *nafsu* are replaced by evil temptations. However, pressure from parents or peers in the community helps the child struggle to stay on the true path. The adolescent child suppresses, but cannot eliminate, the four main *nafsu*. In the *lakon* this struggle is represented by a battle, called *perang kembang*, in a dark forest often between a *ksatria* hero and four ogres of different colours. The red ogre represents *amarah* or anger, the yellow is *sufia* or

sex, the white is *mutmainah* or purity, and the green or dark coloured ogre is *alhuamah* or greed. The road of life is often steep and bumpy.

Eventually the *ksatria* arrive at the sage priest's hermitage deep in the forest or on a mountain. The *ksatria*'s visit to the hermitage represents the young adult's search within the self to understand one's purpose in life. As the *lakon* continues the *kayon* is each time tilted further to the right. Thus as the person ages, one moves closer to God or spiritual awareness (*ngelmu*). Mangkunagara VII's (1957) account of the *lakon* Dewa Ruci has a similar mystico-philosophical understanding.

According to both Keeler (1987:244) and Sears (1996:16), such narrow interpretations have become a bench mark used by many Javanese *wayang* enthusiasts and Western commentators such as Stange (1977) in the prescriptive evaluation of *wayang* performances and the future of *wayang*. The symbolism within the story, structure and character traits in *wayang* performances reflect the ideal 'worldview' of dominant social groups, their ideologies and cultural values.

Formal accounts of the unique historical significance and function of the clown servants also accord with the political interests of the ruling bloc. In books such as those by Sri Mulyono (1982a, 1982b) and Bondan et al those elements of the *wayang kulit* performance that are seen to be of most significance to the Javanese, such as the *Punakawan* or clown servants of the warrior knights, are claimed to be purely indigenous. Notably, the most loved *wayang* character, the clown servant, Semar, is said to be unique to Java (Geertz 1960:275). For many Javanese Semar is the original ancestor. Semar is also frequently identified with the guardian spirit, or *danyang*, of the Javanese village (Stange 1977:116). Analysing mythico-history and contemporary reverence in the region, Sri Mulyono (1982a:48) arrives at an elusive hypothesis that Semar may have originally resided in Dieng Plateau (an active volcanic mountain range west of Solo, Central Java).

Explanations that overstate the indigenous origins of *wayang* are usually appealing for popular nationalist sentiments to support dominant interests rather than celebrating the social significance of the clown figures for the ordinary Javanese folk. Such is the case with the picture book *Lordly Shades* acknowledged in its 'Foreward' as a 'popular explanation' rather than 'scientific treatise' (Bondan et al 1984:5). In appropriating the clowns to celebrate the ancient roots and richness of (elite) Javanese

culture major emphasis is placed on the feudal role of clown servants.

[T]here is no reason to think that wayang has any origin other than Javanese, even if the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics originated in ancient India. For one thing, the wayang stories have some key characters who do not exist in the epics known in India. This is the case with the Panakawan, for instance, the clowns who appear as retainers of the main characters and who help their masters and mistresses to gain their ends (Bondan et al 1984:7).⁸⁹

However, there is ample evidence now that theatrical, including puppet, performances in India use clowns with similar characteristics, roles and functions as *wayang*'s clown servants.⁹⁰ Ras (1976:54) recounts a description by Seltmann (1971) of the position within, and characteristics of, the 'comic intermezzos' in shadow play performances in Kerala, Southern India that virtually mirror that of the Javanese shadow play:

The texts are strictly traditional as far as the sequence of narrative passages and dialogues is concerned, but the performers have great freedom of improvisation in the comic intermezzos. These are filled with persiflage and humoristic comments on topics of everyday life and politics as well as erotic jokes laid in the mouths of clowns.

There is also a description of the principal clown, Killekyata in the shadow plays of Mysore and Andhra regions, whose physical characteristics are remarkably similar to those of *wayang*'s clown servant Semar and his adopted sons:

He is an ugly potbellied figure with tilted nose, dishevelled hair and crooked hands and legs (in Ras 1976:54).

Studying GoldbergBelle's (1989) analysis of the clown figures Bangarakka, Juttupoligadu, Ketigadu, Gandholigadu and Allatapayya in the *Tolubommalata*

⁸⁹ The *Ensiklopedi Wayang Purwa* (1991) produced by the Department of Education and Culture also stresses the indigenous origins of the clown servants, as do international scholars such as McVey (1986:23).

⁹⁰ There are also similarities with the clowns of the southern Thai shadow puppet theatre, *nang talung* (Chalermpow 1989:45).

shadow theatre of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka it is obvious they share very similar characteristics, roles, and socio-ritual functions to Semar, his adopted sons, and other minor clown figures in the Javanese shadow theatre. In the *Tolubommalata* the position and relationship between the clowns and the formal performance (which also draws on the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics) is similar to that in the Javanese *wayang kulit* performance. Furthermore, the relationship between the clown figures, the puppeteer and the audience within the context of the occasion for holding the performance is remarkably similar in both the *Tolubommalata* and Javanese shadow plays. In fact, GoldbergBelle's attention to the central significance of the clown figures in the *Tolubommalata* shadow theatre is, as I assert later, equally applicable to the Javanese shadow theatre.

It is likely the clown servants, such as Semar, do have ancient origins, but such origins are not unique to Java. There are many places throughout the world where comic characters have similar characteristics and functions (GoldbergBelle 1989). As argued in Chapter Nine, rather than proof of the uniquely indigenous roots of *wayang kulit*, as opposed to Indian origins, the origins and characteristics of the clown servants highlight the centrality of rural folk traditions in *wayang*. However, conservative *wayang* observers do not acknowledge the origins and role of the clown servants as evidence of the significance of rural traditions in the development of *wayang*.

Scholarly observations of the *wayang* performance as it is situated within contemporary social relations are critically informed by one's particular understanding of the historical origins and development of *wayang*. Continuing from Dutch colonial times conventional scholarly analysis of *wayang* performances tend to have a narrow, ahistorical understanding, both derived from and encouraging elite indigenous perspectives. This creates an elitist tautological paradigm (Ras 1982:20) where popular traditions are neglected or relegated as marginal in their significance. Indigenous and international understanding of *wayang* uses as a basis of analysis idealised *wayang* conventions rooted in Javanese mystico-religious philosophy tied to courtly traditions and elite Javanese ideology. In *The Religion of Java* (1960) Geertz categorises *wayang kulit* as a classical *priyayi* art form, as distinct from rural folk traditions. Overall, conventional analysis portrays 'authentic' *wayang* as that

which has undergone little significant change since its origins and or highest point of refinement. The benchmark is usually the ancient agrarian kingdoms, the ‘golden age’ of Javanese society. The assumption is that ‘authentic’ *wayang* remains relevant to its surrounding social context without being fundamentally affected by it.

Conservative *wayang* enthusiasts as well as state institutions emphasise pure *wayang* as a communication tool for ‘ethical education’ that informs surrounding society (Bondan et al 1984:8). *Wayang* is seen as a ‘a medium of communication capable of acting as an agent of change in the fast-changing world of modern Indonesia’ (Bondan et al 1984:7) without its fundamental ethical conventions being affected by such social change:

Over and beyond everything else, wayang purwa is concerned essentially with ethics and education. Whatever the changes made in wayang over the centuries since its remote origins, its ethical heart has remained unaltered (Bondan et al 1984:8)

It seems *Wayang*’s unchanged ‘ethical heart’ is centrally located in the elite Javanese philosophy tied up in *wayang*’s traditional conventions and symbolism, particularly the *wayang* puppets’ character traits, the formal narration and classical mood songs; ‘Approximately thirty per cent of the content of the play is entirely bound by tradition in both word and tone’ (Bondan et al 1984:9). Geertz provides a brief outline of *wayang*’s formal structure and predictable content as the reservoir of elite ideals (1960:227):

long formal scenes in the courts with messengers coming and going, interspersed with the short breathless transitional scenes in the woods or along the roads; ... the great nobles, who speak an elevated language full of apostrophes to honor, justice and duty [and] the final war, which ... leaves the vanquished beaten but still noble.

Contextualisation is the method of communicating or disseminating these refined ethics from the rulers down to the level of the ruled. These unchanging ethics, as relevant to the contemporary socio-political situation interpreted by the rulers, are conveyed in simple language understood by ordinary folk. In the crudest sense this entails squeezing information about government programs into an appropriate part

within the *lakon*.

The dalang must also be ready to slip in at the appropriate places the comments on the current situation that he hears among the people, and to add amusing details that enlighten listeners about, say, the drive for better nutrition or family planning. This is how the dalang serves as an instrument of two-way communication between people and government (Bondan et al 1984:9).

Though a dialogue between the rulers and ruled is implied the emphasis is on what is communicated to the audience, rather than what is expressed by the audience/people. The main vehicle or most 'appropriate places' for contextualising the performance and its ethical education into the present is the comic interlude. Separate from the formal plot, the comic interlude allows allegory, using the everyday language of the audience.

the dialogue of the clowns, their jokes and songs, some of which may easily be inserted extempore by the dalang, will serve to point up the moral and draw attention to the ethics of the situation discussed and resolved in the performance (Bondan et al 1984:14).

Choruses and melodies sung by the male musicians and/or the female *pesindhen* singers accompanied by *gamelan* music, typically during the comic interludes, also serve to advise the audience on:

national development programs, village modernisation, the system of night guards and other similar official information, thus providing another opportunity for the dissemination of messages from the government (Bondan et al 1984:15).

The conventional analysis of most liberal scholars deviates little from the understanding of conservative *wayang* virtuosos. In fact, Javanese theatre in general has been understood as a 'mass medium' of 'moral education' (Peacock 1968:4). Accordingly, the chief function of *wayang kulit*, and in particular the comic interlude within, is in communicating educative and moral messages that accord with the perspectives of the state and dominant classes.

Popular theatre, like wayang kulit, the ancient shadow puppet theatre, in centuries past and still today, is far more than a means of entertainment. For people unable to read or unused to reading for pleasure, with limited access to the outside world, dramatic performances provide a vital channel of communication. While laughing at the comic attempts of the clowns to pronounce a new Indonesian word, or marvelling at the adventures of a sophisticated city slicker, one also picks up new ideas and ways of behaving. And through performance of old Javanese legends, with their examples of virtues to be emulated and vices avoided, traditional morals and values are passed on (Hatley 1973:39).

Most liberal scholars also see the major role of the clowns in contextualising the past into the present as not only a vehicle for disseminating government propaganda, but reinforcing a sense of inferiority, subservience and passivity in the *wong cilik* they represent. Traditional theatrical genres, in particular *wayang*, tied to elite patronage and archaic conventions, are said to reinforce a feudal ideology of the inferior status of the peasantry through the bumbling buffoonery of the clown servants (Hatley 1990:344-5).

In rejecting mainstream theories that emphasise *wayang*'s communicative function, Keeler (1987) argues that central to the meaning of *wayang* is the way the pleasure of the performance plays on audience involvement (discussed further in Chapter Nine). Nevertheless, Keeler's use of an idealised, universal model of *wayang* performances characterises *wayang* symbolism as engaging with Javanese awareness of hierarchical social relations. Here, also, the clown servants represent subservience and social impotence that goes with a lack of awareness of social responsibilities and moral obligations. Keeler's idealised model of the clown servants' social position and relationship with their *ksatria* masters is similar to that of the Wahyu Makutharama script cited earlier. For Keeler the clown servants' freedom from social constraints is obtained through their sacrifice of autonomy or social potency resulting in dependency on others.

They [the clown servants] can mock each other ... have fist fights. They can fight against their enemies, using trickery, farming tools, and even excrement. Semar often uses his great flatulence to lay an opponent low ... They can do all these things because they need not protect their status. They have no status. They are dependents (Keeler 1987:209).

In general, conservative *wayang* enthusiasts and conventional scholarship portray *wayang* as a tool for communicating and/or reinforcing an elite perspective on a hierarchical Javanese social structure, morals and values. *Wayang* represents an amalgam of largely unchanged feudal traditions, derived from the Javanese kingdoms, supporting and working together with contemporary state ideology and policies. The clown servants, also, are seen as functional to this discourse which is imposed on the passive, vanquished, or socially inept, subordinate classes.

2. *Wayang's Social Relevance*

The implication of this conventional understanding of 'authentic' *wayang* as essentially static and elitist, whether stressing its roots in ancestor worship or refined Javanese philosophy and mysticism, is that it resists social influences that would fundamentally change its central conventions. The understood consequences that such a position suggests for the contemporary and future position of *wayang* in a rapidly changing society appear unavoidably negative and are usually responded to in a reactionary way.

For example, the purity and authenticity of *wayang* as indigenous (rather than Indian) and having undergone no fundamental change over thousands of years also carries an attendant concern that it, as with other national cultural treasures, needs to be preserved. As a national symbol and standard bearer of Javanese ethos *wayang* must be cultivated in the right way and kept in pristine condition.

This is the ostensible function of the *wayang* museum, *wayang* associations, and books such as those by Bondan et al and Sri Mulyono. They proclaim a constant vigilance against the ever looming threat of cultural contamination from both domestic and foreign sources. In the Forward to Sri Mulyono's book (mentioned earlier), H. Budiharjo is enthusiastic about the role the book will have in defending *wayang* as part of Indonesia's national culture (1982b:xi):

Rivulets like this book will form a torrent, a waterfall, that, with its power deep within, is able to overcome foreign cultural influences that can otherwise quite possibly contaminate our Indonesian culture [my translation].

Conservative *wayang* lovers often fear *wayang*'s lofty qualities are under continual threat from what they see as the negative consequences of rapid social change and *wayang*'s popularisation. Policies centring on *wayang* preservation and upgradings are adopted ostensibly in order to stop the qualitative erosion of *wayang*'s traditional core conventions, but chiefly serve to maintain the cultural legitimisation of central powers. A central motivation behind *Lordly Shades*, as expressed in its concluding remarks, is to check the erosion of 'pure' *wayang* as a consequence of its popularisation both nationally and internationally:

Pains have been taken in the preparation of the book, particularly in the pictures, to portray Wayang Purwa with correct detail. The present wide diffusion of the art has led to some rather frequent inaccuracies in presentation that have nothing to do with experimentation and change, but simply lead to distortion (Bondan et al 1984:18).

It is probable this disdain for experimentation is in reference to both innovations in the arts academies whose younger cultural workers overtly critique classical traditions (see below), as well as populist *wayang* performances.

The institutionalisation of *wayang* has long been a means by which dominant interests attempt to control the development of *wayang* to suit their own ideological and political interests. According to Ras (1976:54) as far back as the ninth century AD *dalang* have been 'subject to certain restrictions and supervised by officials of the king'. During the 1920s the royal courts of Mangkunagara and Surakarta in Solo established upgrading courses, that have later developed into training courses or *dalang* schools, aimed at improving or maintaining the prestige of the royal courts. Some of those *dalang* going through the court courses set up their own schools. These *dalang* published their own guides to *dalangship*, but all were based on the Mangkunagaran and Surakartan court teachings (Ras 1976:72). It is from this very recent point in history that, according to Ras (1976:70), the Solonese courts' style of *wayang* became dominant and recognised as the most refined.

It is the central Javanese courts' model of *wayang kulit* performances that is acknowledged as the purist form of *wayang* and adopted by the new central state as

a symbol of national culture. The ‘authenticity’ of *wayang* is very much tied to the degree to which centralised powers are able to exert influence and control over the construction of meanings in *wayang kulit* performances. It is little wonder, therefore, that, as Ras (1982:19) informs us, the twelfth *wayang* congress of 1974 favoured the court centred Javanese *wayang parwa* over *wayang kulit* performances from Sundanese West Java. Unlike the dominance in terms of patronage and intervention from the courts in Central Java, the attenuation of political and cultural centres in Pasundan West Java meant *wayang* traditions developed from the patronage of local societies. Sundanese traditions are thus characteristic of ‘pure entertainment’ rather than ‘philosophical aesthetics’ (Ras 1982:19).

There is, however, some realisation that in defending ‘authentic’ elitist *wayang* from a qualitative erosion by popular elements there is also a risk of restricting its popularity, and therefore effectiveness, as a national culture legitimising and reinforcing the control of the ruling state. Many conservative *wayang* lovers have a real fear that *wayang* will become socially irrelevant if it doesn’t respond adequately to new demands brought about by rapid social change. The fear of *wayang*’s marginalisation through being unable to keep up with social change, of becoming increasingly irrelevant to lived experiences and changing values, has precedence in the virtual disappearance of the *wayang beber* form. Its rigid and uncompromising conventions based on religious and ritual taboos restricted its ability to adapt as its surrounding social circumstances changed.⁹¹

Elite interpretations of *wayang*’s conventions place tight constraints on *wayang kulit* in order to maintain control of it as an instrument of legitimisation and indoctrination, and not as a vehicle of innovative and alternative cultural expression. This tendency contradicts the very nature of *wayang* that has guaranteed its continuing popularity over the centuries. According to Ras, the puppeteer is foremost an entertainer whose success is determined by his daring in ‘stretching the ties of convention’ to suit the tastes and lived circumstances of a particular audience

⁹¹ Suwaryadi (1983) outlines the physical and practical restrictions on *wayang beber*’s development and popularity, such as the supernatural danger in moving or maintaining the equipment box and its contents (puppets and scrolls).

(1982:31).

Nevertheless, to some extent the contemporary Indonesian nation-state is itself a popularising force of *wayang kulit* through raising *wayang kulit* from a local or regional cultural practice to a standardised national cultural art form with the added function of enlightening the masses on national policies and ideology (Ras 1982:19). Furthermore, there are attempts by individuals and institutions broadly aligned with national cultural policy to make *wayang* more relevant to contemporary society with resultant debate over what are acceptable aesthetic and structural changes that will not compromise *wayang*'s 'authenticity'. Their objective is to ensure the importance of *wayang* in contemporary society by maintaining its social relevance without it being degraded through pandering to popular taste.⁹² One attempt has been to reduce the time from the traditional all night performance to four hours, two hours or even one hour. This is in response to changing patterns of daily life in urban areas where people working standard hours find it difficult to sit through an all night performance (Ras 1976:75). Condensed *wayang* performances are also a response to market demands, such as that from tourism and television.

Attempts by dominant groups to make *wayang* more socially relevant and accessible, such as through condensed performances, without qualitative devaluation, differ according to ideological perspectives. In Solo both the Mangkunagaran court, in association with the Surakarta Institute of Javanology (Lembaga Javanologi Surakarta), and the Indonesian Arts Academy (STSI) have experimented with condensing *wayang* performances in order to make *wayang* more accessible.

On 1 Sura, the auspicious first day of the Javanese lunar year 1919 (or 11 September, 1986) the Surakarta Institute of Javanology invited the teacher of the prestigious Mangkunagaran Dalang School to give a *wayang kulit* performance, which I also attended. He performed the *lakon* Wahyu Makutharama, used at the school to teach *dalang* technique and the mystical essence of *wayang* symbolism. The proceedings were introduced by several dignitaries on the significance and meaning

⁹² GoldenbergBelle (1989:139) notes that the 'urban elite' and 'publicly sponsored art groups' have also been attempting to 'revive' the *Tolubommalata* shadow theatre by purging it of the 'vulgar' comic eroticism and refining its formal components.

of 1 Sura for the people of Solo, Central Java. Apart from halving the performance time to four hours there was no fundamental change in the traditional aesthetics or conventions used. The *gamelan* music, songs and prose, the puppet characterisation and movements, as well as the *lakon* structure followed the Mangkunagaran court's interpretation of traditional *wayang* and mystical symbolism promoted in the *dalang* school.

By contrast, the condensed *wayang*, or *wayang padat*, at STSI represents a 'modern' antithesis to these 'traditional' conventions. Repetitions and embellishments of scenes and sub plots, stock phrases, prose and song as well as stock character traits and movements are pared down or dispersed with. The cyclic, repetitive, open ended, improvised performance is replaced by a tight linear text focused drama inspired by western theatrical theory and cinematographic aesthetics. There is no room for mystical teachings, intervening gods, malevolent ogres, passive princesses or bumbling clowns. The serious *wayang padat* drama promotes modern solutions to issues surrounding romantic love through character development, individual responsibility and an assertiveness in female roles (Sears 1986:163-84).

For the divergent perspectives of the institutions concerned both experimental condensed *wayang* performances may have 'succeeded' in preserving or improving on the 'quality' of *wayang* performances. However, when analysing the restricted audience composition of both performances it is difficult to see how they will achieve the main goal of making their versions of *wayang* more relevant and accessible to wider society.

Whilst the public celebrated 1 Sura out in the streets, night markets and amusement parks, behind the confines of the palace walls only those associated with the palace, friends, invited guests and a few tourists, witnessed the performance. In comparison, audiences for STSI's *wayang padat* performances were limited to fellow students and academics, government officials, selected guests and international audiences (Sears 1986:165, 185). Staff at STSI admitted,

[at] Sasanamulya (the place where *ASKI* [now STSI] is located) we often have [*wayang padat*] performances for various reasons - to honor guests, receptions, exam presentations, competitions, festivals, experimental

performances, etc. – the audience overflows and yet it is limited to our own closed circle or to a specific group [Murtiyasa (1984:2) cited in Sears (1986:185)].

Both the condensed *wayang* performances of Mangkunagaran and STSI are more orientated to preserving elite control of the *wayang* tradition in response to social change than allowing for greater public participation. The Mangkunagaran performance can be seen as part of a larger struggle against the waning cultural influence of the courts in the wake of their political demise through the colonial period and the rise of a modern nation-state. On the other hand, the occasions for the STSI performances, whether for internal exams or as a cultural resource for state rituals, and the overall position and role of the arts academy, are closely integrated with the state's interests in controlling *wayang*'s development (Brinner, 1992:112; Feinstein 1995:627; and Sears 1986:181). According to Feinstein (1995:627), the arts academies, such as STSI, have taken over the court's role in preserving the culture of the ruling elite, no longer as defined by the courts, but by the New Order state.

For conservative *wayang* lovers and the state 'authentic' *wayang* in its idealised form is under threat of being either irrelevant to, or vulgarised by, a rapidly changing society. The practical agenda for dominant interests based on such a perspective often emphasises *wayang*'s qualitative and quantitative preservation and tight control over its development. A critical analysis by many liberal scholars based on the same premise of *wayang* in its idealised unchanging state with its feudalistic or elitist origins usually concludes that it is by definition an archaic tool of domination and repression. Unless this bastion of traditional elitist values undergoes fundamental change in held conventions it is in danger of fast becoming irrelevant as social values change under the sweep of modernisation and its supposedly inherent push for greater democratisation. That is, 'traditional' elitist *wayang* becomes increasingly unable to relate to, and address, the new issues and problems faced by a more politically assertive and informed 'modern' society.

However, both the indigenous elite and conventional liberal scholarship have still not addressed the popularisation and continued development of *wayang*

performances with rapid social change. Custodians of the elitist archaic *wayang* ideal proclaim that where *wayang* attempts to accommodate its surrounding social context, such as 'vulgar' popular tastes, it distorts or corrupts ideal core conventions and is no longer 'authentic'. These 'deviant' *wayang* performances are often dismissed as peripheral to a central understandings of *wayang's* make up, or, alternatively, represent a qualitative threat potentially undermining 'authentic' *wayang*. Thus, popular *wayang* performances are not taken seriously as a valid, or relevant, expression of contemporary Javanese culture, or are taken too seriously as potentially corrupting 'authentic' Javanese culture.

Even STSI's radical experimentation with *wayang padat*, adopting western dramatology, is limited to an elitist critique of classical conventions. It does not recognise the agency of local societies in the *wayang* performance. STSI's *wayang padat* replaces the authority of the *dalang* with a ready made written text and restricts the opportunity for audience participation, symbolised in the reduction of allegorical comic scenes.⁹³ Similarly, most conventional scholarship is usually a critique within the parameters of an elite understanding of classical *wayang kulit* where the influence of the genre's idealised conventions on both local and wider society subsumes any specific relationship between the performance and its surrounding social context. That is, local meanings coming out of a performance are considered negated by, explained through, or contained within, these idealised conventions.

Despite a less conventional theory, that integrates the *wayang* performance and audience involvement into the totality of socio-political life, Keeler also relies on the idealised, *wayang* performance based on elite held assumptions about Javanese behaviour. His universal model negates the relevance of specific local contexts surrounding individual performances; 'I will treat all *wayang* performances as equivalent' (Keeler 1987:205). Thus, by turning a blind eye to the diversity of *wayang* performances informed by specific social relations within their socio-historic

⁹³ Brinner (1992:99,111-2) observes that *wayang padat* is not spontaneous or humorous like contemporary popular *wayang* performances. Rather, it is serious, carefully planned, text orientated, academicised, and standardised according to government interests in representing regional cultures as national art, and according to 'foreign ideas about tradition, aesthetics and purpose in arts'.

context, Keeler can claim tautologically that *wayang kulit* is 'indisputably the "high" art form of Javanese culture' [emphasis added] (1987:240).

None of these conventional explanations with their inherent negativism help us to understand why *wayang* performances continue to be popular amongst largely subordinate class audiences. They are also ill equipped to analyse what many cautiously observe as a populist led revival of *wayang* performances in urban areas. Conservative virtuosos argue *wayang*'s essential function is as a 'tool for persuasion'. Ironically, Ras's (1982:19-20) criticism of the predictive usefulness of this understanding is equally applicable to mainstream liberal analysis.

The question of what the spectators, the consumers of the show, expect to see is not couched. Yet it is they who will ultimately decide what is to be the future of *wayang* as a cultural and social phenomenon.

Incorrectly, Ras limits the potential participatory level of the audience as 'spectators' or 'consumers'. However, he does urge serious analysis of audience participation and the role of a broader diverse society in substantially shaping the construction of *wayang*'s social meaningfulness and significance.

The need to look beyond idealised elite models of *wayang* is evident in the diversity in interpretation and application of *wayang* symbolism as a core metaphor which permeates social discourse throughout contemporary Java. *Wayang* performances are significant in shaping and articulating consciousness and remain the wellspring of *wayang* imagery.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, *wayang* symbolism and analogies also have their own dynamics which transcend actual *wayang* performances.

Wayang symbolism permeates the personal, ideological and political discourses of both dominant and subordinated classes. Although some individuals and sectors of Javanese society, such as those from orthodox Islam and Christianity, the ethnic Chinese, or some of the higher educated urban intellectuals, might be indifferent to, or disdainful of, *wayang* symbolism they must acknowledge and deal with its ubiquitous presence in society. For example, Christianity, has no direct

⁹⁴ The significance of *wayang* performances in local societies is evident in the large number of *dalang* which were estimated to total 20,000 in 1984 (Bondan et al 1984:9).

historical connection with the development of *wayang*. Nevertheless, *wayang* has been incorporated into Christianity by some organisations for religious or commercial reasons. The Roman Catholic Mission developed *wayang wahyu* and *wayang katolik* performances in the 1950s (Sri Mulyono 1982b:163). At a more commonplace level too, we can find an assorted array of Christmas cards incorporating *wayang* themes and characters (Fig. 12).

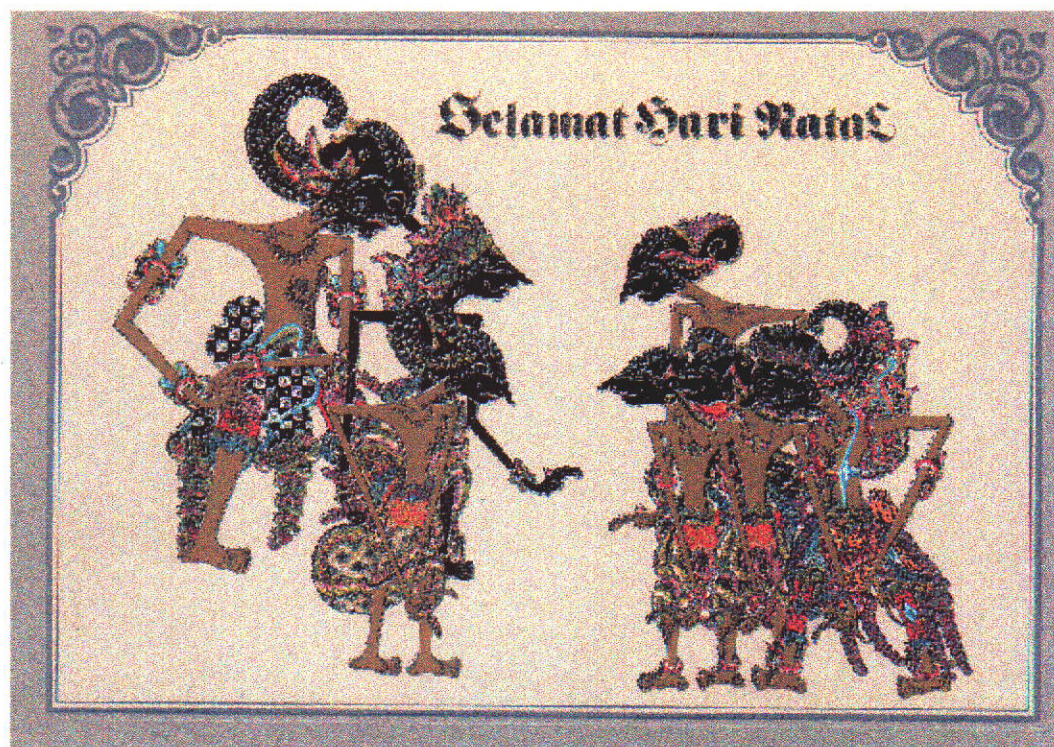


Figure 12 Christmas greetings from the Pandawa brothers.

Wayang symbolism and analogies colour day to day discourse and thought as a means of expression rather than a systematic tool for interpreting all social behaviour. Nevertheless, an individual's personality or actions are often, at least partially, made sense of through the use of *wayang* symbolism and metaphor. *Wayang* symbolism is prevalent in popular culture, such as the print media. Advice columnists in newspapers and magazines, frequently employ *wayang* analogies in counselling their readers on problems they are facing with personal relationships. Sri Mulyono was a well known exponent who has compiled a number of his articles published in the seventies in newspapers and popular magazines (1977). His writings

were often in response to inquiring letters or ‘erroneous’ articles on *wayang*. He connects various *wayang* character traits and well known scenes with contemporary issues and values affecting wider society and individuals, particularly on matters of love and personal relationships. Another example is the *wayang tulis* (written *wayang* stories) published in the weekly Javanese language newspaper, *Jawa Anyar*, in Solo. Some of these are satirical (*wayang plesetan*), written in a language which touches



Figure 13 Lovers, Dewi Utari and Abimanyu in a *wayang tulis plesetan* (Satirical *wayang* article). *Jawa Anyar* 23-29 August 1993.

on the modern concerns, tastes and experiences of an urbanised youth. They may include light hearted criticism of the excesses of those in power and authority, such as official corruption, greed, and sexual immorality (Fig. 13).

Both President Sukarno and now President Suharto have used *wayang* imagery in the legitimisation of their personal and political persuasion. Throughout his autobiography told to Cindy Adams (1965) Sukarno refers to various *wayang* characters such as Bima, Arjuna, Kresna and Karno in justifying his nature from nationalist to womaniser. Suharto, and more generally the New Order regime, use

wayang imagery in their legitimising discourse. The *wahyu* mandate bestowed on worthy kings in the Mahabharata is often inferred to have passed from the hands of Sukarno to Suharto. Recently, Suharto had commissioned a large statue for central Jakarta of Arjuna, with bow pulled back, riding a chariot pulled by several horses into the Barata Yuda war. This, according to the cultural activist, Moelyono, was an aggressive stance against criticism of his personal leadership and growing rumours over his succession at the time.⁹⁵ Suharto has also picked up on the current popularity of the main clown figure Semar. By identifying with Semar Suharto is engaging in populism, projecting himself as a man of the people. In March 1995 Suharto commissioned the nation's senior *dalang* to specifically create *lakons* where the central characters were the *Punakawan*, Semar and his adopted sons. Suharto's rationale is also to make better use of the clown servants in *wayang* as a medium for selling the regime's developmentalist and *Pancasila* ideologies to the *wong cilik*.⁹⁶

The state and dominant classes do not have an impervious hegemonic control over the production and use of *wayang* symbolism. Though *wayang* symbolism in the discourse of the ruling bloc is most visible, *wayang* symbolism is also popular in the discourse of dissent, as well as alternative and subordinate class perspectives.

As referred to in Chapter Seven, *wayang* symbolism was at the centre of the discourse of Embah Wali's messianic protest of the Suharto regime. The Indonesian Communist Party, and other socialist causes, also used *wayang* as a medium of propaganda and 'consciousness raising' in the 1950s and 1960s. This was despite strong ideological debates over the appropriateness of *wayang*. There were, for example, debates over how to overcome *wayang*'s association with feudalistic symbolism, and how to utilise the potential of the comic interlude for social criticism and in representing the interests of the *wong cilik* (McVey 1986:23; Sears 1996:225-

⁹⁵ Personal communications with Moelyono in March/April 1995.

⁹⁶ Suharto's recent liking for Semar generated lively discussion on *Jinarwa@auckland.ac.nz*, an e-mail discussion list devoted to Javanese culture. Discussions included 'Soeharto dan Semar', Djoko Sulistyono, 1 March 1995, 'Lakon-lakon pertemuan dalang', Feinstein, 12 February 1996, 'Re: Kompas: "Lakon-lakon pertemuan dalang"', Cohen, 12 February 1996, and 'Pepali and p-4', Behrend, 13 February 1996. References relating to this: discussion include: 'Semar harus tampil untuk demokratisasi' (*Kompas*, 24 January 1995), 'Pak Harto: "Nekat, tapi penuh perhitungan ..."' (*Kompas*, 19 March 1995), 'Lakon-lakon pertemuan dalang' (*Kompas*, 12 February 1996), and Schlosstein (1991).

6). On the other hand, *wayang* traditions entrenched in the Javanese consciousness also coloured the individual identity and ideological perspectives of Javanese communist party members. In the court hearing prior to his sentencing and execution a party leader, Sudisman, chose to couch his involvement in the communist struggle in the high moral discourse of the *ksatria* warrior hero 'by assuming responsibility for all that resulted from his deeds, acting out his destiny, and accepting his fate' (McVey 1986:21,24)

Apart from *wayang* performances other forms of popular cultural expression also draw on *wayang* symbolism in articulating alternative and subordinate class perspectives. In Solo, members of the 'modern' theatre group, Teater Gapit, all have a background in the 'traditional' arts, including *wayang*. However, they intentionally play with, or invert, elitist cultural conventions in contemporary stage performances that side with the *wong cilik* as victims of developmentalism and modernisation (Feinstein 1995:617-8). In *Tuk* ('Spring') performed during the early 1990s, *wong cilik* residents are threatened with eviction to make way for a bank. Fragments of *wayang* symbolism, such as obligations to help each other in this world in preparation for the next, become metaphor for anxiety and resistance to the impact of rapid social change under the New Order, marked by greed and opportunism (Feinstein 1995:626-8). According to Feinstein (1995:634), a broader achievement of Teater Gapit is in rescuing and returning to the *wong cilik* interpretations of local cultural traditions, such as *wayang kulit*, marginalised and rarefied in state and court constructions of regional and national culture.

Wayang symbolism is also found in the informal cultural expression of the subordinate classes, such as on the tailgate of a truck based in the *wayang* centre, Klaten (Fig. 14). On the back of a truck, which I saw driving between Solo and Yogyakarta, was a painting of the clown servant, Petruk, most likely done, or commissioned by the driver.⁹⁷ Petruk, symbolic of the ordinary person, is sitting down, resting up against a tree enjoying a smoke. Perhaps the caption above, which

⁹⁷ Most paintings commissioned by the trucking companies are beautiful naturalistic scenes. However, the smaller number of painting done, or commissioned, by the truck drivers, with or without permission from the companies, are more commensurate with the drivers' tastes and feelings, such as caricatures of sexy girls (*Suara Merdeka* 1993:7).

reads 'looyoo, mas', ('exhausted, brother') expresses the general 'weariness' experienced by the driver in relation to his working conditions and daily struggle.



Figure 14 Petruk riding the tailgate of a truck, 'Weary, brother'. Photo by G. Reeves.

Conclusion

Wayang symbolism and performance cannot be described simply as the frozen archaic expression of feudalistic values which is an impedance to democratisation and increasingly irrelevant to a rapidly modernising society. In a variety of ways *wayang* symbolism continues to penetrate most sectors of contemporary society in Java. Nor is *wayang* discourse under the total hegemony of the state and dominant classes. As will be expanded on in the following chapters, *wayang* continues also to be a relevant source of meaning and identity in the every day language and cultural expression of the subordinate classes. In the next chapter an alternative view on the historical development of *wayang* provides direction for developing an approach to better identify subordinate class cultural expression through *wayang* performance.

Chapter Nine: An Alternative Approach to *Wayang* Analysis

1. *Contesting Dominant and Popular Cultural Traditions in Wayang Performance*

Three articles by the Dutch scholar, J. J. Ras, provide basis for a populist alternative to most observations that narrowly define *wayang* as a classical art form developed by the central Javanese courts. These articles are ‘The historical development of the Javanese shadow theatre’ (1976); ‘De clown-figuren in de *wayang*’ (1978)⁹⁸, and ‘The social function and cultural significance of the Javanese *wayang purwa* theatre’ (1982). Conventional scholarship seems to have provided little recognition or critique of these observations on *wayang* performances. A few scholars, notably Victoria Clara van Groenendael (1985) and Kathy Foley (1985, 1987 and 1992), have produced empirical research that supports Ras’s perspective on *wayang*’s historical development and social significance. However, as with Ras, the theoretical implications of their observations have not been systematically utilised in a critique of, or for an alternative to, the elitist essentialism of most conventional analysis. This body of work provides justification for serious consideration of the *wong cilik* in *wayang* performances.

Ras’s 1976 article is limited to a critique on the historical development of the ‘aristocratic’ court centred form of shadow theatre that, due to its visibility, has attracted much scholarly attention. Nevertheless, he sees a need to rectify a neglect of the more prevalent and ‘real’ popular or regional forms of shadow theatre. Originally, in asserting *wayang*’s Indic origins Ras (1976:56) stated that *wayang*’s ‘natural’ origins were court based. However, he emphasised that even in early Javanese society there was no uniformity in the character of *wayang* performances. *Wayang* performances varied reflecting different social contexts (1976:57):

From the beginning there must have been well-equipped professional groups,

⁹⁸ Max Lips, a family friend, kindly translated this article for me.

operating in the urban centres around the court (*nagara*) and the residences of the provincial feudal lords, and rambling groups operating a poor men's show. ... professional or part-time story tellers in the villages borrowed *wayang kulit* techniques, competing with the popular *dalang* from the larger centres.

The latter articles by Ras move away from an emphasis on the court centred origins of *wayang*. He distinguishes more assertively between older popular traditions of *wayang*, where the erotic nature of the comic servants is central, and more historically recent court centred traditions, that have elaborated on the *wayang* stories and form. In the more predominant popular forms of shadow theatre the clown servants retain a central significance. On the other hand, it can be inferred from Ras's (1978) observations that the 'aristocratic' form of shadow theatre has sanitised and domesticated these popular traditions through centuries of appropriation. The clown servants have been incorporated as light relief supporting the 'official mythology' of the courts based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata heroes. In court centred *wayang* the overall role and behaviour of the clowns reinforce feudalistic ideology where any alternative or critical aspects are contained well within the tolerance of court conventions. However, this 'aristocratic' form of shadow theatre – 'which is representative of only a restricted section of Javanese society, both territorially and culturally' – is not representative of the large bulk of contemporary *wayang* performances (Ras 1982:20). Therefore, conventional analysis, whether conservative or liberal, whose premises are derived from the 'aristocratic' ideal, can not accurately address the social significance of local *wayang kulit* performance.

Ras asserts *wayang's* origins can be traced back to ancient celebrations of village fertility rites based on plant and animal reproduction where, fittingly, the erotic nature of dance, usually in combination with comedy, was a central component. Even in rural Java today when crops are suddenly endangered, the clown servants, not the *ksatria* heroes, become the leading protagonists in the *wayang* performance (Ras 1982:23).

There are many similarities between ancient and contemporary itinerant troupes employing dancers and clowns with elements of contemporary people's theatre, particularly the comic interlude in local *wayang kulit* performances. The old

itinerant forms of *ludrug*, *topeng*, and *teledak* (or *gandrung*) dance, whose essential elements are comedy and/or dance of an erotic nature, were held for similar occasions as *wayang kulit* performances (Ras 1982:22-4). The dance-clown performance of the *ludrug besutan*, for example, was held at the same time as the comic interlude in the *wayang kulit* performance, between twelve mid-night and three o'clock in the morning. Furthermore, as with Semar, the clown, Besut, in *ludrug besutan* was both revered as a source of wisdom and knowledge and renowned for his crude, erotic jokes (Ras 1982:22-3)⁹⁹.

It is quite probable that the erotic nature of the clown servants in popular contemporary *wayang* performances has ancient historical antecedents in rural Java which cannot be reduced simply to a recent vulgarisation of 'authentic' *wayang*. An observation in the late nineteenth century of the indecent nature of village *wayang kulit* performances gives uncanny precedence for the attitude of the late twentieth century milieu of conservative and conventional observations on *wayang kulit*:

'What an effective tool for refinement of character and aesthetic education *wayang* could be' – Poensen sighs – 'whereas now it often does more harm than good to its spectators' (Poensen 1872-73:152 cited in Ras 1982:24)

The real significance of Semar as the original Javanese ancestor and the village guardian spirit is in pointing to the centrality of the comic interlude, not formal conventions, in the ancient origins, and 'timeless' essence of *wayang*. In fact, according to Ras (1982), it was *wayang's* formal court based conventions, not the comic interlude, which attached itself to *wayang*. By the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries the central Hindu-Buddhist and north coast Islamic kingdoms appropriated *wayang* as a means of legitimising their rule through fusing their genealogy with that of the ancestral deities. According to Ras (1982:26-8), this development of pseudo-Javanese history from *wayang* stories may have developed from as far back as the ninth century Kediri kingdom when the Javanese kings were considered earthly

⁹⁹ This combination of erotic comedy and dance is central to the comic interludes in the contemporary *wayang* performances of *dalang* Enthuis Susmono, as detailed in Appendix Two in reference to Chapter Eleven.

incarnations, like Rama, Arjuna and Kresna, of the Hindu god Wisnu. Ras (1976:61) implies that these are the roots to contemporary elitist *wayang* traditions that continue as a tool of legitimisation and indoctrination for the New Order regime.

Many forms of 'traditional' Javanese cultural expression have evolved from a spiralling process of peasant traditions appropriated by the court or court traditions popularised. Geertz (1960:227-8), applying Redfield's (1953) theories on the development of cultural forms attributes the evolution of Javanese cultural traditions, to a 'persistent cultural dialogue' between two hierarchical cultural traditions: 'whether one calls the peasant tradition a vulgarisation of the gentry tradition, or the gentry tradition a refinement of the peasant'. Geertz continues:

cultural flow is not only outward and downward and from upper to lower classes. Rather we are facing a circular phenomenon in which folk culture draws on and is continually replenished by contact with the products of intellectual and scientific social strata (1960:227-8).¹⁰⁰

The spiralling process of cultural dialogue between a dominant/ superior, urban, elite tradition and subordinate/ inferior, rural, peasant tradition is used by conventional scholarship to characterise evolutionary stages in the development of *wayang wong* (a ballet performance of *wayang lakons* where the puppets are replaced by human actors). *Wayang wong* evolved from a simple rural mask dance and comedy performance based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata cycles. In the late nineteenth century the Central Javanese court in Yogyakarta took up *wayang wong* and refined its dance movements. According to Kam (1987:39) *wayang wong* in the 1920s continued to develop in the Yogyakarta court as a display of the court's glory in substitution for real political power lost to the Dutch colonial government. Later, *wayang wong* spread back out to the urban lower classes in what the elite regarded as a much degraded form. Cheap commercial performances by unskilled dancers that

¹⁰⁰ In reference to Balinese cultural traditions, Hobart (1983b:292) takes issue with Geertz: 'I would suggest that nowadays, as probably in the past, the peasants, the Sudras or jaba (literally "outsiders" to the court) have a prominent role in interpreting and structuring the great tradition.'

were overshadowed by course comic routines were held in village or urban night markets and amusement parks (Geertz 1960:289; Koentjaraningrat 1985:298).

After World War Two *wayang wong*'s popularity increased and its technical and performance quality was improved by a few large professional troupes. Whilst the actor's dance movements, vocal expressions and physical appearance had been highly stylised to mimic the *wayang* puppets, western movies also began to provide inspiration for new *lakon*. There is no longer a blank background to the stage, resembling the *wayang kulit* screen. Simple backdrops and props have been added to illustrate, for example, forest and palace scenes. Such 'improvements' by the major troupes have again attracted audiences from the higher urban social strata (Geertz 1960:289-90; Kam 1987: 30; Koentjaraningrat 1985: 289, 303-5).

Hatley describes this cultural relationship as mutually dependent subordination and domination, where peasants passively accept court models and the court appropriates 'lively elements of village performances'. Here, Hatley (1990:325-6) asserts that *wayang kulit*, because of its built in conventions reinforcing court or state ideology and administrative control, is the 'quintessential example'. Though terming it 'cultural exchange', Ras presented a similar picture in an early article. The *dalang* of the countryside tend to present a less skilled or refined copy of the prestigious *wayang* of the central court or state. In general, this countryside *wayang* tends to lag behind developments made to *wayang* in the urban or court centres and be conservative or old fashioned by comparison (1976:76). It is true the courts acknowledge and frequently invite well-known countryside *dalang* to perform, resulting in a certain amount of cultural exchange. However, Ras's general impression of countryside *wayang* is that it tends to be static and as such under threat of extinction (1976:76).

Observations of *wayang* based on its elitist formal conventions and content conclude that it is a bourgeois cultural expression. Employing Bennett's (1986) understanding of Gramsci to this perspective, the bourgeois ideology in *wayang* could be said to hegemonise, rather than obliterate, any subordinate class cultural expression. That is, subordinate class cultural expression is accommodated within the form or framework of bourgeois culture (Bennett 1986:xv). Similarly, Keeler's

universal model of *wayang kulit* as ‘high’ art that plays on elite held assumptions about the Javanese world fits what Bourdieu (1977:166) terms ‘field of doxa’:

When, owing to the quasi-perfect fit between the objective structures [field of doxa] and the internalised structures [includes art forms] which results from the logic of simple reproduction, *the established cosmological and political order is perceived* not as arbitrary, ie. as one possible order amongst others, but *as self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned, the agents’ aspirations have the same limits as the objective conditions of which they are the product* [emphasis added] (Bourdieu 1977:166).

Here, opposition and struggles over meaning played out during the *wayang kulit* performance would fall within, never threatening, the ‘field of doxa’ or ‘natural assumptions’. In Keeler’s self-contained model, the outrageous antics of the *Punakawan* clowns, indicating their freedom from the constraints of social responsibilities and obligations, is not rebellion. Rather, they have traded social status and potency for this freedom, resulting in their submission to, and containment within, the established ‘natural’ order.

From a different perspective, but reaching a similar conclusion to Keeler, Hatley (1990:328-9) states that social criticism during the *wayang* performance is limited to calling on *wayang*’s elitist conventions. At best criticism is limited to that of individuals from within the ruling elite who contradict their own ideals. In general, social criticism emanating from the comic interlude is subsumed by the weight of dominant ideologies in the formal conventions, and contained within the tolerance of *wayang*’s elite patrons and sponsors. Talking about social criticism in ‘traditional’ forms of theatre in which that of the *dalang* in *wayang* is a case of point Hatley uses the same terminology as James Scott’s (1985) to conclude:

Such expression might be seen as age old, ‘everyday’ resistance, bounded by rather than challenging the parameters of dominant ideology as they are embodied in the conventions of the theatre form. (1990:344).

However, it should be remembered that, in conjuncture with wider socio-political

conditions, this 'everyday resistance' can aggregate and evolve into *wong cilik* based social movements that threaten the current social structure. As touched on in previous chapters, cultural performances are an important form of expression and instrument of populist social movements. The New Order state has been very conscious of *wayang* as a potential agent of social unrest since the 1965/6 crackdown of *dalang* and other artists seen as sympathetic to the Indonesian Communist Party. *Wayang* associations are one avenue through which the state attempts to make *wayang* serve, rather than threaten, state authority (McVey 1986 34,40-43,50).

The relationship between court and rural traditions, or the ruling bloc and subordinate class traditions is more complex than domination and subordination, characterised by imposition and mimicking. Inseparable from social relations, dominant-subordinate cultural traditions are also imbued with negotiation, struggle and resistance. Furthermore, performances constituted from the distinctive dynamics of local social relations express meanings and identities that don't automatically conform to the idealised conventions of a performance genre. Moreover, whilst the *wayang kulit* performances are popular amongst the ordinary urban and rural folk, the dominant classes are more interested in classical *wayang* symbolism than enduring all night performances. In short, we need a more dynamic understanding of *wayang* performances, not as 'high' art, but as popular culture, in the sense articulated by Bennet (1986:xv-xvi):

[I]t [popular culture] consists not simply of an imposed mass culture that is consistent with dominant ideology, nor simply of spontaneously oppositional culture, but rather is an arena of negotiation between the two within which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are mixed in different permutations.

Local *wayang kulit* performances are typically arenas of cultural struggle or contestation. Established traditions are not just taken as is, they are also reinterpreted, resisted or challenged by new or alternative cultural traditions articulating the interests of the subordinate classes. In fact, the largely subordinate class audiences in local *wayang* performances often ignore or are indifferent to elitist conventions and

messages. Their attention is instead focused on the popular elements of the performance. Sears (1996:5) observes that the *dalang*'s ability to 'reproduce unacceptable behaviour in humorous ways [from the voice defects of ogres to] 'the flatulence of Semar seem more important to Javanese audiences than the virtuous behaviour or elegant speech of the more refined characters'.

It is not merely the generic conventions of the *wayang* performance, but more the surrounding social context that determines the cultural traditions and their meanings generated in the *wayang* performance. This is evident in the definition of a *lakon*, the choice of *lakon* and the 'occasional' nature of the *wayang* performance. According to Satoto (1985:6-8) the word *lakon* cannot properly be equated with western concepts of drama, play or theatre. *Lakon* is best described as a manuscript (*naskah*) or story (*kisah*) that has been dramatised. It only becomes a *lakon* in the full sense when it is performed. Many variables, particularly the social context of the performance, will determine the nature of the *lakon*. Usually the *lakon* to be performed is only a mental sketch or outline which is fleshed out and adapted on during the performance. The *dalang* will carefully select a *lakon* to suit the circumstances surrounding the sponsor and the reasons for the festivities (Ras 1976:65). *Dalang* are concerned with the surrounding circumstances of the performance, particularly in regards to entertaining their audience. As such, the most popular choices are peripheral, fictitious *lakon*, not the *lakon pokok* with the constraints of their sombre conventions and content (Ras 1982:30). The looseness in the selection of, and adherence to, the content of *lakon* assists what Ras (1976:65) terms a process of 'allusion' or, in Javanese, '*pasemon*'. *Pasemon* refers to allusions made during the performance according to the *dalang*'s understanding of audience/'community' feelings and expectations. Thus, it is also the circumstance surrounding the patron as audience, not merely patron as performance sponsor, which affect the performance. The dynamics of *lakon* and *pasemon* fit Turner's general understanding of the dynamics of cultural performances (1986:24):

Rituals, dramas and other performance ... genres are instruments whose full reality is in their 'playing', in their performance, in their use in social settings – they should not be seen merely as scripts, scenarios, scores, stage directions,

or other modes of blueprinting, diagramming, or guiding. *Their full meaning emerges from the union of script, with actors and audience at a given moment in a group's ongoing social process* [emphasis added].

It is quite erroneous to assume that any alternative meanings generated during the performance are controlled and subsumed by *a priori* conventions or functions peculiar to the *wayang kulit* genre. My argument is that the analysis of *wayang* should have a broader focus than that of idealised performance content and conventions. Analysis should also address the influence of the specific social dynamics in which the performance is situated, in particular through the interaction between audience and performance.

2. *Wong Cilik Audience Participation*

According to Keeler's psycho-culturalist model, *wayang* audiences are engaged in a 'natural' dialectic between attraction and resistance towards the *dalang*'s performance. He terms the dialectic *eling-lali* (remember/aware-forget). I will argue, however, that his model, a product of psychoanalysis and cultural determinism, seriously under recognises the potential agency of *wong cilik* audiences in *wayang* performances. Furthermore, the 'universal' reality of a dynamic hub of *eling-lali* in *wayang* performance evaporates when observing the relationship between audience and performance as part of broader social relations.

According to Keeler, psychological pleasure plays on a 'natural' dialectic reaction or tension Javanese feel concerning issues of power (potency) and self awareness versus independence. *Eling* is associated with the Javanese quality of not over reacting to events that would make one easily (and dangerously) distracted or deceived. Personally, one displays an air of calmness, of 'emotional invulnerability'. *Eling* also entails remembering one's social position and responsibilities, particularly to family (Keeler 1987:220). The Pandawa *ksatria* knights, in particular Arjuna, display the *eling* quality. In contrast with *eling*, *lali* is to be disloyal to one's parents or forget one's family ties. It is also to forget social constraints or responsibilities and Javanese etiquette. The implication for the self are letting the mind wander. A blank

mind makes one susceptible to attack by spirits, or open to desire that leads to distraction followed by disappointment (Keeler 1987:222). The clown servants and ogres typify *lali*. This tension around the *eling-lali* dialectic is manifest in intermittent audience attention corresponding to different scenes throughout the duration of the *wayang kulit* performance (Keeler 1987:220-21).

According to Keeler, people are initially drawn to the *wayang kulit* performance by the pleasure of forgetfulness; losing self-awareness of social constraints, responsibilities and associated anxieties. However, this automatically sets up a tension linked to psychological and social concerns over the risks and moral concessions of forgetting as opposed to the safety and social obligations assumed in being aware of social norms. Throughout the performance there is a continuing struggle between being lured to *lali* or forgetting, yet feeling a necessity to resist or *eling*. Interacting with different individuals' mental states are demands by the performance on the audience for varying degrees of 'focus' of attention (Keeler 1987:229). For example, in the long opening scenes Keeler (1987:232) observes:

The pleasure of yielding ... snoozing while the *dalang*'s voice drones on in description ... his elegant words superimposed on the shimmering sound of the *gamelan* [slow improvisations by softer instruments with no clear focus].

Whilst some listen in 'diffuse enjoyment', others pay no attention, chatting, wandering, or eating, resisting the pleasure in loss of focus and being suspicious of its distracting or disorientating quality. The choice is succumb or resist sacrificing one's autonomy to the control ('potency') of the *dalang* (Keeler 1987:228-9,234).

In contrast to this lack of focussed audience attention are the 'avidly watched' battle scenes where the *gamelan* plays louder, shorter, clearer and catchier tunes which prompt a more direct, focussed audience attention (Keeler 1987:226). This avid attention is precisely because the battle scenes are 'uninvolving' (Keeler 1987:226). The audience is not lured into being swept away by the *dalang*. Unlike the palace scenes where one faces the dilemma of succumbing or resisting, the battle scenes offer no tension. Because of the standard form of the *wayang* plots the outcome of the battle is predictable (Keeler 1987:229). The battle scene 'draws

attention to the excitement of the moment and to the *dalang*'s skill at manipulating the puppets, not to any overarching dramatic conflict' (Keeler 1987:229).

The ability of *wayang* performances to utilise elite held assumptions on Javanese social hierarchy and moral behaviour to play on the psychology of its audience hinges on an alignment of the *dalang* with these assumptions. The *dalang* must also be autonomous from, in fact have control over, a passive audience. However, *dalang* perform mainly in and around the region in which they reside. Their livelihood as a popular *dalang*, the frequency of performances, is contingent on how well the performance is received by his audience. The *dalang* must give priority to the immediate expectations of the audience, those who determine his popularity. The local *dalang*'s livelihood is not directly contingent on satisfying the individual sponsor's political or ideological concerns, or state ideology and policies. In order to ensure a ritual or celebration has a *rame* (bustling, exciting) atmosphere, sponsors will hire *dalang* whose performances are popular amongst local audiences. Furthermore, as well as residing within the vicinity he usually performs, the *dalang*'s socio-economic background is similar to that of the majority of his audience, the *wong cilik*. He shares a particular awareness of local circumstances that resonates with the sentiment, tastes and experiences of his largely subordinate class audience. Therefore, as shall be reinforced by specific examples in following chapters, the local *dalang*'s ties of affinity and dependence with his audience means that he is more favourably inclined to articulate their expectations and concerns.

The *dalang* is not a stooge for, and the audience not puppets manipulated by, a hegemonising elite form of cultural practice. The phenomenon of intermittent audience attention can not be indicative of the *dalang*'s autonomous potency over a passive audience. On the contrary, the occurrence of intermittent audience attention actually signals the agency of the audience in shaping the *wayang kulit* performance. The audience can show indifference to elitist content or assert popular traditions, either directly or indirectly, through the *dalang*.

The potential agency of the audience in influencing the meaning of a *wayang* performance is also greater than that inferred in Foley's (1985:90-1) communications approach to performance analysis. Though emphasising the power of the comic

interlude to present 'messages' that contradict and criticise dominant interests, Foley like Keeler, stresses the power of the *dalang* over audience psyche. The audience's role in the performance is reduced to reception and reflection. Through an effect described as 'similar to Brecht's *Verfremdungs* technique' the audiences are forced into snapping out of the emotional indulgence of the formal epic and becoming aware of how the epic illuminates on their lived reality. Though the clown servants, in particular Semar, are representative of the general subordinate class mass, the messages they impart to the audience are based on the 'convictions' and 'beliefs' of the *dalang*:

In addition to acting as a medium between the world of the story and the world of the audience, the clowns are consistently used as a mouthpiece of the *dalang* (Foley 1985:90).

Though in using the clown figures the *dalang* undoubtedly facilitates or enhances the insertion of alternative meanings and social criticism, he is also subject to, or intimately part of, the feelings, concerns and interests of the audience. The *dalang* invites the audience to share in dialogue through the clown servant figures in which the collective memories of the local *wong cilik* are articulated. This is where the *dalang*'s authority, symbolically synonymous with Semar, lies; not just in having influence over the audience, but in speaking with and on behalf of the *wong cilik* audience.¹⁰¹

Let's now continue with Keeler's focus on the aesthetics of pleasure, rather than reverting to the conventional emphasis on the *dalang* as a communicator of messages. To reiterate so far, the intermittent attention of the predominantly subordinate class audience at different moments during the performance ties in with the changing ascendancy of 'popular' and elite traditions. The audience is attracted to popular traditions in which they share an affinity and tend to resist 'elite' traditions that are either foreign or antagonistic to audience tastes and experiences. This is

¹⁰¹ At a 1993 '*Sesaji Dalang* conference at TBS, Solo, the *dalang*, Enthus Susmono, from Tegal, rejected the self-indulgent inference by some other *dalang* that they, through being equated with Semar, have a god-like authority and influence over the performance and audience.

revealed in a generalised pattern of intermittent audience attention based on the majority of locally orientated *wayang kulit* performances that I observed in and around Solo between 1986 and 1996.

At the beginning of the performance during the formal court scenes important guests sit on chairs in front of the shadow side of the screen. Ordinary people are still milling around in the background, standing behind or to the side of the guests or crowding around the back stage where the *dalang* and *gamelan* players sit. After about an hour or so the performance livens up with a couple of battle scenes and a minor comic interlude. By this time most of the guests have left and the ordinary people encroach closer, gradually taking their place. After a while most of the audience is ordinary folk whose attention is focused on fight scenes and comedy and lapses during the formal scenes of philosophical and religious content. Between twelve and one in the morning begins the main comic interlude or *adegan Punakawan* which lasts anywhere from half an hour to three hours and where audience attention and participation climaxes. Following the *adegan Punakawan* and the battle scene between *ksatria* and ogre(s) most of the audience disperse or doze off. In the remaining few hours till daybreak the play slowly resolves itself, often livening up in a final decisive battle before dawn.

A Javanese informant of Geertz's (1960:267) provides a similar, yet rather cynical, description of fluctuating audience attention during the course of the performance:

He said that the *alus* [refined] but rather boring speeches of the great lords and diplomats are placed early in the evening before people are tired enough to be put to sleep by them; at midnight, just as some of the audience are beginning to feel drowsy, the clowns come on and ... liven things up with their crude humour ...; and finally, toward morning, when people are really about to drop off, the great wars begin, waking people with their great clatter and vigorous dramatics.¹⁰²

Again, the reasons why *dalang* such as Ki Anom Suroto and the late Ki Nartosabdho

¹⁰² The well-known Javanese anthropologist, Koentjaraningrat (1985:292), who admits to not liking *wayang kulit* performances, has a similarly jaundiced view.

are so popular are:

the songs, the tunes, the persiflages, the humorous allusions to problems of every-day or to political issues, the jokes, the erotic scenes and the clever manipulation of the puppets, especially in the fighting scenes (Ras 1976:74).

These popular elements come together during the comic interlude when audience attention and participation is greatest. In general, as established below, intermittent audience attention reflects differences between the tastes and interests of the few elite and the *wong cilik* majority in the audience.

According to Keeler the *wayang* performance has built-in conventions, most appreciated by the 'educated' *wayang* lover, that allow the audience to distance itself. Bourdieu (Mercer 1986:59) typifies bourgeois audience response to entertainment as that which uses ritual to create distance from the performance: by clapping or calling 'encore'. During the formal palace scenes there is a heavy use of archaic Javanese (*kawi*) as aesthetic superlatives rather than as words for adding nuance or clarification. Keeler (1987:231) says, 'I believe the pleasure of *kawi* lies in large measure there: it inserts a kind of pause, a split second delay between sound and sense, which is found pleasurable'.

From my observations of *wayang* performances only a few *wayang* virtuosos are drawn to the beauty of the court scene's aesthetic elaborations. However, the majority of subordinate class audiences are disinterested, either chatting, walking around and eating snacks, or turning up later in the performance as the action heats up.

By contrast, Bourdieu infers the relationship between performers and audience is more intimate during popular entertainment (Mercer 1986:59). During a 'footy' match, for instance, the spectators shout and laugh at the players and referees, fight between themselves, and run onto the oval. Similarly, there is heightened audience involvement during *wayang*'s comic interlude with uncharacteristic raucous laughter, heckling and asides.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ The intensity of audience involvement during the comic interlude was extreme at one of the (continued...)

The intension in using Bourdieu's examples of contrasting bourgeois and popular aesthetics is not to ascribe to the reductionist concept that elite and popular cultural traditions are pure entities mutually exclusive and in opposition with each other. It is also a totalising distortion to set up a polarity between a detached cerebral aesthetics of the elite and a participatory, bodily aesthetics of the popular. Rather, the examples assert the existence also of cultural traditions in the performance that promote the perspective and agency of an audience composed mainly of the subordinate classes.

An examination of audience participation in local performances shows *wayang kulit* is essentially popular culture, not high art. The locus of the *wayang kulit* performance is the comic interlude. It is a site that allows for the participation of the subordinate classes in cultural production. Subordinate class cultural expression, exemplified in the comic interlude, is to a certain extent distinguishable from, and resistant to, cultural traditions imposed from above and exemplified in the formal elements of the performance. However, populist traditions also permeate the formal story structure and dominant ideologies also imbue populist traditions and are identifiable in the comic interlude.

3. *Wayang as Entertainment*

Most conventional understandings of *wayang kulit* stress its communicative and ritual functions. It is commendable that Keeler has drawn attention to the meaningfulness of simple entertainment and the politics of pleasure in *wayang kulit* performances. As asserted in Bourdieu's (1977) work on exchange and reciprocity, and Mercer's (1986) on British daily tabloids, meaning cannot be reduced to lineal communication. There is play on held assumptions, such as those concerning personal status. There is also an ambiguity of intentions in and through communication functions and formal text

(...continued)

regular performances held at the home of Anom Suroto in 1986. An eccentric ex-*wayang wong* performer stood up and pretended to be one of the *Punakawan* clown servants on the screen, stealing the show and mocking the *dalang's* skills as the audience erupted in fits of laughter. Things got wilder as the *dalang* retaliated with insults directed at the audience member through the clown puppet, Petruk.

that are political and inform the true meaningfulness of the performance for the audience. However, the shifting significance of the different entertainment, communication and ritual aspects of *wayang kulit* performances is best understood by focusing on function and meaning according to the audience and occasion, not idealised conventions and cultural norms.

Typically, 'traditional' *wayang kulit* performances in local societies are part of rites of passage (weddings and circumcisions) and purification or exorcisms ritual celebrations. A. L. Becker says in such occasions the audiences are two: the 'essential audience' or supernatural beings and the 'nonessential audience' or human spectators (1979:233-4). Accordingly, Becker divides *wayang*'s functions into two broad categories: 'to exorcise danger and potential danger' and 'to contextualise the present into the past' in order to educate and entertain (1979:233).

Although emphasising the significance of audience and occasion, like Keeler, Becker's theoretical perspective hinges on an essentialist cultural approach that inadequately accounts for change in social contexts, both temporal and spatial. An underlying assumption is that *wayang*'s essence is ritual, which informs the balanced requirements of 'essential' and 'nonessential' audiences. The result is a pluralist account of the functions of education/communication, ritual and entertainment. However, function and meaning are informed by audience and occasion only as they are shaped by the specific dynamic of the social relations in which the performance is embedded. Although all these elements are apparent in *wayang* performances, rarely would there be equilibrium or complementarity between ritual, communication and entertainment. This was spectacularly demonstrated in a 1986 performance I observed in Dawung, a kampung in southern Solo.

The occasion for the performance was an exorcism ceremony for a child who was born on an inauspicious day making him vulnerable to marauding spirits. I sat with invited guests on the shadow side of the screen to watch one of Indonesia's most popular *dalang*, Anom Suroto, perform the *lakon* 'Lahire Gatotkoco' (Gatotkoco's Birth) which is often used in exorcism performances.¹⁰⁴ However, the ritual

¹⁰⁴ Sri Mulyono (1983) lists sixty possible calamities or misfortunes for which a village or
(continued...)

significance of the performance was swallowed up by lively entertainment. The number of invited guests quickly thinned and were replaced by throngs of uninvited spectators crammed thirty rows deep on the *dalang*'s side of the screen. It was clear they arrived to enjoy the skilful battle scenes and hilarious slap stick comedy for which the *dalang* is renowned. The distinctness of the puppet shadows cast from the *dalang*'s lamp faded under the brightness of powerful spotlights used for a video recording of the performance. This would have made it more difficult for the small minority of audience on the shadow side of the screen to immerse themselves in the world of the supernatural. As the *Punakawan* clowns took to the stage the crowd on the other side of the screen howled with laughter. The clowns sang popular songs from *ludruk* theatre, promoted the success of local government development projects and, ironically perhaps, discussed the richness of Javanese culture that must be preserved.

Peacock (1968) and McVey (1986) portray the coexistence of ritual, communication and entertainment in contemporary performance as a transitory tension. With the process of modernisation *wayang*'s pre-existing ritual function is being displaced by a tendency towards secular entertainment. As discussed in Chapter Five, this is part of an overall trend towards the commodification of cultural practices. Nevertheless, the specific social context, including regional variations, the occasion for the performance, differences in cultural traditions, social relations and issues, also influence the prominence of one element over another. As a general rule, however, I believe the majority of *wong cilik* audiences, both past and present, have been attracted to local *wayang* performances primarily as a source of entertainment and that *wayang*'s communicative and ritual aspects are of secondary significance.

We have seen that conventional analysis stresses *wayang*'s meaningfulness in what it communicates to the audience through its formal form and content. As the formal content and form of *wayang* promotes and symbolises an elite Javanese world view it is logical to conclude that *wayang* primarily reinforces and imposes this elite

(...continued)

individual exorcism should be performed. 'Lahir Gatotkoco' tells of the birth of Wrekudoro's son, who as a baby ogre must be exorcised in order to become normal and grow into the brave *ksatria* warrior, Gatotkoco.

view of social and moral order on the mainly subordinate class audience. In this understanding, the meaningfulness of the performance is linked to the sponsor's purpose in holding the performance. The sponsor's interests, individual or corporate, may be to reinforce status and prestige, increase popularity and visibility, or promote and reinforce state ideology and policies or commercial interests. Typically, the sponsor is someone from the dominant classes, state representative, commercial institution, village head or wealthy peasant, capable of affording the high cost of procuring a *wayang* performance. It seems logical, therefore, that it will be the interests or ideological perspective of the sponsor that will be communicated, reinforced and imposed on the audience.

However, there is alternative evidence that the meaningfulness of the *wayang* performance, not only recently, but since its ancient origins, has been not as a means of communication, but as entertainment associated with ritual. We have already noted *wayang*'s ancient origins within peasant traditions of itinerant dance-clown troupes associated with fertility rites. An inscription of Jaha, issued by King Lokapala in 840 AD also suggests that:

The *wayang* performances were meant as entertainment and formed part of festivities which also involved dancing, singing, cock-fighting, eating and drinking. These festivities also had a definite ritual aspect (Ras 1976:54).

However, in contrast to Becker suggesting that ritual is central to the dynamics of *wayang* performances, Ras asserts that ritual is associated with *wayang* at a more removed level. It is not the genre *wayang* that is essential in community ritual celebrations such as weddings and circumcisions. Rather, it is its entertainment function, creating a *rame* or lively atmosphere, that is sought after as part of ritual celebrations (Ras 1976:74):

A feast [*slametan*], in order to be a success, should be *rame*, ie. "breathing an animated, exciting, and rather noisy atmosphere". There should be a lot of people around amusing themselves.

Because *wayang*'s association with ritual is primarily through its entertainment

function, there are a number of other alternative cultural performances that can fill the entertainment function of *wayang* on ritual occasions. In the short term this can be seen during a downturn in the economy where cheaper alternatives to the relatively high cost of sponsoring a *wayang* performance are found. In the long term the pressures of modernisation and urbanisation have also seen an increasing demand for more convenient and financially accessible forms of entertainment *vis-à-vis* the *wayang* performance.

A balance, however, must be found between seeing contemporary alternatives to *wayang kulit* as coexisting or competing with *wayang* performances. Scholars, such as Peacock (1968) researching in Surabaya and Hatley (1982) researching in Yogyakarta, have noted the current popularity of *ludruk* and *kethoprak* amongst the *wong cilik vis-à-vis wayang kulit* performances. They assert this is indicative of the irrelevance of an elitist archaic religious art with more modern socially relevant and potentially democratic forms of secular entertainment. This, however, neglects to account for regional variation. In the traditionally strong urban Muslim communities of Surabaya *wayang* has never been popular (Koentjaraningrat 1985:212). In urban Yogyakarta it appears true that *kethoprak* is more popular than *wayang*. However, in Solo a variant of *wayang*, considered more entertaining than its more rigid counterpart in Yogyakarta, remains popular.

From my observations around Tegal, preferences for one genre of popular theatre or the other are as localised as individual villages or *kampung*s. Furthermore, scholarly records demonstrate that alternatives to *wayang*, such as *tayuban* dance, were acceptable at least as far back as the beginning of the twentieth century (Ras 1982:23). Again from my observations in various areas, such as Tegal, Central Java and Samarata, East Java, the performers in different genres of popular theatre, such as *wayang*, *ledek*, *dangdut*, *kethoprak*, and *reog* (Samarata) coexist in cooperation, as much as compete, with each other. Performers, with multiple skills such as musicians, actors, singers, clowns, *dalang*, dancers and acrobats, as well as those involved in stage management, and equipment, are shared across genres according to the requirements of the occasion for the performance. Though with the globalisation of culture, such as in the expansion of television, there are fears of a broad trend in the displacement of people's theatre in general, we must be cautious

in making blanket assumptions about the ascendancy of one genre over another.

The ease in which alternative forms of entertainment can substitute *wayang* performances in local celebrations is not conclusive evidence of *wayang*'s growing irrelevance or imminent demise. Rather, it demonstrates that entertainment, particularly of an erotic and comical nature, not elitist ideological conventions, programmatic messages and rigid ritual requirement, is central to an understanding of the social function and meaningfulness of local *wayang kulit* performances.

Furthermore, the significance of this erotic comedy has potential to go beyond representing or articulating alternate or subordinate class traditions to functioning as a catalyst for social change from such perspectives. From a perspective akin to Turner's (1985:238-9) work on liminality and clowns in Indian theatre, GoldbergBelle (1989:118) comments on the almost universal centrality of clowns in dramatic performances. The clowns have an intimacy with the audience and surrounding social context that allows them to be 'agents' 'ushering in' a change to the status quo:

While they [the clowns] are entertaining they are not present merely for entertainment, for through their actions they have a powerful impact on the overall performance. On the one hand there is a 'real world' quality in their characterisations that provides the audience immediate access to the performance and highlights the ideal characterizations of the ideal epic figures. On the other hand, clowns often present a set of contradictory images and values and as such are more than inverse representations of the ideal epic figures. Where performances are associated with a change in the status quo (marriage, puberty, rain, harvest), it is the clowns through their contradictory nature and behaviour, who usher in this change, relegating the epic characters to the role of entertainers [emphasis added].

From GoldbergBelle we can infer that within erotic comedy is a complementarity and continuity, not opposition, between ritual and entertainment. However, in ushering in change the significance of the performance can extend further than reference to the individual, environmental and supernatural played out in local rites. As following chapters demonstrates, the clowns can also 'corrupt' or displace established meanings with those commensurate with *wong cilik* perceptions and experiences of social change and crisis.

Conclusion

Keeler points correctly to the centrality of entertainment in the *wayang* performance and the intimate relationship between performance and audience as inseparable from socio-political life. However, audience-performance relations, as with social life in general, are not a cultural constant. Rather, the *wayang* performance is a creative agent within specific social relations that continue to change.

Audience-performance relations are the dynamic heart of many local *wayang* performances. In turn, the comic interlude, which attracts greatest audience attention/participation, not the formal *lakon*, is at the centre of audience-performance relations. The major patrons of the local *wayang* performance are the *wong cilik*, not the state or elite sponsor. The *wong cilik* are the majority within the audience with whom the local *dalang* shares greatest affinity and obligation. Therefore, the social significance of the *wayang* performance should be couched in terms of its meaningfulness to the *wong cilik* in the audience and local society. As specific examples in the following chapters highlight, the comic interlude as the focal source of entertainment and in articulating the sentiment of the *wong cilik* is central, not peripheral, to an understanding of the social significance of *wayang* performances.¹⁰⁵

There needs to be a shift in the focus and method of analysis away from analysing what Geertz (1960:277) calls the 'idealistic view of life', informing *wayang*'s formal conventions and content. Such a focus over emphasises the imposition of dominant ideologies and reinforces an illusionary status quo. Instead, analysis must directly address that which Geertz says (1960:227) 'represents the realistic view of life as opposed to the idealistic'. There should be more serious consideration of the comic interlude and other informal aspects of the performance which allow for audience participation and engage with issues of contradiction and change in social life.

¹⁰⁵ Despite the obvious significance of the clown servants, their impact on the performance and relationship with the audience, they have received scant scholarly attention, except that which trivialises their role. GoldenbergBelle (1989:120,134) has a similar complaint about the clown figures in the *Tolubommalata* shadow theatre of Southern India.

Chapter Ten: *Wong Cilik* Control Over Production and Meaning In *Wayang*

This chapter illustrates the potential for *wong cilik* to control production and meaning in *wayang* performance. First, we take a closer look at the comic interlude as a space for social criticism and dialogue with the *wong cilik* audience. Through the comic interlude, it is possible for the *wong cilik* to control the meaningfulness of the entire performance. Second, we observe a *wayang* performance arranged by pedicab drivers in the southern outskirts of Jakarta. By controlling the entire production process, the pedicab drivers are able to utilise the *wayang* performance as an instrument of solidarity and protest against oppression. These examples dispel any generalised perception of *wayang*'s social significance that portrays the *wong cilik* as passive in their representation and participation in an elitist, archaic, court centred or traditional art form.

1. *The Centrality of the Comic Interlude and Wong Cilik Audience*

The Popular Orientation of the Comic Interlude and Clown Servants
Ras's historiography substantiates the perspective that the *wayang* performance is a dynamic, ever evolving, cultural field of contestation between dominant and subordinate or alternant traditions. *Wayang* is not a static, unified, one way cultural process of domination and subordination. Over the centuries, the comic interlude has evolved as the nexus for cultural contestation in the *wayang* performance. The comic interlude allows the *dalang* to draw away from the dominant social constraints represented in the formal lakon. The clown servants have the authority and freedom to bridge the gap between the impossible ideals of the formal performance and the lived reality of the audience. This is symbolised in the ambiguous character of the main clown servant, Semar, as both revered, wise god and lowliest, most perverse of human beings.¹⁰⁶ The comic interlude is a space where the *wayang* performance is

¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the clown figures in the *Tolubommalata* shadow theatre of Southern India are
(continued...)

most engaged with its audience in a 'dialogue' concerning their lived reality. This dialogue through the medium of humorous, erotic and light-hearted entertainment may be direct reference to local issues and concerns or as generalised expression of popular tastes and feelings.

The comic interlude is separate from, and has no great bearing on, developments in the formal plot of the performance (Ras 1978). The clown servants are the central protagonists in the comic interlude. Other characters such as the *ksatria* warriors and ogres also appear. However, their role is primarily as a foil for the clown servants' antics. There are three groups of clown servants who most commonly appear in *wayang* performances. Their formal role is as loyal servants to their respective masters/mistresses. According to conventional indigenous understandings, their main function is to provide humorous light relief to the serious events and heavy meanings of the formal story.

A short comic interlude featuring the female retainers to queen Banowati of the Kurawas appears relatively early on in the performance. Cangik is an old shrivelled maidservant with a shrill voice. Despite her ugly appearance, she is vain and flirtatious, as symbolised by the puppet holding a comb. Cangik's daughter, Limbuk, is fat and strong with an ungainly gait and loud masculine voice. Like her mother, Limbuk is vain and coy, always fussing about her make up. The comical dynamics between Cangik and Limbuk inevitably centre on the prospects of finding a suitor for Limbuk (Anderson 1965:44; Hardjowirigo 1982:332-3; Ras 1976).

The second group of clowns are servants to the ogre kings and warriors from far off lands. The main ogre clowns are Togog and Sarawita. Semar acknowledges Togog as his older brother. Togog is a knowledgeable guide whose advice, to the detriment of his ogre masters, is often not heeded. Togog is considered disloyal, often switching masters. He has a loud guttural voice, large round eyes, snub nose and

(...continued)

central to the performance and have the power to engage the audience and inform the performance with alternative images and values. Their 'unstable' or 'contradictory' character, as well as the separation of their skits from the epic narrative, yet ability to enter the formal narrative at will, equips them to 'cross' or 'dissolve' boundaries between the performance, the puppeteer, and the audience (GoldbergBelle 1989:119). Hobart (1983a:168) also says the ambiguous nature of the clown servants in Balinese *wayang* allows them to 'enrich meaning or call attention to other levels of existence'.

gaping mouth with no teeth (Anderson 1965:42; Hardjowirigo 1982:301-2; Suwandono, et al n.d.:455). Sarawita, Togog's friend, is conceited but cries easily when teased or beaten by Petruk and Gareng. Sarawita has large eyes, snub nose and open mouth (Hardjowirigo 1982:301)

According to Ras (1978) the appearance of these two groups of clowns, the Kurawa maid servants and the ogres' clown servants, is rather brief and in general their humour pedestrian. As discussed later, however, the Cangik-Limbuk comic interlude can also facilitate expression of popular or alternate traditions. The ogres and their clown servants can appear anytime during the performance, but are usually the reason behind the *gara-gara* or great disturbance that precipitates the most significant comic interlude (*adegan Punakawan*).

The main comic interlude is the first scene of the second act of the all night *wayang* performances. It usually commences shortly after midnight and lasts for an hour or so. Typically, a Pandawa knight with his clown servants, Semar and sons, bump across an ogre and clown servants whilst walking through an inhospitable forest. Although all the clowns in the *wayang* can be referred to as *Punakawan* (attendants) it is usually used as reference for the principal clown servants of the Pandawa *ksatria*. The *Punakawan*, Semar, and his adopted sons, Petruk and Gareng or Nalagareng, appear in all *wayang* performances. Depending on the region within Java and the personal preferences of the *dalang*, a third adopted son, Bagong, may also appear. The general characteristics of the clown servants reveal how they attract and engage the *wayang* audience.

Dalang, recalling Semar's grotesque appearance and vulgar mannerisms, frequently refer to him as 'nearly lovable' (Ras 1982). However, as Anderson's observations demonstrate, Semar is the most well loved character in the *wayang* performances (1965:23):

Anyone who has witnessed a Javanese shadow play will recall the wave of deep affection and respect which flows out of the audience towards Semar when he appears.

A complete thesis could be devoted to an analysis of Semar alone. Sri Mulyono has

written such a book, entitled *Apa dan Siapa Semar* (1982a). There are both noble and more ignominious versions on how Semar was sent from heaven to become the head clown servant of the Pandawa *ksatria* heroes and future Javanese kings. Though deviating significantly from the 'original' texts of Kitab Manik Maya, Kanda and Pramayogya, I prefer the humorous, more recent *wayang* version of Semar's origins told by Ki Waluya (1977). This version, cited by Sri Mulyono (1982a:51-7), befits Semar's humble, childish character, which contrasts with his godly heritage.

Before the earth was occupied by creatures an egg appeared, resulting from a union between the god Sang Hyang Tunggal (the son of Sang Hyang Wenang) and a spirit wife Dewi Rekatawati. From the three parts of the egg three beings developed: from the eggshell appeared Tejamantri, who later became the ogre clown servant Togog; Ismaya, who later became Semar, came from the egg white; and Manikmaya, now the god Batara Guru, from the yolk. In time, the three squabbled unceasingly over who would inherit power over the heavens and earth. To settle the matter Manikmaya suggested that the right would go to whoever could swallow a mountain. Tejamantri was unable to swallow the mountain, tearing his mouth in the process, and hence Togog's large protruding beak. On his turn Ismaya managed to swallow the mountain, but could not pass it out, thus forming the large belly and posterior of Semar. Like the *gara-gara* in the *wayang*, the incident caused great disturbances in the heavens. To resolve the situation, Sang Hyang Wenang gave Manikmaya or Batara Guru control of heaven and earth whilst Tejamantri and Ismaya were banished to earth in the forms of Togog and Semar. The earth was then filled with the descendants of Manikmaya. Semar and Togog were commissioned to be their guides and protectors and maintain peace on earth. The difference in character between Semar and Togog, and hence the difference in their positions as clown servants to the Pandawas and ogres respectively, is symbolised in which part of the egg they were formed. Togog incarnated from eggshell symbolises a superficial materialistic life without substance, interested only in desires of the flesh. By contrast, Semar coming from egg white is holy and full of wisdom and honesty. Though he is simple, he pursues justice and truth.

Semar, from *samar*, means hidden or disguised. Semar's appearance and

character is amorphous and ambiguous. Physically he is androgynous, looking both male or female, yet Sri Mulyono makes a point of asserting that he is not a transvestite (1982a:58). Semar's characteristics epitomise everything that is considered gross or ugly and inferior in the physical traits and behaviour of humankind. He is stumpy, pot bellied, and off balanced by a fat posterior. He has watery eyes and a hooked nose, he farts a lot (though this is one of his chief weapons against his adversaries), his speech is coarse, and his behaviour is childish (easily bursting into tears). He is constantly the butt of his children's pranks, and as humble bumbling servant, represents a counterpoint to his noble refined master the *ksatria* warrior (Geertz 1960:275-7; Hardjowirogo 1982:224-6; Sri Mulyono 1982a:66-7).

Through meditation, Semar acquired three sons to accompany him, all of whom are similarly grotesque in physical appearance and mannerisms, but with even fewer moral scruples. Nalagareng, Semar's first son, is dwarf like with disjointed arms and crooked leg. He is cross-eyed with bulbous nose and protruding stomach. Everything he says is wrong, though not admitting to it (Hardjowirogo 1982:224). According to Anderson, 'he specialises in puns and sly insinuations rather than in slap stick' (1965:43). Semar's second son, Petruk, also deformed with long limbs, elongated nose, wide mouth and crossed eyes, is, with his attractive smile and clever wit, far more socially adept than Gareng. The target of his wit are often girls in the audience (Hardjowirogo 1982::228-9) or the *pesindhen* singers who he flirts with until provoking their embarrassed response. In addition, Anderson (1965:43) says, 'his special delights (and those of his audience) are practical jokes and comic horseplay. But when called upon in need he is a redoubtable (because totally unscrupulous) fighter'. Bagong, the youngest son, was born out of Semar's shadow and thus shares a similar appearance, but with bald head and small flat nose (Anderson 1965:44; Hardjowirogo 1982:230). He tends to interrupt whilst others are speaking, blurting out a 'stupid childish babble' (Ras 1978). According to Anderson (1965:43) 'His peculiar characteristics are an immensely deep slow voice and impenetrable stupidity, usually taking the form of persistent misunderstanding of what his master or his fellow *Punakawan* have to say'.

There is great ambiguity in Semar's social position and status. As the servant

of the Pandawa, Semar is 'the lowliest of the low, upon whom the Pandawas look, as one Javanese writer puts it, as they look upon the bottoms of their feet' (Geertz 1960:276). Yet, paradoxically, Semar is considered the most important *wayang* figure and father or original ancestor of the Javanese people. If he wished Semar could rule (or destroy) the universe, but he chooses to serve humankind instead (Sri Mulyono 1982a:60-4). Characteristic of his status as the most powerful god is that he speaks only *ngoko* or low Javanese to the other gods. When Semar is angered it becomes apparent that all the gods in heaven are of no match and are lower than the soles of his feet (Hardjowirogo 1982:224). Though often the target of the malevolent and meddling whim of Batara Guru, it's usually only Semar who can ultimately curb his devastating abuse of power. When the world is in chaos, and the brave *ksatria* warriors and wise hermit priests are helpless in the face of evil-minded gods and demons, only Semar's magical power and spiritual wisdom can restore peace and order. According to Sri Mulyono, Semar and his sons, although acting as the *ksatria*'s humble servants, overcome the *ksatria*'s weaknesses. They give advice when the *ksatria* is confused or in difficulty; save him from danger; calm his anger or emotions that would otherwise distract or endanger his objectives; keep him company if lonely or sad; and heal him if sick (Sri Mulyono 1982a:116).

Depending on the social context of the performance, the ambiguous even contradictory nature of the *Punakawan* clown servants, in particular Semar, can express different intensities of criticism or opposition towards dominant interests. Semar can stand for and ensure the balance of the cosmos. He keeps the *ksatria* even tempered and foils meddling gods. Being undefinable in feature, neither man nor woman, both a god and lowly peasant, he symbolises godly values yet represents the earthly needs and rights of the people (Sri Mulyono 1982a:117-9). Following this, he can also represent the gap between the ideals of the social elite and expectations of the *wong cilik*: 'a criticism of gentry values in terms of the more earthy sense of life of the villagers' (Geertz 1960:277).

At first it seems paradoxical that Semar is highest, most powerful of gods, and lowliest of humankind. However, the paradox is resolved in Semar representing the ordinary folk who as a collective mass can decide the fate of a ruling power (Stange

1977:116). This is provocative, potentially explosive, symbolism. The idea that Semar in his angry state as Triwikrama represents the masses that can overthrow a repressive regime is seldom referred to in books. A remarkable exception is the brief citation by Sri Mulyono (1982:38) of A book by A. W. Sarjana entitled *Ismaya Triwikrama*. The book was written in 1965 during a period of mass mobilisation and turmoil. It bluntly asserts:

Ismaya is Semar and Semar is the People. The meaning of Triwikrama is anger. So in other words Ismaya Triwikrama can be defined as the People's Anger [my translation] (Sarjana 1965:6).

Symbolically, Semar is the major character in the main comic interlude. The traits and functions of the clown servants are epitomised in Semar. Nevertheless, Semar's adopted sons, Nalagareng, Petruk and sometimes Bagong, are essential parts in the dynamics between the *Punakawan* and audience/social context. As is the case with latter examples, Semar's more irreverent and mischievous sons, in particular Petruk, seem more frequently used as vessels of outspoken criticism.

The Comic Interlude as a Space for Social Criticism and Popular Discourse

Ras's premise is that *wayang* originated as a peasant based tradition in which the antecedent of the comic interlude was central. The central Javanese kingdoms refined *wayang*'s formal conventions. They also appropriated the comic interlude, reducing it to light comic relief, as an anti climax or respite from the heavy events of the formal performance (Ras 1978). However, even the Javanese courts may have utilised *wayang*'s characteristic of *pasemon* or allusion for cultural resistance. Ras postulates that the courts adapted informal space within the performance as covert criticism of increasing Dutch political intervention.

It is not impossible that the standard scene shortly after midnight in which these demon figures usually enter (to be defeated by Arjuna), a scene which has little if any bearing on the real plot of the play, was introduced in the course of the seventeenth century (Ras 1976:67).

Ras (1976:67) surmises that the creation of special demon characters or *buto* by successive kings in the seventeenth century were meant as caricatures of Dutch ambassadors to the royal courts. Taking advantage of the limited understanding by the Dutch of Javanese language, the *buto* lampooned the barbarian cultural mannerisms of the Dutch whose kingdom, like that of the *buto*, lies across the ocean. A scene favoured for most contemporary *wayang* performances is Arjuna slaying one of these *buto*, Cakil or hook tooth, during the *perang kembang* (flower battle).

The *wayang* performance slips from the formal lakon into the informal comic interlude after a *ksatria* knight and his clown servants invariably stumble across menacing *buto* whilst traversing an inhospitable forest. The clown servants of the Pandawa *ksatria* have great fun mocking the stupid, arrogant or clumsy *buto* before the *buto* are slain at the end of the comic interlude. During and between these events there is great freedom for the clown servants to engage the audience in informal and improvised entertainment that alludes to the contemporary interests and concerns of the audience.

Clara van Groenendael's transcripts, which include audience response, show the contestation between dominant and subordinate class interests, usually aligned with the formal and informal moments in *wayang* performances. Her observations of the close affinity between audience and *dalang* clearly rebut the premise that formal elements of the performance, which mainly present elite views, have a dominant bearing over the performance and audience reception. On the contrary, in a 1977 performance associated with a circumcision ceremony at Bulu, Wonogiri (see map) the largely *wong cilik* audience controlled the essential meaningfulness of the entire performance.

A vital factor here was the position and attitude of the *dalang* giving the performance. Sutayat, a local *dalang* teacher and a farmer from the region was intimately aware of the feelings and difficult circumstances facing the local *wong cilik*. As a popular village *dalang* performing mainly around the region, he explicitly saw his role as '*ngladosi masyarakat*' or 'to serve the people' (Clara van Groenendael 1985:195)

The villagers of Bulu were facing imminent transmigration to West Sumatra

in order to clear the catchment area for a large hydroelectric dam. As such, the village was in a state of unrest and the people were feeling vulnerable and apprehensive about a future that was out of their control. They did not want to leave the land of their ancestors. The village head, along with neighbouring village heads, had just returned from investigating the site where the villagers were to be transmigrated. Feeling responsible for calming the villagers and allaying their concerns, the village head wished to obtain the assistance of the *dalang*. The village head acting on behalf of the sponsor of the performance, asked the *dalang*, Sutayat, to help ease the villagers' unease by mentioning the better conditions in store for them in Sumatra. The *dalang*, just nodded in apparent acquiescence (Clara van Groenendael 1985:189).

In a brief scene squeezed into the formal events of the *lakon* the *dalang* did appear to comply with the headman's request. This was a scene where soldiers were escorting the king on a long journey to claim his new bride from another kingdom. As they left their village some soldiers discuss with pride the beauty and prosperity of their region, but also remark that soon they must move to another area. The soldiers then related the official, or king's, explanation for the move:

Well, the reason is so all the subjects will live in peace, prosperity and happiness and will not be short of clothing and food ... there is no country on earth that would want to bring disaster on its subjects just for no reason at all (Clara van Groenendael 1985:192)

Because the *dalang* had chosen solid characters who, like the clown figures, can represent ordinary persons, the *dalang* was able to engage his audience in dialogue. The intended reassurance with promises of bountiful food was augmented with the remark, from a spectator 'rice each day', in an ironic, unconvinced tone (Clara van Groenendael 1985:192). The formal message was further corrupted by the soldiers' empathy with the audience's attachment to their village:

[T]he wistful remark at the beginning of the fragment, where one of the soldiers mentions his joy each time he enters the area. [and] The tone of regret was even clearer at the end, however, in the exclamation 'there is no place I love so much, do you know! (Clara van Groenendael 1985:193).

The *dalang*'s allusions to the fear and resigned acceptance or impotence felt by the village community were even more poignant during the comic interlude. Here, Petruk comments on the poor person's constant disillusionment with life's struggle as again and again '[a] person tries to win and then turns out to have lost' (Clara van Groenendael 1985:194). Clara van Groenendael then records one spectator's response to Petruk's sombre monologue: 'He is right, Petruk is right ..., *Pak dalang* [Mr puppeteer] is like one of us. He is very clever and has intuited our situation exceptionally well'. She adds, 'Those people sitting nearby who had overheard this last remark nodded in agreement' (1985:194).

Unconvinced by the official rhetoric, the villagers articulate through dialogue with Petruk their acute awareness of, and dissatisfaction with, the unhappy situation that has been forced upon them. This awareness is difficult to reconcile with Keeler's clown servants who symbolise a blissful ignorance of social responsibilities willingly traded off for no social status and dependency on, and control by, others. As GoldbergBelle (1989:138) declares: 'Ultimately, they [the clowns in affinity with the audience] determine the overall message and impact of the performance'. This is achieved through the freedom of dialogue between clowns, puppeteer and audience on equal status introducing 'a consciousness of the production into the performance as the puppeteers and the audience, are, in a sense, brought onto the screen' (GoldbergBelle 1989:138).

Zurbuchen's (1987:250) accounts of Balinese shadow theatre (*wayang parwa*) also points to the comic interlude (*panasar*) as space for oppositional sentiment. She recounts a *wayang parwa* performance just prior to the 1977 Indonesian elections in which the government party, GOLKAR, would inevitably win. In the *lakon* the clown servants commented that winning or losing was irrelevant when transcended by the victory of an enlightened soul. According to Zurbuchen this was a political statement reconciling that even though the village backed opposition party would lose the election this cannot affect the righteous autonomy of the individual's spirit (1987:250).

Wayang's formal conventions and informal comic interludes are not the exclusive domains of dominant and subordinate traditions respectively. Dominant-

subordinate contestation can be within as well as between formal and informal elements in the performances. Those within the ruling bloc, who usually sponsor the *wayang* performance, often attempt with questionable success to utilise the comic interlude in communicating their interests and values.

Clara van Groenendael (1985:179-88) documents a performance at Blimbing, Wonogiri, held as part of a wedding celebration for the daughter of a 'relatively prosperous farmer'. During the minor comic interlude featuring Limbuk and Cangik familiar popular traditions have greater efficacy than imposed values and notions alluding to government policies.

Again, the social position of the *dalang* is an important factor. Sutina Hardakacarita mainly performs around the area he resides, and, like his mainly subordinate class audience, is a small farmer, with little formal education. He acquired his skills and knowledge as a *dalang* through watching the performances of other *dalang*, and also through listening to *wayang* performances broadcast on radio. Clara van Groenendael says that his 'popularity was based largely on direct contact with his audiences, made up for a large part by the inhabitants of his own region' (1985:179).

The purpose of the comic interlude was at the sponsor's request to enlighten the villagers on government endorsed family planning principles (Clara van Groenendael 1985:180). The scene first begins with Limbuk resisting her mother Cangik's desire for grandchildren. Limbuk espouses the material benefits of planning her education, career and family so as not to exceed the family's (and nation's) resources, necessary to ensure a happy and stable future (Clara van Groenendael 1985:182). According to Clara van Groenendael's observations of the audience and discussions with the *dalang*, this part of the scene was done out of obligation, in a 'businesslike fashion'. In parallel with the *dalang*'s lack of feeling and commitment the audience was indifferent. Their attention waned as they began to chat, wander around, eat, and sip tea (Clara van Groenendael, 1985:183-5).

In the second part of the scene the *dalang* relaxes, having fulfilled his obligation to the sponsor, and plays on the familiar antics of Limbuk and Cangik. The roles of authority of knowledge are reversed and now Limbuk eagerly assists her

mother to interpret the meaning of her daughter's dream as a sign that her long awaited suitor is imminent. The audience is also 'riveted' to the stage and laugh sporadically as vain and ungainly Cangik and Limbuk optimistically assess the prospect of Limbuk obtaining a suitor (Clara van Groenendael 1985:185). Here, popular traditions that entertain existing prejudices and preconceptions of the predominantly male rural audiences hold sway. This is a reminder that in providing 'democratic' space for popular sentiment, the comic interlude does not necessarily guarantee the 'democratic' nature of that sentiment.

The comic interlude might be peppered with jokes incorporating the sponsor's business, or include sub-themes on family planning and developmentalist messages. Messages of morality, policies and propaganda imposed on the audience are most likely to be met with unresponsive indifference or cynicism.¹⁰⁷ In order to receive any positive response from the audience the content of the messages needs to be watered down or compromised to fit the lived experience of the audience. In fact, Clara van Groenendael's (1985:195) conclusions are an unequivocal rejection of the *wayang* as an elitist tool of communication and indoctrination thesis:

the *dalang*'s role in society simply cannot be that of a government programme counsellor unless these programmes have already been accepted by the people, as this role consists precisely in articulating the thoughts and feelings of his audience.

Specific examples of local *wayang* performances hark back to Ras's general principle that *wayang*'s continued social relevance relies on its fundamental characteristic of *pasemon* or allusion. *Wayang* cannot impose a set content on, but must adapt itself to, the society in which it is embedded. Ras, discusses the failure of *wayang madya* to become popular outside the 19th century Mangkunagaran court. *Wayang madya* was created in order to bolster the court's legitimacy through linking its genealogy with the grandson, Parikesit, of the Pandawa heroes in the Mahabharata.

¹⁰⁷ A. L. Becker (1979), Hatley (1984) and GoldbergBelle (1989:135) also comment on the counter-productivity on audience attention of imposing messages.

Apparently it is easier to incorporate 'wayang story' into 'Javanese history' than to incorporate Javanese history – even if it is only fictitious or legendary – into the generally accepted wayang repertoire (Ras 1976:69).

The same rule applies to more recent short-lived attempts to impose wayang stories for specific political, ideological and religious agendas. Amongst others, these include the creation in the 1940s of wayang *Pancasila* (for the Ministry of Information for the indoctrination of the state philosophy); wayang *Adam Marifat* (Islamic mysticism) and wayang *wahyu* (Roman Catholic mission) (Ras 1976:73). Such ventures were based on what we have already identified as false assumptions. That is, the conventional premise that the primary function of wayang is as a force for education, edification and straight out indoctrination.

[T]he rather short life of these variant forms that were meant to employ the shadow theatre as a cheap and effective means of persuasion, either education, or political or religious, and the fact that their circulation remained very restricted, both socially and geographically, proves that these qualities are only of secondary importance and should not be mistaken for the life-spring of the wayang art (Ras 1976:73).

Wayang's characteristic of *pasemon* identifies the barriers to the efficacy of imposing messages of ideological and political persuasion that contradict or relate little to the lived experience, attitudes and tastes of the majority local wong cilik audience.

The social context of the performance, not the innate characteristics of the wayang genre, determine the extent of hegemonic control of either dominant or popular traditions in the performance. As shown in Chapter Eight, wayang performance within the confines of the Mangkunagaran palace include a tame comic interlude that reinforces an elitist religio-philosophical ideology. However, its audience is also limited in composition to invited guests, those associated with the courts, government officials and tourists. Students of the Mangkunagaran *Dalang* School are rote taught the main comic interlude with the idealised characteristics of the clown servant. However, when they return to their villages they must acquire the skills of relating the performance to local concerns if they are to be successful as

popular *dalang*.¹⁰⁸ The *dalang*, Sutayat, whose performance articulated the feelings of the Bulu villagers, was himself a student of the Mangkunagaran *Dalang* School (Clara van Groenendael 1985:189).

Clara van Groenendael's empirical evidence supports Ras's (1978) assertions regarding the characteristics of the comic interlude that contrast with the formal *lakon*. The comic interlude works as an outlet of social criticism felt by the ordinary folk, not a tool for the legitimisation and reinforcement of dominant class and state interests.

It is expected from the *dalang* that he dares to criticise what the man in the street considers social wrongs, misuse of power by public servants, police or army, corruption and the like. One expects that the *Punakawan* act as a voice for the little man to make his complaints known and not as a loudspeaker for a paternal officialdom which does not like criticism (Ras 1978).

We have seen how dominant traditions tend to align with formal elements in the *wayang* performance, whilst alternative or subordinate traditions, in contest with dominant traditions, are asserted during informal moments in the performance. However, with the popularisation of *wayang* there is a further blurring in the distinction between elements identifiable as expressing dominant or subordinate cultural traditions. This tendency is symptomatic of the superficial collapse of high and low art in late capitalism. It is most noticeable in the commodification of culture, such as *wayang*, for mass consumption.

As noted in previous chapters, the critique of the adaptation of *wayang* to popular tastes is part of an attempt to control the meaningfulness of *wayang*, to suppress alternative traditions and legitimise dominant interests. Nevertheless, according to Foley's observations of *wayang* performances in Sundanese West Java, the dominant model of *wayang*, espousing feudal behavioural codes of the *ksatria* warriors, is weakening as the Indonesian nation-state transforms under the processes of 'modernisation' (1985:94-5). Foley observes that since the late 1970s subordinate class traditions are finding new expression in populist *wayang* performances that replace the *ksatria* warriors with clown servants as the chief protagonists. The

¹⁰⁸ My conversations with student *dalang* at PDMN in June 1986.

clowns, not the *ksatria* warriors, have become the heroes who ‘are marrying the princesses, winning the contest subduing the foes’ (1985:96). Foley describes other *lakon* where the clowns are falsely accused or willingly sacrificed by the self-centred or shortsighted personal and political ends of the once heroic *ksatria*. In many *lakon*, such as ‘Suryaningrat’,

[n]ot only has Arjuna been replaced as the protagonist, ... he has become the antagonist. The Pandawa should love and care for their loyal people, as represented by the clowns. But, deceived by false counsel, they think the clowns have stolen their heirlooms or seduced their wives. They are ready to sacrifice their people, if need be, to gain some supernatural power or end a plague in the kingdom. They themselves turn on their loyal followers (1985:96).

According to Foley, the ‘democratisation’ of the *wayang* performance mirrors the growing awareness of ordinary people of the social contradictions brought about by rapid social change. With the institutionalised de-politicisation of the masses, the clown servants have become an informal, yet vital, outlet of social criticism and discontent. ‘The myth of the benevolent aristocrat’ ... ‘is questioned’ (1985:96). The clowns criticise corruption, greed and arrogance amongst the ruling bloc in context with their neglect of the well being of the ordinary people. The clowns warn that the ordinary people ultimately determine the legitimacy and power of the rulers (Foley 1985:96-8).

However, as discussed in earlier chapters, what appears as the ‘democratisation’ of cultural practices can disguise underlying relations of cultural production where the dominant interests of state and capital appropriate control and meaning from the *wong cilik*. A superficial blurring between dominant and subordinate cultural traditions in contemporary *wayang kulit* performances means it is vital for analysis to take into account the social context of the performance. We must be wary of populist *wayang* performances, such as those by ki Anom Suroto and ki Manteb Sudarsono, where local nuances of meaning are sacrificed for the commercial and political interests of mass entertainment. This requires assessing the degree to which the *wong cilik* audience relates to, or are part of, the performance.

We must ascertain whether the audience directly participate in, and control, the processes of cultural production, or indirectly participate as consumers or spectators. The issue of populist *wayang* performances is expanded on in Chapter Eleven. Here, the orientation of performances by Ki *dalang* Entus Susmono of Tegal has shifted from a concern for the local *wong cilik* to the objectives of a capitalist enterprise integrated with the political objectives of the New Order state.

In the following section, analysis of a pedicab *wayang* performance in Jakarta reinforces the importance of the local social context in determining the meaningfulness of a performance for the *wong cilik*. Pedicab *wayang* is a further denial of elitist and archaic stereotypes constructed by conventional analysis. It is a rejection of formalist and essentialist assumptions that place greater significance on the dominant meanings embodied in an object or cultural form, such as *wayang*, whilst under playing alternative meanings arising from the social construction of the performance. Pedicab *wayang* also serves as a reminder that *wong cilik* participation and control in *wayang* performances is not necessarily confined to the comic interlude.

2. *Pedicab Wayang*

Pondok Labu is a relatively cool, leafy suburb located on the border of southern Jakarta and the province of West Java. The urban encroachment onto the previously rural landscape has produced a mixture of residents, many of whom are recent migrants. Along the main roads and well-developed sites are the luxurious houses of wealthy people who commute from this cheaper, more hospitable land, on the outskirts of the city. Their private cars increasingly clog a network of narrow roads and lanes unable to cope with the rapid urban expansion. The poorer Betawi residents, the original inhabitants of Jakarta, many of whom have been pushed out of the centre of Jakarta as it develops, are mainly located in the inner kampungs. Within the inner kampungs are also groups of poor seasonal and semi-permanent migrants from rural villages in search of alternative or supplementary income. These rural migrants typically work as food hawkers, minibus conductors and pedicab drivers.

Migrants from the same village or area tend to congregate together. This is the case with 'kampung *becak*' (pedicab neighbourhood) in Pangkalan Jati, Sawangan-Pondok Labu. They have migrated from Purwodadi-Gabogan, a poor, infertile rural area about fifty kilometres north of Solo in Central Java.

The following discussion centres on a *wayang* performance, called *wayang TBC*, put on by these residents in August 1990 in conjunction with Indonesian Independence Day celebrations.¹⁰⁹ The performance received front-page coverage in one of Indonesia's leading national dailies. The title of the article was '*Bila Tukang Becak Berdasi*' or 'When a Pedicab Driver Wears a Tie' (Kompas 1990).¹¹⁰

Solidarity and Protest

The personal details of the *wayang TBC dalang*, Ki Radiyono Purbo Carito (known as Pak Kembu amongst his friends) (Fig. 15), is similar to that of other poor migrant residents.¹¹¹ Radiyono (aged 36 in 1991) is a seasonal migrant to Pangkalan Jati. For part of the year he lives in the district of Toroh, near Purwodadi. There, he farms 0.5 hectares of *sawah* for which he pays an annual rent of rp 800, 000 (A\$ 530.00). Able to irrigate the rice field from a tributary of the Kedung Ombo dam he manages two harvests a year. He averages 2 tons of rice per harvest providing an annual income of rp 1,200,000 (A\$ 800.00). This clears rp 400,000 (A\$ 265.00) per annum, from which is deducted running costs, such as for fertiliser and hiring labourer friends to help work and harvest the rice. The remaining money is not enough to subsist on.

When there is little work to do on the land, Radiyono spends one to one and a half months at a time in Pangkalan Jati, working as a pedicab driver. He goes to

¹⁰⁹ *Wayang TBC* is an abbreviation of *Wayang Tukang Becak* or Pedicab Driver's *Wayang*. The pedicab drivers created the name themselves. *TBC* also has a double meaning as the common abbreviation for tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is an every day reality for the pedicab driver due to unfavourable living and working conditions and, in attacking the pedicab driver's physical health, is a direct threat to his means of livelihood.

¹¹⁰ Subsequent quotes from this article are according to my translations.

¹¹¹ This information is derived from personal discussions with the *dalang*, Radiyono, conducted both in his home village in Central Java and his rental accommodation in Pangkalan Jati in September and October 1991. Many of these details are supported by an article entitled '*Dalang jadi sambilan: Kalau Bagong mbecak, Petruk jadi penumpangya*' ('Puppeteering as a sideline: When Bagong drives the pedicab, Petruk becomes his passenger') in a now defunct popular magazine called *Senang* (1990:6-7).

Jakarta with a group of friends where they rent a small house in 'kampung *becak*'. Five of them share the rent of rp 25,000 (A\$ 16.00) per month. He began going to Jakarta when in 1980 his first wife became seriously ill with heart disease and needed to find money to pay for her medical expenses (he had no savings, or land to sell). According to Radiyono this was around 1983 before the 'Cilandek explosion' (anammunitions depot near Pondok Labu which exploded accidentally in 1985).¹¹² He first bought a pedicab for rp 70,000 (A\$ 46.00) and by 1987 owned four. Later, three pedicabs were seized by the authorities. In 1988, seven years after first coming to Jakarta, his wife died leaving four children. Radiyono remarried shortly after. Each month Radiyono sends about rp 60,000 (A\$ 40.00) back to his family (he earns between rp 5,000 and rp 7,000 [A\$ 3.30 to A\$ 4.60] a day as a pedicab driver) (Senang 1990).



Figure 15 Radiyono: farmer, pedicab driver and *dalang*. 'When Bagong drives the pedicab Petruck becomes his passenger (Senang 1990).'

¹¹² The local residents who don't keep precise dates in memory use this incident as a handy reference point.

Less typical of most of the other rural migrants is Radiyono's 'hobby' as a *dalang*. As a child Radiyono had a love for *wayang* and used to play with toy puppets the children made from the leaves of the jack fruit tree. Although his grandfather was a *dalang* he does not consider himself a *dalang turun-temurun* (*dalang* by inheritance). In 1974 after finishing primary school he went to a *dalang* school run by Pak Toyo at Sumber Lawong, Majopurwo, in Solo. He went there because it was free to poor people who couldn't afford to pay for lessons. Radiyono said Pak Toyo was a good *dalang* who, before retiring, was well known from his performances at the local government radio station. Radiyono went to *dalang* school every Sunday from 9 am to 12 pm for eight months. He didn't complete the course as he was already getting offers to perform.

Radiyono's hobby as a *dalang* has provided him with another more sporadic source of income. He usually gets work in his home village or in other areas along the north coast *pasisir* region, such as Semarang, Purwodadi, Jepara, Kendal and Pekalongan (to my knowledge he has only performed twice in Jakarta). He laments that since 1989 the demand for *wayang* has declined as *tayuban* dance and outside video films become more popular. During the *wayang* season he only averages about two or three jobs a month. Sponsors pay rp 200,000 to rp 300,000 (A\$ 130.00 to A\$ 200.00) for a performance from which Radiyono must pay the *gamelan* players and singers and hire the puppets. This leaves him as *dalang* about rp 150,000 (A\$ 100.) (Senang 1990).

A large proportion of the kampung residents are or have been pedicab drivers. This means of livelihood is becoming increasingly insecure.¹¹³ Over the years there has been a government campaign to eradicate pedicabs from Jakarta. The main reason given for the ban on pedicabs in Jakarta is to reduce a major source of road congestion. An additional reason rather ironically used to justify the often brutal

¹¹³ Jelinek (1991:38-65) provides a brief background and history of migrant pedicab drivers in Jakarta and the increasingly hostile government attitude towards them. Critchfield (1970) narrates the personal perspective, changing life circumstances and rural-urban ties of a pedicab driver in Jakarta.

campaign of pedicab eradication is that their type of occupation, with its harsh working conditions, is inhumane (Kompas 1990). The pedicab drivers have pointed out that their area of operation lies outside Jakarta, in West Java. However, they have also been subject to harassment from the local authorities concerned about the chronically congested streets around Pondok Labu:

‘Actually, this area is part of West Java region and Jakarta civil security and order officers (*Kamtib*) had no right to operate here’, said Suwarjo (40 years) whilst pointing to the sign that said boundary of Jakarta-West Java.

Nevertheless, reality shows otherwise, many of the cooperative members had to surrender their pedicabs because they were hit by the clean up operation. One pedicab driver said he was even threatened by a rifle held against his cheek by an army person in striped shirt when he tried to hold on to his pedicab, at the same time another showed fingernail marks from the security officer on his right arm (Kompas 1990).

The response by Jakarta’s pedicab drivers to this threat on their livelihood is multi levelled and varies from region to region. North Jakarta, including the old port area, is renowned for the aggressive resistance by pedicab drivers. On 12 October 1990 two police and two pedicab drivers were reported to have been killed. A police raid on pedicabs escalated into a riot as defiant drivers, supported by local residents, defended their vehicles:

‘Its always like this, these *becak* wars. People side with the drivers against the police. It’s natural’ said a girl near the intersection where the fighting had broken out (West Australian 1990).

I do not know whether the pedicab drivers from Pangkalan Jati have ever engaged in violent resistance. However, circumstances surrounding their *wayang TBC* performance indicate kampung solidarity has enabled other more organised strategies of both adaptation and cultural resistance to imposed constraints on pedicabs. Organised response is facilitated by similarities in class and ethnic/regional identity amongst most of the kampung residents:

Feelings of those with similar fate, especially the feelings of being less fortunate, often bring people together in sincere friendship. Especially if added to these similar feelings is included that all the people come from the same region, profession and aspirations (Kompas 1990).

In 1989, in response to restrictions on the area where pedicab drivers may operate and the confiscation of pedicabs, the pedicab drivers established a cooperative or association (*paguyuban*). Its recently changed name, Untung Margi Lestari, is in memory of Untung an ordinary member who died in an accident the previous month. The cooperative's activities are funded by small monthly subscriptions (rp 500 or \$A 0.33) and regular voluntary donations by the pedicab members. The pedicab drivers are proud of the success of their cooperative:

'By organising the cooperative and with the activities we do we feel stronger. We want to show we aren't stupid', said Karmadi, 35, who now must sell *cendol* [a type of snack] because his pedicab was seized by the civil security and order (*Kamtib*) officers (Kompas 1990).

A major function of the cooperative is to lend money to drivers who must repay the owners of confiscated pedicabs.

'Until now there hasn't been anyone who hasn't paid back there debt as they all realise the treasury money belongs to all', said Sukimo (30 years) (Kompas 1990).

Forced change in occupation, at the time 114 out of 164 cooperative members remained pedicab drivers, had not weakened solidarity within the association. Cooperative members also assist each other in changing to a new vocation. For example, those members who have succeeded in becoming minibus drivers lend their vehicles so others can learn to drive. The cooperative also lends its members the money needed to obtain their driver's licence (Kompas 1990).

Further testimony to the solidarity and resolve within the pedicab association and kampung residents are arrangements made for the *wayang TBC* performance held in celebration of the 45th anniversary of Indonesia's independence. A committee of association members was formed to oversee arrangements. Expenses totalled 1.4

million rupiahs (A\$ 930.00), and was raised from kampung members and outside donations. The whole kampung, the cooperative and their wives and children participated in the performance and its preparations.

‘The main point is it was us who planned it, brother, the pedicab drivers cooperative and its Dharma Wanita [actually the name of the rather pretentious women’s organisation for wives of civil servants] he...he...hee’, joked a pedicab driver wearing a denim jacket (Kompas 1990).

Kampung members arranged the decorations, schedule of proceedings and equipment. During the performance they also provided the security and sold snacks whilst the *dalang* and *gamelan* players were also local *wong cilik* residents.

The *wayang TBC* performance, in particular preparations surrounding the event, was a celebration of close, cohesive relations and solidarity amongst the local *wong cilik*. Motivation for this assertion of local *wong cilik* strength and pride was to resist and protest against their marginalisation from wider society. It was a protest against being treated as non-citizens, against inhumane pedicab eradication policies and practices of the authorities.

‘Although we are only pedicab drivers, we feel we are also Indonesian citizens. In organising this performance, we want to show our participation’, stated Mulyono (39 years) both committee leader [that organised the performance] and the cooperative leader (Kompas 1990).

Unlike the violent resistance of pedicab drivers in northern Jakarta, the pedicab drivers of Pangkalan Jati have chosen to negotiate with mainstream values and perspectives. Perhaps surprisingly, the *wayang TBC* performance as an organised public form of protest and criticism of the state was allowed to proceed undisturbed. In addition, it received prominent, sympathetic coverage in the national print media. However, the *Wayang TBC* performance was positioned within the acceptable shared cultural identity of the Indonesian Independence Day celebrations (*Tujuhbelasan*) and the Javanese *wayang kulit* performance.

The residents of kampung *becak* in Pangkalan Jati have used the *Tujuhbelasan* celebrations to protest their dehumanisation by state authorities and claim their rights

to participate in society. As discussed in Chapter Seven, participation of the local *wong cilik* residents in the national celebration of *Tujuhbelasan* cannot be reduced to merely legitimising and reinforcing state authority. Rather, they are working within common ground to take control of, and manipulate, meanings for their own purposes. They also deconstruct and challenge the validity of dominant meanings and interpretations.

The pedicab drivers sent one hundred formal invitations to guests, including the prominent Islamic pro-democracy figure, Abdurrahman Wahid. The invitations hint at the irony of national freedom asserted in Indonesian Independence Day celebrations compared to the circumstances motivating the performance; the daily reality for Indonesia's marginalised and repressed.

Thanks be to God for the freedom of my country, my land and my nation (Kompas 1990).

The pedicab drivers have also chosen the shared cultural identity of the *wayang kulit* performance as a channel for asserting their concerns publicly. As we have seen, the *Tujuhbelasan* makes up an increasingly large percentage of the *dalang*'s bookings. In addition, *wayang* is important in the legitimising discourse of the state and promoted as national culture. However, the flexibility of *wayang* symbolism has always accommodated alternative meanings and expressions. Although the newspaper article I have been referring to mentions little of the performance content, the choice of *lakon* indicates the pedicab drivers intentions in staging a *wayang kulit* performance. 'Wisanggeni Guggat' tells of the courage of Arjuna's son, Wisanggeni, who, in order to defend truth, opposes the high god Batara Guru, known for his abuses of power. The puppeteer doesn't mince words when he says,

The reason why we chose this story is in a symbolic way to show the existence of the powerless side who are claiming their rights (Kompas 1990).

Again, the rights he refers to are to be treated as part of Indonesian society with a share in its history, not to be treated as rubbish, without human dignity or spirit. Through the *wayang* performance the pedicab drivers were able to manipulate a

shared, not imposed, cultural identity. Through the performance they became visible, were able to voice their concerns, and solicit the sympathy of wider society.

Ambiguity in Meaning

As popular theatre *wayang TBC* expresses the ambiguities or conflicts that arise through the meeting within it of various traditions. The pedicab drivers had succeeded in their intentions to use the *wayang kulit* performance celebrating Independence Day as a channel for asserting their perspective to higher levels of society. However, by participating in the common cultural ground the pedicab drivers were also incorporated into the language of wider civil society. This increased visibility, including front-page exposure in a national newspaper, is a two-edge sword of empowerment and cooptation.

The pedicab driver's assertiveness was presented through a 'front of respectability' by engaging in the acceptable cultural discourse of a *wayang* performance for *Tujuhbelasan*. Yet this appearance of conforming to mainstream cultural traditions can disguise inner oppositional meanings (Epskamp 1984:49). On the other hand, in entering common cultural ground there is also a risk of intended meanings being reinterpreted or even appropriated according to mainstream perspectives and dominant interests.

Within the *wayang kulit* performance and the way it was reported on in the national press meanings become ambiguous and subject to multiple interpretations as pedicab drivers tried to engage wider society in dialogue. As with the writing on the formal invitations and the sly quip about the cooperative's Dharma Wanita, mentioned above, certain symbols used by the pedicab drivers become unclear as to their original intentions. This ambiguity is heightened in the paternalistic tone of the newspaper article which applauded the orderly conduct of the audience and focused on the quaint attempts by the pedicab drivers to present a sophisticated occasion:

What was rather striking (*mencolok*) was a group of men dressed elegantly around the stage, amongst the spectators, and on pedicabs ringing the performance arena. Indeed the gentlemen mentioned, who were elegantly dressed, some of whom were even wearing ties, were the hosts of the shadow

play performance that Saturday night on the 25th of August. And their parked pedicabs were their means of earning their daily living (Kompas 1990).

The pedicab drivers are described as wearing clothes that *mencolok* (translated above as striking); that poke at the eyes, the pain forcing them to open. They were also elegantly dressed and wearing ties. Perhaps the educated and dominant classes with an air of superiority would be flattered by the crude, inferior and gaudy attempt to appeal to their standards. What about the pedicab drivers? Were they trying to gain recognition or respect through a naive mimicking of established etiquette, to show their worthiness as Indonesian citizens? Were they trying to meet mainstream society half way? Or, were they poking the public in the face and forcing them to take notice through a caricature of dominant values? Were these ambiguous symbols more covert, subtle forms of mocking or criticism directed at the transparent hypocrisy and cynicism of dominant values and discourse?¹¹⁴

The tone and ambiguity of meanings in the newspaper article indicate a lumping together of different class perspectives. The article is written according to the sensibilities of a readership mainly within the upper intermediate strata, such as professionals and bureaucrats. There is sympathy for the pedicab drivers, but relief that the pedicab drivers are being 'sensible'. The pedicab drivers are applauded for trying a new market for their labour, such as becoming minibus drivers, rather than violently opposing or threatening the social structure that will continue to marginalise, and exploit the labour of, the *wong cilik*. After all, many of the newspaper's readership own the private cars clogging the streets, are the ones most inconvenienced by the slow and untidy pedicabs cluttering the streets, and have at least tacitly approved of government initiatives to bring order to the streets (Jelinek 1991:61,63). The newspaper article is 'democratic' in its advocacy of benign mercy, rather than socio-economic equality, for the *wong cilik*.

Wong cilik cultural expression tends to be invisible and ephemeral as it

¹¹⁴ Roger Taylor (1978:106-10) also shows how blacks in 19th century America ambiguously adopted or 'imitated' dominant white cultural institutions through ball room dancing and the early formation of Jazz, military marching bands and Christian praise gatherings. 'Improvising' within these acceptable cultural practices blacks expressed their own suffering and covertly parodied the pretensions and brutality of their white oppressors.

doesn't usually attract public attention and is therefore rarely documented. When it does visibly enter the public arena and come under scrutiny it is not only subject to reinterpretation but is at risk of appropriation. According to Epskamp (1984:44), arising out of popular culture's ambiguous nature as a common meeting ground is its potential to either 'serve the purposes of oppression as well as liberation'. As we have seen in previous chapters the New Order regime strongly believes in theatre as a tool of persuasion.

The original intention of the kampung pedicab residents was to hold an annual performance of *wayang TBC*. However, it seems this has not eventuated and instead the authorities have attempted to appropriate *wayang TBC* for their own purposes. Radiyono says he was invited by the governor of Jakarta to perform in Sukapura, North Jakarta. He actually never met the governor, but met his staff in their offices and the deputy governor came to his performance. It was held on 13 October 1990 to celebrate Armed Forces Day. Apparently the governor sponsored Radiyono's *wayang kulit* performance for the sizeable amount of 2,800,000 rupiahs (A\$ 1,865.00) (Senang 1990). Commensurate with choice of occasion for the performance, Armed Forces Day, Radiyono said the intentions of the government were to remind the more militant pedicab drivers from northern Jakarta that they were not allowed to work in Jakarta and to encourage them to look for alternative work. From Radiyono's understanding of his assigned role it seems the state intended to appropriate pedicab *wayang* as a tool of indoctrination and repression.

Conclusion

The *wayang TBC* performance in Jakarta demonstrates that the social significance of *wayang* goes beyond simplistic classical court centred, parochial rural or state legitimising stereotypes of *wayang*. The sponsors, performers and audience of *wayang TBC* were rural migrants who have become lumpen proletarian food hawkers and pedicab drivers and are very much part of the urban environment. We can not use the usual dichotomies of elite/popular, rural/urban and modern/traditional in analysing *wayang TBC*.

In the pedicab *wayang* performances the dominant-subordinate contestation

of meaning and identity goes beyond the actual *wayang* performance to include preparations for the events and post event responses. Central to the significance of the *wayang TBC* for the kampung *becak* residents was the process of bringing the performance into being, which reinforced collective solidarity, strength, and pride. Preparations for the performance were no less important than the performance itself, which celebrated these qualities and articulated them to a wider society.

Wayang TBC was, like other forms of peoples' theatre, extraordinary in providing a public forum for expressing otherwise hidden or not articulated *wong cilik* perceptions on experienced social relations.¹¹⁵ The *dalang*, a typical local resident whose title, Ki Radiyono Purbo Carito, means 'he who has the authority to tell all stories' (Kompas 1990), had authority to represent the collective voice of his audience. Nevertheless, the 'authenticity' of the *wayang TBC* was not limited to the *dalang*'s credibility as a spokesperson. In fact by focusing away from the content of the performance proper, and the role of the *dalang*, we can see that participation by all the residents in the performance and its prior preparations guaranteed the meaningfulness of the performance for the *wong cilik* residents.

Participation in the whole production process assured the *wong cilik* dominant control over the generation of meaning in the performance. However, by becoming a public forum involving wider society through the distribution of invitations and coverage by the national press, *wayang TBC* developed into more than an outlet for local resident feeling. However, by its inclusion within the common cultural ground of a stratified society, *wayang TBC* also became subject to mainstream interests through the mass media, and appropriation by the State as an intended medium of social control.

The following chapter on theatre in Tegal further extends the concern of this thesis in analysing popular performance through evaluating the degree to which the *wong cilik* control the cultural production process and the generation of cultural

¹¹⁵ A seminar at Curtin University in 1993 by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a critical Kenyan novelist and playwright, points to the universality of this function in reference to local community vernacular. Describing the performance of the village play he wrote and that culminated in his exile, he said utilising the language from which the people's experiences are enmeshed provides a venue for discussion of ideas and issues at the village level. He said such discussion of issues and variety of ideas could not be raised through a foreign medium such as the national language or at an extra village level.

meaning. The chapter emphasises that the surrounding social relations that constitute the performance, more than *a priori* characteristics, conventions and contents of a specific genre, determine the degree of *wong cilik* cultural agency. Again, a vital key to evaluating the cultural agency of the *wong cilik* is the relationship between audience and performance. Audience-performance relations are enhanced by the nature of the performance and skills of the performers, but only to the extent that the performance and the performers themselves are a product of specific social relations. Thus, the following analysis of 'modern' theatre and populist *wayang* in Tegal is not to compare the social significance of different cultural forms. Rather, it demonstrates that the specific social relations which permeate the processes of cultural production determine the agency of the *wong cilik*, and meaningfulness for them, in a particular performance. These social relations, and the popular performances constituted within them, are a product of class relations characterised by the specific socio-historic and geographic location of Tegal.

PART D: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF *WONG CILIK* AGENCY IN POPULAR PERFORMANCE

Chapter Eleven: 'Modern' Theatre, *Wayang Mbeling* and the *Wong Cilik* in Tegal

This regional study on the performing arts in Tegal presents a microcosm of the theme of this thesis.¹¹⁶ That is, analysing the significance for the *wong cilik* of popular performance, in this case 'modern' theatre and *wayang mbeling*, through a focus on the social context of audience-performance relations. In doing so, this chapter relates back to earlier discussions on the social and cultural agency of the *wong cilik* within the confluence of changing local and macro social relations in Indonesia.

The 1990s seem to be characterised by an irrepressible growth and broadening in the overt expression of alternative perspectives and social criticism, in which the performing arts have a significant role. However, there have also been growing tensions with increased coercion through the state apparatus leading up to the general elections in 1997. As a result, in the performing arts, as elsewhere in society, there has been significant repression and cooption, met also by pockets of determined resistance. Mass politics is beginning to colour this struggle between dominant, oppositional and subordinate interests. It is in the context of these socio-economic and political changes that this chapter analyses the ways in which Tegal's performing arts addresses the experiences and interests of the subordinate classes or *wong cilik*.

¹¹⁶ The essence of this chapter was presented as a working paper, entitled '*Wayang mbeling* and "modern" theatre in Tegal: The mischievous assertion of class interests and regional identity', to the 20th anniversary conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in July 1996. I would like to thank Dr. Keith Foulcher for his useful comments on that paper.

1. Popular Consciousness and Contesting Symbolism in Tegal Society

The representation and participation of the subordinate classes, as well as the position and influence of Tegal's theatre within the nation's performing arts, are couched within the rubric of contested regional identity. Members of urban Tegal's progressive intelligentsia, for example, claim that the 'unique' social dynamics of the Tegal region have produced an assertive, egalitarian, 'grassroots' ethos that provides an antithesis to overbearing local and centralised authority.¹¹⁷ In Tegal's performing arts, expression of this 'grassroots' ethos as a 'democratising' force has resulted in both challenge to, and cooption within, centralised cultural production. The following is an outline of the continuity of intense social dynamics in the Tegal region and the contested construction of its regional identity.

Tegal is one of the poorest agrarian regions in Indonesia (Kompas 1993:1). As we have seen, agrarian poverty is perpetuated in Java through unequal access to strategic resources accentuated by new capitalist social relations encouraged during the 1970s 'green revolution'. However, severe poverty and social inequality in Tegal also have their roots prior to Indonesia's independence. Onerous administrative systems supported the extraction of land and labour to service Dutch sugar exports and the Japanese war efforts. This led to explosive peasant uprisings against the indigenous elite who were complicit in, and benefiting from, these violently repression administrative systems. In 1864 a religious leader, Mas Tjilik, led a messianic revolt against the regent of Tegal, killing or wounding a number of local officials and Dutch associated with the sugar industry (Kooiman et al 1984:86). Then, as discussed later, a more widespread social revolution in 1945, known as *Peristiwa Tiga Daerah* or the 'Three Areas Affair', momentarily overthrew the local elite and threatened the authority of the central government.

Encroaching on the largely agrarian region, Tegal's rapid industrial

¹¹⁷ Unless specifically cited, all information concerning Tegal society and cultural production is based on my observations and numerous informal discussions from August 1993 to January 1994 and in June 1996 with Tegal's cultural workers or *seniman*. Amongst others, these include Nurhidayat, Enthus Susmono, Yono Daryono, Lanang Setiawan, Eko Tunas and Widjati.

development has its origins in the colonial sugar industry. Tegal's industry has benefited from its location on the north coastal plain in proximity to Jakarta and being situated on the trans-Java highway between Jakarta and the provincial capital, Semarang. Though having textile and other industries, Tegal is most well known for its small scale metal recycling industries in rural centres and along connecting roads (Fig. 16). The tenacious ingenuity of these small workshops in replicating imported products out of recycled metal has earned Tegal the predicate as Indonesia's Japan.¹¹⁸ Most of the industrial labour, sourced from local rural societies, is employed in these small-scale industries that feed into larger enterprises (Marco 1994).



Figure 16 Tegal is known for its *teh poci* and recycled metal industry. Photo by G. Reeves.

Near the north west border of Central Java, Tegal lies on the periphery of Javanese culture as constructed by the Central Javanese courts in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. This, for example, is reflected in the Tegal dialect of Javanese, which is considered crude and brash. As well as the attenuation of official Javanese court culture, Tegal has also been influenced by its location on the periphery of Cirebonese and Sundanese culture to the east, and Purwokerto to the south. The influence of Cirebonese and Sundanese cultures is evident in the popular arts of local societies,

¹¹⁸ To entice a wary domestic market many products were given names with a Japanese ring. A pesticide sprayer, for example, had the brand name '*Musuhama*', which in Indonesian means 'Enemy of pests'.

such as *wayang golek* (wooden puppet play) and *sintren* (female folk dance). However, with the establishment of provincial boundaries, Tegal's 'modern' urban theatre has had no direct cultural ties with West Java.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, improving communications and transport systems have enhanced Tegal theatre's continuing interaction with the performing arts from other regions and urban centres, including nearby Jakarta.

Tegal's location at a convergence of different, at times contradictory and extreme, socio-economic and cultural forces has produced a continuity of intense and dynamic social relations associated with the integration, reworking and resistance of these forces. The perceived continuity and uniqueness of Tegal's social relations is evident in the assertion of a strong regional identity.

The popular expression of Tegal's regional identity is crystallised in the symbolism of *banteng loreng binoncengan* (Lucas 1991:xxv; Suputro 1959:47). This is a conceptual image of a wild bison being ridden by a young boy playing a bamboo flute. The wild bison is the temperament of the ordinary Tegal peasant who, though rough and tenacious, is hard working and easily led by benign authority, symbolised by the gentleness of the little boy playing soothing music. However, if such authority becomes unduly oppressive the wild bison, or Tegal People, will turn against it in an uncontrollable rage.

The symbol of the *banteng loreng* is at the centre of Tegal's contested history. In popular memory there are both ancient and more recent 'historical' moments that invoke the *banteng loreng* symbolism. These are alternative memories hidden beneath official histories constructed by the local and central states. This contested history highlights class contradictions in the region, including tensions and resistance between the region and centralised powers.

As with elsewhere in Java, the early history of the Tegal region is a collection of subjective truths based on scant archaeological evidence, court writings (*babad*) and oral folk stories, myths or legends (Soemarno 1984:i). Those retelling the history of Tegal, whether officially or unofficially add to the myth making process. I will use

¹¹⁹ Matthew Cohen initially alerted me to some of the possible influences of Cirebonese culture on Tegal's 'traditional' performing arts.

three main sources in outlining Tegal's contested mythico-history.

The first, Suputro (1959), is an official history published by the Department of Education and Culture in Jakarta, but written by its Tegal district office. In parts the historical account is confused and lacks detail, but carries some of the revolutionary socialist sentiment of the Sukarno period.

The second reference, Soemarno (1984), again from the Department of Education and Culture, Tegal, draws on, yet clarifies with greater detail and 'evidence', Suputro's history. Like Suputro, Soemarno espouses the defiant anti-Dutch collaboration stance of Tegal's forefathers. Another major theme running through Soemarno's history is the civilising role played by Tegal's forefathers in developing the region's economic and political foundations. This accords well with the present Suharto regime's preoccupation with order, stability and economic development.

The third reference, is a prominent, radical, cultural worker from Tegal, Eko Tunas.¹²⁰ He claims his family descends from the Mataram kingdom, but he grew up amongst neighbourhood gangsters. His historical perspective is a critical reaction to the 'establishmentalist' bias of official histories such as Soemarno's. He claims official accounts have either coopted or silenced the 'true' grassroots basis of Tegal's social history and identity. His is a populist history claiming to represent, and identify with Tegal's lower classes. It is the very popularity of this 'grass roots' history, articulated from generation to generation in folk stories, and often dramatised in community theatre, such as *kethoprak*, which he asserts proves its authenticity.

On comparing various local folk legends with historical analysis by early Dutch scholars, Suputro (1959:26-8,32) asserts that a local Tegal identity, known as Embah Panggung, was in fact one of the nine Islamic saints or *wali songo*, called Sunan Drajat. He and another of the saints, Sunan Bonang, are said to have travelled around the Tegal region spreading Islam from village to village. They used wooden *wayang* puppets with Kresna, as an incarnation of Wisnu, giving religious instruction to Arjuna (Soemarno 1984:21). Many of the region's village names are based on

¹²⁰ Discussions with Eko Tunas took place during 1993 and early 1994.

legendary events surrounding the two saints' visits. As their mission was to bring Islam to the people, it is most probable the saints came to the region from the east walking from village to village, rather than arriving directly via the region's insignificant sea port(s) (Soemarno 1984:20-2; Suputro 1959:26-8,32).

After a number of years the two saints had a dispute, with Sunan Bonang accusing Sunan Drajat of developing heretical teachings, symbolised by Sunan Drajat's care of two magical dogs (considered offensive to Islam). Sunan Bonang met with the other *wali songo*, which resulted in sentencing Sunan Drajat to death. On a wooden stage he was burnt alive in 1452. Afterwards Sunan Bonang continued to proselytise in the area (Soemarno 1984:19-22; Suputro, 1959:26-8,32). However, according to Tunas, it is Sunan Drajat who is popularly remembered and represents a grassroots expression of Islam.

Rather than Sunan Drajat, contemporary officials in Tegal have chosen another identity, Ki Gede Subayu, as Tegal's founding father. He represents a mix of conservative, urban-court Islam (*santri*) and aristocratic lineage. He represents a shift in focus of Tegal's history from rural region to the origins of Tegal as a city.

Initially, Tegal, then known as Tetegal, was a small nondescript village and port supported by rice cultivation.¹²¹ By 1530, however, Tetegal became a flourishing village officially recognised, within the residency of Pemalang, which was under the authority of the kingdom of Pajang. In 1500 Tome Pires, a Portuguese trader and scholar, estimated the population in the town of Tegal to be 4000 (Soemarno 1984:18,24-5,34; Suara Merdeka 1992; Suputro 1959:40-1). Around 1580 Ki Gede Subayu, a descendent from royal intermarriages between kingdoms in Tegal, Majapahit, and Pajang (Ponorogo), decided to move from his residency in Pemalang to Tetegal. He saw Tetegal as an area with great potential to develop. He is attributed with introducing an irrigation scheme enabling the intensive cultivation of wet rice, which supported greater population density (Soemarno 1984:18,24-5,34; Suara Merdeka 1992; Suputro 1959:40-1). Ki Gede Subayu named the new flourishing town Tegal. His son, Ki Gede Honggowono, carried on, improving the region's

¹²¹ Tegal means *ladang* or dry rice cultivation.

irrigation system. This allowed for an increase in agricultural produce, some of which was being exported to other regions through a centralised market place and now busy port at the Gung River mouth, attracting migration and increasing the town's population (Soemarno 1984:18,24-5; Suara Merdeka 1992; Suputro 1959:40-1).

However, Eko Tunas and other progressive intelligentsia in urban Tegal claim the developmentalist orientation of official history on Ki Gede Subayu as the forefather of Tegal city detracts from the more significant origins of Tegal's regional identity. They argue that far more popular as an expression of regional identity found in local folklore are the 17th century heroic figures of Martoloyo and his servant Gendowor.

In 1625 the highly revered Sultan Agung made R. Tumenggung Martoloyo regent of Tegal (Soemarno 1984:34). According to Soemarno (1984:86) Martoloyo had noble origins, a result of an intermarriage between the descendants of Sunan Kalijogo (one of the spiritually powerful *wali songo*) and Sultan Trenggono of Madiun (East Java). However, Eko Tunas identifies Martoloyo with a tough, rebellious, grassroots tradition. He says Martoloyo was originally a *warok* (fighter/magic man) from Ponorogo who became a sea pirate in Surabaya preying on Dutch boats.

At the time the Dutch were aggressively expanding their trading interests. The Governor General J. P. Coen forcibly took control of the region of Jayakarta, renaming it Batavia. In 1628-29, in angry defiance, Sultan Agung sent his troops along the north coast of Java to snatch back Batavia. According to Soemarno (1984:26), Tegal, along with other north coast ports, became an important resting-place for Sultan Agung's troops. Many metal working experts were brought into Tegal to make weapons, such as daggers and spears, for the Sultan's troops. Tegal was also important in providing food supplies for the troops. However, alerted by Dutch spies, the Dutch burnt down the food storage warehouses, eventually forcing Sultan Agung's troops to withdraw for lack of supplies to sustain their attack (Soemarno 1984:30-1).

According to Soemarno (1984:31) Martoloyo was bitter in defeat, but remained determined to keep the Dutch trading company out of his region.

Unfortunately, Sultan Agung died in 1645 and was replaced by Amangkurat 1, who, because of his collaboration with the Dutch, was hated by many. Trunojoyo of Madura, who felt he was more entitled to Mataram's throne, attacked both Mataram and the Dutch. Amangkurat 1 fled east to Batavia seeking help from the Dutch. However, on the way he fell ill, died, and was buried at Tegal, the funeral of which Martoloyo attended.

In Tegal, Adipati Anom was crowned the new sultan of Mataram with the title of Amangkurat II. Amangkurat II sought Martoloyo's council over Mataram's predicament. Martoloyo advised strongly against seeking help from the Dutch who had a history of deceit and trickery that would only lead to his later regret (Soemarno 1984:30-2). Amangkurat II rejected Martoloyo's advice, insisting that Martoloyo should assist him and the Dutch oust Trunojoyo. Martoloyo, bitterly disappointed with Amangkurat II's cowardly self-interest, refused and headed back to Tegal leaving an angry Amangkurat II. Amangkurat II sent Martoloyo's brother, Mertopuro, to persuade and bring back Martoloyo. On meeting, Mertopuro, loyally representing Amangkurat II, and Martoloyo, sticking to his principles, had an angry confrontation, which led to the tragic deaths of both in 1678 (Soemarno 1984:27, 30-2).

At this point it is interesting to compare how earlier and later official histories reflect on the significance of Martoloyo. Suputro's history emphasises the strong principled quality of Martoloyo that justifies his rebellious stance against Amangkurat II's collaboration with the Dutch. Martoloyo is portrayed as a strong, just and loyal hero, who, due to the treacherous self-interest of his superior, is forced to rebel against him with tragic consequences. Suputro (1959:47-9) declares that Martoloyo is the original manifestation of Tegal's archetypal ethos in the wild bison and boy imagery. Martoloyo was a very spiritual and powerful Tegal identity who dutifully obeyed Amangkurat II, but insulted and feeling betrayed by Amangkurat II, Martoloyo refused to cooperate further with his king (Suputro 1959:48). This earlier official history is sympathetic to a revolutionary ideal in the socio-political context of a continuing peoples' revolution.¹²²

¹²² According to Eko Tunas, Tegal's airport was officially opened as Martoloyo Airport by
(continued...)

Soemarno (1984:27), on the other hand, dissolves the imagery of Martoloyo into a unity with his brother, Mertopuro. He refers only to Martoloyo as a good soldier, and the strong loyalty of Mertopuro being equally justified. The rebellious consequences of Martoloyo's high ideals are negated tragically by the unquestioning loyalty of Mertopuro to his king. Here, there is a shift in emphasis implying that whether justified or not rebellion against authority will only lead to disastrous consequences for those under it. The unified imagery is of a loyal *wayang ksatria* warrior-soldier. This accords with the contemporary concerns of the state for order and stability bolstered by the trauma of the 1965 'communist coup' and a wariness of Tegal's role in the 1945 Three Areas Affair.

After the death of Martoloyo, Amangkurat II, with the assistance of the Dutch Governor General, Mr. J. Maetsuyker, eventually defeated Trunojoyo, reclaiming Mataram in 1679. The agreed on war debt for Dutch assistance was to make accessible to the Dutch administration and trade all the north coast ports, including Tegal (Soemarno 1984:33). According to Soemarno (1984:33), angered by the death of Martoloyo, Gendowor (a Tegal community leader also called Ki Lurah Pranataka) gathered troops and attacked both Mataram and the Dutch trading company. Eventually the Dutch appointed him to the position of regent of Tegal (replacing Martoloyo) with the title of Tumenggung Sindurejo. Soemarno (1984:33) says he died an accidental death, drowning in quicksand.

According to Eko Tunas this containment of Gendowor's rebellious spirit contradicts a people's portrayal of him in popular folklore and performance. First of all Gendowor, unlike either Ki Gede Subayu or Martoloyo, is said to have originated from Tegal's lower classes. Eko Tunas says he was originally a sea pirate and Martoloyo's right hand man. Others claim he was Martoloyo's lowly court servant, a grass cutter who supplied feed for the royal horses.¹²³

To avenge Martoloyo's death Gendowor and his followers disguised themselves as a theatrical troupe called *bodor encele*. Gendowor was disguised as a

(...continued)

'Bung Karno' (President Sukarno) and that at this time the regional flag was the wild bison and boy.

¹²³ Personal communication with the father of Nurhidayat's domestic servant.

clown (Bodor) whilst a local woman, Rantan Sari was the principle dancer or encele. The theatre disguise was used to infiltrate Dutch defences to launch an attack from within. Like Martoloyo the rebellion failed with the death of Gendowor. The nature of Martoloyo's rebellion may be interpreted as the personal defiance of a member of the local elite against his king. However, Gendowor's death symbolises a grassroots mass rebellion.

There is contested memory over the mythico-history surrounding the early development of the Tegal region and its relationship with central powers. Local folk legends retold through people's theatre celebrate a 'grassroots' tenacity, loyal to benign leadership, but defiant against coercive or corrupted authority. Recently, however, the 'grassroots' or mass base of popular legendary heroes, such as Embah Panggung, Martoloyo, and Gendowor, have been denied or sanitised to fit official New Order history of elite lineages and developmentalist ideologies.

A more recent and tumultuous manifestation of popular consciousness and official reinterpretations of Tegal's history concerns Tegal's pivotal role in the 1945 regional social revolution of *Peristiwa Tiga Daerah*, encompassing the residency of Pekalongan.¹²⁴ At the core of Tegal's involvement was a violent subordinate class uprising in Talang led by the notorious Kutil. Peasant movements led by Kutil and other 'popularly' elected leaders had overthrown local elites. In climax, an uneasy collaboration between local revolutionaries with some national socialist and communist figures set up a new revolutionary government in the residency of Pekalongan. This, however, lasted only a few days when the local elite supported by sections of the national armed forces crushed the revolution in a swift counter offensive.

With Kutil executed as a murderer and anarchist, the regional social revolution, with rural Tegal at its epicentre, was condemned in terms of lawlessness and criminality, and as disruptive to the national revolutionary struggle against Dutch resurgence. In fact, it was seen as an act of separatist rebellion against the authority of the central republican government. According to Soemarno (1984:68) President

¹²⁴ Anton Lucas (1991) provides a fascinating and well-detailed documentation on *Peristiwa Tiga Daerah*.

Sukarno in his speech to a huge public meeting in Tegal said:

Hey people of Tegal, Brebes and Pemasang, don't set up little Republics ... your own individual Republics ... we must be one, we must build one large and strong national Republic.

However, from the perspective of the local revolutionaries and people in *Tiga Daerah* the whole notion of freedom and independence was in overturning the oppressive social system as they had experienced it under the local elite. Furthermore, the revolutionaries were suspicious that the republican government through institutions such as the national army was supporting the feudal/colonial status quo (Lucas 1991:257).

There were sharp contradictions in perceived interests between the *Tiga Daerah* region, particularly Tegal as its centre, and the national government. Also, the intensity of the social revolution within the region, and the degree of collective violence insistent on democratic change to the existing social hierarchy, was greater than almost anywhere in Java (or Indonesia for that matter) (Lucas 1991:133,252). There were intense local social dynamics with wider, national ramifications, driven by

a strong popular consciousness during the social revolution in the Tegal region. They arose out of severely oppressive and inequitable economic and social systems under Dutch and Japanese rule.

Official histories have suppressed popular memories of Embah Pangung, Martoloyo/Gendowor, Mas Tjilik and Kutil. Similarly, local authorities have chosen to ignore or superimpose the wild bison and boy symbolism with an innocuous seaside theme for the official representation of Tegal city. A traditional fishing boat

with the words *Tegal Kota Bahri* or 'Tegal, Maritime City' welcomes travellers as they pass through the city gates (Fig.17). Consistent with the town's sea



Figure 17 *Kota Bahri* ('Maritime City') is Tegal city's official motto. Cloth badge.

theme, fences, walls and building facades have been painted light blue and white. The pedicabs also are painted blue for those licensed to operate during the day and white for those that operate at night.

Even though Tegal city is situated on the coast the significance of fisheries and port facilities has always been minimal compared to its dependency on the agrarian interior, represented by the wild bison. However, inherent in the wild bison and boy symbolism is a class structure between a large peasant base and small elite that, as in 1945, is potentially unstable. Since the annihilation of socialist/communist movements and greater acceptance of capitalism after 1965 there is a conscious effort to suppress, or depoliticise, anything that represents the interests of the *wong cilik* or makes visible class contradiction and social inequality.

Therefore, the choice of the atypical seaside imagery is because it is amorphous and apolitical. On the other hand, the town's motto, *KOTA BAHRI* has been created to suit the political and economic objectives of New Order state and capital. The Arabic word *Bahri* recognises the strong Muslim elite. Furthermore, as with most, if not every, city in Indonesia, the town's motto is also an acronym, a reflection of the *bahasa sandi* or coded language of old feudal Java. *BAHRI* is a moral code for peace and prosperity for the collective well being: *B* is for *bersih* or clean (clean environment, home and personal hygiene); *A* is for *aman* or safe (free from fear, disorder and stress); *H* is the letter in *sehat* or healthy (free from disease or mental illness and awareness of one's rights and obligations); *R* is for *rapi* or neat (harmonious, orderly, fostering community pride and motivation for work); finally, *I* is the letter in *beriman* or spiritual/faithful (obedience to God in terms of orders and prohibitions).¹²⁵

Generally speaking, the city authority's objective is to ensure an environment conducive to industrial development through applying its *BAHRI* principles by

¹²⁵ This interpretation of *BAHRI* came from a seminar held in 1992 entitled 'Strategi Pembudayaan Tegal Kota Bahri' (Strategy for Enculturating Tegal, Maritime City) (Suprpto 1992:8). At this seminar government officials and industry representatives, with the assistance of a couple of academics and representatives of the mass media, clarified the official perspective on Tegal's 'unique' cultural identity.

mobilising the Tegal people's 'natural' propensity as a close knit, hard working, dynamic community. According to the authorities, the proper Tegal identity will be materialised through maintaining the city scape and micro architecture; by applying the *BAHRI* principles to the orderly upkeep of Tegal's green areas, bodies of water, police boxes, public toilets, side walks (with sellers), fences, sign posts, city gates and city clocks (Suprpto 1992:13-4). However, as with other cities in Java, acronyms such as *BAHRI* are part of the legitimisation of developmentalist policies that are antagonistic towards the *wong cilik*, such as the removal of 'disorderly' pavement sellers, 'unhygienic' peoples' markets and 'obstructive' pedicabs.

Although official and elite ideologies marginalise the symbolic representation of Tegal's popular consciousness, there are frequent incidents that reveal the tenacity of subordinate class solidarity in every day resistance to repression by dominant interests. It is not uncommon for the town to take on a siege-like atmosphere when sections of the *wong cilik*, such as its numerous pedicab drivers, retaliate against the enforcement of onerous new policies or arbitrary intimidation by state functionaries, such as the police. As a consequence, local authorities have often felt forced to address the *wong cilik* concerns in order to avoid an escalation of tensions.

In one incident that occurred close to the time of my research a policeman beat a daytime pedicab driver caught working at night. In response, pedicab drivers chased after the policeman who was eventually able to out run the pedicabs on his motorcycle. However, the pedicab drivers later retaliated by stoning his house. Then, in the days that followed, they held a protest outside the mayor's office that successfully pressured the government to bring the policeman to trial.

There is a fine line between a conscious, 'justifiable' response by the subordinate classes to excesses of repression and more reactionary violence or, criminal behaviour. At the time of my research in 1993/4 nine youths were on trial for the brutal murder of an off duty policeman attempting to quieten rowdy street revellers during celebrations of Muhammad's birthday. The policeman was allegedly bashed and kicked, sate sticks inserted into his ears, and then repeatedly driven over

by a vehicle. The brutality of the incident and the fact that the policeman was the son of a high-ranking politician afforded national media attention.

Resistance to repression, sometimes bordering on hysteria, is implicit in Tegal's popular consciousness and the construction of its regional identity, and explicit in the daily struggles of the subordinate classes. The radical 'nature' of popular consciousness and the plight of the *wong cilik* in Tegal are of central concern in Tegal's performing arts. Furthermore, like the region's social dynamics, the dynamics of Tegal's popular theatre have not only local, but national, implications.

2. Tegal's 'Modern' Theatre: Harnessing The 'Grassroots' Ethos

Lenggaong as People's Theatre

In Java the early 1990s was a period of creative vitality, with a reasonable level of critical content in the arts and mass media 'tolerated' by state authorities.¹²⁶ In Tegal there had been a stream of theatre productions in the 1980s.¹²⁷ However, by the early 1990s, there was concern from some of Tegal's cultural workers that they should sharpen their creative edge (Nurhidayat 1992). Newspaper articles by the director of Teater Puber, Nurhidayat (1992), and director of Teater RSPD¹²⁸, Yono Daryono (1992, 1993), debated the actuality and causes of a perceived slump in the creativity of Tegal's 'modern' theatre. Debate centred on the sincerity and authenticity of 'modern' theatre's attempts to incorporate elements of traditional people's theatre.

Daryono argued that 'modern' Tegal theatre should contain the 'spirit' of *teater rakyat* (traditional people's theatre) as the public appreciation is still couched in the more familiar idioms of traditional theatre. In defence against perceived criticism of

¹²⁶ Based in Solo in late 1993 I experienced the sharp social criticism of the tabloid *Detik* (recently banned), Emha Ainun Nadjib's play *Pak Kanjeng*, Wiji Thukul's poetry readings, an exhibition of Djoko Pekik's paintings and the re-release of Sjumandjaja's film *Yang Muda Yang Bercinta*.

¹²⁷ In *Jalan Panjang Teater dan Sastra Tegal* (1994) Lanang Setiawan provides a brief description of the major actors and social influences on the development of Tegal's 'modern' theatre production from the 1950s to early 1990s.

¹²⁸ Teater RSPD is an abbreviation for Radio Siaran Pemerintah Daerah Theatre or Theatre of the Regional Government Radio Broadcaster. However, the association is largely in name only. For rehearsals, Teater RSPD uses the premises of, but is not officially affiliated with, the government radio station where Yono Daryono is employed.

his own theatrical productions, Daryono saw the issue of 'authenticity' as reflecting broader social change affecting both cultural workers and audiences. Theatre that is inauthentically traditional and inauthentically modern reflects problems in Tegal society. Adopting the perspective of nationally recognised playwright Putu Wijaya, Daryono believes Indonesia's (Tegal's) urban populace are like *anak haram* (illegitimate children). Dislodged from their traditional world, they are also not yet intimate with the modern world. This affords a freedom to step in and out of, and explore, both traditional and modern worlds, but with the risk of having no secure identity (Daryono 1992). Daryono (1992) argues that if Tegal theatre is losing its authentic creative commitment then this is also a result of change in wider social values. The problem of regeneration, according to Daryono, is in finding young people willing to commit themselves to hard work and suffering with little financial gain. Hedonism, and mechanistic and materialist cultural values based on economic success attack creativity. Materialistic interests also orientate the priorities of theatrical production towards profits, costs, and the marketability of the production.

In a more positive newspaper article (1993), Yono Daryono, from the perspective of Teater RSPD's vision of modern theatre (not dissimilar to the ideals of Nurhidayat and Tunas) expands on how Tegal theatre is situated in Tegal society as both a product of, and agent for, social change. Based on Brechtian theory, Daryono emphasises the vulnerability of theatre to social transformations and its dependency on its public. However, this intimacy with society allows theatre to offer a free space for collective celebration where ideas can be thrown around. He is optimistic that theatre can be a basis for socialisation, democratic development and the advocacy of human rights.

Between 1992-1994 momentum for 'regeneration' had come through efforts to reaffirm the 'grassroots' Tegal ethos as the true spirit of Tegal's 'modern' theatre, and through energetic promotional activities on a local and national scale. However, a performance by Teater Puber in late 1993 entitled *Lenggaong* highlighted the difficulties of harnessing a 'grassroots' identity through the integration of people's

theatre conventions and aesthetics into 'modern' theatre.¹²⁹ These difficulties arose out of the gap between the ideals of wishing to represent the concerns of the subordinate classes, through the expression of a 'democratic' popular consciousness, with the reality of the relations of cultural production situated within the interests and needs of the intermediate strata and bourgeoisie class.

Publicity for the performance was typically low key. It centred on Tegal's informal modern theatre network. Teater Puber members and associates divided up and distributed the brochures and invitations to colleagues, friends, and regular supporters and theatregoers. More formal, yet unsystematic, was promotion through various mass media channels. A few days prior to the performance the Central Javanese newspaper, *Suara Merdeka* (popular in Tegal) published a small commentary including performance details from Yono Daryono (who was not directly involved in the production). As discussed later, there was also a promotional radio interview in which I was conscripted. Limited sponsorship was obtained from the private radio station, Radio Raka, which organised a banner advertising the performance, to be hung outside the venue, bottled drinks given to the theatre members, and the printing of invitations and brochures.

In the production of *Lenggaong*, the cultural workers met initial costs, such as stage lighting and hall rental, and were barely recompensed by latter ticket sales. The 2,000 rupiah (A\$1.30) price of tickets was affordable for an audience from the intermediate strata, whose composition was typical of most 'modern' theatre audiences in Java. Reflecting the promotional initiatives, the audience consisted of friends, family and colleagues of the cultural workers, high school and tertiary students, and representatives of the mass media.

In general, the producers, directors, playwrights and main actors, often individual cultural workers with multiple roles, are not financially dependent on their theatrical productions. They can be classified as the urban intelligentsia from the lower intermediate strata who receive a regular income as professionals or state

¹²⁹ According to Tegal's cultural workers 'modern' theatre is distinguishable from people's theatre in that in 'modern' theatre they rehearse a detailed script and use 'professional' stage techniques rather than improvised dialogue and action. In general, 'Modern' theatre performances are secular entertainment for a broader public rather than part of a communal rite or celebration. (Hatley 1991:1-2).

employees within the tertiary sector. Though any additional income is welcome, their involvement in theatre is a passion, subsidised by their regular employment, and not essential for survival.

By contrast to Tegal's 'modern' theatre workers, members of an itinerant *kethoprak* group, the subject of the *Lenggaong* play, were critically dependent on ticket sales. The playwright of *Lenggaong*, Lanang Setiawan, was by profession a journalist for the newspaper, *Swadesi*. Material for the major part of the play was derived from lengthy observations of a touring *Kethoprak* group performing in the Tegal area. Over a three month period Lanang was able to observe closely the personal relations, including the sexual intrigue and poor living conditions, of the *Tri Budaya kethoprak* members. In competition with television as the new medium of popular entertainment, *Tri Budaya* has faced declining popularity. With ticket sales hardly covering production overheads, the actors have been forced to seek alternative employment as pedicab drivers, food hawkers, and factory labourers (Setiawan 1987).

In the play, *Lenggaong*, the *kethoprak* group overstays its permit in a vain attempt to accumulate enough money to finance their travel expenses home. Their predicament is exploited by the village head, whose threats to imprison the manager of the troupe for overstaying can only be evaded by paying a bribe and agreeing to provide the village head's 'boss', a district officer, the sexual favours of the troupe's 'prima donna', Ni Ratu.

Like Lanang as journalist, the audience witnesses the *kethoprak* performers' struggle for survival under oppressive conditions. In addition, they also become the audience of a performance by the *kethoprak* group. This play within a play is adapted from a local legend about two *lenggaong* or thugs, from neighbouring villages, who fight for supremacy. To this day there is animosity between the two villages, manifest in taboos of intermarriage and the occasional skirmishes. In parallel with the theme of sex and power, illustrated on the invitations (Fig. 18), affecting the lives of the *kethoprak* performers, a beautiful *ronggeng* dancer, Sailah, becomes a pawn in the power struggle between the two *Lenggaong*.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Similar to *tayuban* in Central Java and *gandrung* in East Java, *ronggeng* or *sintren*, from western Java, involves an itinerant female dancer who performs at village celebrations such
(continued...)

Teater Puber's *Lenggaong* attempted to reveal to its closed intermediate strata audience a humanity in the daily struggles facing the *wong cilik* and their own sense of moral integrity despite their misery. The play also explored the exacerbation of *wong cilik* suffering through the abuse of power, such as arbitrary oppression and corruption in local government.

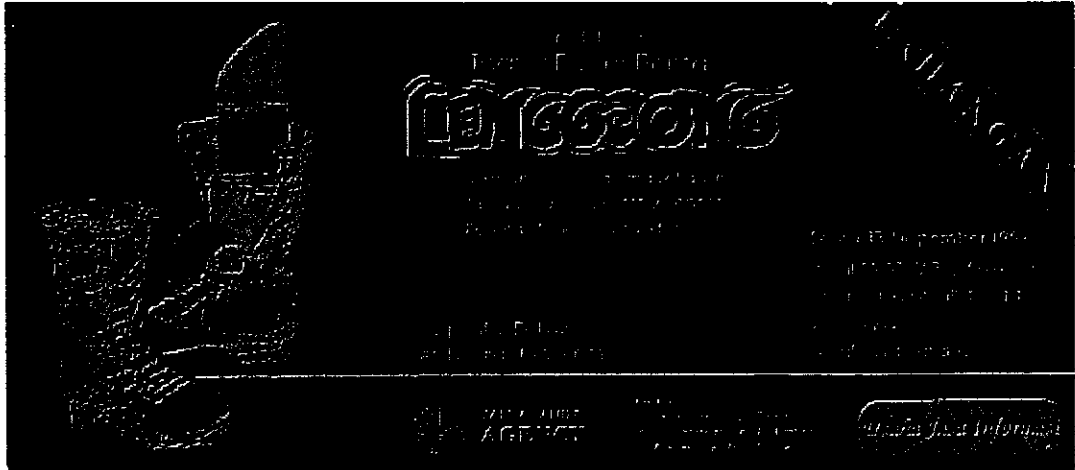


Figure 18 Ticket for the play *Lenggaong*. Lipstick and jackboots intimate the central themes.

However, in an off the cuff promotional interview at Radio Anita, that has an ebbing intermediate strata audience, self-censorship ensured the critical content of the performance was not mentioned. Instead, when asked what the audience should expect from the performance, Nurhidayat and Enthieh, who were involved in the production, invited everyone to partake in a communal get-together or *selamatan*. In an invitation that intimates the gender bias towards males in the performing arts, both 'traditional' and 'modern', Nurhidayat encourages the listeners to 'Bring your family, wives, friends and lovers and come to relax and enjoy a *selamatan*.' In attempting to authenticate the representation of the subordinate classes and elicit empathy from the audience Teater Puber was eager to construct the social entertainment or celebratory atmosphere of people's theatre.

Efforts were made to dissolve the established conventions of urban intermediate strata 'modern' theatre with those of people's theatre. There was an attempt to adapt to the technical and dramaturgical conventions of peoples' theatre.

(...continued)

as weddings and circumcisions. Males pay money to have a turn at dancing with her.

Connected with this, were strategies to break down the distance between the subordinate class experiences represented in the performance and the sensibilities of audience members from the intermediate strata. Based on idealisations of the more egalitarian and democratic 'nature' of people's theatre, efforts were made to defuse the centralist authority of the play script and single director, use dramatical tricks to encourage audience involvement, and incorporate the local Tegal dialect into the performance. Unfortunately, as we shall see, there were also formidable barriers to the successful reconstruction of people's theatre in the *Lenggaong* performance.

Part of the regeneration concerns, mentioned earlier, was criticism over the dominant influence of long term producer directors such as Teater RSPD's Yono Daryono and Teater Puber's Nurhidayat. The *Lenggaong* performance was an attempt to elevate fresh blood into the directorship role. In fact, according to a flier (Enthieh 1993) distributed amongst the audience, all the 'actors' were to become directors. The flier asserts that the production process was democratised by dissolving the authority of a single director and fixed play script through allowing all performers to have equal responsibility in shaping the performance outcome through open discussion and debate. The basis for this approach was a romanticised understanding of the production processes in peoples' theatre such as *kethoprak*, which was after all the theme of the performance.¹³¹

We are performing '*kethoprak/Ludruk*', they have become '*actors*' without a director. Not like what happens in most modern theatre. In '*puber*' theatre all become the same, one '*level*', without one person as director or someone else leading us. That which is heavy carried by all, that which is light carried by all [my translation].

Central to this 'philosophy' was that, as with people's theatre, the script was to be seen as a basic idea for the actors to improvise with during rehearsals and the performance.

And what inspires this alternative, beginning with that which was said by

¹³¹ It is also possible that the manager/director (and often main actor) of a people's theatre troupe has an authoritarian, paternalistic relationship with the ordinary members of the troupe, deciding what, and how, they should perform.

Lanang Setiawan that the manuscript is not in the form of a 'holy book', but can be seen as a basic idea ala '*Kethoprak/Ludruk*' that can be developed by the actors themselves. [my translation]

In reality, inexperience, confusion and discontent necessitated recalling Nurhidayat the week prior to the performance in order to help raise the production to an acceptable standard. In the end, there was little variation between the original play script and performance content, except for a few pre-rehearsed theatrical tricks designed to draw the audience into the performance.

These theatrical tricks were necessary given the physical separation of audience and performers. The venue was a large community hall in which approximately 250 people sat in rows of fold-up chairs down a slight incline to within about three metres from a stage raised about 1.5 metres. The lively propensity of Tegal's audiences was tapped through the use of these tricks in convergence with scenes using the coarse Tegal dialect and depicting sexuality and violence.

For example, in the unresolved fight between the two *lenggaong* (Mangusaren and Pungawaren) there was an exchange of rough insults. During the escalating fight each *lenggaong* incarnated into more and more terrifying spiritual beasts, which included that of tiger and wild bison. One audience member heckled loudly at the absurd looking cardboard tiger, its lack of ferocity, and its toothless mouth. The fight ended with Mangusaren temporarily defeated, lying half conscious on the stage. Slowly he recognised the voice of his lover, Sailah, the beautiful *ronggeng* dancer, calling out to him from the back of the auditorium. In this obvious strategy to draw the audience in, Sailah walked through the audience carrying a tray of frangipani petals, which she tossed into the audience on either side of her. As she exchanged words of sensual longing with Mangusaren, who finally reached down and helped her on stage, the audience hooted with delight and encouragement.

As in people's theatre the Tegal dialect was used during the internal *kethoprak* play about the *lenggaong*. The forthright, unpretentious Tegal dialect, most effective in scenes displaying sexuality and conflict, succeeded in reducing the distance between audience and performers. However, Indonesian language was used for the bulk of the performance, which centred on the plight of the *kethoprak* performers.

The use of the Tegal dialect of Javanese, as compared to the national language

of Indonesian, is central to debate over the ‘authenticity’ of a regional identity constructed by Tegal’s ‘modern’ theatre. To its credit *Lenggaong* was one of the first performances to attempt integrating Tegal dialect. However, the dilemma for Tegal’s progressive intelligentsia is that their social relations, including employment, are situated in the nation-state where Indonesian language is the official and preferred language of modernity and national connections. Indonesian language predominates even in informal conversations amongst peers. However, it is the directness and rough nature of the Tegal dialect that Tegal’s ‘modern’ theatre workers claim embodies the assertive, tenacious, open and egalitarian spirit they are trying to harness. When comparing Tegal dialect with modern Indonesian and the refined Javanese from the courts of Solo and Yogyakarta, Tegal’s progressive intelligentsia waver between pride and shame, and familiarity and unfamiliarity, for their indigenous tongue.

The main criticism of *Lenggaong* raised in the usual post-performance discussions held at the venue with fellow cultural workers and journalists was the play’s failure to construct a convincing people’s theatre and expression of Tegal’s grassroots ethos. In the moderator Eko Tunas’s words, *Lenggaong* was ‘*teater rakyat yang kurang merakyat*’, or peoples’ theatre which didn’t reach the people.¹³² According to Tunas, like most of Tegal’s ‘modern’ theatre productions, *Lenggaong* sacrificed local meaning in search of national recognition. That is, apart from the token insertion of Tegal dialect during the *kethoprak* play, the use of formal Indonesian language and romanticised *wong cilik* behaviour was not a convincing reconstruction of social reality.

Such criticism might be directed to the final scene that intentionally revives the *banteng loreng* (wild bison) symbolism. Ni Ratu, the *kethoprak* troupe’s prima donna, represents multiple oppressions facing the *wong cilik*. The threats and powerlessness faced by the troupe in overstaying its permit, the resultant exploitation of Ni Ratu’s sexuality, and the murder of her lover (a fellow actor in the *kethoprak* troupe) are a result of the abuses of authority and power. Ni Ratu arrives at the office

¹³² Eko Tunas, a playwright and son of one of Tegal’s ‘modern’ theatre founders, established Teater RSPD with Yono Daryono, and now works in the television industry in Jakarta.

of the district official, whom she is supposed to service, and to her disgust discovers that he is Mas Rajo, her estranged husband. Aware he is behind all the tragic circumstances that have befallen her and the *kethoprak* troupe, she flies into a rage smashing everything in his office. As the curtain closes the frightened boss vainly tries to appease the furore of the wild bison personified in Ni Ratu.

Criticism that the *Lenggaong* performance, and Tegal's 'modern' theatre in general, failed to construct an 'authentic' people's theatre and grassroots ethos highlights the gap between well-meaning ideals and the social reality of the performance. However, such criticism falls short of recognising how the social relations from which the performance was constituted circumvent these ideals. From conception through Lanang's observations as a journalist, rehearsals, sponsorship, promotion and final performance and audience reception, the intermediate strata dominated the relations of production which constituted *Lenggaong*. Subordinate class involvement was at best indirect, through Lanang's interviews and observations. As such, *Lenggaong* could be nothing else than a reconstruction of subordinate class experiences elevated and made visible to the sensibilities within the intermediate strata.

One scene, in particular, expresses a convergence of subordinate class and intermediate strata interests. Judging from heightened audience attention, it may also have momentarily raised the audience's critical awareness of the abuse of power and encouraged them to empathise with the *wong cilik*. The scene was reminiscent of the comic interlude in *wayang* and other forms of people's theatre in that it used humour to contextualise the performance with contemporary social issues.

After the *kethoprak* play about the power struggle between the *Lenggaong* ends (the play within the play), the master of ceremonies comes out on stage in his ordinary daily attire, and tells the audience to quickly and peaceably go home as there is nothing more to see. Then, he, himself, is chastened by the owner of the *kethoprak* troop, Gembluk Bodong, to stop mucking around as it is obvious the audience has already departed in a rush. This direct recognition of the audience in the performance has the effect of bringing us, the real audience into the main performance in intimate contact with the *kethoprak* actors. This clear break or switch back to the daily lives and troubles of the *kethoprak* troupe is also reinforced by a switch from Tegal dialect

to Indonesian language. The next scene is a hyperbole of slapstick comedy. Here, the pretensions of characters symbolising dominant or elite values are lampooned by mischievous clowns or *wong cilik* characters accompanied by roars of laughter from the audience.

Audience attention heightens as Gembluk Bodong is suddenly arrested by an overly officious *hansip* or village security officer and is goose stepped into the office of the *lurah* or village head. Gembluk Bodong cowers in front of the arrogant, corrupt *lurah*, who reproaches him for overstaying his permit to perform by seven days, announcing a heavy fine of seven million rupiah (A\$ 4,650.00) or seven months in jail. Gembluk Bodong protests that how on earth could he afford to pay fines totalling millions of rupiah and can't go to jail as his thirty *kethoprak* members are dependent on him. To this the village head retorts: *Itu urusan saudara! Ini undang-undang modern* ('That's your problem! These are modern regulations'). This is clearly a criticism of new traffic regulations that were mooted at the time. The regulations include harsh fines which, while exorbitant for the intermediate strata, are way beyond the means of the *wong cilik*. Such fines would just lead to greater bargaining powers for corrupt officials, as happens in the performance. The village head uses the situation to enforce his real motives for calling in Gembluk Bodong. In order to stay out of jail Gembluk Bodong must agree to provide the district officer the services of his hottest female star, Ni Ratu. Then, in hilarious comic farce, the village head also wanting to get something out of the situation for himself, continues to haggle with Gembluk Bodong over a more appropriate fine. Eventually, before allowing Gembluk Bodong to return to his *kethoprak* troupe, the village head settles for a price of sixty five thousand rupiah (A\$ 45.00) and his wrist watch. This is all Gembluk Bodong possesses.

The above is a rare moment in the performance where there seems a convergence of *wong cilik* and intermediate strata interests in opposition to arbitrary oppression and abuse of power. Overall, however, the *Lenggaong* performance is exclusively orientated to the particular sensibilities of Tegal's intermediate strata audiences, who, like Lanang the journalist, are observing the 'other' world of the *wong cilik*.

A key to these sensibilities is Daryono's reference to the illegitimate child

(*anak haram*) metaphor of neither belonging to past traditional or future modern worlds, as evident in the ambivalence the urban intermediate strata have towards the local Tegal language. Rapid social change brought about by late capitalism has detached the urban intermediate strata from traditional social relations and values. However, in the modern world they are feeling alienated from human experience and insecure about changing values and employment opportunities. Observation and vicarious experiencing of the 'other' *wong cilik* as they have constructed it may help to purge a number of possible anxieties. There seems a quest to preserve/construct the 'authentic' Tegal ethos found in traditional people's theatre; to grasp a secure and stable regional cultural identity and morality in the face of uncertainty and amorality brought about by global forces of change.¹³³ There is a desire to experience, be it vicariously, the humanity of the *wong cilik* from which the urban intermediate strata are finding themselves increasingly alienated. In connection with this is the construction of a safe outlet for the sexual repression by puritan urban intermediate strata ideals through a portrayal of the exotic *wong cilik* 'other'.¹³⁴ The construction of the degenerated 'other'; the sexual intrigue, violence and misery, also serves to reassure the audience of the value and security of their own world.

The well-meaning advocacy of the *wong cilik* and lofty ideals in constructing an egalitarian Tegal ethos or regional identity based on a popular consciousness are subsumed by the needs and interests of the urban intermediate strata. This is because it is the intermediate strata who dominate the relations of cultural production in Tegal's 'modern' theatre. Similarly, the ideals of 'enriching' and 'democratising' a

¹³³ Similarly, Lorna Kaino (1996:192-3) notes that those in the lower and upper intermediate strata in urban Perth, Australia, are experiencing insecurity in adjusting to or becoming victims of rapidly changing social relations brought about by a continually fluctuating global market capitalism. She notes that 'where the material and ideological bases of people's lives are constantly demanding re-examination, people seek symbols of a more secure, stable and "human" society as provided by "traditional" institutions such as the art museums or church' (Kaino 1996:192-3).

¹³⁴ Widodo (1995:13-4) has observed the same phenomenon in the way the print media constructs 'voyeuristic' accounts of illicit sexuality in village *tayuban* dances for the 'fantasies' of urban males from a 'puritan' 'middle-class'. The *tayuban* articles are a substitute 'tourist destination' for those who are attracted to, but physically separated from, the world of the village *tayuban*. Janet Wolff (1988:129-31) also lists a number of ways the nineteenth century Victorian 'middle class' are able to maintain, or endure, a repressive sexual ideology through visiting, or representing, the erotic and exotic 'other' through art and literature.

national culture through the promotion of Tegal's modern theatre with its egalitarian ethos are subject to the interests of those who dominate the associated processes of cultural production.

Regional Identity and National Recognition

In the post-performance discussion on *Lenggaong*, Eko Tunas expressed concern about the cooption of 'regional identity' in Tegal theatre's negotiation of national recognition. He offered the proliferation of the famous *warteg* (*warung Tegal*) or Tegal style food stall in Jakarta as an ideal model to be followed by Tegal theatre as it ventures into the national arena. The *warung* or road side food stall can be viewed as a democratic space that doesn't distinguish between people. It provides cheap, simple and clean food and refreshments. In the *warung* conversations amongst friends and newcomers often run freely until the early hours of the morning. For Tunas, however, the *warteg* are more than static democratic spaces. They are a collective democratic force infiltrating main stream culture.

There are approximately 14,000 *warteg* in the national capital. Rather tongue in cheek, Eko Tunas claims the *warteg* offered the first fast food in Jakarta.¹³⁵ However, the *warteg* is an antithesis of the now mushrooming 'modern' fast food franchises like California Chicken and Macdonalds. California Chicken is big capital catering for a burgeoning affluence in the higher levels of the intermediate strata. However, an individual operator owns the *warteg* and the smaller capital outlay would place him in the intermediate strata, or petty bourgeoisie. The *warteg* serves up cheap, clean food for ordinary people on the street, such as construction workers, factory labourers, and transport workers.

Unlike the recreational diners at the fast food restaurants, the *warteg*'s subordinate class clientele are there essentially to fill their stomachs whilst finding respite from their daily toils. Tunas adds, the erroneous perspective from Jakarta is that Tegal people came to Jakarta in desperate need of a livelihood so set up the *warteg*. However, from Tegal's perspective, rather than Jakarta being the paternalistic

¹³⁵ Tunas even suggests that Tegal's famous food stalls have their origins in the seventeenth century, supplying Sultan Agung's troops with sustenance as they rested on their way to the heroic rebellion against Batavia.

provider, the people of Tegal came to Jakarta and provided it with a service it was lacking. Tunas continues, Jakarta has been fortunate in gaining cultural and democratic enrichment through the *warteg*. In fact, the *warteg* is only a humble part of Tegal's cultural penetration of Jakarta which includes an impressive number of professionals and notorieties, including film and television directors and stars as well as outspoken politicians. Without the democratising influence of the *warteg*, and by inference, Tegal culture, Tunas declares, there would be greater incidence of social unrest in Jakarta.

In reality, the ideals of Tegal's culture enriching and democratising national or centralised culture are compromised through the process of integration. In October 1993 six of Tegal's cultural workers accepted an invitation to perform *Malam Sastra Tegal* (An Evening of Tegal Literature) at W. S. Rendra's Bengkel Teater in Depok, West Java. Rendra, a well known radical cultural worker of the 1970s, has had a long standing, intimate relationship with Tegal (Setiawan 1994:1,6). The rising young poet, Sitok Srengenge, who, at the time, was Rendra's right hand man and protege, is also maintaining friendly relations between Tegal and Bengkel Teater through visitations to Tegal.

Aside from these friendly relations, Rendra's explicit objective in inviting Tegal's cultural workers was as an initial stage in the promotion of Tegal as a regional cultural force worthy of national recognition. Implied here was Rendra's position as their patron. Rendra's noble gesture to assist and promote regional cultural production should be situated in the context of a trend in cultural regionalisation challenging the centre's authority/dominance. Even in Jakarta there is regionalisation. The unquestioned central authority of the Jakarta Arts Centre, Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM), has been shattered in recent years by the mushrooming of a number of smaller, more vital, theatre *sanggar* (bases) throughout Jakarta (Sopyan, 1993:29; Oton, 1993:29). As part of the national performing arts, Rendra's status is also under attack. Perhaps the hope was that his position as 'king maker' could be maintained in a new role as patron of regional culture.

The arrival of Tegal's cultural workers to Bengkel Teater conjured images of a visitation from distant vassals or principalities to the central kingdom, as in the days

of Tegal's Martoloyo and the Mataram kingdom. Rendra's lavish generosity and concern for his guests was almost overwhelming. Apart from catering for all their needs over the two days, Rendra took time to get to know the cultural workers individually. In more formal discussions Rendra sat on a wooden platform together with his 'courtly' adviser, Sitok Srengenge, and the Tegal cultural workers forming an intimate circle (Fig. 19).



Figure 19 Rendra, mas Willy, was a gracious host to the artists from Tegal. Rendra with hat, Nurhidayat on his immediate left, and Widjati to the left again. Photo provided by Nurhidayat.

After reminiscing about his past glories, Rendra came to the purpose of the Tegal visit. As well as the evening's performance, Rendra wished to promote Tegal, and later other regional cultures, through a national journal. For this purpose he had invited Hamsad Rangkuti, editor-in-chief of the once authoritative cultural journal *Horison* – which was floundering through internal strife and as smaller local publications began to flourish. As an outcome *Horison* published a special edition of Tegal literature in August 1994.

Motivation in making Tegal theatre more visible nationally through the *Malam Sastra Tegal* performance was evident in the energy put into promotion and preparations, reflected in the size and composition of the audience at the performance. There were cultural editors and journalists from almost all the major tabloids, newspapers, and cultural and popular magazines; well known cultural critics

and artists from theatre, literature, film and television; and a large public from many locations scattered throughout Java, including a chartered bus load from Bandung and a group of local high school students.¹³⁶ The audience numbered about five hundred.

The performance was preceded by a short introduction by Rendra on the existence of quality 'modern' regional cultural production invisible to the centre. According to Rendra, this invisibility of regional cultural production results in a general pessimism amongst most critics over the decline or stagnation of 'modern' Indonesian culture. However, Rendra said there are many regions, such as Tegal, which have long established and dynamic 'modern' cultural production of equal quality to that of the centre. Rendra's desire therefore was to make that already existing regional culture visible nationally.

Rendra's speech, and the impressive biographies of the cultural workers read out by Sitok prior to each individual performing, made the otherwise largely unheard of Tegal cultural workers familiar to the audience, enhancing the sympathy and respect noticeable in the audience response. Throughout the performance the audience was diligently attentive with encouraging comments, loud applause and laughter.

The highly animated and personalised poetry readings of Widjati, which conveyed a more subjective and individualistic, rather than politically overt, expression of Tegal ethos, were particularly well received. Encouraged by Rendra's and Sitok's genuine, publicly expressed admiration for him, Widjati felt relaxed and was able to recall from memory almost all of his poetry. This left him free to deliver playfully and dramatically his poems as romantic-tragic, warm and comical. Widjati's animated style set up, and fed off, a receptive audience: a rhythm of expectant silence followed by bursts of laughter and applause at mischievous and ironic endings to a quick succession of short poems based on his personal life long struggles and suffering. Widjati's poems are an extension of his identity and the audience were not so much laughing at poems designed to attract their laughter, but rather laughing at

¹³⁶ This is a remarkable success given that, although Bengkel Teater is located close to Jakarta, it is isolated and difficult to get to, and at this time there was a clash of agendas with Teater Populer's (Teguh Karya and Slamet Raharjo) 25th anniversary seminar and performance in Jakarta.

who Widjati is.

Widjati's poems are simple, honest and open testimonies of his struggle over more than sixty years to live out his passion for poetry coping with, or resisting, the material constraints of his world. For Widjati, living and breathing poetry meant walking away from his ethnic Chinese family's traditions in trading; coping with marital tensions and breakdowns (he has married three times); and enduring periods of poverty and hunger, and even public ridicule. Though now through his wife's shop front business they have a reasonably good income, Widjati lives an austere existence. By being aware of, yet consistently and loyally resisting cooption by such material concerns, Widjati's poems retain an aura of freshness and 'authenticity' (Widjati 1992).

Widjati's 'A plate of fried rice poem' (*Sajak sepiring nasi goreng*) written in 1990, though longer than average, encapsulates well the inseparability of his poetry and life with its manifest tensions. His passion for poetry is impinged upon by daily practicalities involving financial and marital difficulties and basic necessities, such as the frequently occurring theme of food. His all night efforts to write a sensational poem on a par with Rendra's work as a gift for his wife are disturbed by thoughts of a current argument with his wife over her request to buy some necessity he knows they cannot afford. The next morning, rather than being rewarded with breakfast after the successful completion of his poem, his bitter wife sarcastically criticises the futility of his poems and he is left waiting hungrily, but in vain, for a plate of fried rice to appear.

Plate of fried rice poem

"Have you got the baby's nappies ready yet, darling?"

This I asked my wife as I picked up some pebbles

'No, I asked for a plate of rice and fruit salad, not ice cream' she answered sharply.

My heart shrank.

As Rendra once gave a lively performance of "Swan Song"

so too tonight is the night of my most glorious poetry

But unfortunately, there is a bunch of sentences that fell apart. Should I chop

out one sentence after the other?

Before dawn this poem is sure to be finished, and successful.
I'll give it as a present to my quarrelsome wife.
and a plate of fried rice surely won't be forgotten for my breakfast.

"What have you been writing all night, hey?" my wife scolded.
"Ah I'm bored. More of those poems you write. Write something else, not a poem. Your poems stink!"¹³⁷

I was still waiting, grumpily
for a plate of fried rice that after a long time still hadn't appeared!

(Widjati 1992:39)

(for the Indonesian transcript see Appendix One, F)

During the *Malam Sastra Tegal* performance, Sitok retold an anecdote about Widjati that relates closely with this poem. In an attempt to impress his wife that his poetry had value Widjati gave some money to someone working for a tabloid asking him to send the money back addressed to him. In this way his wife would think he had been remunerated for publishing his poetry.

Subsequent newspaper articles on Widjati were full of praise, describing his 'bohemian' lifestyle and poetry as a 'natural', individual expression of the Tegal ethos – 'Tegal personified' (Bre Redana 1993b). Like Tegal's fresh sea breeze, Widjati is simple, honest, free from pretensions, an antithesis to materialistic values and pursuits, and with a cultural self assurance that resists dependence on dominant cultural forces (Bre Redana 1993b, Malna 1993). In promotion at the national level, Widjati was used as a figurehead demonstrating the grassroots ethos supposedly underpinning Tegal's performing arts.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Literally, stink of shrimp paste or worthless!

¹³⁸ It is only recently that Widjati has risen from obscurity to national recognition. This culminated in a back page article and photograph of him in the prestigious national daily, *Kompas* (Bre Redana 1993b). No doubt newspaper reviews of *Malam Sastra Tegal*, all of which focused glowingly on Widjati, were heavily influenced by the star maker Rendra's personal opinions. Nevertheless, it was locally based groundwork, particularly by Nurhidayat, which first made Widjati visible. Nurhidayat, himself adept at courting the mass media, encouraged the reticent Widjati to accept more exposure, organised local publication of Widjati's poetry, and was central in organising performances with Widjati at Bengkel Teater and elsewhere.

However, the performances at *Malam Sastra Tegal* by the other cultural workers from Tegal had more in common with *Lenggaong* than Widjati. The short stories (*cerpen*) performed by Ratmana, Yono Daryono and Nurhidayat, for example, presented the discourse and world of the *wong cilik* constructed from intermediate class observations of the *wong cilik* 'other'.

The three *cerpen* by Ratmana, Daryono and Nurhidayat elicited a perception of the hysterical-reactionary nature by which the *wong cilik* as individuals or as a collective respond when faced with extraordinarily severe events beyond their control. That is, a passive, ignorant people unable to make sense of, let alone control, powerful threatening or destructive forces explode in a reactionary, unorganised, non-rational way. Malna (1994) writes:

[In Ratmana's *cerpen*] criticism towards the feudalistic Dutch East Indies system is expressed through attacking the local Dutch superior as having a grotesque belly button. This method turns into anarchy in Nurhidayat's character who burns down the markets as well as himself. The same is the case in Daryono's character who increased her weeping when faced with her sick child [my translation].

During post performance discussions Tegal's cultural workers registered surprise that the Jakarta critics had focused on an interpretation of hysteria and claimed they had not intended such an interpretation. It was suggested that perhaps the Jakarta critics were too quick to conclude that these *cerpen* are depicting a negative Tegal trait traced back to official observations of the Tiga Daerah Affair. That is, the villagers suffering under severe economic and political oppression were easily whipped up into hysterical rampaging mobs by the likes of Kutil. In part, these interpretations are a consequence of the class perspective of the Tegal cultural workers observing the *wong cilik* from without. The narrator in Daryono's short story, *Waseng*, is an outsider (new arrival) to the village community. Similarly, Daryono, himself, regularly visits villages in the region as a public relations officer for the regional government radio station RSPD. Again, like Setiawan's *Lenggaong*, Nurhidayat's *cerpen*, *Semar Panggang* ('Roasted Semar'), is based on observations and discussions with *wong cilik* market sellers.

Semar Panggang was inspired by a recent incident in Tegal, which frequently occurs in cities and towns throughout Java, where informal people's markets are displaced or upgraded. In Tegal, *Pasar Pagi* (*Pasar Esuk* in *Semar Panggang*), a regular morning market, informally established from generation to generation of small fruit and vegetable traders catering for ordinary people, was recently closed down to be replaced by a modern multi-level shopping plaza. The shopping plaza intended to make available a number of small neatly organised kiosks for fruit and vegetable selling. However, only a small minority of sellers in the old markets would have access to these kiosks. The number of kiosks was limited and, more importantly, the annual leasing fee of ten million rupiah (A\$ 6,650.00) was way beyond the means of the typical small trader.

The ensuing climate of repression and resistance over the new shopping plaza project in Tegal was characteristically intense. The displacement of *Pasar Pagi* and the exorbitant leasing fees for the kiosks, higher than anywhere else in Indonesia, met with anger and determined resistance backed by broad community support and NGO assistance.

Sellers protested, setting up banners in the market whilst nearby shops closed for business in a show of solidarity. The government, equally determined to see the project continue, went to the extent of prohibiting the market people from reading newspapers carrying articles on the protests. However, distributing photocopies of related newspaper articles within the market circumvented this prohibition. As people became more organised a letter of protest was sent to the city mayor. Delegations went to the provincial Legislative Assembly in Semarang and to Rudini, the then Minister for Internal Affairs at parliament house in Jakarta. All efforts were to no avail and eventually the last of the sellers refusing to budge were removed. Ironically the project has stalled over a dispute in financial arrangements between the local government and the private developers. In 1996, several years after the small traders were removed, the shopping plaza remains fenced off and not completed.

Although fictitious, *Semar Panggang* is a direct reference to the *Pasar Pagi* incident easily identifiable to anyone living in Tegal, and aims to express the sentiments of the *wong cilik* market sellers. Since *Semar Panggang* was written in

January 1993 it has been published in the print media and performed in Tegal, TBS Solo and Bengkel Teater. At TBS Solo the energetic young *dalang* Ki Enthus Susmono gave a very colourful, animated monologue of *Semar Panggang*, including the dramatic use of a small fire.

The story unfolds through dialogue between the different market characters. The market sellers speak in coarse Javanese or Indonesian which distinguishes them from the formal Indonesian used in the general narration and by officialdom represented at the market. The main character, and anti-hero, from which the *cerpen* story and its symbolism revolves, is a crazy beggar who is affectionately nicknamed Kang Letmi, short for Kang Letnan Miring or Brother Crazy Lieutenant. Kang Letmi is obviously drawn from Semar, the *wayang* clown-servant of the Pandawa *ksatrias*. Like Semar, Kang Letmi has an ambiguous social status.

The story begins with the gloomy market sellers, worried about their future prospects with the spectre of the plaza development already adversely affecting trade.¹³⁹ Kang Letmi cheerfully singing his beggar's song and clowning around easily aggravates them:

Kang Letmi:	Move aside, hot ginger drinks... I beg you share, as much as possible, aaaa...
Seller:	Kang Letmi, don't sing here, Go on or I'll give you a shove, quick, move away
Kang Letmi	One Two One Two ? shoes One Two One Two ? shoes (whistle noise)
Seller	Dog! fucking (dog). Trade is slow, but you continue to make a racket

(for the complete Indonesian transcript of 'Semar Panggang' see Appendix One, G)

Ironically, Kang Letmi also enjoys great respect. The ambiguity of Kang Letmi's status is symbolised in the humorous description of his attire and behaviour which

¹³⁹ Before the small traders were removed, a corrugated iron fence was put around the perimeter of the Pasar Pagi markets making them invisible to the outside and difficult to access for prospective customers.

first introduces a person of high rank, but soon degenerates into describing his disgusting culinary habits:

Someone in an officer's cap and badge denoting rank on the chest, and colourful tassles, is rooting through a rubbish bin, as he laughs continuously. Chewing on mustard green husks

Though at times his behaviour is annoying, like the clown-servant, Semar, Kang Letmi is also remembered for his helpful nature, such as carrying merchandise for the sellers. Furthermore, he is seen as a necessary institution of the markets, having been there since he was small and considered the '*mbahuarekso pasar esuk*' or 'original wise guardian of the *esuk* markets'. This parallels Semar as original ancestor of the Javanese and *danyang* or spirit guardian of the village.

Kang Letmi's crazy antics, apparently oblivious to the dire situation facing the market sellers, causes them to reflect. With her mind on the market redevelopment plans, one of the sellers says Kang Letmi is fortunate to be crazy as we are now living in crazy times (*zaman edan*) where abuse of power and rampant corruption seems normal. The other woman has no time for the abstract symbolism of the ancient Jayabaya predictions and squarely puts the blame for their predicament on government regulations and those with the vested interests making those regulations. She goes on to reaffirm her position, like many of the other sellers, to stay put and refuse the offer by the developers to lease the new kiosks.

This stance contrasts with that of *Pak Mantri Pasar*, the government paid market supervisor responsible for collecting rent. He acts as the official mouthpiece justifying the displacement of the old markets and redevelopment plans in terms of the government's developmentalist ideology:

Market Supervisor I once again stress. Development requires sacrifice. You must be willing to sacrifice. Because what we are doing is always for progress!

His efforts are either ignored or met with cynicism:

Seller Progress to where Mr supervisor?
Market supervisor: Progress as best as possible. Of course forward. Now
if you don't progress forward you'll all be left behind.

Suddenly the story takes a dramatic twist when in the quiet of the night a fire is seen raging through the old market.¹⁴⁰ The sellers sleeping nearby rush to the market gathering in bewilderment and panic. An hysterical voice screams out that Kang Letmi is standing on the old Dutch colonial built observation tower in the middle of the burning markets. They beg Kang Letmi to come down, but he refuses. He declares that it was he who started the fire and delivers a surprisingly coherent speech.

All this time you all have considered me as not sane. A crazy person. By burning this market I'm going to prove that it is I who has the most healthy mind. And it is actually you all who are crazy. Because it is you who are unable to do anything when faced with a situation as difficult as this!

Then before jumping into the flames below Kang Letmi states:

I've already proven, I'm the most sane amongst us all. If later the modern market is built then where is the place for people like me, like you all?

The final analogy with Semar as the representative and protector of the people whose well-being in turn guarantees the existence of those in power is completed when an old person from amidst the crowd mutters:

Kang Letmi is the contemporary symbol of Semar. He has become a sacrifice for the greatness of the Pandawa brothers. Kang Letmi has perfected himself as Roasted Semar – because of Batara Kala's doings. Mythology that never dies.

In the *wayang lakon*, *Semar Panggang*, the world is on the brink of destruction which can only be averted through the self sacrifice of Semar as the most powerful being. It is a distressing lakon, to see Semar victimised with no way out but to sacrifice himself, and is damming of the mistreatment of ordinary folk through the abuse of

¹⁴⁰ Fires frequently raze slums or informal markets earmarked for development.

power.¹⁴¹

In sympathy with the *wong cilik*, Nurhidayat's *Semar Panggang* conveys the anxieties, anger and frustration of the *wong cilik* sellers about to lose their market. It represents a strong criticism of insensitive developmentalist projects. In this sense, response from the *Malam Sastra Tegal* audience and newspaper critics is disappointing. In reality, the *wong cilik* of Pasar Pagi were very assertive in their action against the development of the shopping plaza. However, *Semar Panggang*'s audience chose a narrow interpretation of the 'hysteria' and 'anarchy' in Kang Letmi's actions. This discrepancy illustrates the separation between the cultural production of *Semar Panggang* and the world of the *wong cilik* it is supposed to represent. Whether as a theatrical performance or published in the print media *Semar Panggang* is limited essentially to an audience from the intermediate strata.¹⁴²

This is the dilemma facing Tegal's 'modern' theatre cultural workers caught between their own ambitions for recognition and suitable remuneration¹⁴³ and a genuine concern for the *wong cilik*. *Malam Sastra Tegal* was a promotional exercise intended to make modern Tegal theatre and literature (the cultural workers) visible nationally. The case for worthy national recognition rested on its unique regional identity, a brashness and egalitarian openness based on an archetypal *arus bawah*, or grassroots, Tegal ethos. The 'authenticity' of Tegal theatre in expressing this Tegal ethos rests on how convincingly the cultural workers can represent the *wong cilik*.

Widjati represented the ambitions of 'modern' theatre in harnessing the Tegal ethos to enrich, whilst in the process resist the assimilating tendencies of, mainstream cultural production. *Malam Sastra Tegal* represented negotiation between the established centre and the growing independence of the periphery in progressive intermediate strata cultural production. For example, during their stay at Bengkel Teater Rendra arranged for a management consultant to encourage the Tegal cultural

¹⁴¹ The surrounding circumstances, character traits and role of mBah Kawit in Bambang Widoyo's play 'Tuk' (1989), performed by Teater Gapit, is very similar to that of Kang Letmi. Like Kang Letmi, mBah Kawit's death is ambiguous in stubborn opposition, and ultimate capitulation, to contemporary 'progress', and its inhumane tendencies. This leaves Feinstein (1995:626) to ponder 'is this victory or defeat'.

¹⁴² In *Mutiara* (1993) the advertisement for Italian made shoes placed at the end of *Semar Panggang* points to its likely readers.

¹⁴³ Nurhidayat received an honorarium of rp 150,000 (A\$ 100.00) when *Semar Panggang* was published by the tabloid *Mutiara* in January 1993.

workers to forge permanent links with larger commercial and cultural institutions. The consultant reasoned that by further integrating their cultural production into the capitalist system they would avoid marginalisation and ensure well paid, regular work. In response the cultural workers stood up one by one and quietly walked out on the meeting, showing their wariness of becoming dependent on a centralised culture industry and losing their 'autonomy'. Piek Ardijanto Soeprijadi, an older member of the Tegal entourage, said this was the reason why he had turned down an offer as editor of a Jakarta based tabloid. As discussed later, this stance has somewhat weakened over the years. In general Tegal's 'modern' theatre cultural workers are perhaps best described as part of a 'democratic' push for a broader sharing of national cultural production which has been dominated by an established centre.

It is also true that on several occasions Tegal's cultural workers such as Nurhidayat, Yono Daryono, and Lanang Setiawan have organised critical performances and discussion groups at great personal risk, where surveillance and interrogation from local intelligence officers is not uncommon.¹⁴⁴ However, 'modern' theatre groups in Tegal are not consistently involved in the lives and struggles of the *wong cilik*. Despite the depth and vitality of 'modern' theatre in Tegal, there is, to my knowledge, no theatre group working with Tegal's large industrial working class, employed in the metal, textile and various consumables factories. 'Modern' theatre's advocacy of the *wong cilik*, criticism of rapacious developmentalism, and invocation of 'traditional' non-market orientated, anti-materialistic, cultural symbolism are compromised and contained by the relations of cultural production. Tegal's 'modern' theatre is detached from the *wong cilik* and dependent on socio-economic relations dominated by the intermediate strata.

Unlike Tunas's *warteg*, The clientele of Tegal's modern theatre are not the local *wong cilik*. Tegal's modern theatre does not provide the local *wong cilik* with a 'democratic' space where they are free to participate in dialogue as equals. This is

¹⁴⁴ In August 1994 local police questioned Nurhidayat all day, every day, for a week. He was involved in a committee that organised an all-Indonesia poetry reading performance called *Peluncuran Dari Negri Poci*. They had not only invited the mayor of Tegal to perform, but also the radical poet Wiji Thukul. Thukul's poetry, in particular *Lawan!* or 'Resist!', elicited a spirited response from the young audience. Shocked officials asked the committee to stand Thukul down, but Thukul continued on finishing his poetry in defiance.

where we now turn to the *wayang* performances of the mischievous Tegal *dalang*, Enthus Susmono. Susmono's performances have been orientated to the majority of his patrons, the local *wong cilik* audience.

3. Susmono's Mischievous Wayang Mbeling

Popularising Wayang

The *wayang* performances of Ki *Dalang* Enthus Susmono (Figs. 20-23) which I observed in 1993 were an interplay between the socially constituted self as a *dalang* and his patrons – the largely *wong cilik* local audiences and the sponsor of the performance. However, besides local social relations his performances are part of wider trends affecting cultural production in Java. The personal socio-history and resultant artistic perspective of the *dalang*, Enthus Susmono, embody many of the apparent contradictions in his performance, such as the clash of the 'modern' and 'traditional' and the 'conventional' and 'populist' as well as the fusion of various theatrical genres and styles.

In 1966 Enthus Susmono was born into an extended family of *dalangs* of which he became the 9th generation *dalang*. However, Soemaryono, Susmono's father, did not at first become a *dalang*. He chose to establish a *tumil* or *kethoprak* troupe to supplement his income as a village secretary in order to finance his children's schooling. Soemaryono, inherited 'artistic blood' from his uncle, Dalang Paing, who was also Susmono's grandfather. Along with managing the *kethoprak* troupe, based in an old unused rice storage shed, Susmono's father was theatre director, responsible for organising the choreography, music and stage settings. The influence of other theatrical genres on Susmono's *wayang* performances began with his father's *kethoprak* plays where, accompanied by his dancing mother, Susmono was performing minor parts at the tender age of one.



Figure 20 Ki *dalang* Enthus Susmono. Photo provided by Nurhidayat.



Figure 21 *Gamelan* players and *pesindhen* singers accompanying Susmono at a performance in Maribaya, Tegal, September 1993. Photo by G. Reeves.



Figure 22 Kukun's *jaipongan* welcome dance with the maid servant puppets *cangik* and *limbuk* (in full flight). From a video recording by G. Reeves of Susmono's *Maribaya* performance in September 1993.



Figure 23 Kukun, Eni and Ika perform a *dangdut* song accompanied by an electric guitar. The clown puppet *Bagong* joins in enthusiastically. As *Petruk* and *Gareng* look on. From a video recording by G. Reeves of Susmono's performance.

According to Susmono it was ironic that because of its popularity, his father's *kethoprak* theatre became increasingly not viable economically. From a sense of social responsibility, his father often waived admission charges for audience members he recognised, and let others remain in his troupe even though they were lazy or not directly productive. Eventually, the two hectares of *sawah* he possessed as village secretary were used up in supporting and feeding his troupe which had grown to fifty members.

From his artistic and financial experiences managing the *kethoprak* troupe Susmono's father concluded that he would be better off as an individual artist. He claimed, for example, that the *kethoprak* actors, about to enter the stage, would often forget or not know what to say, relying on his father to prompt them. Thus, in telling Susmono's grandfather he wanted to become a *dalang* also, Soemaryono argued it was better to be his own voice instead of telling other actors how to speak.

When Susmono was about five years old his father sold part of Susmono's grandmother's land in order to commission three friends to make *wayang golek* puppets for his new occupation. During the three months it took to make these puppets the Soemaryono family subsisted on corn which his wife ground into flour. However, the notoriety of his old *kethoprak* troupe and the integration of *kethoprak* aesthetics into his *wayang golek* performance ensured his popularity as a *dalang*. For example, during a performance concerning the Dutch colonial period Soemaryono would let off fire crackers as the Dutch soldier puppets discharged their fire arms. This reputedly sent the audience wild with delight.

The young Susmono was forbidden by his father to play *gamelan* or hold *wayang* puppets. His father reasoned that by concentrating on his formal education Susmono's fate would turn out better than his father's. Nevertheless, Susmono had a rebellious spirit and while his father was away Susmono would steal opportunities to play with the *gamelan* or *wayang* puppets. Then, in junior high school he was able to take formal lessons in the school's *gamelan* ensemble. In second year, senior high school, he began a *dalang* apprenticeship with a teacher called Marwati.

In order to commemorate the 25th anniversary of his school Susmono was

asked to give a *wayang* performance. Shedding tears at his son's determination, Susmono's father gave his blessing for his son's first *wayang* performance on 25 August 1983. Susmono soon became popular as a *dalang kecil* (little *dalang*). In 1984 Susmono's father died and the family relied on Susmono's earnings as *dalang* to get through a period of economic hardship. This struggle for survival necessitated that he radically develop his performances to gain a popularity amongst the largely *wong cilik* audiences that would ensure regular work. Susmono admits that even today, where his wealth has grown with his substantial popularity, memories of these early experiences of economic necessity drive his creativity.

A measure of Susmono's increasing popularity was his being awarded in 1988 best youth *dalang*, and in 1990 second best senior *dalang*, in Central Java. In 1993 he also received an arts award from the Central Javanese branch of the Indonesian Journalists Association (Pesatuan Wartawan Indonesia) and the Arts Council of Semarang (Dewan Kesenian Semarang). Susmono has also recently performed at Taman Ismail Marzuki, in Jakarta, which only invites the most nationally acclaimed *dalang*, such as Ki Anom Suroto and Ki Manteb Sudarsono (Lanang 1993).

As with the *wayang* of his father and grandfather, who were also very popular and renowned for their 'mischievous' performances (Setiawan 1993), Susmono's *wayang* is radically different from the rigidly conservative and feudalistic Central Javanese court ideals. In part this is due to Tegal's location on the periphery of Javanese court culture, manifesting in the more 'independent, egalitarian, grassroots regional identity', discussed earlier. Furthermore, Susmono's *wayang*, as with Tegal's traditional arts in general, is influenced by a proximity to Sundanese and Cirebonese cultural practices. For example, as in Cirebonese *wayang* performances, amongst the *pesindhen* singers are also *ronggeng* or *sintren* dancers. These dancers are asked by the *dalang*, and even members of the audience, to get up and dance to erotic *jaipongan*, *tayuban* or *dangdut* rhythms (Figs. 22 and 23, and Appendix Two).

In part a product of Tegal's regional cultural identity, Susmono's *wayang* performances have a propensity to be more populist. This propensity is augmented by Susmono's location in the urban intelligentsia, and dialogue with modernity, that not only 'updates' his performances aesthetically, but sharpens their critical content.

Apart from the influence of his family's involvement in *kethoprak*, Susmono's creativity has been enriched by his participation in Tegal's 'modern' theatre since 1986 where he was a member of Yono Daryono's Teater RSPD.

Susmono is also part of an emerging young generation of *dalang* who have radically carried on aesthetic changes initiated by populist *dalang* such as Anom Suroto and Manteb Sudarsono from Surakarta. Susmono, similar to his young peers, is affectionately referred to as a *dalang edan* (crazy *dalang*) and his performances as *wayang mbeling* or mischievous *wayang*. By radically transforming, or corrupting in the eyes of conservative opinion, 'traditional' *wayang* conventions they are realigning *wayang* with contemporary popular tastes and regaining the patronage of some of *wayang*'s ardent critics, the urban youth.¹⁴⁵ In contrast to conservative opinion, Susmono believes *dalang* must be courageous in breaking through archaic and restrictive *wayang* conventions in order to meet the changing demands of a new era. In particular, Susmono believes it is important to simplify the ancient courtly Kawi and old Javanese languages normally used in *wayang*. As much as possible he replaces archaic and difficult language with contemporary everyday language, such as 'modern' Javanese, Tegal dialect and the jargon of the youth (*prokem*). Susmono concludes that if *wayang* adapts to contemporary tastes and interests it will 'automatically' be popular in society. However, if *wayang* does not revolutionise itself Susmono believes *wayang* will become but a memory, marginalised by 'modern' forms of cultural expression (Susmono 1996:104-6).

The young *dalang* are incorporating elements from other forms of 'modern' culture, such as western style and indigenous rock music (*dangdut*), as well as moves and aesthetics from kungfu and other action films. Apart from a complete 'traditional' *gamelan* (percussion) ensemble with high quality musicians that accompanies the performance, Susmono has introduced other musical elements catering for contemporary popular tastes, such as a trumpet, base and snare drums, electric guitar, and keyboard. The keyboard, coloured lights, drums and whistles, and the 'tree of life' or *gunungan* puppet are used to enliven the performance, such as

¹⁴⁵ Articles by Beno (1993) and Beno and Wiek (1993) provide details of this young generation of populist *dalang* who are leading a *wayang* 'revival' in urban areas.

during scenes of storm and tempest. In addition, Susmono has numerous new *wayang* characters, some of which have their heads fly off, their intestines spill out, blow smoke, and represent or become possessed by malevolent spirits (Beno 1993).

However, Susmono, drawing on his diverse creative experiences, allows his performances the potential of being more than lurid populist entertainment. His critical social understanding has been part of, and favourably disposed to, yet goes beyond, the general *wong cilik* experiences in local societies.

Susmono's interest in films shows his socio-cultural awareness is a mixture of subordinate class experiences and tastes with the critical observations of the progressive urban intelligentsia. He admits his favourite films are *silat* (indigenous martial arts), kungfu and Rambo movies which accord with popular *wong cilik* tastes and provide him with inspiration for fight scenes in his *wayang* performances. Nevertheless, he also enjoys the more auteur Indonesian and 'Western' films which frequently contain some social criticism, but are generally less popular amongst the *wong cilik*.

One such film was *Yang Muda Yang Bercinta* (Young And In Love) written by Umar Kayam and directed by the late Sjumandjaja. This 1977 film was unexpectedly re-released in October 1993. The leading role was played by the, at that time, radical W. S. Rendra, whose own performances during the seventies were regularly banned (Sen 1987:251). The film got larger than normal audiences for an auteur Indonesian made film due in part to press coverage claiming the film was previously banned.¹⁴⁶ Although the film in general was a romance set amongst the urban intermediate strata it did contain some critical commentary on social inequity. Through the radical young student poet played by Rendra, the film expressed moderate social criticism concerning the lack of access to education for the *wong cilik* and the hypocrisy of the ostentatious lifestyle of the Jakarta elite compared to the ideals of the revolutionary heroes with which they claim to associate. Furthermore, the rerelease showed previously censored scenes, such as Rendra's

¹⁴⁶ In *Detik* [(1993). No. 029. 22-28 September. pp. 24-5.] a poster style advertisement for *Yang Muda Yang Bercinta* claims that 'yang pernah dilarang sekarang boleh beredar!' (what was banned is now allowed to be circulated!). Sensual images of the film such as the photos in the poster and accompanying article-advertisement entitled 'Menghibur dengan daya kritis' (Entertains with a critical strength) would also have contributed to the film's popularity.

poetry readings, that Sen (1987:251-3) described as illuminating on class conflict and contradictions in the comfortable lifestyle of 'middle class' students with their radical egalitarian ideals.

In Tegal about fifty people attended the afternoon screening of *Yang Muda yang Bercinta*, including Susmono and a number of 'modern' theatre cultural workers. Throughout the film Susmono egged other audience members on with frequent retorts and asides. Despite the 'natural' propensity for Tegal audiences to be more vocal than elsewhere one would seldom get such overt audience involvement at auteur films frequented by the educated intermediate strata. Lively audiences are more characteristic of popular films and particularly people's theatre such as *wayang* or *kethoprak* where the *wong cilik* predominate. From my observations, Susmono's outbursts seemed as much uncontrolled feeling, caught in the flow of the story, as intentional. He enjoyed playing his part in the film and stirring up others around him. In the cinema, as in his *wayang* performances, Susmono was at once educated social critic, mischievous audience manipulator, and captivated *wong cilik*.

During his *wayang* performances in the early 1990s Susmono refused to be used as a government mouthpiece, but also refused being labelled as a radical intellectual endeavouring to raise popular political consciousness. Yet, in reality, through subversion of elitist aesthetic conventions, Susmono had much greater freedom to direct criticism at the social elite and dominant institutions such as the press, government officials and *wayang* committees. In fact, Susmono was very serious about protecting his freedom to be 'mischievous' (*nakal*) and refused invitations to perform by government bodies that he felt would compromise his independence and integrity (Beno 1993; Setiawan 1993).

Susmono recognises elitist *wayang* conventions found in the feudal relations between stock characters only to systematically discredit or destroy them in order to support and suit the tastes and interests of his patrons, the local *wong cilik* audience. Popular aesthetics, of which erotic humour is central, are also tools by which Susmono intentionally protests, subverts or parodies elitist *wayang* conventions during the performance. The clown puppet, for example, can be used to ridicule romantic norms or parody social relations based on differences in socio-economic

status. In one of Susmono's stock routines, a clown puppet is attracted to a beautiful refined princess. He brazenly puts his arms around her shoulders giving her a smooch (unthinkable in conventional *wayang*). The princess's reaction is to turn her cheek away in revulsion.

Very conscious of his *wong cilik* patrons, Susmono prefers to use plays where the clown figures can have dominant roles. In a performance on the 28th of September 1993 as part of a circumcision ceremony at Maribaya, a small hamlet within a renowned prostitution area, Susmono chose the *lakon* 'Suryo ndadari'. Here, the malevolent god Batara Guru disguised himself as a sage, Suryo ndadari. Batara Guru's presence as a foreign sage was an attempt to orchestrate Semar's death through confusing and manipulating both the Pandawas and Kurawas. For Susmono, Batara Guru represented oppressive and arbitrary power inflicted by rulers on the people, represented by Semar. Susmono said that when, on failing to get the Pandawa brothers to kill Semar, Batara Guru attacked Semar and started beating him the audience, empathising with Semar, felt very sad and hurt. However, when eventually Semar in uncontrolled rage transformed into an unbeatable force and defeated Batara Guru the audience cheered and yelled. As with the *Peristiwa Tiga Daerah* and Tegal's wild bison imagery, dominant power can oppress and crush the people to a certain extent, but stretched to the limit the people will ultimately turn in blind fury against the source of their oppression. In the end, like Semar, it is the people whose power determines the fate of the nation-state.

Susmono finds the clowns most suitable in empathising/engaging with the people, or being a voice through which the people can find self-expression. Susmono explains further why he gives the clown figure who traditionally identifies with the ordinary people much more freedom and prominence in the performance. Kings and warrior *ksatria* have refined faces that have expressions reflecting abstract and idealised high ethics and metaphysics that Susmono considers unreal. The clowns, however, have facial and bodily expressions that can be used to show the diversity of feelings and experiences of ordinary people in their daily lives. The importance Susmono places on the clowns parallels D. Sherzer and J. Sherzer's (1987:48-50) understanding of the major function of puppetry through the humorous manipulation

and juxtaposition of sociolinguistic diversity within a society:

Like all humor, the humor of puppets is a subversive one. It makes fun of the linguistic differences. But it also attracts attention, in a most positive way, to linguistic diversity, play and creativity. [Furthermore] ... puppets offer an alternative to the serious world we live in and when satirical and socially and politically critical provide a carnivalesque letting off of steam (1987:62).

As illustrated in Appendix Two, the comic interludes of the maidservants Cangik and Limbuk, and the main *adegan Punakawan* in the Maribaya performance are imbued with this carnivalesque dynamic. That which is formal, official, elite, dominant or serious is set up only to be consistently subverted or ridiculed. Erotic humour, calling on a diverse linguistic and cultural repertoire, undermines the sponsor's prestige, the solemn religious prayer and message, the formal Indonesian language speech and the pretensions of the visiting 'Western' cultural analyst. The motor for these carnivalesque dynamics is the banter or interaction between *dalang*, puppets, singer-dancers and musicians. Susmono, as *dalang*, directs other members of his entourage who have reasonable freedom as creative actors in the production. Less directly, the audience congregating around the stage behind the screen participates in the 'carnival'. They laugh and hoot, provide occasional retorts, and, when carried away by the performance, blurt out words in empathy with the puppets. Those few on the shadow side of the screen, any remaining guests or members of the sponsoring family, are physically divorced from the riotous revelry and merrymaking. The 'carnival' themes are embedded in the social context, the circumcision of the sponsor's child, the area's renown for prostitution, the general experiences and tastes of the *wong cilik* audience, and the unusual appearance of foreign visitors at the performance.

On one level, Susmono's preference for the clown figures can be seen as the continued affirmation of popular traditions, often more significant than court ideals, in local *wayang* performances. At another level, his performances could be part of a perceived overall shift in *wayang* performances in Java away from conventional *wayang* stories where clowns were peripheral characters to stories where clowns become the protagonists. As mentioned in Chapter Ten, Foley (1985:94-6) believes

the widespread trend, of the clowns representing the *wong cilik* under siege from gods or misguided *ksatria* representing the ruling elite, reflects changing political awareness of 'democratic ideals' after independence. If this is so, Susmono, along with other young *dalang edan*, may be at the radical edge of a broader transformation of contemporary Indonesian social consciousness and mainstream *wayang* performances.

I believe Susmono's earlier performances, such as that at Maribaya and for the Brebes street traders discussed next, demonstrate, in the assertion of *wong cilik* sentiment, a potential to subvert and critique dominant social values and interests. However, the essentialist notion that the clowns and their humour characteristically lead to the subversion or democratisation of elitist or unequal social conventions is incorrect.¹⁴⁷ In Susmono's more recent performances, discussed in the final section of this chapter, the ruling bloc, not the *wong cilik* audiences, has become the major patron. Here, the clowns and their humorous antics mainly reinforce, rather than subvert, dominant values and interests.

A Performance for the Brebes Street Traders

Although Susmono's *wayang* can be represented by a collective of diverse identities of which the *dalang* is the locus, the characteristics of each individual performance are also directly shaped by the demands of his patrons, who in 1993 were the largely *wong cilik* audience. Testimony to the authenticity in meaning of Susmono's *wayang* for local societies around Tegal is his rapidly rising popularity. There has been a revival of interest in *wayang*, at least Susmono's *wayang*, in certain sections of Tegal's community, such as urban youth, which have until recently been largely impervious to *wayang* performances (Setiawan 1993). This belies an overall trend of 'traditional' *wayang kulit* performances becoming increasingly unpopular with an urban youth having access to other forms of modern entertainment supposedly more

¹⁴⁷ Seizer's (1997) analysis, for example, demonstrates that sexual jokes used by male comedians in popular Tamil theatre in Southern India reinforce established social conventions constraining female participation in the public sphere. It is also obvious from the style of humour in the Maribaya performance, outlined in Appendix Two, that the female singer-dancers are often laughed at and denigrated as sexual objects fulfilling the desires and prejudices of the predominantly male audience.

relevant to their lives. Moreover, several communities, such as Maribaya and Brebes, that had traditionally favoured other popular theatrical genres to *wayang* or have placed a taboo¹⁴⁸ on *wayang* performances, are now warmly receiving Susmono's *wayang*.

On the 9th of September 1993 Susmono gave a *wayang kulit* performance for street traders in the next town east of Tegal, called Brebes. The regional government of Brebes decided to clear the section of the trans-Java highway which runs through Brebes, including the bus terminal, of all hawkers and small traders, who were seen as obstructive, and making the place untidy and unclean¹⁴⁹. The small traders were to be cleared out without thought of alternative provisions for them. However, through the intervention of the *demang pasar*, or market supervisor, negotiations were made with the government to relocate the traders to a small back street off the main road.

The government seemed pleased with the arrangement. However, the traders were not, with the likely reduction in business through the loss of their strategic location in the major traffic areas. The *demang pasar* acted as a mediator between the interests of the government and the street traders. He is like an elected village head who has loyalties with both the government and the traders, as well as his own vested interests. He is responsible for safety and security in the markets, which protects the stalls, from whom he collects protection money, but also prevents the markets from becoming a hot bed of dissent. For the street traders the market relocation was the lesser of two evils, between losing their strategic location and losing their livelihood altogether.

Officially, the *wayang* performance was to celebrate the formal recognition of a special location for the street side traders. Susmono saw the performance's function as a bridge or peacemaker between the government and traders. In reality,

¹⁴⁸ Kampung Panggung's ancestral spirit Mbah Panggung, for example, does not like *wayang* performances. It is believed serious misfortune, such as accidental death, is likely if a *wayang* performance is held in the area. As such, no matter how much he was offered, Susmono would be very reluctant to perform there (Sukmawati 1993).

¹⁴⁹ Informal markets or trading places are like an anathema to state and capital whose interests are expressed through public order. According to Chakrabarty (1992:544), markets, like the Indian *bazaar*, are perceived as a nest of disease and disorder, and rumour leading to rebellion. Capitalist efficiency and state control require regulated and disciplined public space.

the government tried to use the occasion to reinforce its authority over the street sellers. The government decision on the fate of the street sellers was justified in terms of acting in the best interests of the community as a whole. In reality, also, but unofficially and informally, the performance became a vehicle through which the small traders could express their anxiety and dissatisfaction.

The small traders through the *demang pasar* sponsored the performance. Together they raised 1.7 million rupiah (A\$ 1,000.00 in 1993) to pay Susmono, others in his entourage, and cover other costs associated with the event. They also provided the personnel from within their own ranks, such as security guards and bicycle parking attendants. Contrary to Brebes reputation for being indifferent to *wayang* performances, the audience was large, about 1500 people, made up of small traders, pedicab drivers and other urban youth.

Before Susmono's performance began there was an Islamic prayer and various dignitaries gave speeches, of which the *bupati's*, or regent's, was most significant. He thanked the traders for being responsible in accepting their new location without creating trouble and apologised for any inconveniences to them. Acknowledging there may be some lingering disappointment and cynicism, he reminded them that the decision was necessary for the good of the whole community. He then elaborated on this. The authorities had received many negative comments from within and outside the region about the untidy and unhealthy situation of the street traders. The decision to relocate the traders was repeatedly couched in terms of tidiness, cleanliness and security in line with the town's motto – *BERHIAS* – clean, green, beautiful and safe. This was linked with the shame that unlike the neighbouring towns of Tegal and Pemalang, Brebes had never been awarded the *piala Adipura* or annual trophy for cleanest and neatest town.

The *bupati* closed his speech by reminding the traders to keep their area neat and tidy, with a refuse bin at each stall, and to tell their customers when tasting fruit not to throw the peelings on the ground but in the bins. He then apologised that he would be leaving early as he had other engagements for the night. In fact all of the official guests, like the *bupati*, who were honoured with seats in the front rows and served snacks and drinks, left within the first twenty minutes of the nine hour

performance.

Analysis of Susmono's performance is focused on a couple of incidents which demonstrate how space is available for subordinate class expression through dialogue between the *dalang* – acting as an ‘organic intellectual’ articulating the collective memory of local society – and the predominantly subordinate class audience.

About an hour or so into the performance during a court scene in the *Kurawa* kingdom (the bad brothers in the Mahabharata cycle) their scheming and slippery court adviser, Sangkuni, was reminded to be careful not to abuse his position as a high official. If in his position of power he bullied or was too heavy handed towards the people he may find that when he is pensioned off he would come under public sanction or criticism. Response to this obvious criticism of the government officials, who were earlier guests, was unconstrained laughter, yells of delight and spontaneous applause (applause being rare in *wayang*).

Between 1:45 and 3:00 am was the main comic interlude. Besides slapstick comedy and sexual innuendo, jokes about trading and things traded, and singing popular songs, there was one important reference to the traders’ relocation. One of the clowns, Petruk, raised the issue of the cleanest city trophy, that Brebes was unsuccessful whilst all the other neighbouring towns were. Petruk suggested that perhaps it was because it was the officials who were dirty or *kotor* – turning upside down the *bupati*'s speech that harped on the dirtiness of their street side markets.

According to one of the audience members I spoke to during the performance, the puppeteer was suggesting that perhaps the reason was the officials in the other towns were dirty or corrupt, that they paid off those who evaluate which towns are cleanest. The audience member went on to say that this was a high price and that the Brebes officials were only interested in the trophy to enhance their chances of a new term in office. Petruk continued to make a farce out of the trophy. He showed how stupid it was that something as trivial as a cleanliness prize can soak up peoples taxes and 'voluntary' work (*kerja bakti/gotong royong*) instead of the government dealing with more important issues concerning the people’s welfare.

In general, the democratic space for subordinate class participation in *wayang* is in the middle of the night after all the local elite and officials have gone home. A

steady stream of ordinary people, for whom the climax of the performance is the comic interlude, replaces them. However, with popular aesthetics, giving clown figures prominent roles, and intentionally subverting elitist conventions, Susmono has extended this space to infiltrate large portions of the formal play outside the comic interlude.

Susmono's 1993 performances were motivated by a financial need to be popular, as well as a calling to inform, educate and provide a voice for his predominantly *wong cilik* audience. Susmono had a genuine empathy with his audience, and, through the joy of providing entertainment, a tendency to be subconsciously led by, or share in, their tastes, interests and concerns.

4. Tegal Theatre as the Elections Loom

The mischievous assertiveness of Tegal's performing arts during the period 1992-1994 had by mid 1996 dampened noticeably. Tegal's cultural workers are feeling the pressure from the mass media as a dominant socio-economic force, and the political climate leading into the general elections. In particular, tensions in Tegal are rising over pressure to conform to the government's political party – GOLKAR, symbolised by the colour yellow. The town's blue and white sea theme is now yellow and blue as the subordinate classes are forced, at their own expense, to paint their pedicabs and change their *warung* awnings to yellow.¹⁵⁰ The politics of centralising regional identity and cultural production have broadened to include kampung children throughout Tegal being 'encouraged' to practice an East Timorese dance, called *tebe-tebe*. To symbolise the integration of East Timor into Indonesia, the children dressed in yellow learn the *tebe-tebe* dance steps, which are adapted to *dangdut*, now officially elevated in status as national culture.

In 1995-1996 Tegal's 'modern' theatre productions have become infrequent and routine. Some cultural workers, whose theatrical work was subsidised in terms

¹⁵⁰ Apparently responding to a directive from the provincial government, local authorities in most towns in Central Java have taken the arrogant and undemocratic initiative to have all public facilities painted yellow.

of free time and finances with government jobs, are aligning themselves further with private television, radio and newspapers. For example, Nurhidayat, whose family income is supported by his wife as school teacher, has quit his job as school librarian to concentrate on writing short stories for the mass media and publishing books. In 1996 Yono Daryono, the director of Teater RSPD, was also in the process of leaving his job with the government radio station and working full time as a regional journalist for the private television company RCTI. These moves have the advantage of receiving a regular income for their creative efforts. However, this shift to mainstream commercial cultural production away from live theatre has reduced the 'creative autonomy' of individuals to express social criticism or advocate the concerns of the subordinate classes.

One interesting development was Lanang Setiawan's change of occupations, working now for the private radio station, Radio Serenada, in Slawi, whose main audience are the *wong cilik* in the region.¹⁵¹ Lanang is able to continue his ambitions of articulating *wong cilik* interests and concerns through the use of Tegal language. He helps write a comical radio play, 'Teater Warteg', set in a *warung*, which plays with ordinary *wong cilik* experiences. Lanang also contributes to the program 'Informasi Sacimit' which broadcasts daily news snippets concerning every day incidents in local societies. This, to some degree, challenges centralised or dominant cultural production where local radio stations are fed pre-packaged news from the regional government radio station. Unfortunately, radio is also reeling from the expansion of television. The shift of advertising sponsorship from radio to television has substantially reduced the frequency of Lanang's radio plays from thirty to eight per month.

Unlike Tegal's 'modern' theatre cultural workers who have made themselves less reliant on income from theatre production, Susmono's livelihood is tied to his *wayang* performances. This financial dependency and increased visibility with his huge popularity appears to have left Susmono more exposed to pressure to conform

¹⁵¹ Radio is still a significant source of information and cultural resource for local societies. The potential advertising revenue is not lost on local capitalists. The region of Tegal has at least 10 private radio stations. Radio Serenada has a potential market of 700,000 people within its broadcasting range that encompasses the region and city of Tegal, and the regions of Brebes, Pemalang, Pekalongan and Cirebon (Herusansono 1997).

to dominant socio-economic forces and political interests. The result has been a pronounced transformation of Susmono's *wayang* performances since 1994.

The size of Susmono's *wayang* production has continued to grow with his increasing popularity sustained through the addition of a variety of contemporary cultural elements, such as rock music instruments and dancing singers. Along with larger more prominent performance occasions and higher performance fees is the necessity to guarantee the quality and reliability of performances. Under Susmono's regular employment are a core personnel of about thirty five. These include the *Satria Laras* gamelan musicians, *pesindhen* singers and dancers, drivers, administrators and sound technicians. Depending on the nature of the performance occasion, Susmono also employs on a more casual basis many other individual artists living in and around Tegal. In addition, Susmono owns his own gamelan instruments, puppets, sound equipment and support vehicles. As an entertainment entrepreneur, owning and controlling the means of production, equipment, artists and support staff, Susmono has established a moderately sized capitalist enterprise.

The most visually striking change in Susmono's performances is his appropriation as a mouthpiece for the government which in turn has contributed to the growth of his enterprise. In 1996 performances the raised platform where Susmono and his large entourage sat was a sea of yellow. Susmono, the *gamelan* musicians, and *pesindhen* singers, were dressed in bright yellow, replacing a subtlety and diversity of colours. The usually sensuous dancing of the singer-dancers was negated by the overpowering presence of yellow, from head to foot, including yellow Islamic head dresses.

Susmono became the regional head of GOLKAR's traditional arts section. In each performance he invites the audience to vote GOLKAR at the forthcoming election. According to Susmono, it is far more effective to advocate the concerns of the *wong cilik* and criticise the excesses of the state and dominant interests from within rather than outside on the margins. Despite the rhetoric, however, it is clear the subversion of the formal conventions of *wayang* is now an instrument to attract large audiences to performances that are an overall reinforcement of dominant ideologies and government interests.

In a turn around from his performance at Brebes, Susmono gave a *wayang* performance for the district of Batang in June 1996 in celebration of Batang receiving the cleanest and neatest city trophy. Susmono was paid six million rupiah (A\$ 3,800.00 in 1996). His audiences, including those listening on the radio, would have totalled several thousand *wong cilik*. A continuous use of slap stick comedy, empty of local meaning and overburdened with sexual innuendo, kept this audience amused. In one scene a male puppet parachuted out of a helicopter puppet (complete with battery operated spinning rotor). On descent he snatched a towel off a bathing girl (the keyboard giving sounds of splashing water). This revealed her naked figure which, unlike the clothed and stylised female body of traditional puppets, had a very natural shape.

The orientation of meaning in his performance was squarely at the numerous government dignitaries who, on request from the regent, stayed for the duration of the performance. Susmono's *wayang* expressed a populist modernity, combining explicit sexual reference with sophisticated unconventional puppetry. This, along with mild and generalised reminders against the abuse of public authority, only reinforced the overall theme that GOLKAR, capable of internal democratic reform and adaptation in an era of globalisation, was the only credible political party. Unlike the performances at Maribaya and Brebes, almost three years before, the *wong cilik* audience remained as consumers with little opportunity to participate in the stage managed production.

This nauseous 'yellowing' of the cultural symbols and practices in Central Java has, however, produced a broad disquiet with moments of overt resistance. In Solo, for example, local members of the Muslim party PPP, ignoring warnings from the city's mayor, painted over yellowed objects and structures in the Solo *Kraton's* northern square, *alun-alun*, returning them to their original white colour (Wibowo 1997).

Susmono, also, is suffering a backlash. A number of his friends and colleagues in Tegal's 'modern' theatre have begun to distance themselves from him. His performances are also attracting verbal and physical abuse. In July 1996 at the regional police headquarters in Pekalongan Susmono presented his version of a *lakon*

called *Semar Mbabar Jati Diri*. The *lakon* was written in response to President Suharto's request for more stories about Semar which conveyed the benefits of developmentalism for the ordinary people in an era of globalisation. According to Nurhidayat, Susmono's performance was peppered with GOLKAR campaign propaganda.¹⁵² However, Pekalongan is a Muslim stronghold where in the general elections held five years previously PPP won. Nurhidayat reports that on listening to the GOLKAR propaganda in Susmono's performance, some irate PPP supporters in the audience threw missiles, including drink bottles and thongs, at Susmono. This was despite the performance being held in Pekalongan region's police headquarters.¹⁵³

Conclusion

Tegal is located in a *daerah pasisir* (peripheral region) in terms of Javanese court culture, yet within the orbit of modernity (with Jakarta at its locus). The result is a vibrant quasi-independent socio-cultural identity. This, associated with contradictions experienced through an authoritarian state sponsorship of expanding capitalist relations, has produced intense social dynamics, including an assertive subordinate class undercurrent. A part of these social dynamics are Tegal's energetic and brash performing arts.

Tegal's 'modern' theatre and Susmono's *wayang mbeling* have been concerned with articulating the consciousness and experiences of the *wong cilik*. As well as the cultural workers' own personal ambitions, their political objectives, understanding theatre as an agent of social change, have been the advocacy of *wong cilik* concerns and the 'grassroots democratisation' of cultural production.

Tegal's 'modern' theatre, where the relations of production are essentially contained within the intermediate strata, has had to abstract and reconstruct its representation of *wong cilik* consciousness and experiences. This is done through observing the *wong cilik* and invoking Tegal's 'grassroots' ethos or regional identity.

¹⁵² Written communication from Nurhidayat dated 21 September 1996.

¹⁵³ Pekalongan is one of the areas in Indonesia which has recently experienced mass rioting with religious or ethnic overtones. The underlying cause seems to be frustration over the contradiction between raised expectations of democratic prosperity and the continuing reality of harsh political oppression and social inequality.

As is evident from 'modern' theatre's closed, intermediate strata audience, the *wong cilik* seldom participate directly in the processes of cultural production.

In rarefying, or adapting, *wong cilik* experiences to meet intermediate strata sensibilities, the well-meaning intensions of the 'modern' theatre cultural workers are too often seriously compromised. Without genuine *wong cilik* participation in cultural production there is no real 'grassroots' democratisation of, or challenge to, mainstream or centralised cultural practices. A display of the constructed *wong cilik* 'other' may serve more to reinforce ideologies and identities within the intermediate strata. Furthermore, the 'charisma' (Rahardi 1994:vii) of Tegal's constructed 'grassroots' regional identity is more useful in negotiations between Tegal's urban intermediate strata cultural workers' and the established centre for a share in national cultural production. The appropriation of popular consciousness or construction of a regional grassroots identity is largely superficial 'democratisation'. That is, the symbolism of dominant cultural production might be enriched or broadened by the appropriation of marginal or *wong cilik* cultural traditions. However, there remains no fundamental change in the marginalisation of the *wong cilik* in access to, or control over, mainstream cultural production.

In contrast to 'modern' theatre audiences, Susmono's *wayang* performances have a predominantly *wong cilik* audience. The ability of the *wong cilik* to control or participate in the relations of production depends on the circumstances surrounding each performance, but is at its greatest potential during the comic interlude. Susmono enhanced the space for the expression of *wong cilik* tastes and concerns by breaking down elitist conventions, expanding the role of the clowns, and genuinely empathising with the local *wong cilik* rather than promoting dominant interests. As such, his performances, as an alternative to 'traditional' *wayang* based on feudalistic court conventions, became very popular.

Along with a substantial rise in the popularity of Susmono's *wayang mbeling* was a rise in the scale and grandeur of his performances. In striving to develop his career based on popularity he became increasingly exposed to, and dependent on, the dominant forces of the state and capitalist production. Susmono's *wayang mbeling* performance is now a growing capitalist enterprise. He has capital invested in the means of production – the *wayang* puppets and screen, gamelan orchestra, sound

equipment and support vehicles. He is also reliant on a core group of workers who include musicians playing traditional and contemporary instruments, *pesindhen* singers and dancers, as well as technicians, drivers and administrative assistants. In order to maintain this substantial capital investment and large number of permanent and casual employees Susmono must be assured of regular, large, well paid performance occasions. This, plus his visibility as a popular and influential *dalang* amongst the *wong cilik*, has fostered an association of convenience with the New Order state apparatus. By becoming a GOLKAR cadre his populist appeal is appropriated by the state in return for his more secure political and economic future. As reflected in recent performances, Susmono's success as a *dalang* is no longer dependent directly on his *wong cilik* audience, but patronage through the state apparatus. His populist aesthetics are used to draw in large crowds and as a sweetener with messages that legitimise the state and dominant values. His performances are pre-packaged cultural products which leave the masses to watch on or listen to through the radio as anonymous consumers. However, the alienation of the audiences in Susmono's recent performances has led to growing resentment, even hostility.

Chapter Twelve: The *Wong Cilik*, Popular Performance and Social Change in Java

The main concern of this thesis is to recognise the agency of the *wong cilik* or subordinated classes in cultural production. This supports a broader assertion that the *wong cilik* have a greater than generally recognised role in contemporary Indonesian social dynamics. Popular performance, including poetry, the shadow play and 'modern' theatre, has proved a useful window on to *wong cilik* social agency in Java. It was, however, first necessary to develop an approach to observing popular performance that was amenable to identifying *wong cilik* consciousness and action associated with cultural production. Popular performances were viewed as nodal sites of cultural contestation. Here, alternative and subordinate cultural traditions mix and contend with dominant traditions and interests in the processes of cultural production, including construction of meaning. The processes of cultural production, manifesting sites of cultural contestation, are inseparable from general socio-economic relations of power and class struggle. This is obvious in the poetry of Wiji Thukul expressing the growing disquiet amongst factory labourers towards the oppressive circumstances of work and daily life. Similarly, Begog's poetry is intimately connected with the creative survival strategies, amidst the perils, of the street hawker.

The thesis has avoided analysis relying on any idealisation of formal performance content and conventions. Too often formalism promotes an elitist perspective on social dynamics that also hinders recognition of social contradictions and change. Instead, popular performances were analysed according to their relationship with the specific social contexts from which they were constituted. Here, audience involvement, a less formal and under recognised element of performance, was critical. Audience involvement is a nexus where the performance and surrounding social relations converge.

Anchoring popular performance to its social reality through a focus on audience involvement allows one to develop an approach that recognises the importance of *wong cilik* cultural agency. First, this approach allowed us to check, according to specific circumstances, assumptions regarding the social efficacy of

official, dominant or formal cultural traditions. We have observed that *wong cilik* audiences are consistently absent, through lack of access to, or interest in, the pomp and paternalism of official Independence Day formalities, or the pretentious portrayal of the *wong cilik* 'other' by the dominant classes in cinema, poetry and 'modern' plays. Second, and in respect to the latter example, audience participation was a useful gauge as to the 'authenticity' of performances thought to represent, or be in advocacy of, the *wong cilik*. In some instances, such as Kantata Takwa's appropriation of Iwan Fals, existing *wong cilik* audiences have been alienated through expensive entrance tickets and sanitised performance content. On other occasions, such as the production of the play 'Lenggaong' in Tegal, the *wong cilik* existed primarily in the imagination and interests of the intermediate strata cultural workers and audience members. Finally, and most importantly, attention to audience involvement assisted recognition of *wong cilik* cultural agency that is often manifest through such informal yet critical aspects of the performance. *Wong cilik* dancing to amplified music outside the *dangdut Sekaten* tents in the night market largely defy the constraints of dominant norms and capitalist cooptation.

A closer look at *wong cilik* audience involvement in local *wayang kulit* performances reveals most clearly the 'hidden', yet significant, space for *wong cilik* cultural agency. This thesis argued against conventional stereotypes of *wayang kulit* as an elitist and static genre where official culture is communicated through and around archaic feudal court conventions. It is misleading to rarefy *wayang kulit* as simply a high or classic art form in which dominant social norms are imposed on a passive *wong cilik* audience. Under certain social circumstances, such as threats to local *wong cilik* livelihood, analysis of audience involvement demonstrated that, in *wayang kulit* performances, *wong cilik* concerns and interests were not only identifiable, but also strongly asserted. On such occasions, the social meaning of dominant or official cultural traditions can be corrupted or marginalised by alternative traditions generated through involvement of the *wong cilik*, expressing their tastes and concerns, in the performance. The dominance of *wong cilik*, over official, cultural meaning was evident from the confluence of changing audience involvement and changes in the formal to informal character of the *wayang* performance.

As found in other locally situated celebrations, rituals and performances, such

as the communal cultural evening celebrating Independence Day, the majority *wong cilik* were least involved during the opening formalities, formal speeches and initial court scenes, of a *wayang* performance. Less than an hour into a *wayang* performance most of the official guests sitting in front of the screen go home, having fulfilled their obligations towards the performance sponsor. A smaller number of people, including the sponsor's family, remaining guests, and old virtuosos, may remain to enjoy the flickering shadows cast; the distant and pretentious aesthetics of cultivated or inherited knowledge and wisdom. With ensuing battle scenes and minor comic interludes *wong cilik* audience numbers and attention would start to grow, particularly around the back of the screen. Behind the screen, the audience is able to experience the richness in colour, sound and spectacle. They share the excitement and play in the interaction with the *dalang*, his puppets, the female singers and musicians.

Around mid-night the calamity of the *gara-gara* alerts the audience to the arrival of the long awaited main comic interlude, or *adegan Punakawan*, in which audience involvement will climax. The dynamics of the *adegan Punakawan* are independent of the formal performance structure and story. Here, through the medium of erotic comedy and popular song, the *dalang* and audience are engaged, not only sharing tastes and pleasures, but in expressing their social attitudes and concerns. Cultural traditions in the comic interlude are often the antithesis of official culture, and direct criticism or ridicule of official messages, norms and values is not uncommon. A large majority of the audience depart shortly after the comic interlude. In an anti-climax the substantially reduced and somewhat drowsy audience linger as the rest of the formal story unravels before dawn.

In my alternative generalisation of *wayang kulit* performances situated in local societies is the centrality of the comic interlude engaged with the predominantly *wong cilik* audience. Meaning and identity celebrated during the comic interlude break down and eclipse elitist proceedings and conventions in the formal aspects of the *wayang kulit* performance. The durability of such an assertion, however, is entirely subject to the specific social circumstances, both local and wider, within which the performance is situated.

Hatley's (1981:39) observations of local *kethoprak* performances 'celebrating' Independence Day clearly demonstrate the correlation between *wong cilik* control over cultural production and the intimacy between surrounding social relations, the

performance, and audience participation. In kampungs where *wong cilik* involvement in communal activities remained strong, *kethoprak* performances were also characterised by strong *wong cilik* participation as actors and spectators. In such performances the celebration of communal pride and solidarity eclipsed the nationalist discourse of the ruling elite. In *wayang TBC*, too, there was a strong correlation between shared experiences and cooperation amongst the local residents (pedicab drivers and hawkers), the high level of their participation as performers and audience in the performance, and, through holding the performance, the assertion of *wong cilik* solidarity and protest over ill treatment.

In general, the linchpin of *wong cilik* cultural agency in the *wayang* performance is the correlation between audience and *dalang*. In most *wayang* performances the more influential patrons of the performance are not the paying sponsors, but the mainly *wong cilik* audience drawn from the local region. A guarantee of future engagements for the ordinary *dalang* is his popularity or renown amongst the local population, who are predominantly *wong cilik*. Moreover, the average *dalang* is from a similar socio-economic background as his audience, such as a landless or small land owning peasant. Because he is dependent on his popularity amongst the same people with whom he shares lived experiences, the core of his performance, the comic interlude, will tend to express the tastes and concerns of local *wong cilik*. Frequent attempts by an elite sponsor or official to utilise the comic interlude for propaganda only prove this point. As Clara van Groenendael (1985:183-5) demonstrates, often, such obligations placed on the *dalang* are delivered half-heartedly and are met with audience indifference or cynicism.

Because of the position of the *dalang*, *wayang kulit*, in particular the comic interlude, has potential towards greater social efficacy than the popular culture characterised by Bakhtin's carnival.¹⁵⁴ The carnival for Bakhtin was a safety valve that allowed the expression of dissent contained spatially and temporally. Here, official culture is dragged into the temporary realm of the popular where it is deconstructed, inverted or ridiculed without there being a long lasting threat to the surrounding status quo. The *dalang*, however, can harness the potential seen by

¹⁵⁴ Of use here is Brandist's (1996) thought provoking revival of Gramsci and Bakhtin's work on the potential agency of popular culture, and 'organic intellectuals' tapping into popular culture, in promoting progressive social change.

Victor Turner (1986) of theatre and ritual to induce social transformation. The comic interlude provides space for the critical evaluation of dominant norms, the articulation of unspoken concerns and the introduction of alternative or new ideas. The *dalang* not only has the authority to articulate the otherwise silent ‘collective memories’ of the *wong cilik* as an alternative to the constructed memory of the ruling elites. Similar to the notion of an ‘organic intellectual’, the *dalang* has the intellectual and leadership means to ‘systematise’ and direct *wong cilik* sentiment as a sustained counter hegemonic force. This is well understood by the state that sees the *dalang* as powerful mass communicators who must either be constrained or appropriated.

The potential to act as ‘organic intellectual’ is not unique to the *dalang*. Wiji Thukul’s performance, akin to the comic interlude in *wayang*, at the All-Central Java poets convention in Solo is also a good example of the praxis of a *wong cilik* intellectual. With frankness and parody, his poetry seriously undermined the authority and dominant position of the pretentious ‘liberal’ poets, through expressing the aesthetics and collective voice of the *wong cilik*.

In this thesis the range in character and changing position of cultural workers, such as Thukul, Begog, Moelyono, Radiyono, Widjati and Susmono, engaged with the *wong cilik* illustrates both the importance of, and difficulties with, the notion of organic intellectual. At one end, the poet-street hawker, Begog, the pedicab *dalang*, Radiyono, and, to a certain extent, the ‘bohemian’ Tegal poet, Widjati were most organically part of the *wong cilik*. However, as intellectuals, their leadership amongst their fellow *wong cilik* and influence on wider society was limited. At the other end, the mischievous Tegal *dalang* Susmono’s ties with the *wong cilik* were more tenuous. However, his access to the knowledge and technologies of the urban intermediate strata greatly strengthened his influence as a leader and channel for asserting *wong cilik* sentiment in wider society.

The same social contradictions that give rise to, and generate space for, *wong cilik* cultural expression also affect it with tension and instability. The early *wayang* performances of Susmono and Radiyono can be seen as instances where invisible *wong cilik* sentiment is systematised and raised to a level where it operates as a counter hegemonic force in the construction of meaning in the public arena. In the process, however, both Susmono’s *wayang mbeling* and Radiyono’s *wayang TBC* have become exposed to, and appropriated by, dominant social and cultural forces

associated with the state and capital.

Thus, having identified the space in which *wong cilik* cultural agency can manifest, its significance needs to be qualified by the constraints and contradictions of local and broader social relations affecting the *wong cilik*. Here, it is important not to view *wong cilik* social agency in isolation from other social forces and class relations.

Cultural workers positioned more within the intermediate strata than *wong cilik* proper have ambiguous roles in both the rationalisation of cultural production by dominant cultural forces and the propagation of alternative or resistant cultural traditions. Usually the interests of the upper intermediate strata have more in common with, than in opposition to, those of the broad ruling elite. Often the intermediate strata, even those that may be categorised as belonging to the ‘progressive’ intelligentsia, are a party to the promotion of reified regional and national cultural practices at the expense of local *wong cilik* cultural traditions. The construction of Tegal’s regional identity through the representation of local populist traditions is predominantly about local intermediate strata cultural workers in Tegal’s ‘modern’ theatre looking for a niche in the national market. Employing Ulf Hannerz’s terminology (1991:119-23), ‘entrepreneurs of popular culture’ utilise their involvement in local ‘cultural sensibilities’ producing a product that is popular because it resonates with the ‘tastes and concerns’ of local consumers. This would also describe the development of Susmono’s *wayang* performances. His *wayang mbeling* has ‘hybridized’, to again use Hannerz (1991:124), transnational cultural products – the keyboard sounds, snare drums, whistles, coloured lights, guitar, and film aesthetics – synthesising them with existing local popular traditions and creating a new indigenous cultural commodity in the process.

As the development of Susmono’s *wayang mbeling* demonstrates, the processes of cultural production, including the construction of meanings, are extremely fluid and changeable. As such, it is perilous to analyse cultural production according to categories such as modern/traditional, elite/popular, rural/urban even local/national. *Wayang mbeling* and *wayang TBC* make a mockery of the usual *wayang* stereotypes of traditional, elitist and archaic. The social context of *wayang TBC* was a fusion of the rural and urban. Semi-permanent rural migrants live and work in the nation’s capital. Using the occasion of a national celebration, local wong

wong cilik used both the regional and national meaningfulness of *wayang* to assert their stance on the contemporary issues of citizenship and urban traffic congestion. Similarly, urban street traders used *wayang mbeling* as a medium for articulating their concern over their relocation by local authorities.

The contemporary relevance of *wayang* performances employing populist aesthetics such as *wayang mbeling* can be seen in their growing popularity, even amongst the urban youth. *Wayang's* future, indeed *wayang's* past, cannot be represented by the classic court model. As Ras (1982) asserts, of greater social significance are the popular traditions at the centre of most historical and contemporary *wayang* performances. A central issue is how these popular traditions represent resistance to, or cooptation by, the dominant forces of state and capital. Like all popular culture the characteristics and social significance of *wayang* performances are contingent not on *a priori* conventions but the changing social contexts from which they are constituted.

Popular performance is a valuable window through which we can substantially 'aid comprehension of emerging social trends' (Peacock 1968:254). Peacock (1968:254) claims that by observing and analysing *ludruk* theatre in the 1960s he was able to predict the rising strength of the bourgeoisie that led to the anti-communist outbreaks. In order to take full advantage of popular performance as a window on society this thesis has argued throughout for a more complete understanding of the processes of cultural production. We must also account for the informal, although not necessarily inferior, elements in cultural production. This researcher is well aware of the practical difficulties of utilising more ephemeral research materials. However, the thesis has shown that analysis based on observations of audience participation, though sometimes unavoidably limited, can provide for more critical insight on the social significance of cultural production. By addressing both the formal and informal elements of cultural production, and viewing it as a socially constituted site of cultural contestation, we can begin to identify and give due recognition to the agency of the *wong cilik*.

This thesis has argued that the *wong cilik* deserve greater recognition as a social force. There has been prevalence in analyses of the ways in which dominant social forces control cultural production at the expense of the passive *wong cilik*. Furthermore, a trend in many recent studies on Indonesian culture and society is to

invent an inflated, amorphous, but somehow, unified, middle class(es). Whether optimistic or pessimistic, these studies emphasise the middle class(es) as the locus of any possible alternative to cultural production controlled by the state or dominant capitalist classes. Using the positivist imagery of bio-diversity, and in line with Hannerz's celebration of cultural diversity, Dick (Hooker and Dick, 1995:18-9), for example, asserts that the urban 'middle-class' will determine the future of Indonesia's national culture. For Dick (Hooker and Dick, 1995:19) the question is whether the urban 'middle-class' has the fortitude and creativity to appropriate the diversity of local traditions and blend them with an international culture. In this way, the hope is that the 'middle-class' will thwart, rather than be an accomplice to, the dominant trend towards cultural reification instilled by the centralising state and cultural commodification¹⁵⁵.

However, an over emphasis of the hegemonic forces of state and capital or the illusionary unity of the middle class(es) as a '(un)democratic' social force leads to insufficient recognition of the social agency of the *wong cilik*. The growing consolidation of an increasingly assertive working class, as both producers and consumers in an industrialising, urbanising Indonesia, is more significant than the illusionary 'middle-class' as a locus of social dynamics. Social analysis must more seriously address the social and cultural agency of the *wong cilik* in order gain greater understanding of contemporary Indonesian society. Finally, the researcher, as part of an internationalised intelligentsia, must also anticipate desired outcomes in asserting due recognition of *wong cilik* agency. It is hoped that such research contributes to a democratic process that engenders greater *wong cilik* participation in cultural production and social transformation.

¹⁵⁵ In the context of Australian popular culture, Frankel (1992) is highly critical of this 'cultural pluralist' approach which romanticises marginal cultures and focuses on cultural difference. In not seriously addressing the underlying social structures and relations of inequality inherent in international capitalist relations 'cultural pluralists' are 'playing an indirect but useful role in negating organised opposition to the new market order' (Frankel 1992:328).

APPENDIX ONE – TRANSCRIPTS

A

Teka-teki yang ganjil

Pada malam itu kami berkumpul dan berbicara
Dari mulut kami tidak keluar hal-hal yang besar
Masing-masing berbicara tentang keinginannya
yang sederhana dan masuk akal

Ada yang sudah lama sekali ingin bikin dapur
di rumah kontraknya
Dan itu mengingatkan yang lain
bahwa mereka juga belum punya panci, kompor,
gelas minum dan wajan penggoreng
Mereka jadi ingat bahwa mereka pernah
ingin membeli barang-barang itu
Tetapi keinginan itu dengan cepat terkubur
oleh keletihan kami
Dan upah kami dalam waktu singkat telah berubah
menjadi odol-shampo-sewa rumah
dan bon-bon di warung yang harus kami lunasi

Ternyata banyak di antara kami yang masih susah
menikmati teh hangat
Karena kami masih pusing bagaimana mengatur
letak tempat tidur dan gantungan pakaian

Ada yang sudah lama ingin mempunyai kamar mandi sendiri
Dari situ pembicaraan meloncat ke soal harga semen
dan juga cat tembok yang harganya tak pernah turun

Kami juga berbicara tentang kampanye pemilihan umum
yang sudah berlalu
Tiga partai politik yang ada kami simpulkan
Tak ada hubungannya sama sekali dengan kami: buruh
Mereka hanya memanfaatkan suara kami
demi kedudukan mereka

Kami tertawa karena menyadari
Bertahun-tahun kami dikibuli
dan diperlakukan seperti kerbau

Akhirnya kami bertanya
Mengapa sedemikian sulitnya buruh membeli sekaleng cat
padahal tiap hari ia bekerja tak kurang dari 8 jam
Mengapa sedemikian sulitnya bagi buruh
untuk menyekolahkan anak-anaknya
Padahal mereka tiap hari menghasilkan
berton-ton barang

Lalu salah seorang di antara kami berdiri
Memandang kami satu-persatu kemudian bertanya:
'Adakah barang-barang yang kalian pakai
yang tidak dibikin oleh buruh?'
Pertanyaan itu mendorong kami untuk mengamati
barang-barang yang ada di sekitar kami:
neon, televisi, radio, baju, buku...

Sejak itu kami selalu merasa seperti
sedang menghadapi teka-teki yang ganjil
Dan teka-teki itu selalu muncul
ketika kami berbicara tentang panci-kompor-
gelas minum-wajan penggoreng
Juga di saat kami menghitung upah kami
yang dalam waktu singkat telah berubah
menjadi odol-shampo-sewa rumah
dan bon-bon di warung yang harus kami lunasi

Kami selalu heran dan bertanya-tanya
Kekuatan macam apakah yang telah menghisap
tenaga dan hasil kerja kami? (21/9/93-Solo Kalangan)

B **Hak Asasi Manusia**

Hak untuk hidup tenang tanpa tekanan
tanpa rasa was-was
Hak sebagai pribadi yang sama dimuka hukum
bebas dari kerja paksa dan perbudakan.

Mulia benar terdengar
ditelinga kami orang-orang bodoh
yang tak mengerti apa itu.....?
Hak Asasi Manusia

Sebab yang kami tau
hanya sederhana
kerja, gaji, makan dan hidup yang layak
sebagaimana manusia disana.....

Hak asasi manusia
kata apa itu?
sesuatu yang baru bagi kami
orang-orang dipinggir jalan.

Kami yang tiap hari menggelar barang dipinggir jalan
yang kerap kali dikejar tibum
digusur, digaruk!
kami tak tahu, apa salah kami.

Apa ini hak asasi manusia
yang bebas melakukan apa saja, pada kami
orang-orang kaki lima, asongan, tukang becak
orang liarkah kami.....?

Kami tak tahu, hak asasi manusia
hak asasi manusia, bukan untuk kami
hak asasi manusia, untuk manusia disana.....
kami disini saja, dipinggir jalan, ditemper toko

Kami sadar,
Kami orang pinggiran.

C **Pinggir Jalan di Atas Trotoar**

Tuan dan Nyonya
saat tuan-nyonya jalan-jalan cari angin
terganggukah tuan-nyonya
dengan para pedagang kaki-lima

Bukankah tuan merasa terhibur
dengan celoteh dan aksi
yang mungkin tak ada nilai
dimata tuan-nyonya

Dipinggir jalan
kaki-lima mangkal

Dari oncom sampai sop buntut
isi korek sampai isi perut
majalah poster sampai setiker
tuan bisa lihat atau sekedar iseng

Ramalan nasib ramalan adab
dijual oleh ahlinyadari jimat sampai kapsul serbaguna

semua ada dikaki-lima

Dipinggir jalan
diatas trotoar

Ada kondom ada obat impoten
obat panu ada pula obat rambut
tuan kurang bergairah
rudal tuan sudah loyo silakan datang ke kaki-lima

Mau panjang
atau tahan lama
tuan bisa menyoba tangkur buaya
soal manjur-tuan bisa menyoba

D
Batas panggung

kepada para pelaku

ini daerah kekuasaan kami
jangan lewati batas itu
jangan campuri apa yang terjadi di sini
karena kalian penonton
kalian adalah orang luar
jangan rubah ceritera yang telah kami susun
jangan belokkan jalan ceritera yang telah
kami rencanakan
karena kalian adalah penonton
kalian adalah orang luar
kalina harus diam

panggung seluas ini hanya untuk kami
apa yang terjadi di sini
janagn ditawar-tawar lagi
panggung seluas ini hanya untuk kami
jangan coba bawa pertanyaan-pertanyaan berbahaya
ke dalam permainan ini
panggung seluas ini hanya untuk kami
kalian harus bayar kami
untuk membiayai apa yang kami kerjakan di sini

biarkan kami menjalankan kekuasaan kami
tontonlah
tempatmu di situ (Solo, 21.11.91)

E

Mendonkel orang-orang pintar

Kudongkel keluar
orang orang pintar
dari dalam kepalaku

aku tak tergetar lagi
oleh mulut orang-orang pintar
yang bersemangat ketika berbicara

dunia bergerak bukan karena omongan

para pembicara dalam ruang seminar
yang ucapnya dimuat
di halaman surat-kabar
mungkin pembaca terkagum-kagum
tapi dunia tak bergerak

setelah surat- kabar itu dilipat (Kampung halaman Solo, 8/9/1993)

F

Sajak sepiring nasi goreng

(1990)

"Siap sudah kain-kain popok untuk bebi kita yad, manis?"
Demikian kutanya pada isteriku sambil memunguti butir-butir kerikil.
"Tidak, kuminta sepiring asinan bukan eskrim!" jawabnya ketus.
Kecut juga hati ini membulir.

Bila Rendra pernah meramaikan "Nyanyian Angsa"
malam ini adalah malam sajakku yang paling bergelora.
Tapi sayang, ada serangkaian kalimat yang hilang memikat.
Kubabat saja kalimat demi kalimat?

Sebelum fajar sajak ini pasti selesai, dan berhasil.
Kuhadiahkan nanti buat isteriku yang rewel
dan sepiring nasigoreng tentu takkan lupa untukku sarapan.

"Apa yang kau tulis semalam suntuk ha?" tegur isteriku.
"Ah bosan aku. Lagi-lagi sajak yang kau tulis. Tulislah yang lain
bukan puisi. Puisimu bau terasi!"

Aku jadi tersungut-sungut menantikan
sepiring nasi goreng lama sekali belum juga hadir! (Widjati,1992:39)

G

Semar Panggang

Patok-patok itu telah terpasang. Garis merah menyilang menandai setiap bedeng. Pada setiap los, plastik memanjang yang diikatkan pada buhul tiang – berfungsi sebagai tenda – penahan terik dan hujan nampak berkibar-kibar tertiuip angin.

Biji sawi, rompesan rebung, rempah sisa parutan kelapa teronggok menggunung di tong sampah. Lalat hijau berdengung berpesta. Sebentar kemudian buyar menggelepar kian kemari ketika seseorang dengan topi pet, tanda pangkat di dada, jumbai warna-warni. Mengobrak-abrik tong sampah itu. Sambil terus tertawa. Rompesan rebung biji sawi dikunyah-kunyahnya. Lelaki dengan topi pet dan tanda pangkat itu, kemudian menyanyikan lagu-lagu mars perjuangan.

"Hussss ...! Kang Letmi, mbok jangan nyanyi-nyanyi terus. Wong banyak orang lagi pada susah. Malah bikin brisikr!"

"Minggir, anget-anget wedang bandrek..."

"*Nyuwun paring, sakuasane, aaaaa...*"

"Kang Letmi nembangnya jangan di sini. Ayo, nanti *thak bandem kowe*. Cepet minggir!"

Lelaki yang dipanggil Kang Letmi cuma senyam-senyum, sebentar kemudian Kang Letmi atau Letnan Miring, sebutan yang diberikan orang-orang pasar kepada dirinya, mengambil ancang-ancang, sikap hormat. Kaki tegap, berderap.

"Tu... Wa... Tu... Wa... Sepatu Dawa...."

"Tu... Wa... Tu... Wa... Sepatu Dawa..."

"Prrriiiiiittttt...."

"Asu! Diancuk. Dagangan lagi sepi malah ribut terus!"

"Memang dasar compong! Pasar begini sumpek. Kok, malah enak-enakan edan!"

"Mbakyu Tar ini gimana? Lho, wong edan bukan kehendak dia kok dibilang enak. Ya, sebenarnya enak dia memang. Letmi itu jelas-jelas edan. Lho, kalau kita yang maunya dibilang waras, tapi disuruh ngadepi zaman gendeng, Ya, jadi edan beneran, tho?"

"Kamu ini ngomong gimana? Yang edan itu kan cuma peraturannya. Orang yang bikin aturan. Oknum istilah kerennya. Whelah, kalau zamannya sendiri sih, tetep anteng mantep!"

"Sekarang saya pengen tanya sama Mbakyu. Apa Mbakyu sudah parap. Sudah teken?"

Wanita yang dipanggil Mbakyu itu terus mencacah-cacah daging, Wajahnya terus cemberut Seperti juga semua penghuni los daging. Berwajah kusut bagai serat-serat lemak yang menggelambir. Mereka nampak gusar ketika desas-desus yang lama berkembang kini nyaris menjadi kenyataam.

Renovasi pasar yang dulu menjadi momok yang mencemaskan. Kini kecemasan itu telah tercacah seperti irisan-irisan daging di hadapan mereka. Pasar *esuk* yang mereka tempati puluhan tahun bahkan ada yang menempati pasar itu seperti sebuah *trah* Yang turun-temurun, bergenerasi. Sebentar lagi akan dibangun menjadi sebuah pasar swalayan – pasar modern dengan tingkat berlapis-lapis.

"Gimana Mbakyu Sudah parap?"

"Ya, belum Lho, yang kayak gini kan jelas melebihi edannya si Letmi. *Mosok* harga kios yang akan dibangun itu setengah *modar* mahal!"

"Lho, ya kan dapat dicicil?"

"Dicicil sampai matamu mencicil. Ya, *ndak* akan kuat!"

"Lantas Mbakyu ini mau gimana?"

"Ya. *ndak* gimana-gimana. Tetep saja bertahan di sini!"

"Wah, Mbakyu jangan nekad begitu. Sebentar lagi tempat ini akan digusur, lho."

"Masa bodo. Pokoknya saya tetep akan di sini!"

'Wah, edan *tenan*!'

Kegusaran semakin bertambah runyam, ketika *slentingan* terdengar bahwa patok-patok yang telah terpasang itu sebagai isyarat mereka harus pindah dari tepat yang mereka huni. Beberapa orang pedagang yang ada yang telah menandatangani kontrak perjanjian tetapi lebih hampir separuh mereka tetap pada pendirian semula: menganggap bahwa harga kios yang mereka akan huni – setelah renovasi terlalu mahal. Maka mereka menolak semua isi perjanjian yang dianggapnya terlalu sepihak

Dari tinjauan letak dan struktur bangunan. Barangkali pasar *esuk* menjadi *seonggok* bangunan lapuk yang tak sedap untuk dipandang. Bahkan lebih jauh bangunan itu dalam tataran *masterplan* pembangunan tata kota yang sekarang menghamba pada keindahan dan keserasian, jelaslah bangunan itu terkesan menjadi primitif di tengah kota yang sedang mengembangkar – impian-impianya.

Tapi bukankah zaman tidak pernah berjalan mundur, hitungan waktu selalu melaju ke depan. Percepatan dan kemajuan menjadi rumus kajian. Begitulah setidaknya kata para sesepuh kota. Begitu pula kata Pak Mantri pasar yang tak jera-jeranya memberikan petuah.

"Saya tekankan sekali lagi. Pembangunan membutuhkan Pengorbanan. *Sedulur-sedulur* musti ikhlas berkorban. Karena apa yang sedang kita lakukan. Tetaplah untuk kemajuan!"

"Maju ke mana Pak Mantri?" orang-orang yang sejak tadi terkonsentrasi ke Pak Mantri kini beralih ke datangnya suara itu. Sementara Rusdi pedagang buah cuma cengar-cengir.

"Maju *sedulur-sedulur*. Jelas ke depan. Nah, kalau saudara tidak maju ke depan. Sampeyan semua. akan tertinggal.

Pak Mantri pasar terus nyerocos. Di tengah pasar yang sekarang kian sumpek Pak Mantri menghadapi persoalan yang amat pelik; tugas yang disandang kian bertambah. berat. Berkali-kali ia harus menghadap atasannya karena dianggap tidak mampu menjalankan tugasnya. Padahal segala upaya telah ia kerahkan untuk memberi penerangan bagi suksesnya pemindahan lokasi dagang mereka. Tapi para pedagang seperti tak pernah mendengar suaranya.

Malam telah merambat. Pasar esuk Yang di pagi hari tak pernah berhenti pada kegaduhan. Di malam hari seperti sebuah restoran pertempuran. Sisa-sisa. meja dagangan, bangku reot, plastik, dan timbunan sampah menggantung dalam sunyi yang menggigit.

Dari luar, pasar esuk itu memang telah terkurung pagar dari seng yang menutup hampir seluruh kawasan itu. Pagar seng itu konon telah dikerjakan atas perintah investor untuk selekasnya membangun pasar tradisional yang terbelakang itu menjadi sebuah mahakarya dari peradaban baru modern dalam membelanjakan uangnya. Hingga sekarang dari luar orang hampir tidak bisa menatap bentuk bangunan pasar tradisional – yang orang namakan sebagai pasar esuk

Di tengah malam yang seni. Tiba-tiba suara, gemeretak dari dalam pagar seng itu seperti suara binatang aneh yang menggeliat di malam buta. Tapi suara gemeretak itu bukanlah binatang, melairikan gemeretak lidah api yang menelan meja-meja dagangan, timbunan sampah kering. Api itu menjilat dengan cepat ke sayap-sayap bangunan dan menimbulkan percikan di atas. Sehingga dari luar pagar seng, orang-orang dapat melihat bagaimana bumbungan api itu menyalakan cahaya yang amat benderang di tengah malam yang sepi.

Segera orang-orang berlarian, berhambur ke pasar esuk. Para mbok-mbok penjual sayur, kain rombengan, yang tidur di dekat pasar terjaga dari tidurnya, meloncat dan segera menuju ke pasar esuk. Mereka semua seperti tak percaya pada apa yang mereka lihat. Pasar tempat mereka mengadu peruntungan selama puluhan tahun, bahkan mewarisi dari mbah buyut mereka tiba-tiba kini di depan mereka akan dilumat oleh api. Seseorang entah siapa, menjerit-jerit histeris. Segera dipapahnya ia keluar dari kerumunan massa yang mulai berdatangan. Seorang perempuan tua tiba-tiba menyerak ke tengah-tengah kerumunan itu sambil berteriak keras:

"Kang Letmi. Ayo, cepat Kang Letmi!"

"Ada apa dengan Kang Letmi?"

"Kang Letrni ada di dalam pasar!"

"Di dalam pasar?"

Orang-orang yang mendengar bahwa Kang Letmi terkurung di dalam pasar yang sedang terbakar, segera mendobrak pintu pasar. Beberapa orang segera masuk ke dalam pasar.

Di dalam pasar api telah melumat hampir seluruh bangunan yang terbuat dari papan-papan usang. Pada pojok pintu gerbang pasar ada menara pengawas yang dulu dibangun semasa Pemerintahan Kolonial.

Dari atas menara itu terlihat Kang Lotmi berdiri dengan perkasa, pada kedua

tanggannya terenggam obor yang menyala.

"Kang Letmi, ayo turunlah! Sebentar lagi api akan menejan pasar dan menara itu. Ayo, turunlah!"

Kang Letmi yang dianggapp oleh penghuni pasar sebagai orang gila, tetap tak bergeming. Kedua obor pada kedua tangannya diayun-ayunkan sambil tertawa-tawa. Kang Letmi memang gila, tetapi bagaimana pun Kang Letmi tetap dianggap yang *mbaurekso* pasar esuk. Karena konon ia sudah berada di pasar itu semenjak kecil. Semua penghuni pasar membutuhkan kehadirannya. Karena walaupun ia tidak waras, ia tidak pernah mengganggu bahkan Kang Letini sering membantu para pedagang untuk mengangkut dagangan maupun keperluan lain.

"Ayo, Kang Letmi turualah!"

"Saya tidak mau turun dari sini!" suara Kang Letmi terdengar nyaring di tengah amukan api yang terus berkobar.

"Kamu akan hangus terbakar. Ayo, segeralah turun!"

Orang-orang yang berkerumun di luar pasar kian cemas ketika mereka mengetahui bahwa Kang Letmi berada di atas menara. Beberapa orang yang nekad masuk ke dalam pasar tak lagi bisa berbuat banyak karena menara itu juga telah terkurung api.

"Kang Letmi, ayo turunlah!"

Kang Letrni terus tertawa keras-keras.

'Saya tidak akan turun. Sayalah yang membakar pasar ini. Selama ini saya dianggap oleh kalian sebagai orang yang tak waras. Orang gila. Dengan membakar pasar ini, saya akan membuktikan bahwa sayalah orang yang paling sehat pikirannya. Dan kalian semua justru yang gila. Karena kalian tidak bisa berbuat apa-apa menghadapi situasi pasar yang pelik seperti ini!'

Orang-orang yang mendengar kata-kata Kang Letmi tersirap seketika. Mereka takjub pada kecerdasan Kang Letmi dalam menyusun kata-kata.

Tiba-tiba kerumunan orang-orang itu merasakan barangkali apa yang dikatakan Kang Letmi, membiarkan diri mereka bertahan berdagang di pasar itu.

"Ayo, Kang Letmi turunlah!" serak suara seseorang membahana di tengah jilatan api.

"Ya, saya akan turun! Tapi dengan cara melompat ke dalam timbunan api itu!"

"Kang Letmi jangan nekad!"

“Telah saya buktikan, sayalah orang yang paling waras di antara kalian. Kalau pasar modern ini kelak dibangun. Lantas dimanakah tempat untuk orang seperti saya, seperti kalian semua?”

Sambil mengakhiri kata-katanya. Tanpa diduga Kang Letmi terjun dari atas menara pengawas itu. Tubuhnya melayang dan langsung masuk ke dalam timbunan api yang mendadak menimbulkan suara gemeletuk keras. Dan kobaran api kian menghebat.

Orang-orang yang melihat pemandangan fantastis itu cuma melongo. Seorang tua entah siapa, bergegas ke luar dari kerumunan massa yang panik. Meninggalkan pasar yang berkobar oleh jilatan api. Tertatih-tatih ia bergumam:

"Kang Letmi adalah simbol Semar masa kini. Ia telah menjadi turnbal kebesaran Pandhawa. Kang Letmi telah melengkapkan dirinya sebagai si Semar Panggang – karena. ulah Batara Kala. Mitos yang tak pernah mati!"

Sementara itu orang-orang terus menyaksikan api melumat pasar. Meluluhlantakan bangunan usang. Yang sebentar lagi akan berubah menjadi puing dan debu. Tetapi mungkin juga dalam waktu yang tak lama akan muncul bangunan megah di atas bangunan pasar yang kini sedang, terbakar. Tapi bukankah Kang Letmi atau si *Semar Panggang* tidak akan muncul melihat bangunan megah itu?

Nurhidayat (1993)

APPENDIX TWO – COMIC INTERLUDES IN WAYANG MBELING

The following are extracts from *Ki dalang* Enthus Susmono's performance of the *lakon* 'Suryo ndadari' at Maribaya hamlet, Tegal district on 28 September 1993.¹ This is an outline of the comic interludes with the maid servants Cangik and Limbuk which occurred early on in the performance, lasting approximately 20 minutes, and the main *adegan Punakawan* with Petruk, Gareng, Bagong and Semar which occurred between 1 and 2 am. This is not a comprehensive transcript and there is a richness and subtlety of play with language, music and gesture that has either not been mentioned or has been reduced to a general summary. It is, for example, difficult here to give justice to the marvellous montage of different, modern/traditional and Sundanese/Javanese, musical elements. Nevertheless, the outline highlights the carnivalesque dynamics – the erotic banter between *dalang*, puppets, singer-dancers, musicians and audience – that engages with the experiences, tastes and interests of the predominantly male *wong cilik* whilst subverting formal or dominant discourse and symbols.²

Cangik and Limbuk Scene

Shortly after the performance commences, Susmono uses the minor comic interlude with Cangik (skinny mother) and Limbuk (fat daughter) to thank his sponsor for inviting him, welcome Dr. Geoff Reeves and myself as 'art ambassadors' from Australia, and generally give the performance a lively kick start.

Susmono announces that he is grateful for the sponsor's trust in taking the risk of inviting him, a cheap local *dalang*, instead of using a well-known *dalang* from outside the region whose popularity would have ensured the required lively ('*rame*') atmosphere. According to Susmono, a lively atmosphere is important ('*sing penting meriah*') as a fitting celebration of the momentous ritual occasion, a circumcision. Susmono also saw a lively atmosphere as the fulfilment of his role as an artist. He guaranteed a lively atmosphere as the sponsor has ordered a complete performance, which includes three sensuous female singer-dancers, Kukun, Eni and Ika.³ Finally, as a joke, but emphasising the importance of achieving a lively occasion, Susmono declared that if the performance was not yet lively enough then he would set fire to the shadow screen to ensure it was ('*yen kurang rame, ngobong layar*').

¹ This outline is based on my observations, supported by a video recording that was kindly done by Dr Geoff Reeves whilst accompanying me, at the performance. My wife, Endah Pancaningsih Curtis, provided vital assistance with translating the performance discourse.

² The audience of about 400 people did include a reasonable number of women and children who came from the nearby houses surrounding the performance space. There were also a few prostitutes watching on.

³ It appears that these singer-dancers were 'borrowed' from a local *dangdut* troupe. The older *pesindhen* singers as part of the *gamelan* orchestra were not so conspicuous in the performance and sat behind the *dalang* amongst the other musicians.

With great formality, Cangik announces: ‘Lets meet some Dutch, ... no, Australians ... art ambassadors (*duta seni*) from Australia to see our performance ... Come on! Stand up here on the stage ... Ok, now, everyone meet him the most honourable (*‘panjenengane ingkang minulya almuqaroh*) Mr Richard. Then, in an instant, Limbuk’s quip corrupts the formalities: ‘Oh look how tall he is ... Just think if he is so tall how long his torch (*‘batere*, literally penis) must be. One of the musicians says to no one in particular ‘do you want it’ (*‘gelem, pa?’*). As the audience hoots with laughter, Cangik chastens Limbuk for being so rude (*‘kurang ajar tenan kowe iki*). Limbuk says ‘Good evening’ in Indonesian and I respond, ‘Good evening’ (*‘Sugeng dalu*) in high Javanese. Cangik then mocks her daughter: ‘How is it that you can’t even speak Javanese properly and a foreigner can?’ (*‘kok, landa isa basa Jawa, kowe iki malah ora isa basa Jawa?’*). This rather ironic comment, given the nature of Susmono’s performance, may be associated with a general fear of people losing their knowledge of Javanese culture through modern/international influences.

The audience is titillated further when as Geoff and I are about to climb down from the stage Susmono asks Kukun, one of the singer-dancers, to welcome us by showing her ‘pussy’ (literally tobacco) (*‘pamerke ndhuk “mbako”mu*). Instead, she welcomes us with a Sundanese *jaipongan* dance (see fig. 22). She is wearing a shiny bright aqua top (modern *kebaya*). She understands what turns her male audience on, accentuating her sensuality through movements of her arms and shoulders and hips. In the background, Limbuk is also dancing, occasionally tossing her mother in the air then catching her. As they dance, Susmono starts soliciting the services of his singer-dancers. He directly offers them to Geoff and I, as is sometimes customary for important visitors to the village, but also indirectly advertises them to the audience at large.⁴ This dance is followed by another where the three women dance to *dangdut* sung by Kukun and accompanied by an electric guitar.

Main Punakawan Scene

Susmono engages his audience through a mischievous, haphazard banter⁵ that continues to allude to his surroundings: the Muslim circumcision ritual, the army background of the sponsor’s late husband, prostitution, Middle-East politics, and his stooges – the singer-dancers, musicians, and foreign visitors.

Petruk delivers a serious Muslim prayer in Arabic for the sponsor’s late husband, Darsono. The audience respond with amen. He then explains the circumstances of the performance, a circumcision of the sponsor, Ibu Saruni’s, child, which is in fulfilment of a request by her husband, who was also an army veteran. Then, to quickly avoid a sombre mood developing, Petruk starts a caricature of a religious sermon delivered in Indonesian: ‘All members of the congregation, tonight’ (*‘Para sidang, malam ini’*). Petruk then reiterates that the sponsor asked for a whole performance, musicians, dancers and singers. He goes on to say that all the dancers have shiny big foreheads. This is an allusion to their genitalia and high sex appeal.

⁴ Throughout the performance, both in the formal *lakon* and comic interludes, there are ambiguous references to prostitution.

⁵ Often there is no clear logic or continuity in the flow from one idea to the next. Also, the clowns will change rapidly from being themselves to becoming caricatures of the *dalang*, Geoff, myself, the audience, religious figures or the audience.

He says that all the dancers are his, which is to suggest to the audience that they are his wives, before clarifying that he means they are from his group.

Petruk begins to imitate the sounds of the *gamelan* in preparation for a song. However, Susmono is distracted when someone suddenly turns up the *dalang's* lamp. He says he is delighted with the brightness for now he can see his workers, the musicians, whether they are doing their job or dozing off. He says the light helps him see the dribble coming from their mouths, alerting him that they are falling asleep. Someone (musician or audience member?) yells 'reproached/caught out!' ('*keweleh*'). Susmono further embarrasses the musicians by intimating that they think they can sleep on the job as they wish if they work with him. However, they did not count on being seen by Mr Richard [acting as Susmono's overseer?]. How embarrassing to be caught, seen asleep, dribbling, by an Australian ('*podo katon ngilere ... rumangsane yen melu aku ora arep ditonton karo Richard ... ditonton karo wong Australia kok ya ngiler ki jan*').

On a number of levels, these gibes could be offensive, particularly to the older musicians. Like snoring, caught drooling whilst asleep is embarrassing, particularly in the context of Javanese beliefs that emphasise moral and spiritual maintenance through wakefulness (Siegel 1986). There is also an inference that they are inclined to be lazy. All this in front of a foreign 'cultural expert' witnessing these base contradictions to the grand tradition of Javanese *wayang*. The audience respond to all this with shrieks and laughter. Perhaps this intimately touches their own everyday fears as workers of the boss catching them slacking off on the job. In order that the musicians don't get sleepy, and to lighten things up in case he really did offend someone, the *dalang*, through Petruk, accompanied by the *gamelan's pesindhen* singers, offers a traditional Javanese work song called 'lumbung desa'. The song's lyrics suggest it may have been sung by the women husking rice collectively, before the advent of mechanisation. ('*Lumbung desa para tani padha makarya ayo dhi, njupuk pari nata lesung nyandhak alu ayo yu*')

Gareng now arrives and casually greets Petruk with '*Salam lekum*'. Petruk, in a caricature of a narrowly religious Muslim, immediately reprimands Gareng for truncating scurrilously the most holy greeting, '*Assalamu'alaikum*'. Petruk continues his lecture saying if you only understand half, and not all, of something you are liable to trip up. Gareng says he trips up because he has a lame foot from when he was a guerilla fighter in the revolutionary days, and that he is an 'army measurer' (*tentara meteran*). Petruk corrects him, 'army veteran, not measurer' ('*tentara veteran, kok meteran*').

Gareng then asks Petruk if he knows that in a battle Arab and Israeli armies suffer different wounds. Petruk gets impatient as Gareng draws out his joke. The essence of the joke is that when the bullets are flying and the Arabs hit the ground they get shot in the head because their long noses cause their heads to stick up in the line of fire. Gareng demonstrates this to Petruk by jumping up and pulling Petruk's head down until he is lying on the ground (Petruk also has a long nose). On being asked if he now understands, Petruk replies in English, 'Oh ... yes, yes, yes'. Gareng continues, the Israelis, on the other hand, get shot in their buttocks, because when they hit the ground they get a large erection causing their bottoms to stick up in the line of fire.

Petruk then refers back to the importance of circumcision. First, he quizzes

Gareng's knowledge on whether circumcision is obligatory or not. Getting nowhere with Gareng, he then explains that circumcision is also desirable for personal hygiene. Gareng, however, foils Petruk's attempt to be serious. When Petruk asks, 'What are the benefits of circumcision?' (*'Gunane sunat ki kanggo apa?'*), Gareng responds: 'To create demand for doctors, so nurses have work, to create demand for *dalang* if a *dalang* is asked to perform' (*'Nglarisna dhokter, mantri ben duwe pegawean, nglarisna dhalang yen nanggap dhalang'*). Gareng then explains the main issue about circumcision according to him by posing a question for Petruk: 'The way one eats a banana, which is nicer, with or without the skin, Truk?' (*'Ibarate wong mangan gedhang diuceti karo ora diuceti, enak endi, Truk?'*). Petruk answers, 'Of course peeled is nicer' (*'Ya, enak diuceti'*). The inference is that circumcision makes the penis more sensitive, and therefore sex is more pleasurable.

By now, Bagong has joined up with Petruk and Gareng. The clown's next target is the performance sponsor. Gareng starts complaining about the money they were given by the sponsor for the performance, that it wasn't much considering that in addition she got *jaipongan*, keyboard, guitar and tourists. One of the musicians then yells out 'talkative' (*'recek'*) criticising the *dalang* for going on complaining about it. But Gareng does go on, saying one of the musicians is only a colt driver and relies on Susmono for a regular income, including bonuses.

Gareng then introduces a song requested by Mr Richard called 'Iki duweke sopo?' (Who belongs to this?). My request is insinuated to mean I am attracted to Kukun. Gareng then has some fun getting the musicians of the various instruments ('modern' and traditional, Sundanese and Javanese) and singers to follow his hilarious attempts to mimic them. Later, Gareng calls out, 'Richard, are you asleep yet? To which I respond, 'not yet'. Gareng asks me, 'Do you want an affair with Kukun? You can have her as a second wife, if you wish.' (*'demen sama Kukun? Bolehlah punya isteri kedua, mau.'* Gareng, who is now Mr Richard⁶, then starts dancing to the song, which he sings with Eni, whilst gyrating his hips as if making love. He does this whilst embracing Petruk from the front. Petruk avoids him by turning around, but Gareng is determined and does it again, holding Petruk from behind. Then Petruk pushes him away. Gareng's song is strained and high pitched showing the extent of his desire. Gareng seems to be referring to his erection when he sings the chorus, 'What about this? ... what about this, girl?' (*'Iki piye ... iki piye dhuk'*).

The next song Gareng introduces in English, 'This is sing of song ... with *judul* [title] is 'Gandrung' (Passionate devotion). Accompanied by a trumpet, Gareng sings, eliciting responses from the singer-dancer Eni. He hands her rp 3000.00 (A\$ 2.00) because her sensual voice turns him on. The song allows Gareng to flirt with Eni, but she does not respond quite the way he wants. Gareng sings, 'Who belongs to the big bright eyes, En?' (*'Mripat mblalak sing dek'e sapa, En?'*). Eni responds, 'Oh ... those are mine' (*'Oh ... mripat mblalak ya duweku'*). She should have responded 'Those big bright eyes belong to you'. Gareng then sings, 'who belongs to those thin lips, En' (*'Lambe tipis dek'e sapa, nduk En?'*) and Eni responds correctly, 'Those thin lips are yours' (*'Lambe tipis duwemu'*). Gareng then sings,

⁶ Susmono appears to have created some intimate relationships, representing me through Gareng, attracted to Kukun, Geoff as Bagong, attracted to Eni, and himself as Petruk, attracted to Ika.

‘who belongs to the delicate chin, En’ (*Janggut goyor dek’e sapa, En?*) at which point a musician butts in ‘The delicate chin belongs to Mr Kasmin’ (*Janggut goyor ya duweke Pak Kasmin*) one of the musicians. Gareng, having failed, is replaced by Bagong. Eni responding sweetly encourages Bagong. He becomes naughtier, singing, ‘That which is hanging down (the inference is his genitals) belongs to whom, En?’ (*Sing gumandhul dek’e sapa, En?*). Bagong expects Eni to respond, ‘That which is hanging down belongs to you’. Instead, she gives cheek back to Susmono, ‘That which is hanging down belongs to the *dalang*’ (*Sing gumandhul duweke dhalange*). Susmono seems shocked at her cheekiness, but is quick to turn it back on her again. Bagong starts shaking like the ‘tree of life’ puppet (*kayon*) at the beginning of the great disturbance or *gara-gara* and chants the formula start, ‘The earth shakes, the stars are sparkling in the sky’ (*Bumi gonjang-ganjing, kelap-kelap katon liir lintang ing langit ... o ... ng*). The insinuation is that Eni’s response has caused a sensation/scandal and Bagong-Susmono asks, ‘En ... En ... on what basis do you say that which is hanging down belongs to the *dalang*? Have you ever experienced that thing hanging down of mine, En?’ (*En ... En ... apa dasarmu yang gumandhul punya dalang? Apa emange kamu udah pernah tahu gandhulan gue, En?*). Then Petruk scoffs, ‘[she] meant the mangoes hanging off your tree at home’ (*sing dikarepaken sing gumandhul liki pelem dirumah*). Gareng tries to continue the song with Eni, but she’s not responsive. This prompts Gareng to suggest to Eni that they both just up and leave the performance (*Yuk minggat dulu, En*).

An infatuated Petruk and the *dalang* try to entice the other singer-dancer, Ika, to stand up and perform. Petruk gets the audience to clap their hands and Ika reluctantly gets to her feet. In the end, however, she doesn’t want to sing and then Petruk lets her sit down again. The refusal to cooperate embarrasses Petruk (Susmono?) and he says, with a slip of the tongue, ‘Ah ... how troublesome, you make my genitals’ (*Ah ... payah deh, membuat kemaluan gue*). Gareng castigates Petruk for his shameful misuse of the word ‘*malu*’. He hits Petruk on the back of the head and says what he should have said was, ‘you make me ashamed’ (*membuat gue malu*). Eventually, however, Ika does dance *jaipongan* and Petruk joins in, shaking with released inhibition. Like the *tayuban* dancer, Petruk (Susmono) gives Ika money in appreciation after her dance.

Perhaps Susmono senses a feeling in the audience that he might be losing control of his singer-dancers, because Petruk now gets the three women to stand up. He asks them to repeat almost word by word in unison after him a declaration using formal Indonesian. With some reluctance, the women cooperate. The declaration degenerates, however, to a crude joke questioning the women’s virginity:

Good evening, please enjoy meeting with us, all the singers from *dalang* Enthus Susmono. Tonight we are ready to serve all the guests in regard to songs. We declare that we are still original (*Selamat malam, selamat berjumpa dengan kami-kami, para pesindhen dari dalang Enthus Susmono. Pada malam ini kami bersedia meladeni para tamu dalam hal lagu. Menyatakan bahwa kami masih orisinal*).

Then, after an ambiguous pause, Bagong clarifies that their ‘originality’ is in reference to their voices not virginity. Then, from the sound of the word ‘sizzling’

(*'cus'*), in crude reference to the pleasure of making love to a virgin, Gareng, blurts out the name George Bush. Gareng wonders who would win in a boxing match between George Bush, Bill Clinton and Saddam Hussein. Someone in the audience, perhaps growing weary of this babbling, yells out 'what a fuss' (*'ribut wae'*). Seeming to get the point, Susmono cuts the joke short and instead introduces the song, 'Tetes air mata' (Tear drops). Switching to the formality of a government radio broadcast, and holding a large microphone, Bagong announces a song requested by Mas Marto (someone of local importance): 'This is the Radio of the Republik of Maribaya ... of no address' (*'Inilah Radio Republik Maribaya ... RT 00 RW 00'*). Someone in the audience then shouts out the correct address, 'RT 01'. The three singer-dancers dance to a *dangdut* song accompanied by the electric guitar (see fig. 23). Bagong also dances, appearing to mimic the movements of a few of the younger audience members dancing on the periphery. Although initially requested to do so, the three women decline to dance to the final pop song, '*Gantengnya pacarku*' (How handsome my boyfriend is) which is introduced by the dramatic sound from the keyboard of grandfather clock's chimes. Petruk, Gareng and Bagong have a great time dancing and performing acrobatics to the song.

At last, Gareng prepares the stage for Semar's arrival. He asks that the *dalang's* lamp be turned up, and makes the stage wider by pushing further to the side the *kayon* puppets on either side of the performance space. Susmono states that Semar's name means he who can see what is still not clear. Semar greets his naughty sons. Gareng is surprised that, unlike them, Semar has a moving jaw. His children pay him homage. Touched, Semar blesses them. To this, an older woman in the audience registers a sound of delight. Similarly carried away, others in the audience mimic the familiar sounds of Semar made by the *dalang*.

Semar announces that he had a dream last night. Gareng quickly tells Petruk to make a note (*catat*). Semar rebukes Gareng, asking why every time one has a dream he has to have a ballpoint and paper ready. Some people in the audience realise the joke and yell out, 'oh ... a number' (*'ah ... nomor'*). The joke is in reference to the common gambling pastime amongst the *wong cilik* who buy lotto tickets and try to predict the winning numbers through, amongst other ways, the interpretation of dreams. Semar says he dreamt of a flood which came to him carrying a serpent. The serpent wrapped itself around him squeezing his body. Luckily, Semar found he had a long whip in his hand with which he was able to defeat the serpent and thus restore peace in the world. The dream is 'that which is not clear', and refers back to the main *lakon* with Batara Guru as the serpent. The *adegan Punakawan* merges into the final stages of the *lakon* as the Kurawa *ksatria* arrive in an attempt to bring Semar back to their kingdom.

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