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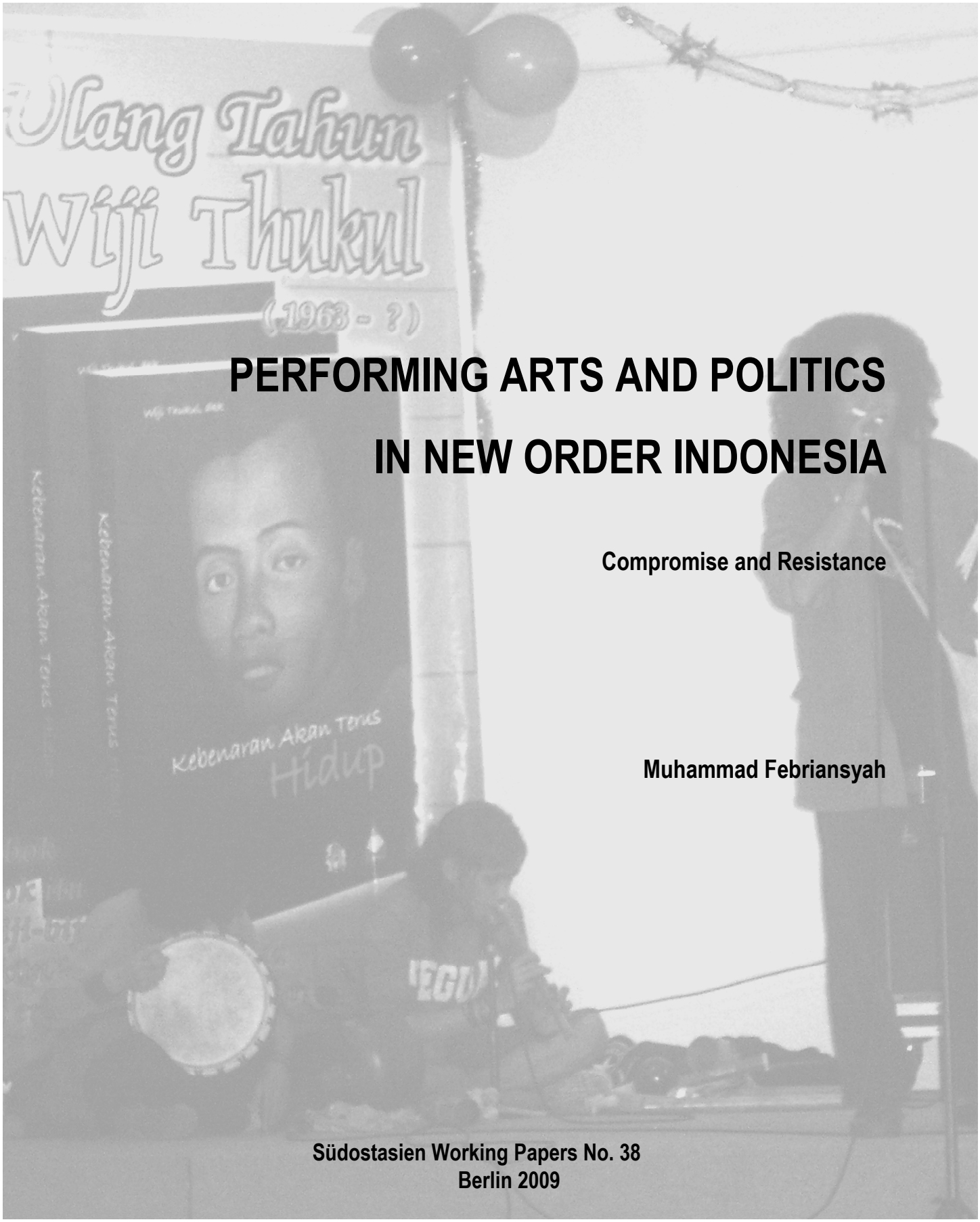

PERFORMING ARTS AND POLITICS IN NEW ORDER INDONESIA

Compromise and Resistance

Muhammad Febriansyah

Südostasien Working Papers No. 38
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INTRODUCTION

In his study on theatre in Southeast Asia, James Brandon (1967) noted the important role of the performing arts in this region. While in Western society the performing arts mainly serve to entertain those willing to pay, in Southeast Asia they are an integral part of culture and society. Therefore, the field of performing arts is an important lens through which social scientists can understand society in this region.

Performance in Indonesia first became the object of cultural and political research in the 1980s, contemporaneous with the burgeoning of political performance art in that era. As many scholars of Indonesia note, the performing arts were an important medium both for the ruler and the ruled in Indonesia during the New Order. Besides controlling the mass media, the former also employed the performing arts in campaigns and in publicizing their political programs. For some artists, that kind of cultural production was an important window on and component of their social agency (Curtis 1997). Many artists believed that their work was only of value if it expressed the feelings of society and communicated with it (Hooker & Dick 1993: 2). In some cases, artists used the performing arts as an instrument to disseminate their concerns about the socially and politically repressive conditions of the New Order. These actions sometimes ignited conflicts between artists and the state, as well as among artists themselves.

This paper attempts to analyse the influence of the New Order regime on the performing arts and discusses how artists responded to such hegemonic designs. Since performance is interwoven with people's everyday lives, rulers always harness it in order to preserve their superiority. At the same time, it can be argued that the ruled also use performances to challenge authorities. Therefore, performance becomes a space for the contestation of power between both parties.

During the New Order, cultural workers applied several experimental approaches and methods in dealing with the Soeharto regime. The approaches ranged from cooperation to confrontation. In this regard, Arif Budiman points out that the issue of conflict between a country's government and its politically-committed artists only takes place under certain types of government, that is, those that strictly avoid any possibility of political instability (Fenstein 1995:631). In order to identify the type of government under the New Order regime, Ariel Heryanto argued that "the regime applied a hegemonic state power which was achieved through a combination of both the apparent and celebrated consent on the one hand, and perceived but undiscussed coercion on the other. In that hegemonic position, the regime was able to maintain an authoritarian control over major political, economic, and cultural institutions" (Heryanto 1996:242). It also attempted to control public discourse and cultural production by various means, including regulation, censorship, and the banning of newspapers, books, and performances (Bodden 2005:3, Sen & Hill 2000, Heryanto 1995:244).

As a point of departure, I will use Budiman's notion of three categories of artist approaches in responding to state control. The first is to avoid performing plays with political themes, which is a kind of pre-emptive self-censorship. The second is to take up political issues, but in a creative and stylized manner. The third is to express one's opinions as they are (Fenstein, 1995:631). To a great extent, these categories describe the collective approaches of artists dur-

ing the New Order. I nevertheless assume that these categories are flexible and may vary depending on the particular circumstances of their employment. On the one hand, artists might strongly criticize the government. On the other hand, they might wittingly or unwittingly collaborate with it on issues on which they disagree.

The first part of this paper describes the relationship between art and politics in Indonesia from a historical perspective. Traditional performances such as *wayang, ludruk* and *ketoprak* were integral parts of Javanese society and were used for political purposes from time to time. A new development in performance starting in the early 1970s was the rise of popular culture, which created a space for rebellion among the people, and especially the youth. Later, I will explain how the popular movement in the late 1980s was tied in with lower-class cultural production. Further discussion will focus on poetry readings and analyse how they became sites for power contestation between the government and artists. How the presence of the elites in performances was received by the artists determined the actions against the regime that they were willing, or unwilling, to make. How different artists reacted to the presence of the elite will then be analysed in the context of their social and political backgrounds.

ART AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA: AN OVERVIEW

When discussing art and politics in Indonesia, we must refer to two responses to one basic question: can art be separated from politics? Although debates about this go as far back as the early 1920s, the question is still relevant today. The *Polemik Kebudayaan* (Polemics of Culture) in the 1960s, pitting social realists against universal humanists, represents a period in which this problem can be discussed. The first group was represented by Lekra (League of People's Culture), which believed that art must serve the ideals of the Indonesian revolution. The universal humanists, meanwhile, wanted to keep politics separate from art. Their debate involved arguably the most prominent thinkers and artists in that period from both parties. Moreover, in the form of Lekra, it provoked what is regarded as "the first organizational response in Indonesia to the question of relationship between a commitment to social and political change and the practice of art and literature" (Foulcher 1986:201). This debate also had a political impact when, in 1964, Soekarno banned some works and activities tied to the universal humanists; some of them also lost their jobs at government institutions and universities.

This debate, however, was interrupted by the G30S incident, which resulted in casualties among Lekra members and leftist elements in the country.[1] The following period was a time of "victory" for the proponents of universal humanism, who then had a monopoly in the cultural and artistic realms. In the early 1970s, a small but significant number of young artists rejected the individualistic philosophy of universal humanism. It is ironic that some art students protested that they were unable to express themselves freely under the limitations imposed on them by the same teachers who stood for freedom in art (Maklai 1993:70).

Like other forms of cultural production, the performing arts in Indonesia tend to become entangled with society and politics. Discussing the performing arts is also made more complex because they take many forms. Moreover, they are deeply rooted in the community, unlike the fine arts or literature, which are often enjoyed only by the elite and the well-educated. One other important way in which the performing arts are distinguished from others is their attachment to space and time. Audiences at performances can interact with actors, puppeteers, or poets in a shared time and place. These interactions create spaces for dialogue, criticism, or support in spontaneous ways. This makes the performing arts particularly useful mediums for spreading political messages.

Shadow plays (*wayang*), for example, have been important parts of the lives of Javanese people for more than a thousand years. Their story lines commonly revolve around the struggles for power contained in the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, and they normally take

[1] In this incident, seven generals kidnapped and had lower-level military officers murder Lubang Buaya on the morning of 1 October 1965. A day later, both the Army and the media in Jakarta blamed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) for the murder. Shortly thereafter, widespread killings and detentions were carried out against individuals associated with PKI. More than one million people are believed to have been killed. For more information see: Cribb, Robert (ed.), *The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, Vol 21, Monash Paper on Southeast Asia. Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990.

the form of all-night performances. The epics extol the virtues of the ruling class, in which the king's power is absolute and the people's duty is to serve and obey their king (Brandon 1967:19). In a different time, *wayang* served as a locus for renegotiating power relationships between the Javanese and the Dutch colonizers, with intellectuals and performers mounting allegories of resistance (Lockard 1998:58).

Indonesian leaders in colonial times also understood the important role culture had to play in the struggle for independence. In the 1920s, Gondo Durasim, one of the most prominent practitioners of the East Javanese traditional performance art *ludruk*, organized his own troupe. This troupe always performed for the nationalist study group *Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia* (Indonesian Union), an important organization during the prewar nationalist movement. It is believed that Durasim was recognized by Dr. Sutomo, a pioneer in harnessing folk plays for the nationalist cause (Peacock 1968:30). *Ludruk* continued to be popular in East Java until 1965. James Peacock's study on *ludruk* notes that in 1963, there were 594 *ludruk* troupes registered with the Cultural Administration Office in East Java. He estimates that on holidays such as May Day or Independence Day, there were more than 300 *ludruk* troupes performing in Surabaya at the same time, with more than 400 spectators for each performance. There were different performances held in five different venues on every evening, each attracting audiences in the hundreds (Peacock 1967:4).

A study by Barbara Hatley (2008) shows that in Yogyakarta, one of Java's cultural hubs, *ketoprak,* a form of traditional theatre from Central Java, achieved immense popularity at about the same time. In the early 1920s and 1930s, there were often three or four *ketoprak* troupes in one village and 300 groups were active in Yogyakarta. People were so keen to be involved in productions that many of those who were not given a role in the performances were happy to act as props, such as trees in garden scenes (Hatley 2008: 20).

While reviewing some sources about Indonesian performance, I came upon several statements and stories from actors who, in their youth, dreamt of becoming performers in theatre productions. These convinced me that taking on the role of the actor in traditional performance was very attractive to people. This was not because acting in traditional performances was a high-status profession in Indonesian society. Rather, a more plausible explanation is that it gave people the opportunity for close encounters with people's everyday life.

Against this background, it is not surprising that every group to take power in Indonesia used performances as outlets for propaganda. When the Japanese took over from the Dutch in 1942, they forced theatre into service to disseminate the idea of a Greater East Asia. They recognized the communicative potential of the theatre and allocated personnel and financial resources to the task of employing it in their campaign. Total censorship of performances was imposed. And though there were some artists who objected to this policy, those who dared to complain were severely punished. One of the most famous cases of such punishment during the Japanese occupation was the execution of Durasim, the prominent *ludruk* troupe leader. Instead of obeying orders and glorifying the Japanese, he recited this famous verse: *"Pagupon Omahe Doro. Melok Nippon Tambah Sengsoro"* ("*Pagupon* is a box where pigeons live. Working for the Japanese fills own lives with more suffering"). As a consequence of his defiance, he was executed by the Japanese military.

When Indonesia achieved its independence, the new state's government also used performances to tell people about their policies. In order to adjust the arts to their new style of propaganda, the government created several new types of performance. One such example is *wayang suluh*. Instead of focusing on Hindu epics like in a *wayang kulit* shadow play,

wayang suluh revolved around contemporary figures such as Soekarno, Nehru, soldiers, Dutchmen, and peasants. The puppets told stories of "national leaders and guerrilla soldiers in their struggle to obtain independence for their country" (Brandon 1967: 287). Since its purpose was to be performed for guerillas and soldiers during the fight for independence, *wayang suluh* disappeared once the armed struggle against the Dutch ended in 1949. At that point, another form of *wayang*, *Wayang Pantjasila* was invented. In this new form, the five Pandawa brothers became a symbol of *Pancasila*, the five principles of the Indonesian state as proclaimed by Soekarno. *Wayang Pantjasila* was created by the Ministry of Information during the early Soekarno era with the expectation that it would be performed by puppeteers, or *dalang,* and welcomed by audiences.

However, like *wayang suluh* and earlier forms of *wayang* created by Javanese princes to glorify themselves, *Wayang Pantjasila* never attracted much public interest. People saw it as pure propaganda and a top-down novelty with no roots in their communities. In addition, shifts in ideology soon made its messages appear out of date. Marxism, for instance, which later grew into communism, was one of the demons in *Wayang Pantjasila*. Later, however, it became one of the most important elements in Soekarno's political program, along with nationalism and religion (Brandon 1967:288).

Yet it was not until the so-called Guided Democracy period (1959-65) under Soekarno that the performing arts were substantially integrated with politics. This shift came about in part because of Soekarno's push to make politics into a symbol of a national revolution that had not yet been completed. This led to more dynamic political intervention in the cultural realm.

At the time of Guided Democracy, *ludruk* was widely embraced and popular in certain Javanese cities. Mixing music, comedy, and satire, *ludruk* had the potential to excite the lower classes. Lekra was the most active cultural organization during the period, and was reputed to have had more than 500,000 active members (Van Erven 1992:185).[2] Lekra was a cultural organization with a political orientation, and it was aware of how popular theatre could play a role in meeting its political goals. The group focused on rural areas, with the intention of consolidating and strengthening peasant organizations. Their performances, presented in various political gatherings in the years before 1965, proved very popular (van Erven 1992:185).

Another cultural organization related to the PKI was BAKOSKI (All Indonesian Ketoprak Organization). The biggest theatre organization in Indonesia, BAKOSKI had a clear political orientation since 1957. At the time, it had four times more members than the Association of Nationalist Ketoprak (LKN), which was affiliated with the Nationalist Party of Indonesia (PNI) (Brandon 1967 216). PNI was the nation's biggest political party and was led by Soekarno.

Almost all cultural production ended after the 1965 political tragedy that led to the beginning of the New Order regime and the rise of Soeharto. Many of the country's leftist writers and performers were killed, sent to jail, or exiled between 1965 and 1968. This had a significant

[2] Lekra was the country's most active cultural institution and one of the biggest political blocs. It openly supported Soekarno's calls to complete the national revolution. Additionally, Lekra had ties to the PKI, one of Soekarno's "die hard" sources of support during Guided Democracy. The true extent of the relationship between Lekra and PKI is still debated by scholars. The mainstream view is that Lekra was employed by PKI as a tool to disseminate political propaganda in cultural forms. Whether these two institutions really ever had institutional links is contested by Keith Foulcher, who believed that the ties were just a natural outgrowth of interests held in common (Foulcher 1986:206). He believed that Lekra was not only aligned with the PKI itself but also with the overall intellectual and cultural tradition of Indonesian Marxism.

impact on Indonesia in many ways. In the cultural realm, almost all activity stagnated because people did not dare to attend public gatherings after dark, let alone hold performances. It took several years for theatre groups to recover from the violent repression of the time. In Yogyakarta, theatre gained a new momentum when *Bengkel Teater* (Theatre Workshop) was founded by the famous playwright Rendra in 1968, upon his return from the United States. The first traditional Javanese theatre group was founded several years later, on the initiative of the military, and involved established actors. Surprisingly, several former political prisoners also became involved in these military-bound theatre troupes.

Sapta Mandala, a theatre group founded by the Central Javanese Diponegoro regiment in 1971, recruited a number of former members of the *Krido Mardi* troupe, the largest and best known *ketoprak* troupe in Java before 1965. As former political prisoners, they were not given the chance to form an independent troupe. They could, however, perform with *Sapta Mandala* and other troupes that had military patrons. Since the ex-prisoners were still enemies of ABRI (Indonesian Armed Forces) and the state, their recruitment would seem unexpected. But I argue that besides exploiting their talents and forcing them to share their skills with other members of the troupe, there was also a political reason behind the recruitment in that it allowed for easy, direct surveillance of the ex-prisoners.

Jennifer Lindsay has noted that in Indonesia, "the arts — and the performing arts in particular — have long been considered as a fertile field for political promotion and propaganda, and as a vehicle for political messages" (Lindsay 2005:5). In this respect, the New Order regime simply repeated the approaches of former rulers. Like its predecessors, the New Order government provided facilities and organizational networks to encourage cultural activities at the community level. This was made easier because the political tragedy of 1965 had traumatized the people and made them believe that only the state could ensure their safety.

Meanwhile, performances were subjected to surveillance — even in the early stages — to ensure that there were no dissident elements presented in skits or story lines. Any form of cultural expression that had political content in opposition to the government was often identified with Lekra. Due to the New Order regime's anticommunist doctrine, such cultural expression was banned, or at least heavily censored. In this way, the New Order regime tried to remove politics from the daily life of the people. It also made a strong attempt to cleanse society of opposition forces and political dissidents in order to maintain political stability.

The response to these government measures by cultural workers varied. As noted earlier, many traditional and modern artists became involved with or supported the authorities. This was a common occurrence in the early New Order. The artists were often individuals or groups whose political views were in opposition to Soekarno and PKI, and it was therefore normal that they would support Soeharto and the New Order regime.

THE RISE OF POPULAR CULTURE

Although state intervention in the cultural realm was a main factor in the revival of cultural life after 1965, it also changed the nature of many traditional art forms and transformed them into official performances. Still traumatized by political violence even after 1965, the people were aware of the political impact of every spontaneous shout or chant during performances. If they made the wrong moves — even if they were traditional or spontaneous — they could be misinterpreted by the authorities. Watching these performances, then, became a very different experience. Those who still attended did so primarily for entertainment, rather than to witness an expression of community identity (Hatley 1982, Wilson 1997). Consequently, the traditional arts were made to compete with more attractive forms of entertainment that could be accessed easily through the mass media. The spread of popular culture through radio, television, and popular magazines that began to flood Indonesia at the time had a great influence on the younger generation. This might explain why in the early 1970s, when *dangdut* music emerged, it was widely accepted by the people.

Dangdut, sometimes known as *orkes melayu*, emerged from the urban village, or *kampung,* and was considered to be a parochial or lower-class style of music (Siegel 1986: 214, Murray 1991:11). According to Frederick (1982:112), *dangdut* propelled the rise of Indonesia's first true entertainment superstar. Its early success was due in part to the efforts of Rhoma Irama, who created a form of popular music that could be easily understood. He also tended to compose and sing songs with religious and social content. Frederick refers to the *dangdut* style as "kitsch," while Murray deems it similar to early reggae, with its urban, lower-class origins and its outrageous style adopted in response to oppression. *Dangdut's* popularity was also sustained by Rhoma Irama's theatrical performance style, in particular his flamboyant costumes and magical stage shows. He quickly became known as the "King of Dangdut" and attracted people to his performances, where many of his songs raised social issues.

Indeed, during this period popular performances became fertile ground for political and social criticism. Song lyrics touched on society's problems and mass gatherings could be organized around concert stages. Indeed, when Iwan Fals, another music star, emerged in the late 1970s, he not only created an atmosphere that embraced criticism, but gave people a way to vent their grievances more visibly. Having grown up in a *kampung* in Manggarai, Jakarta, Iwan Fals started his music career as a busker, but became increasingly popular because of his talent for and commitment to creating songs grounded in social reality. The themes of his songs always centered on social problems such as the hypocrisy of the media, poverty, corruption, and a lack of democratization.

Young people responded enthusiastically when Iwan Fals and his group, SWAMI, set out on a hundred-city tour in 1991. The first concert was held on 26 February of that year in a parking lot at the Senayan sports complex in Jakarta. At least 100,000 young people from Jakarta and other cities packed the area. Fired up by Iwan's music, the crowds vented their anger by wrecking public property and burning vehicles. After that, not only was SWAMI banned from completing the tour but all other rock concerts were also banned for an unlimited period. (Harsono 1989: 14).

The worst concert riot in the country's history took place at a performance of the American heavy metal band Metallica in Jakarta in April 1994. A crowd of angry young people stoning and looted houses, vandalizing shops and cars in the elite suburb of Pondok Indah. The media widely interpreted the riot as an expression of class resentment, triggered by the expensive ticket prices and the location of the venue in one of Jakarta's wealthiest suburbs (Sen & Hill 2000:184)[3].

These new developments posed challenges to the powerful. Popular performances became havens for political and social criticism through not only their content but also their ability to bring the masses together. For most Indonesians, large gatherings of people have long been associated with a desire for social change and a willingness to aggravate or try to intimidate authorities (Heryanto 1990: 296). And, not surprisingly, when such gatherings developed into riots they were always seen as serious threats to political stability. Indonesians' persistent willingness to mobilize for social change was not overwhelmed by years of social engineering on the part of the government, and activists continued to find new ways of expressing their rebellious sentiments. Rock concerts, then, became one major outlet for popular discontent.

[3] The ticket prices for this concert ranged from Rp 30,000 to Rp 150,000, ten to fifty times the Rp 3,000 minimum daily wage for a factory worker at the time.

RENDRA AND *BENGKEL TEATER*

In the early 1970s, modern theatre was thriving in Indonesia. The word "modern" does not imply that this new theatre was the opposite of traditional. Rather, it merely describes the form of theatre that emerged after traditional theatrical activity was halted after 1965. Indeed, this modern theatre grew from more or less the same roots as traditional theatre and shared similarities with it. Modern works created by the playwright Rendra, for instance, tried to fuse Western theatrical forms with Javanese myths. Rendra adapted Western classic drama to a Javanese context, employing Javanese costumes and gamelan musical accompaniment (Hatley 1994:226).

Rendra established a theatre troupe called *Bengkel Teater* in Yogyakarta. While more mainstream artists were preoccupied with their own work at *Taman Ismail Marzuki* (Ismail Marzuki Park), a prestigious arts institution in Jakarta supported by the government, Rendra built his own in a Yogyakarta *kampung*. *Bengkel Teater* members lived in a rented house in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city, supporting themselves through odd jobs and cultivating a plot of land together. Rendra's main inspiration for the troupe was his experience with the commune movement in America, the bohemian appearance and lifestyle of which carried an antiestablishment image and was more Western-influenced than traditionally Javanese (Hatley 1994:226). During his early encounters with this new social environment, Rendra wrote and produced many plays that were translations or adaptations of foreign works, including "Lysistrata," "Hamlet," and "Macbeth." In the following years, he instead wrote his own plays.

Rendra's main contribution to social change was to open up spaces for political opposition to the government. He was one of the first middle-class artists to foster political opposition to Soeharto through his performances. His performances before politically conscious audiences were unprecedented in the New Order period. He was able to attract people in huge numbers, for example, to his 1974 performance of "*Mastodon dan Burung Kondor"* ("Mastodon and Condor Birds")**.** The play was set in a fictitious Latin American nation, where a dictator called Colonel Carlos ruled with iron fist. Student protests eventually led to a revolution and forced Carlos to flee and seek foreign military aid. According to Max Lane, this performance was the first time in New Order Indonesia when a political movement attracted crowds to a national stadium where Soekarno had also held rallies (Lane 2007:81). The performance, however, also caused Rendra to be banned from performing in Yogyakarta until 1977 (Aveling 2001:135). Another *Bengkel Theatre* performance, *"Perjuangan Suku Naga"* ("The Struggle of the Naga Tribe") functioned more as a rally than an artistic performance. It was held outdoors at *Taman Ismail Marzuki* on two nights and received widespread coverage in the newspapers. The plots of Rendra's performances raised contemporary political issues such as corruption, military repression, and development.

Rendra was part of the student movement in the mid-1970s, when the movement reached its peak. He was the one who popularized poetry readings during the New Order. He recited his poems during student gatherings and in dormitories (Hatley 1994:228). The fact that students were a main source of opposition during that period must be further explained. Students were a prominent and vocal source of opposition during the 1970s in part because in 1966 they had

allied with the Army and supported Soeharto's rise to power. This essentially gave them a license to protest that was not afforded to other groups (Aspinall 2005:118), including cultural workers. Rendra, therefore, did not have as much of a chance to convey his political and social criticism through performance for the lower classes. This was aggravated by the fact that the New Order regime had pursued its opponents to such an extent that workers and other marginalized groups were left with very poor organizational structures.

Although Rendra's poetry often touched on the struggles of the lower classes, it was difficult for poor people to actually hear them, and ultimately, his messages to those groups did not get through. This became a serious obstacle for him in getting close to the lower classes. Indeed, he further distanced himself from them when he moved from Yogyakarta to Jakarta and became involved in a profitable arts management company. From the mid-1980s onward, many people believed that Rendra was no longer a force to be reckoned with in the realm of Indonesian political theatre, though not all felt that way.

Rendra was the first theatre director to receive a large-scale commercial sponsorship for his productions. As a result, some disenchanted former members of *Bengkel Teater* accused Rendra of hypocrisy and of selling out to commercialism (Murray 1991:4). Further bolstering their claim, it was noted that most of the lower classes could not afford tickets to Rendra's performances. As a result, Rendra's name was not widely known by either villagers or the urban poor, particularly in the capital city (Murray 1991:3). Rendra, however, maintained that he remained true to his ideals. He once complained that after years of hardship and harassment from the authorities he should have been rewarded. Responding to criticism about the amount charged for tickets to his Yogyakarta performances, Rendra once remarked:

> Protestors deemed the ticket prices too expensive. I would raise a question: How was that measured? It was only expensive for those who disregard art. But for those people who acknowledge art and are in agreement with my poetry, the ticket price meant nothing. Apparently, all of the tickets were sold out. (Kompas/11/5/1994).[4] (Translation by the author.)

It is surprising that Rendra simply split the public into those who did not hold the arts in high regard and those who did. Art, it seems, and not politics, was the main issue. Although much of his poetry dealt with social problems and poverty, the ticket pricing for Rendra's performances went against much of his message. I would further argue that in this case, audience protests about the ticket prices for Rendra's poetry readings demonstrated the social problems at hand even more clearly than the readings themselves did. His critics claim that "he became a publicity-hungry caricature of his former self and that he had struck a deal with the military for permission to perform his theatrical poetry shows for the Jakarta bourgeoisie" (Erven 1992:186). Ironically enough, the change in his commitment in the late 1980s occurred at the same time that the social problems faced by the people were becoming more severe.

Nevertheless, many cultural workers in Central Java took up Rendra's original methods and his style. After he moved to Jakarta in the late 1970s, other groups continued to develop popular, socially involved, modern theatre. Troupe leaders were often actors who had spent time in Rendra's *Bengkel Teater*. Indeed, Central Java remains the home of numerous small, usually

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[4] "Para demonstran menganggap tiket yang dijual panitia terlalu mahal. Saya bertanya, untuk ukuran siapa? Untuk orang yang bersikap pelit pada seni, yang tidak menghargai seni, dan menjadi parasit seni barangkali tiket-tiket itu terlalu mahal. Tetapi bagi rakyat Yogyakarta yang mencintai seni dan solider pada isi sajak-sajak saya tiket itu tidak terlalu mahal. Sebab nyatanya semua tiket terjual habis."

neighbourhood-based theater companies. Rosslynn von der Borch (1988), van Erven (1992), and Barbara Hatley (1991) point out that these *kampung*-based theatre groups became prominent in social and political movements in the 1980s and 1990s. From then on, authorities had a tougher time handling the criticism, protests, and messages of grievance and discontent that appeared on the country's stages, and state hegemony became more hotly contested. In the following section of the study, I will explain how the cultural workers who succeeded Rendra were involved in social and political movements during the late 1980s.

FROM POPULAR CULTURE TO POPULAR MOVEMENTS: LOWER-CLASS CULTURAL PRODUCTION

One noteworthy development in the late 1980s was the emergence of increasingly radical opposition movements. Though these movements were, as before, dominated by the middle-class, including university-educated activists and professionals (Heryanto 1995:262), they began to draw their strength from the lower classes. Their ideas and political activities spread out into many areas and took on a more militant style.

Until 1978, the student movement was the only active opposition group in Indonesia. The state, however, banned student political activities the following year. While the movement was under pressure as a consequence of the implementation of NKK/BKK[5] in 1979, they continued their activism through discussion groups and international networks set up by some nongovernmental organizations. These networks paved the way for "foreign" ideas to be discussed within domestic political circles.

Meanwhile, the New Order's developmentalist perspective was increasingly being challenged by the neo-Marxist structural approach pioneered by Arif Budiman. Budiman had been an anticommunist student activist in 1966, and supported the New Order before he went to study at Harvard. When he returned to Indonesia in 1980, he became a leading intellectual critic of the New Order and reintroduced the basics of classical Marxist thought to Indonesian intellectuals.

Marxism and its various forms were well known in the country prior to independence. These ideas were, indeed, one of the main pillars of the independence struggle. However, after 1965 people were prohibited from discussing and disseminating Marxist thought. In this way, the reintroduction of this approach by Budiman in the 1980s did, in a sense, offer a "new" economic and political approach to counteracting the increasingly negative impacts of developmentalism.

These Marxist ideas were well received by student discussion groups and were debated frequently. And while they had only returned to Indonesia recently, these sentiments also had at their disposal a history of activism from the 1920s and 1960s. Meanwhile, the poverty and other economic problems caused by industrialization were becoming more apparent. Cases of land being taken over for the construction of development projects like factories, dams, and even golf-courses, became more widely known. These problems provided activists with opportunities to apply the theories that were being discussed and accepted in middle-class, intellectual circles. They also took the time to learn the lessons of the student movement in the 1970s, which failed in opposing the New Order regime because it was cut off from the people.

[5] NKK/BKK (Normalization of Campus Life/ Bodies for the Coordination of Student Affairs) was a social order policy used in institutions of higher education. Under the policy, students were forbidden from carrying out political activities. NKK/BKK changed the role of members of the civitas academica in politics. It was marked by the replacement of student councils with student representative bodies. The regime stressed that universities were part of government bureaucracy and, therefore, appointments to campus positions such as rector or dean were political rather than academic (Nugroho 2005:149).

Moreover, they also learned from the experience of the Philippines, where Marcos was forced to step down by a well organized "people power" movement. Aspinal (2005:242) argues that "student activists looked to the Phillippines as an exciting example of what could be achieved by mass action."

Evidently, the developments in Philippine politics did not only inspire the Indonesian student movement. Cultural workers, too, learned to organize the lower classes by drawing on Filipino popular theatre. In 1979, four actors from Arena Theatre in Yogyakarta were invited to participate in a community theatre workshop in the Philippines that was organized by the Philippines Educational Theatre Association (PETA). PETA, formed in 1967, was a pioneer of liberation theatre. The group applied the Freirean liberation method in theatre education. Their experiences at these workshop made the Indonesian artists realise the importance of autonomy of the community, with theatre at its center. After the workshop, they returned and practised liberation theatre and built their own theatre communities through workshops in rural areas of Indonesia.

Up until 1981, PETA held annual workshops that were also attended by Indonesian cultural workers, including the poet Emha Ainun Nadjib, Simon Hate from *Teater Dinasti*, and Fred Wibowo from *Teater Arena* (Erven 1992 194).

Another Philippines-based people's art organization, the Asian Council of People Culture (ACPC), also invited Indonesian artists such as Moelyono and the lower-class poet Wiji Thukul to participate. Cultural workers who attended workshops held by these two Philippine art organizations dedicated their works and energy to lower-class cultural production. Moelyono organized cultural activities among the people of Wonorejo, East Java, who were victims in a land dispute over the building of the Japanese-financed Wonorejo Dam. Wiji Thukul, for his part, worked with children and local theatre groups in his neighbourhood.

In 1987, about fifty social workers from all over Indonesia participated in a two-week workshop organized by *Teater Arena*. The participants were educated in the theatre liberation process and then returned to their own communities and set up theatre groups of their own. In October of that same year, they convened an international seminar on the subject of "Development Support Communication in Indonesia." Participants tried to create people-centred communication strategies and community organizing measures that could help to break the culture of silence.[6]

According to Freire, the culture of silence is a condition in which alienated and oppressed people are not heard by the dominant members of their society and are incapable of speaking for themselves. The work carried out by the theatre artists from the seminar attempted to expose this culture by encouraging the oppressed to speak for themselves through dialogue and cooperation. This work appeared to have great success in increasing lower-class engagement with economic, political, and social problems through their own cultural activities. The emergence of workers' theatre in the early 1990s was one example of such collaboration between the middle class and the workers, in which the former was able to facilitate the political awareness of the latter through performance.[7]

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[6] Documents and papers for this seminar compiled in Oepen, Manfred (ed), 1988, *Development Support Communication in Indonesia.*

[7] See for example on Bodden, Michael. 1997. *Workers Theatres and Theatre about workers in 1990s Indonesia.* RIMA, vol 1/Number 1. Page 37-78.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that the Indonesian lower classes, or *wong cilik,* only had a passive role in these collaborations. To them, performance was a medium of social action that not only reflected but also brought about social change. Thus, by participating in various performances they were also acting as agents of social change (Curtis 1997:21). Generally speaking, the performances provided participants with the rare opportunity to assert their own perspectives on life. In the following section, I will give examples of how the lower classes not only expressed their problems through performance art but in the process also stood in opposition to the elites.

POETRY READING: PERFORMANCE AND POWER RELATIONS

At the end of the 1980s, a popular movement emerged that increasingly demanding democratization. Student groups and some NGOs began to advocate for democratization more aggressively, and this had an impact on government discourse. Senior officials frequently endorsed openness, communication, and softening their approach to security (Aspinall 2005 43).[8] This new political development increasingly facilitated political and cultural expression and paved the way for artists to show their commitment to social causes. When in the 1980s industrialisation was seen as having negative economic and social effects, cultural workers placed more emphasis on social problems in their art. Indeed, some of the poets who had initially opposed social debate in art, such as Abdul Hadi WM and Sutardji Calzoum Bachri, Ikranegara, in the late 1980s started to write poetry that had social themes. One of the leading cultural networkers, Halim HD, described the situation at that time by saying, "Poetry readings were like 'mushrooms in the rainy season.' There was no event that did not include a poetry reading" (Halim 1999:292).

Various debates about the role of art in social life — liberation literature, contextual literature, engaged art, etc. — soon followed. These debates, along with the increase in more low-profile cultural activities, received significant coverage in media. Moreover, many artistic communities began to produce their own media, which sidestepped official publication procedures by being spread through the artistic networks of various groups.

In theatre and literature, cultural freedom fostered unprecedented ways of conveying social criticism. Antiestablishment plays and readings, some by long-banned artists like Rendra, were performed much more openly. A new phenomenon also emerged in that these performances were often well attended by the elite (Lockard 1998:105, Murray 1991:1).

Poetry readings attracted the most attention from the elite because of their inherent characteristics. In practice, the stage at the readings was open for everyone, not only for the poet. Elites attended poetry readings not just to fulfill their role as official overseers, and they often took part in them by writing their own poetry and reciting it. This created an opportunity for collaboration between the rulers and artists, but in a way that strengthened the former's hegemony. It is also noteworthy that at poetry readings the elite were often present for the entirety of the event, and so any criticism had to be conveyed in a stylized manner. This was different from the all-night shadow puppet performances, in which criticism against the government by the *dalang* was often inserted during the *goro-goro* scene at dawn, by which point the elite in attendance had usually departed.

The increased freedom of cultural expression on the one hand and the elite involvement in performance on the other may have seemed an odd combination, but one thing is clear: Performance attendance amounted to an effort by the regime to tighten its control over the performing arts. It was by no means a coincidence that this phenomenon only emerged in early 1990s as the regime was pushing openness and popular movements were gaining pace.

[8] For more information on this political situation, see Lane, Max, 1991. *"Openess", Political Discontent, and Succession in Indonesia: Political Developments in Indonesia, 1989-1991.* Australia-Asia paper No.56. Nathan, Queensland: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University.

Heryanto argues this may well have been a period of transition in which the regime tried to strengthen itself after its recent decline and renew its old hegemonic power (Heryanto 1995:243). Although there was no visible weakening of its dominant position, the New Order regime did face massive resistance at the grassroots level, as well as hostility amongst elites over the unequal distribution of power.

COMPROMISES AND RESISTANCE

While the presence of elites at performing event could be seen as an effort to domesticate the artists, at the time it was, ironically, welcomed by the latter and most artists were eager to be involved. This is a paradox because the artists who had always been victims of surveillance and censorship chose to collaborate instead of confronting the ruling power. Many artists expected that the close relationships they developed with the elites would negate their past disputes. Nano Riantiarno, a leader of *Teater Koma*, who frequently saw his works banned, even said that this new intimacy showed that the elites also had artistic and cultural sense (Pikiran Rakyat 18/8/1991).

It can be assumed that no challenge to a ruler would exist when artists and elites are not in conflict. And once they are in agreement, even if performances are able to proceed with the permission of the authorities, the artists inevitably lose their bargaining power. This loss of power was on display when the government organized spectacular celebrations to mark the fifty-year Golden Anniversary of Indonesian independence in August 1995. Many of the state-sponsored events featured various Indonesian performing art forms, including *dangdut*, pop and rock music performed through *wayang*, dance, and poetry readings. *Malam Puisi Merah Putih*,(Red White Poetry Night) held at the National Monument (*Monas*) in Jakarta on 15 August 1995, was attended by a heterogeneous crowd. Sitting in the front row were ministers and other state officials, as well as high-ranking businessmen. A group of poets, meanwhile, were made to sit on floor mats on the sides of the stage. Amongst them were Taufiq Ismail, Sutardji C. Bachri, and Rendra (Republika 20/8/1995). (Rendra's involvement was exceptional because at the time he was still barred from reading his poetry in public.) While these three poets were prominent in the Indonesian cultural realm, their prominence at the event did not even approach that of the political and business elites present. Indeed, we may know this from the respective places where they were seated. In Javanese norms and customs, maids or servants are not allowed to sit in the same row as their masters.

These developments reached beyond the capital city of Jakarta into rural areas. As shown in a study conducted by Amrih Widodo in Blora, a rural area in Central Java, the involvement of the local elite and other state elements in the traditional performing art *tayuban* could be called the "Rites of Hegemonization." The cultivation of new knowledge, values, and aesthetics through these performances also played an important role in manufacturing the political consent of the villagers. "Thus state hegemony manifest itself in a local cultural arena, creating conflicts which give the state the opportunity to show its authority" (Widodo 1995:27). In his study, Widodo witnessed a small scandal during a *tayuban* performance, in which several dissatisfied young men protested toward both *pengarih* (master of ceremonies) and the front row of the audience benches where local elites were sitting. Widodo finally found that their protests derived from special privileges enjoyed by those officials because the latter always had the seats of honour. The interventions into their performance made the youth of the village feel that they could no longer believe in or proud of their own performance.

We cannot compare the two cases above in a linear manner. In the first case, the presence of the elite was accepted and contributed to the atmosphere. In the second case, the performance itself was disrupted because there was dissatisfaction about the presence of the elite. Although

the latter case proved that a performance could be used as a means to oppose authority, in this case it did not come about because of political consciousness: the protestors were only disappointed that the local audience had lost their monopoly on the performance. They believed that their cultural production, which was a part of their community's life, was being damaged by the outside authority's influence. The freedom and equality of the performance were lost because of the presence of the elite.

Since these two cases produced different results, we might be tempted to make the conclusion that the different outcomes stemmed from differences between Jakarta as a social centre and the country's outlying regions. Indeed, during the 1990s there was an increase in the number of new "art centres" established in the regions in opposition to Jakarta's art centre, which was perceived as arrogant. The dominant view was that the cultural activities in the centre were supported and even provided by government institutions and corporate sponsors. Moreover, artists in Jakarta were constantly featured in the media, whereas cultural activities outside the capital garnered no publicity. The artistic communities in the regions therefore considered themselves more independent from the centre, instead relying on their own members' connections and networking to survive. They always held events in a very simple and independent manner. They were not dependent on the commercial media, and instead pursued self-publication. Based on all of these qualities, the regional artists claimed that they had greater freedom to express themselves. Dependence on the media and the government, they argued, would force them to sacrifice their idealism and cultural freedom.

In fact, however, even these artists did not have real freedom. Their independence was limited to their work within their own communities. If they came face-to-face with the authorities, however, the story played out differently. Situations similar to the one seen at *Malam Puisi Merah Putih* could also happen in the regions. And like their counterparts in Jakarta, they could be also find themselves supporting state hegemony. One poetry reading in Semarang in 1994 illustrates this point.

To celebrate Independence Day in 1994, Central Java's Art Council (DKJT) held a Festival of Resistance Literary Works (*Pesta Sastra Perjuangan*) in Taman Budaya Raden Salleh (TBRS), Semarang. In the audience were not only more than fifty artists and participating poets but also the head of the police district, Pak Didi, who was asked to write a poem by the organizing committee. He asked to recite his piece, which told the story of police officers who died during the early Independence War in a heroic five-day battle. His participation in the event showed the hegemonic relationship between poets and the state apparatus in New Order Indonesia, with the Army intervening in the political and social realms. Through his poem, Didi tried to convince the audience about the important role of the police (and the Army in general) by retelling the story of Indonesia's struggle for independence.

Artists' reactions to the policeman's performance were recorded in an article in a national daily newspaper written by Beno Siang Pamungkas, a poet and member of the organizing committee. He praised the officer's performance and wrote: "The applause could not be stopped just after Pak Didi read his poem. That night, poetry and poets truly found their home" (*Republika* 11/9/1994). Applause was seen as a signal of audience approval toward the presence of the elite bureaucrat. Beno Siang Pamungkas himself was a leading figure of the *Sastra Pedalaman* movement, which had questioned the role of national newspapers and the Jakarta art centre. Although his article appeared in a national newspaper was an irony, but the way he praised that event also left a question mark to some artists.

Wiji Thukul, the Solo-based poet and activist who read a poem at the same event, refuted Beno's statement. In a self-published bulletin, he responded teasingly by saying that since so many elites were present the event was more like an official ceremony for a dam launching than a poetry reading. He felt that the event was tasteless and undemocratic. And not only because too many police officers attended but also because of the way in which the organizing committee behaved. Prior to the event, Thukul was officially asked by the committee to submit his poems to be published in an anthology marking the event. He submitted five poems touching on social criticism, including his poem *"Peringatan"* ("Reminder"). However, none of the poems he submitted were published. Instead, the committee published another of his works. According to the committee, Thukul's poems were not included because he failed to submit his poems prior to the deadline. But Thukul said he learned that other poets had submitted their poems later than he did and still had their works published.

Thukul believed that the committee was not brave enough to take the risk of publishing his critical poems. He wondered why one of the organizers said that poetry and poets had truly found their home when the committee itself had become a censoring authority, saying: "The police who were monitoring people overtly were not only present at TBRS, but in the committee member's mind as well." (*Ajang* 1994/15). Thukul also read his poems in a stylish and explosive manner, as he did in every performance (*Republika* 11/9/1994). Thukul himself insisted that this did not happen because of the committee's charity, but because he seized his right to do so. He believed that his rights were not obtained by begging from others; they had to be attained.

How he attained his rights remained unclear. But we can perceive it more clearly in a poetry reading held a fortnight later in Tegal.[9] Prior to the event, Tegal had gained national attention on account of its cultural activities. In October 1993, six Tegal artists had performed in *Malam Sastra Tegal* at *Bengkel Teater Rendra*, Depok, Jakarta, upon being invited by Rendra himself. That same year, a group of poets connected with Tegal published a poetry anthology called *Dari Negeri Poci*. In August 1994, *Horizon*, a prominent literary magazine, published a special supplement on Tegal literature.

Following up on the success of *Dari Negeri Poci*, the group planned to publish a sequel, *Dari Negeri Poci 2*. To generate excitement, a series of artistic events was held, with the launching of *Dari Negeri Poci 2* at the top of the agenda. Since the event was considered prestigious and of meeting a national standard, it received the full support of the local elite. This support was embodied in the presence of *Musyawarah Pimpinan Daerah* (MUSPIDA), a local leadership forum. This time, not only did a police officer attend, but also the city mayor and various other officials, including the head of command of the Army district.

Although *Dari Negeri Poci 2* contained the works of 45 poets from all over Indonesia, only a handful of them were given the opportunity to read their poetry. As one of the poets whose works were compiled in the book, Thukul was invited to read five of his eight poems, and it appears that his work passed through the committee's censorship process. Apparently, the ceremony ran smoothly until Thukul began to read. Instead of reciting the poems that were included in the book, he recited other poems that the committee did not expect. The atmosphere became tense when he started to read his third poem, *"*I Prefer Comedy,"[10] which tells of general election fraud and was aimed at Golkar, the ruling party.

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[9] The event was held at a school hall in Tegal on 27 August 1994. This account of events is based on my interview with Nurhidayat Poso on 7 March 2008 in Tegal. He organized and witnessed the poetry reading.

Thukul was interrupted by the master of ceremonies, who asked him to leave the stage and give way to the other poets. But he refused to stop reading, believing that he was asked to do so because his poem was highly critical of Golkar, and because a city mayor and Golkar leader, Muhammad Zakir, was in the audience. He insisted on continuing his performance, saying that it was his right to decide which poems to read and accusing the committee of imposing self-censorship. He later read "Reminder" (Appendix), one of his best-known poems. Being fully aware of the explosive impact of this famous work, artists, students, and activists in the audience yelled the last line of the poem together: *"Hanya satu kata: Lawan!"* ("There is only one word: Resist!"). Zakir, who clearly felt uncomfortable, responded by leaving the hall angrily.

The committee members were later subjected to serious interrogation. Zakir told them that he could barely contain his wrath toward Thukul and intended to act harshly. The presence of journalists at the reading, however, prevented him from doing so at the time. In an official statement in a national newspaper regarding the event, the head of the Social and Political Office (*Kakansospol*) said that no restrictions would be imposed upon any artistic performance as long as it was a purely artistic event. However, if politics intervened the performance could be jeopardized. The official said that while he believed that art was an "admiration of God's beautiful creations and everything nice, it could become dangerous if art blends with politics" [11] (Kompas 31/8/1994).

From that point on, all of the cultural activities in Tegal were subjected to intense and unprecedented scrutiny and control. Tegal artists could not imagine a worse mayor than Zakir. Not surprisingly, activist cultural workers later became prominent members of the student-led movement to oust Zakir during Reformasi in 1998. In this regard, they were involved in rallies, speeches, performances, and poetry readings at public meetings and demonstrations. Anton Lucas (2001) notes that the poetry reading by Thukul was a precursor to Reformasi in Tegal four years later.

It is important to note Tegal's political and social history prior to that event. The former head of the military district, Zakir, who was well known among the people in Tegal as a corrupt mayor, had always ruled with an iron fist. Although Thukul was not a Tegal resident, he was occasionally invited to read his poetry and participate in discussions there. His friendship with Tegal artists, especially Nurhidayat, meant that he was familiar with Tegal's development and its social problems, which were not very different from those of his home city, Solo. In a letter to Nurhidayat, he said:

> Are you thinking of how to prevent Pasar Pagi Tegal and its historical value from being torn down and lost? And don't forget to visit the bright Solo, which always claims to be the cleanest city but haul everywhere. And yes, in Solo too there is a historical building that would be toppled to build a mall. This is a tear-down era. Oh, sorry: a development era. (Thukul 1991)

Pasar Pagi, hinted at in the letter was a traditional market informally established by small traders in Tegal. At the time, it had been closed by authorities, who intended to replaced it with a modern plaza. The move met with anger and resistance from NGOs and the commu-

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[10] I would like to thank Lanang Setiawan for this detail. Since documentation of this event is not available, Lanang's memory of this event was very helpful.

[11] "Kesenian yang murni itu adalah kalau penyair menampilkan puisi-puisi yang berisi puji-pujian terhadap alam, Tuhan, maupun hal-hal yang baik, bukan puisi yang disusupi berbagai kepentingan politik karena kalau tak hati-hati dapat menimbulkan kerawanan"

nity. Although the market traders were ultimately removed by force, the project was held up for unknown reasons. At the time that Thukul recited his controversial poems the market area remained fenced off and abandoned. Tegal's artists were not always involved with the lives and struggles of the lower classes. They were often detached from them and were dependent on socioeconomic relations dominated by intermediated strata (Curtis 1997:284). The artists were also divided in their response to Thukul's performance, with some seeing him as "an outsider" who made a fuss in their city. On the one hand, the artists supported freedom of artistic expression. But on the other hand, their standing was compromised because many of them were also civil servants.

As a member of the lower class, Thukul was not burdened by similar circumstances. However, to do what he did at the poetry reading took exceptional courage sharpened by the political awareness he had gained. Though it was still early in Thukul's artistic career when he wrote "Reminder" in 1986, he had, in fact, already developed a bold willingness to carry out resistance. The word "Resist!" itself was articulated by Thukul before the rise of popular movements in the late 1980s. Thukul, significantly, "found" the word while other social movements were still under pressure and likely being silenced by government-related agencies. In short, it could be concluded that in certain circumstances, poets and poetry could initiate resistance to the ruler. Thukul also constantly recited his poems in various places and events; not only on stage but also in restaurants, at wedding parties, or wherever crowds gathered.

He was also always invited by students and NGOs to perform at their seminars and clandestine meetings. Although his featured word, "resist," was just a word it became deeply embedded in the popular movement and his poem became familiar to a growing number of activists. "There is only one word: Resist!" became a verbal symbol of opposition to the New Order.

Although there were attempts by middle-class intellectuals, activists, and cultural workers to empower the lower class, in his poetry readings as described above Thukul showed that the latter did not just have a passive role to play in the artistic relationship. In a broader sense, *wong cilik* had their own interests, which sometimes went against those of the government, opposition groups, middle-class artists or activists.

CLASS: DOES IT MATTER?

Although middle-class activists did want to politically enlighten the lower classes, they were usually unable to work as one with them. Middle-class cultural workers tended to render poverty or lower-class suffering as the object of artistic works. And while still critical of the oppressive regime, they produced works that were guided by "artistic" perception rather than social perception. Indeed, such artistic practices may be seen as exploiting the subject.

This approach drew criticism from some populist cultural workers who were dedicated to the liberation of the lower classes. Moelyono, a cultural worker, gave his opinion on the matter by saying, "Artists must work with the poor, not for the poor. This is the only way to avoid their exploitation" (Haryono & David 1990:29). Moelyono practised what he preached by working with and organizing cultural activities for the people of Wonorejo, Tulungagung, East Java. As mentioned previously, these people were victims of a land dispute over the development of a major dam project.

Moelyono's work was reminiscent of the Lekra method of "down among the people" *(Turun ke Bawah/Turba)*. In its conference in 1960, Lekra asserted that "*Turba*" as a working method "expressed a particular concept of the relationship between cultural workers and ordinary people, and was intended to ensure that the artist was at one with the thoughts and feelings of the people, not an observer of their lives but full participant in them" (Foulcher 1986:110). Using this method, Lekra supporters tried to distinguish themselves from non-Lekra cultural workers and raise issues of class identity.

A lower-class artist himself, Wiji Thukul said that artists were preoccupied with the debate about whether art or artists must be involved in the concrete problems facing the people. For him, when popular unrest against the state began on a large scale, such debates became irrelevant. "Now is not the right time to discuss how the artist must be involved with the problems of the people," he said. "We have to leave such debates behind. The involvement with and the support of the people now is being shown in practice. This attitude must now be realised through art works" (Thukul 1995:2).

The son of a pedicab driver, Thukul grew up in a poor urban neighbourhood in Solo. The majority of people in his neighbourhood were pedicab drivers and workers, with the rest, like him, being engaged in the informal sector. "His experience of life among them, and how he had to deal with these situations, infused and characterized his works, both in intellectual and aesthetic sense" (von der Borch 1987:11). As an older son from a poor family, he had to face many difficulties. After leaving school at 16 years old, he supported himself through several casual jobs, including working as a newspaper seller, a day labourer and as an employee at a small furniture business.

He was part of the Rendra and *Bengkel Teater* legacy. His involvement in cultural activities began when he joined a *kampung* theatre founded by Lawu Warta, a former member of *Bengkel Teater*. In his own troupe, Lawu applied the educational methods he had gained from *Bengkel Teater*. As an apprentice, Thukul also admired Rendra, and his early works were greatly influenced by him.

Like Rendra in his early days, Thukul was well-known as a poet who was brave enough to face the consequences in order to express his opinions as they were. This attitude made him a persistent target of surveillance and repressive measures by the state apparatus. He experienced this pressure not only because he was recognized as a critical poet but also because of his direct involvement in political activities amongst the lower classes. As a way of articulating his commitment, he and a group of other young radicals founded the People Democratic Party (PRD). This illegal party was a product of the popular movement that emerged during the late 1980s. Thukul, who was already active in opposition movements at that time, was appointed head of the cultural division of PRD. As a member of a poorer community, Thukul was aware of his exploited and marginalized position. His involvement in PRD gave more weight to the meaning of his resistance through art.

Ultimately, however, he paid the ultimate price for his radical cultural and political actions. His whereabouts have been unknown for many years now. It is assumed that he "disappeared" after being kidnapped by the state security apparatus prior to the rise of the student demonstrations leading to the fall of Soeharto in May 1998.

While Thukul and Rendra are arguably the most expressive poets in terms of their social and political concerns, there were some significant differences between them. Unlike Rendra, who had a cosmopolitan social background and studied in New York, Thukul grew up in a poor *kampung* in Solo. Most of Thukul's poems speak about his own life, including the following:

> ***Song of a Pedicab Driver***
>
> *If the price of kerosene goes up, mother will fight*
> *more often with father*
> *if the kerosene goes up, so will chillies,*
> *so will all basic necessities*
> *and we'll be forced into the hands of the money-lenders*
> *(……..)*
> *Lamps need to burn, burning needs kerosene*
> *stomachs need to be fulled, filling them needs food*
> *but father is just a becak driver!*
> *so when the family's treasure becak*
> *comes home without money*
> *mother will again start fighting with father*
>
> *(Inside Indonesia 1987:31, translated by Keith Foulcher)*

He raised issues in his works by discussing problems he himself had experienced, problems that were similar those facing others in his neighbourhood. He was completely dedicated to the people among whom he lived and attempted to raise awareness among them and to break the culture of silence (von der Borch 1987: 28). As a result, he did not make his poems anonymous and always spoke out about things occurring in his neighbourhood. Many poets raised the same issues, but some of them, including Rendra, had not actually experienced the things that they wrote about:

Poor People

Poor People in the roads, living in the gutters
They have lost their battles
They are tantalized by their dreams
You must not forget them.
(……..)
Poor people. Sinful people
Carrying dark babies in their souls
Grass and moss beside the highway
You must not neglect them

(Aveling 2001:151)

In terms of the words chosen by Rendra for this work, he clearly made an appeal for greater attention to the plight of the poor. But by labeling the poor as "they" Rendra revealed the gap between the writer and his subject. Rendra's poems were symbolically critical of oppression as he subjectively interpreted it through artistic perception, not social perception. In Rendra's mind, poor people had to fit a stereotype of "living in the gutters," "losing their battles," and being "sinful." In this way, he interpreted poverty through his artistic viewpoint. This was an important difference between Rendra and Thukul. To Thukul, the term "poor people" also referred to himself since he was of a poor family background. He regarded his status as a villager as more important than his status as a poet. Villagers are members of humankind with problems that must be scrutinised and solved, and poetry was but one method of expressing these problems. Thukul believed that the problems of poetry and aesthetics were nothing when compared with the real problems facing his village community.

CONCLUSION

The performing arts are a crucial component of Indonesian society. It is in this context that the New Order regime had to try to control them permanently as a means of perpetuating its hegemony. The regime mobilized all possible means to sustain its existence. The direct involvement of the regime's political institutions, including its censorship agency, the police, and local authorities, in "managing" the artistic sphere increased people's awareness of political issues.

The presence of certain elites at artistic performances was not only a means of control but also an opportunity for the regime to make a show of force. At *Malam Puisi Merah Putih* and the poetry reading in Semarang discussed earlier, hegemony was unchallenged and even supported by the artists present. Any attempt by the artists and the regime to collaborate only weakened the bargaining power of the former. Regardless of the fact that these artists should have tried to serve as agents of change, they in fact remained in subservient positions as dominated actors.

What was happening in Tegal, however, showed how the presence of the state apparatus also could trigger conflict. Conflict was only possible when there were acts or movements made to challenge those in power. Thukul's actions in Tegal contested the regime's hegemonic design. Therefore, in New Order Indonesia, the arts were not only areas of contestation between those who supported the regime and those who criticized it but also a "discursive field" contested by both politician-administrators and artists as agents of the subaltern.

APPENDIX

Reminder

If the people leave
while the rulers make a speech
We must be careful
Perhaps they are desperate
When the people hide
and whisper
while discussing their own problems
the rulers must be vigilant and learn to listen

If the people don't dare to complain
That means it is serious
And if what the rulers say
Is not to be disputed
Then the truth is surely in danger

If proposals are rejected without consideration
Voices silenced criticism banned for no reason
Accused of subversion and disturbing the peace
Then there is only one word: Resist!

Wiji Thukul, Solo, 1986
(Translated by Will Derks 1995)

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