

**POWER, LEADERSHIP AND MORALITY:
A READING OF KEN AROK'S IMAGES
IN INDONESIAN LITERATURE
AND POPULAR CULTURE**

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
2005**

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SUMMARY

The image of the Singasari king Ken Arok persists in the Indonesian imagination through novels, plays, comic books and television serials as well as in authoritative discourses such as history textbooks and political journalism. A king, rebel and hero rolled into one, Ken Arok is a symbol of particular pasts reflecting problems of power, leadership, morality and other political questions in today's Indonesia. The oscillation of opposing values in Ken Arok's dual status corresponds to the ordinary people's predicament in the search for model leadership given the country's history of repeatedly failed political transformations. This thesis will show that the ambiguous location of Ken Arok's representations can be better grasped by contextualising the specific reasons and passions behind the different images within particular historical junctures in Indonesian society, economy and politics. The selected texts under discussion form a sketch of Indonesia's history of political leadership from the various eras since the rise of nationalism in the 1920s through to Suharto's New Order and the current Reformation. In examining the varied cultural representations of this thirteenth century king this thesis hopes to contribute to the debate on statehood and leadership in contemporary Indonesia.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Apart from the breathtaking scenery, travelling across Java will be more amusing if one cares to take notice of witty bumper stickers seen on various means of public transportation ranging from mini-vans to buses and trucks plying the streets and highways. These bumper stickers are as different as images of “Iwan Fals” the Indonesian rock star, titles of popular movies such as “Rambo” and “Terminator” beneath portraits of their corresponding lead actors as well as slogans such as “Kutunggu Jandamu” [I’ll look forward to you handing me down your widowed wife] alongside the depiction of a long-haired, scantily-clad alluring woman. Also, one would most likely spot among the bumper stickers, the name of “Ken Arok” which sometimes is accompanied by a picture of a masculine man at the back of a truck filled with cassava, fruit and other vegetable produce. Ken Arok is a historical figure – the founder of the Singasari Kingdom in 13th century East Java whose name has come to be associated with a host of different meanings. For example, Ken Arok is sometimes associated with stamina, speed and young, dare-devil drivers. At other times, Ken Arok is an inspiring hero that has been known by many ordinary Indonesians or *wong cilik* for his perseverance and struggle. In fact Ken Arok has become a signifier of a variant of often conflicting meanings: for some people, Ken Arok is a name synonymous with violence and political immorality while for others, this historical figure symbolises courage, manliness, daredevil drivers - as indicated by the car bumper stickers, for instance. Why does this ancient ruler with a twofold personality appear to know no boundary of time as his various images continue to persist in the Indonesian imagination? What does it mean to Indonesians when employing Ken Arok to represent different sets of social and cultural values as well as political and ideological agendas? This study explores the construction of the Ken Arok

images to show how this figure has persistently been used as a symbolic site for the various expressions and negotiations of power, political leadership and morality. The undercurrent tensions that Indonesian society today has to endure seem to result from the moral failure of political leaders across strata – being unaccountable, deceptive and corrupt so as to ignore their social contract with the people. The recurring images of Ken Arok in some selected literature and popular culture, this study will argue, reflect the society's qualms along with people's expectations of their leaders' political behaviour.

Ken Arok is known to generations of Indonesians as the source of inspiration for a wide variety of popular culture and art forms. As pointed out above, kitsch culture such as car bumper stickers often make use of Ken Arok. Nevertheless more serious art forms such as literature, poetry, short stories and novels as well as comics also often feature Ken Arok. Likewise, his image has been reproduced and adapted in traditional plays, modern theatre, movies and even in television serials. In fact one can argue that no other historical figure apart from Ken Arok has so persistently captured the interests and imagination of Indonesian society over time. At times he is celebrated for his bravery, fortitude and kingly authority, while at other instances he is evoked to symbolise the scandalous, treacherous, and the pariah. Inevitably, the figure of Ken Arok has become a repository for a variety of meanings.

What is it about Ken Arok that evokes such contradictory and divided perceptions? What is at stake in the popular representations of this figure? What do the differing images of Ken Arok tell us about the popular sentiments and politics of ordinary Indonesians? These are some of the questions that both inspired as well as motivated this search for an understanding of the popular and persistent fascination with Ken Arok in Indonesian society and the meanings of the images produced over time.

This thesis will explore these and other questions by analysing the reproduction of Ken Arok's images in two main forms of popular culture, that is, textual materials and performance arts which appeared at different junctures of Indonesian history beginning from early nationalism in the 1920s to the New Order and recent Reform eras. Discussed according to the chronology of their appearances, the textual materials under study include: Muhammad Yamin's play *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1928); R.A. Kosasih's comic books *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1977) and the novel of Pramoedya Ananta Toer *Arok Dedes* (1999). The performative art forms studied include: Harry Roesli's musical/rock opera *Ken Arok* in 1975 and its renewed version in 1991; the ketoprak *Anusapati* (scripted by S. H. Mintardja in 1984 and performed in 1986); Sultan Hamengku Buwono X's sacred dance *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* (1990) and George Rudy's TV serial *Ken Arok* (2003).

This thesis argues that cultural products such as literature/texts and the performing arts are sites where people negotiate, express tensions, dissatisfaction with and criticism of everyday social and political realities. And in Indonesia, socio-political reality often cannot escape the looming problem of political leadership and morality where the issue of a corrupt, despotic, unstable, irresponsible and inefficient government has plagued Indonesian society since its Independence. I shall argue that the popular representations of Ken Arok not only reflect people's perceptions, negotiations and critique of Indonesian political culture and leadership but also signify hopes and aspirations for a better, if not ideal political leadership for a future Indonesia. The central argument of this thesis is that we must read the different representations of Ken Arok in the art forms selected as products of individual authors' social

circumstances, socio-political location as well as perception of Indonesian political culture.¹ This thesis examines the extent to which the distinctive social experiences and personal politics of the authors of these texts and performances helped shape their representations of Ken Arok. The various images of Ken Arok constructed by these cultural producers here are not merely metaphors of existing Indonesian political culture but they also display aspirations and ideal political visions for a future Indonesia.

In order to understand the popularity of the story of Ken Arok and its suitability as a repository for the differing meanings and takes on political leadership and morality in Indonesian society, we need to understand the significance and appeal of the historical location of this Singasari king as well as the mass appeal of the myths/legends to which the tribulations, wit and fortune of Ken Arok make his story part of this genre of stories about (extraordinary) folk heroes among the Indonesian public.

The Attraction of History/Myth Ambiguity

The story of Ken Arok has caught public imagination and been continually reproduced with various modifications over time in Indonesian society. It is the contention of this thesis that Ken Arok's tenacious hold on the Indonesian imagination hinges on the appeal of the ambiguity of his character in terms of: 1) power, leadership and morality; 2) historical location given that accounts of his life oscillate between "myth/legend" and "history" as well as the imbrications of both good and bad dimensions embodied in his

¹Gleaned through Hobsbawmian lens, this remake is a process of invention and reinvention of tradition. See Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Invented Traditions" in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1-14.

character. Ken Arok's place in history will be discussed first. I shall then elaborate on the charm of the Javanese folklore about Ken Arok as a mythical figure.

Mythical Hero/Villain in History

In order to understand better the continued appeal and widespread reproductions of the Ken Arok story in Indonesian society, we need to be first familiar with the 'original' version of the story which can be found in, for example, the 16th century classical chronicle *Pararaton* or the Book of Kings.²

According to the *Pararaton*,³ Ken Arok, begotten from the union between an ordinary woman named Ken Endok and the god Brahma, was destined to become a king. This forerunner of the famous Rajasa Dynasty⁴ had begun his career as an outlaw before working at the service of the local governor of Tumapel, Tunggul Ametung, upon the advice of his mentor Lohgawe. The lure of power and the beauty of Ken Dedes, the governor's wife, compelled Ken Arok to order a *kris*, a Javanese dagger, and murder the kris maker with it before proceeding to kill Tunggul Ametung, marry Ken Dedes and overtake Tumapel's leadership. Having defeated the neighbouring Kediri Kingdom, which was torn at that time by religious conflicts, the new ruler of Tumapel managed to unite people and subsequently

² We can also find the story of Ken Arok in another chronicle *Nagarakrtagama*. See Slametmuljana, *Nagarakretagama dan Tafsir Sejarahnya* (Jakarta: Bhratara Karya Aksara, 1979). See also his *A Story of Majapahit* (Singapore: Singapore University Press Pte Ltd, 1976).

³ When referring to this court writing here and elsewhere I use its English version by I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi, *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1996).

⁴ The founder of the Rajasa dynasty, Sangrama Wijaya, or Kertarajasa Jayawardhana was the son-in-law of the last king of Singasari, King Kartanegara. Claiming dynastic continuity with the Singasari Kingdom, Wijaya partially took the official name of its founder Ken Arok or Sang Rajasa Sang Amurwabhumi and established the empire under the name of Majapahit. The Majapahit Kingdom saw its golden age under King Hayam Wuruk who reigned with the assistance of his capable commander Gadjah Mada. Most parts of Southeast Asia were then conquered under the banner of the Majapahit Empire: Nusantara (Indonesia), Tamasek (Singapore), Malay Peninsula (West Malaysia) and North Borneo (East Malaysia). See Slametmuljana, *A Story of Majapahit*, pp. 1, 61-4 and I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi, *The Pararaton*, p. 15.

made himself king of Singasari with approval from Shivaite and Buddhist priests alike. At the command of his stepson Anusapati, the King was murdered at the point of the same kris with which he killed Tunggul Ametung. The *Pararaton* goes on to tell the tale of victory and vengeance involving the descendants of Tunggul Ametung and Ken Arok.

The figure of Ken Arok is a controversial one as he defies the usual genealogies and moral conduct of royalty. He begins his life as a rascal of obscure parentage, as a notorious robber and rapist but ends up as king. Given his dual character, Ken Arok the King is ‘alive’ in people’s mind with his image as a crowned ruler as well as criminal. In addition, given Ken Arok’s history of political violence, he can hardly be seen as either an icon or hero.⁵ When discussing issues surrounding the seizure of political power, Ken Arok is often the name that comes to people’s mind. In fact in Indonesian society, Ken Arok is often considered so repulsive as a name so that no institutions of cultural and intellectual pursuits bear the name “Ken Arok”. In addition, Ken Arok’s spouse, Ken Dedes, who usually forms part of the Ken Arok narrative, suffers a similar fate. Ken Dedes is often depicted as a conspirator for leadership change, a betrayer of her own husband and as the antithesis to the ideal traditional construct of an obedient, loyal and supportive wife and mother. Given the negative image of Ken Arok (and Ken Dedes), it is not surprising to see them used as objects of desire in adult websites.⁶

Added to this ambiguous twofold persona, the combination of ‘mythical’ and ‘historical’ aspects of the Ken Arok story in the *Pararaton* has undermined the legitimacy of

⁵ It can be said that herein Ken Arok complicates Rene Girard’s theory in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) on the elevation of a criminal into a king/hero exemplified in Sophocles’ Oedipus, because Ken Arok’s transformation is plagued by his personal not communal interests, albeit he attempts the appeasement of conflicts involving Shivaistic and Buddhist priests under his leadership. On Girard, see R. A. Segal, *Hero Myths: A Reader* (Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000), pp. 26-9.

⁶ One example of on-line (sex) entertainment is “Selamat Datang di Kahyangan” [Welcome to the Paradise of Pleasure] that features Indonesian artists posing as famous couples like Ken Arok and Ken Dedes. See URL: www.personal.rad.net.id/kenarok.

Ken Arok as a historical figure.⁷ Thus, it is precisely because of ambiguity of this kind that a multiplicity of Ken Arok's representations is prevalent in the Indonesian imagination. Note must be taken here that the popularity of this image in the 20th century that the present study seeks to investigate might have indicated continuity with the transmission of the *Pararaton* via, for example, oral history and traditional stage performances, rather than through official historical records.⁸

Written in medieval Kawi in the sixteenth century, the *Pararaton* was not taken seriously and was quite inaccessible until the later dissemination of the manuscripts⁹ –thanks to J. L. A. Brandes and N. J. Krom who translated them into the Dutch language in 1896¹⁰ while the Indonesian translation appeared only 70 years later.¹¹ Historians in the past like C. C. Berg, for example, contend that the *Pararaton* is among the chronicles concocted by court poets to legitimise the authority of the rulers.¹² As such, along with similar texts like the *Nagarakrtagama* and the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, it can hardly be considered a reliable historical

⁷ We can draw a parallel with the accounts of the Sri Lankan king in the chronicle *Mahavamsa* that Western discourse hastens to dismiss because of its mythological exaggerations. See Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 47-52.

⁸ The Ken Arok story might have disappeared or been less popular compared to the Panji stories in between 17th to 19th centuries. If court writing is any guide, the Surakarta Manuscripts, for example, make no mention of Ken Arok. In narrating the history of the “Four Kingdoms” of East Java, i.e. Jenggala, Kadhiri, Ngurawan and Singasari, the *Pustaka Raja Puwara* manuscripts by Ronggowarsita composed in mid 19th century present mostly the Panji tales. Neither did any of the *Serat Sajarah Para Empu* series mention Ken Arok or, for that matter, Mpu Gandring, when recording the history and lore of Javanese armourers from classical times to the Mataram period. See Nancy K. Florida's *Javanese Literature in Surakarta Manuscripts Volume 2* (Ithaca, NY: SAP Cornell University, 2000), pp. 50-9, 384-387. That Ken Arok does not figure in the Jogjanes court literature can be seen from the *Katalog Induk Naskah-Naskah Nusantara Jilid 2: Kraton Yogyakarta* edited by Jennifer Lindsay, R. M. Soetanto and Alan Feinstein (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1994).

⁹ The manuscripts respectively named MS “A”, “B” and “C” written on palm leaves are preserved in Bali. See I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi's *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1996), p. 1.

¹⁰ See J. Brandes, *Pararaton (Ken Arok) of het Boek der Koningen van Tumapel en van Majapahit* (Batavia: Albrecht & Rusche; Hage: Nijhoff, 1896).

¹¹ See R. Pitono Hardjwardojo, *Pararaton* (Jakarta: Bhratara, 1965).

¹² C. C. Berg, “The Javanese Picture of the Past” in *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography*, ed. Soedjatmoko et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp. 87- 118.

source.¹³ Next, drawing his sources from Berg, Vlekke concurs that classical texts are not to be taken at face value as they are crafted by skilful poets under the order of the kings.¹⁴ Meanwhile, challenging Berg's view, the ancient historian and philologist J. P. Zoetmulder suggests that we look at indigenous sources like the *Pararaton* in studying the past as to examine the inextricably linked issues of culture and religion in the period and region under study.¹⁵ Here, it seems that Zoetmulder has the better of the argument as later historians agree that published documents of all kinds, even if biased and orchestrated, can tell us important things about the past.¹⁶ In fact, the task of thinking about the past can be made less daunting if historians liberate themselves from what Reynaldo Ileto calls the tyranny of (colonial) archival sources.¹⁷

Although seen by Theodore Pigeaud as “the only one which really deserves the name of a book of history”,¹⁸ the *Pararaton* appeared to have been sourced partially in some contemporary history textbooks. While a number of (foreign) history textbooks have little say about Ken Arok,¹⁹ Indonesia's official history today, which is often based on the colonial

¹³ J. D. Legge, “The Writing of Southeast Asian History” in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Volume I, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 4.

¹⁴ Benard H. M. Vlekke, *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia* (translation), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1967, pp. 36-82.

¹⁵ P. J. Zoetmulder, “The Significance of the Study of Culture and Religion for Indonesian Historiography” in *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography* edited by Soedjatmoko et. al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), pp. 326-43.

¹⁶ Using Old Javanese texts, for example, Hall argues that the texts are ‘literary temples’ with which we may construct ‘textual community’ in Java prior to the Islamic conversions whereby the ritualised court culture also grew out of interaction and acceptance of the non-elite rather than merely imposed from above. See Kenneth R. Hall, “Traditions of Knowledge in Old Javanese Literature, c. 1000-1500” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36. 1 (February 2005): 1-27.

¹⁷ Reynaldo C. Ileto, “History and Criticism: The Invention of Heroes” in *The Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse and Historiography*, Quezon City: ADMU Press, 1998, pp. 203-37.

¹⁸ Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud, *Literature of Java Volume 1: Synopsis of Javanese Literature 900-1900 A. D.*, (The Hague: Martinus Nyhoff: 1967), p. 121.

¹⁹ As an example, a textbook currently used in one undergraduate course at the National University of Singapore, Mary Somers Heidhues' *Southeast Asia: Concise History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) appears inaccurate when making no mention of Ken Arok. It points out King Airlangga, instead, as the founder of the Singasari Kingdom which was split and later united by its last king Kertanegara (See p. 52.) On a more

discourses that tend to neglect indigenous sources, does not present the complete narrative of Ken Arok found in the *Pararaton*. Hailed by the ruling power as the testimony of national consciousness, Indonesia's official history has immense power of dissemination through school textbooks in making schoolchildren see the image of Ken Arok in a way so desired. And in Indonesia moralistic approach is adopted in the narration of Ken Arok in history textbooks. To cite one example is that of the school text endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Culture during the New Order government that goes as follows: "Ken Arok was a son of a Hindu god, raised by a thief, and later worked at the residence of the local governor Tunggul Ametung of Tumapel. Having killed and snatched his wife from him, Ken Arok made his way to ascendancy upon the conquest of the neighbouring Kediri kingdom."²⁰ Or again the following from a textbook for the fourth graders (aged 9 to 11):

Ken Arok worked for an Akuwu named Tunggul Ametung. Ken Arok killed him with a kris made by Mpu Gandring the ironsmith. Ken Arok walked free from the murder. Instead, his good friend Kebo Ijo was punished for the crime he did not commit. Ken Arok then made Tunggul Ametung's widow, Ken Dedes, his wife.²¹

through narration of Ken Arok, see Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 136-137.

²⁰ See *Buku Sejarah Indonesia* Jilid 1 (Jakarta: Depdikbud, 1977), p. 11. [My Translation] This official textbook for highschool students was one of the 4-volume books edited by the Minister of Education and Culture, Noegroho Notokusanto to replace the existing school texts. A military historian, the Minister also commissioned a team for the writing of the *30 Tahun Indonesia Merdeka* (30 Years of Indonesian Independence), a set of 6 volumes from which history school textbooks should be based - a subject drawing scholarly attention in studies of Indonesian politics especially with regard to the bias accounts of Sukarno in this book as to extol Suharto. See, for example, Barbara Leigh's "Making the Indonesian State: The Role of School Texts" *RIMA* 25:1 (Winter 1991): 17-43 and Gerry van Klinken's "The Battle for History for Suharto" *Critical Asian Studies* 33.3 (2001): 323-350.

²¹ Bermana, Nana and Enung Jumirah, *IPS Terpadu: Mengenal Nusantara* (Bandung: Grafindo Media Pratama, 2002), p. 21. [My Translation]

The textbooks' narrations sampled here leave a lacuna by not giving thorough accounts of Ken Arok in such a way that his "good" and "bad" sides appear more balanced. There is no single mention, for instance, of the contribution of Ken Arok to Indonesia's history and politics with the founding of his kingdom.²² Indeed, the Singasari Kingdom appears to be treated insignificantly, especially when compared to the Majapahit Kingdom that receives generous explanation in most history textbooks.²³ As I mentioned elsewhere, the portrayal of Ken Arok in selected schoolbooks used in Indonesia pales in comparison with another historical figure like the Majapahit's Great Commander Gajah Mada.²⁴ Thus, unlike the past generations who grew up with this story through oral tradition or watching traditional plays, today's awareness of Ken Arok is shaped mostly by formal teaching which may not be the same as popular imagination.²⁵

²² According to the *Pararaton*, a certain village youth from Pangkur by the name of Ken Arok managed to put the district of Tumapel under his authority, subsequently defeated the Kediri kingdom and, taking the name Rajasa Sang Amurwabhumi and assumed his throne in 1222. See I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi, *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle*, p. 11. Meanwhile, *Nagarakrtagama* song XL/5 tells of one Ranggalah Rajasa who was enshrined at Kagenengan as god Shiwa and at Usana as Buddha upon his death in 1227. See Slametmuljana, *A Story of Majapahit*, p. 5

²³ Most textbooks used in Indonesian schools come in two series. The first part usually ends with the Majapahit Kingdom. The second begins with the emergence of the Islamic Kingdoms. The coming of Islam in the next period is concomitant with the fall of Majapahit. The elimination of topic on Singasari Kingdom in the 1992 curriculum, for example, is offset by allocating more topics on the Islamic kingdoms with the ratio of 2 to 8. See *Pedoman Pengajaran Sejarah SLTP* (Jakarta: Depdikbud, 1991).

²⁴ Novita Dewi, "Ken Arok and Ken Dedes: A Construction of History Textbooks" presented at the Inaugural NUS Graduate Students Symposium 2003, Asian Research Institute, Singapore, October 16-17, 2003.

²⁵ My fieldwork observation, if lacking in ethnographic sophistication, may bear out this judgment.

The fieldwork was carried out at a public primary school, SDN Candirenggo I No. 168, located just behind the Singasari district office, Malang, East Java. At the entrance of the office sits a statue of the twin place guard Duarapala - an unmistakable landmark for anyone in search of the region when Ken Arok once became a ruler. It was tempting to find out what the pupils here knew about the history of Singasari; what in their mind was when playing hide-and-seek and running about the gigantic statue. What did a cluster of temples only a few meters away from the school building mean to them? I was quite chestened for having assumed that "people living in close vicinity with historical sites have more historical awareness" once I discovered that such was not always the case with the schoolchildren in question. Regrettably, not until students learned about Ken Arok and Ken Dedes from their history teachers, would they become sufficiently knowledgeable about this king of Singasari and his queen. The headmaster and one schoolteacher there spoke to me saying that nowadays parents would rather rely on teachers for the education of their children. Indeed this historical and cultural ignorance is aggravated by the gradual extinction of storytelling tradition as television takes over. Fieldwork Notes, August 13, 2002.

Here we see that the Indonesians often grapple with the historical representation of Ken Arok especially on account of his “moral” qualities. However, Ken Arok’s place in literature and popular culture is contestably fascinating as it draws much of its appeal from the character’s proletarian bravado, heroism, to say nothing of its stirring adult theme, i.e. illicit love story between the nobility and the commoner. It is to these circumstances that I shall turn to discuss next.

Historical Hero in Myth

One defining characteristic that distinguishes people from other living beings is the possession and cultivation of arts. Such archaeological remnants as statues, inscriptions, temples alongside chronicles and the rolling legends and myths from one generation to the next have all made the presence of art sufficiently palpable. Conceived within these artistic representations is the idea of celebration and emulation of the ideal person(s). It is a human desire to copy and connect with someone bigger than oneself, the materialization of which is through arts. Indeed, myth and hero worship attached to it is as old as civilization itself. The Romanian-born historian and myth theorist Mircea Eliade contends that society needs myth for its existence, suggesting the function of the reinvented myth, i.e. as a means of instruction as well as model of education.²⁶ He maintains that human memory is limited in capacity for which reason myth is needed to preserve the portrayal of the archetype heroes and heroines such as mythical figures in ancient society and historical figures for modern people’s use.

²⁶ See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1965) [Willard R. Trask translation] (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971).

Eliade argues that myth is religious for the archaic but the modern looks at it with contempt so much as they need it to justify their actions.

In the light of Eliade's argument, it is important to look at other myth theorists to situate precisely Ken Arok's place in the history/myth conundrum. As a reminder, the paradox in Ken Arok's social morality makes it hard for people to align themselves with this rebel king, while at the same time, this figure is admired nonetheless.

Indeed theories on the origin and adoration of heroes vary from one culture to another and evolve from time to time as examined by Robert Segal when attempting to find a precise theorization of hero myths.²⁷ But despite the variety shown in these theories, mythical heroes, Segal construes, have several things in common. First, they are beyond ordinary human beings. Second, they are gifted by the gods for one reason or another. Third, they carry missions in their life. Fourth, they are tested by social or environmental forces. Lastly, they invariably fall from grace at the end of their quest. As such, at the heart of all myths is the hero with the recurring cycle of birth-journey-return. The theme reinforced in myths is therefore the journey of the heroes from their initiation, adult life right through his downfall or occasionally spelled death, to be followed by resurrection in the event that the hero is divine or has god-like characteristics. Here we see that the hero- return- aspect does not precisely apply in Ken Arok's myth.

²⁷ Segal claims that the past studies on the subject only succeed in establishing patterns of the heroes' origin, function and subject matter, but they fall short in providing analysis. The example he gives us are the pattern of exposure-return heroes from the Austrian Johann Georg von Hahn and the 31 generic narrative units of folklore heroes from the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp. Segal then examines keenly the later theorists whom in his view more successful in providing analysis of hero myths. The latter hero hunters or mythmakers like Lord Raglan, Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell are more sophisticated as they incorporate psychoanalysis in their theories. While Raglan, Rank and Campbell respectively build their theory on Frazer, Freud and Jung, they depart from their mentors. See Robert A. Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1999), esp. pp. 135-42.

It appears that the work of Joseph Campbell is the most useful among other hero theories summed up by Segal because it addresses the link between hero and myths built around him with which Ken Arok could be better understood by not seeing him as either an outright historical personage or a wholly mythical figure. Campbell's heroes have either human or divine qualities. It is nevertheless the psychological thrust that Campbell adds on his hero myths theorization that may help us in finding first, the appropriate category for Ken Arok as a hero and second, commendation (and condemnation) associated with him.²⁸ According to Campbell, the heroic journey is metaphorical as it represents the emotional trepidation of the hero in his constant struggle throughout his life. Campbell's Jungian approach is helpful in understanding the personality traits of Ken Arok and the ways in which his enthusiasts accept the hero, although Ken Arok's moral doubling does not encourage people to follow his steps naturally and willingly. But Carl Gustav Jung knows that at the unconscious level, people who grapple with such moral contradiction need justification for their action whereby myths can be the channel. Here is Jung quoted in Segal: "Myths are original revelation of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical process."²⁹

Campbell's preoccupation with heroes and myths in his seminal *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and elsewhere³⁰ helps us to see and make sense of our life in society. Built on Jung, the theory of Campbell looks at the functional use of myth as in seeking balance between human beings and their cosmos for understanding the riddle of life so that they can

²⁸ The term "anti-hero" does not seem to suit Ken Arok even when one may look at his villainous character. While the divide between anti-hero and villain blurs, when used in (modern) literature, anti-hero carries the complexity in the characterization of the hero, for example though flawed, she or he has heroic aspects of some kind. In the case of Ken Arok, approval and disapproval of him often come together, hence the avoidance of using this categorical, clear-cut term.

²⁹ R. A. Segal, *Theorizing about Myths*, p. 67.

³⁰ See also his *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) and "Myth and Society" in *Traversing Philosophical Boundary*, ed. Max O. Hallman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co: 1998), pp. 596-602.

justify or tolerate various social practices and the aberration thereof. His notion on the metaphors of ancient myths to the depth psychology of modern people may give us some clues on the perennial hero like Ken Arok. My reservation to Campbellian doctrine, however, is the fact that to understand Ken Arok is to have some familiarity with the society in which he once lived/ruled, hence somewhat contradicting Campbell's own thesis that all cultures share the same archetype. Understood as a figure oscillating between myth and history from the past to the present, only part of Ken Arok fits comfortably with Campbellian heroes. This Singasari hero is too big a treasure house of complexity to stand together with other universal models of heroes. Ken Arok needs to dwell in his own local environment to which our discussion now turns.

Ken Arok's Portrait in Local Frame

Southeast Asia has long history from which different pictures of heroes should emerge. In the pre-historical period, ancestors are the ideal beings, the evidence of which can be found in the faceless statues and other archaeological artefacts telling us that when people die their soul joins with that of the bigger beings.³¹ In early Southeast Asia the heroes and heroines are kings and queens adored by their subjects, as they are the embodiment of spiritual power. Later, the coming of Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, and Islam in the late medieval period herald changes in the conception of the ideal personage. Modern Southeast Asia again has its own pictures of heroes and heroines from the region.

Using the same grounds, it can be said that the image of Ken Arok as a hero must have undergone changes from time to time. While scholarship on kingship in Southeast Asia

³¹ Professor John Miksic is due thanks for help with this.

comes aplenty, none appears to explain satisfactorily Ken Arok's bifurcated facade as a rebel and king alike. To take as an example, Ken Arok is an archetype of the Divine King in Heine-Geldern's work.³² While one may be persuaded by Geldernian idea that Ken Arok's god-like status gives him legitimacy and justification for his usurpation, s/he needs to consider the socio-cultural condition of the region Ken Arok once controlled.

Attention to localization challenges the formerly influential notion of Indianization of the Southeast Asian region. Miksic, for example, asserts, "[earliest] texts and religious artefacts found in Indonesia were not imports from India or copies of Indian models, but rather had already been altered through the lens of Indonesia's indigenous cultures."³³ Suggesting the necessity of producing local statements in the study of the region, Oliver Wolters provides examples from different Southeast Asian countries on how such a study may take place. His seminal work has undergone revision after seventeen years, but his major tenets remain. Of the more pertinent to this study is what he termed "localization" to be used not as "historian gimmick" but as the groundwork in any culture to produce meanings by consulting local literatures in addition to the foreign sources ventured thus far.³⁴

Considering the importance of glimpsing through the local culture, it is important to locate Ken Arok's place in the history/myth nexus with which his persistent images can be better understood as well. To this end, it is necessary to make a comparison and contrast to other texts describing Ken Arok and relevant materials produced in not so distant a period. These texts may enlighten us about the reasons behind the depiction of Ken Arok. Only then

³² See Robert Heine-Geldern's "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia" (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Department of Far Eastern Studies Cornell University, 1956), especially pp. 6-10.

³³ John N. Miksic, "Archaeological Studies of Style, Information Transfer and the Transition from Classical to Islamic Periods in Indonesia" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20. 1 (March 1989): 9.

³⁴ Oliver W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1982); rpr. revised (Ithaca: SEASP and Singapore: ISEAS, 1999), pp. 1-15.

can one conclude as to what kind of ideal being Ken Arok is supposed to mean for people of his time. Is there continuity and/or change in the perception of this image at present?

The account of this Singasari king of the thirteenth century was not scribed until two centuries later in the *Pararaton*. While its author is unknown, containing the history of Singasari and Majapahit, the *Pararaton* was presumably written in 1478 during the reign of Girindrawardhana, the last king of Majapahit. Another chronicle that bears the narrative of Ken Arok is the *Negarakrtagama*. Written by Prapanca in 1365, *Negarakrtagama*, like the *Pararaton*, opens with the story of Ken Arok and it details the royal families of both kingdoms of Singasari and Majapahit. Slametmuljana concurs that these chronicles were written to eulogize the Majapahit kingdom, which was then declining with the rise of the Islamic kingdom of Demak.³⁵ Extolling the genealogy of Ken Arok through his deification, the Majapahit king meant to self-acclaim and legitimize his own position as the empire gradually lost its best. Taking the issue of the importance of authorial intention in the writing of the *Pararaton*, Ras is also of the opinion that the text, “written by the order of the king’s father”, is to secure his kingship and the succession thereafter.³⁶ What can we make of this carefully constructed image is thus: Ken Arok is an acceptable model king in his time and subsequent period utilized by his successors to enhance their own credibility. Ken Arok in his grandeur is therefore a construct by the author of the texts; an image they wish to build in the mind of what literary critics call “the ideal” reader.³⁷

³⁵ Slametmuljana, *A Story of Majapahit*, pp. xiii-xiv.

³⁶ J. J. Ras, “Hikayat Banjar and Pararaton: A Structural Comparison of Two Chronicles” in *A Man of Indonesian Letters: Essays in Honour of Professor A. Teeuw*, ed. C. M. S. Hellwig and S. O. Robson (Dordrecht-Holland: Foris Publication, 1986), p. 185.

³⁷ Among the prominent member of this school of literary criticism is Hans Robert Jauss known for his theory on “horizon of expectation”. See Terry Eagleton’s *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 48-61.

Ken Arok's exploits as in raiding, raping, rebelling might be seen with reproach now, but in his time, he is another story –the golden son, the Trinity on earth and hence the hero. One might ask how this rather Dionysian construct of Ken Arok could possibly be seen as being acceptable as testified by the *Pararaton*, for example. To understand the now appalling adventure of Ken Arok, one may consider the culture of his time. The predominantly Hindu-Javanese society in the 13th century East Java was Shivaite whilst Buddhism was also gaining influence. King Arok's consort Ken Dedes was the daughter of the Buddhist ascetic. Both religions do not consider the practice of Tantra, i.e. combination of sensuality and asceticism, some kind of excessive or loose morality.³⁸ Conversely, for the devotee, the practice is a form of spiritual knowledge, no matter how difficult this paradox is to comprehend by modern mind. Understood in this way, we can readily accept that Ken Arok in his time was untarnished by his gambling and stealing habits as well as his fondness of women. The reason is that this son of the god Brahma was also Shiva the Destroyer. At the same time, he is the reincarnation of Vishnu and likewise Krishna the Divine lover. That being said, Ken Arok's hero status can be understood within the socio-political and cultural condition out which the ideal picture of him emerged.

In conclusion, Ken Arok is a figure caught in the oscillation of myth and history, to say nothing of his double personalities. He reaches people's consciousness as one of the historical figure in the past, while at the same time he is perpetually present in quotidian experiences. When the talk turns to political transition, Ken Arok quickly comes to mind as a reform hero. Others may also refer to Ken Arok when talking about outlawry. Ken Arok is a word in everybody's lips for good and bad reasons. In this eventuality, he is the signifier and

³⁸ See Alex Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras: light on the Indo-Tibetan esotericism* (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990).

the signified alike. The ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Ken Aroks travel together from the past to the present.

Ken Arok’s reputation among historians may be poor, but his influence upon popular culture is far from insignificant. This being so, the picture of Ken Arok is meaningful within the context of diverse cultural situations whenever his image is brought forth. His transitory position as a historical personage as well as mythical rationalization makes him a timeless hero as testified by recurring images of Ken Arok across different eras in Indonesian society. Arguably, one can say that Ken Arok is not merely a man but has also become a “culture” in Indonesian society as he is at once a hero and a villain and a popular figure among ordinary Indonesians as evidenced by persisting representations of Ken Arok in Indonesian literature and popular culture today.

At the heart of the Ken Arok story is a catalogue of sensuality, exotica, violence, triumph, betrayal and revenge – favourite topics that folk drama invariably dwells on. Indeed the Ken Arok story can be seen as concoction of all delightful ingredients. The romance between Ken Arok and Ken Dedes, for example, is likened to the legendary love story from the Indian epic, Sri Krishna and Radha, whom people take delight in the love affairs and exploits of this hero and heroine and do not seem to mind their forbidden relationship. To make a further comparison with other legendary narratives, the tale of treason and victory is repeated in the Aryo Penangsang story.³⁹ The divinity of Ken Arok finds some similarity with Trunajaya whose lowly background does not prevent him from claiming his right to power. The story of Ken Arok can thus be seen as a mixture of the necessary sensational

³⁹ In challenging the authoritarian rule of his uncle the Pajang Sultan Hadiwijoyo, the rebel prince Aryo Penangsang died at the point of a kris stabbed into his stomach by the ruler, thanks to the cunning advice of the court counsellor Ki Ageng Pemanahan.

aspects of these three stories, to say nothing of the myth-centredness they share – an explanation for the success of the Ken Arok story over other narratives of the same variety.

Still the Ken Arok story differs from others because of the dual characteristics of outlaw and king, evil and benign rule and commoner and nobility. While Ken Arok is sometimes compared to Robin Hood for, among other similarities, the unusual blend of values, i.e. defiant (robbing the rich) and conservative (piety for the poor), the resemblances end in terms of the different downfall of these two heroes.⁴⁰ The work of Eric Hobsbawm on outlaws is useful here where he illustrates the bandit paradigm through Robin Hood whose death by treachery qualifies him as a hero.⁴¹ Death-by-vengeance, conversely, is the case for Ken Arok. We are presented with atypical characteristics and curious relationships in the course of his life. Not surprisingly the rich and often dualistic personality of Ken Arok saw his life become the endless source of reinvention.⁴² The ending of Muhammad Yamin's play is a clear example: Having publicly confessed his past mistakes, Ken Arok took his own life for the sake of unity.⁴³ Or another, in the ketoprak *Anusapati*, the climax is Ken Arok confronting his stepson only to meet his untimely death. Or the third version: Ken Arok

⁴⁰ Admittedly comparing two heroes of different cultural traditions does invite a criticism in itself. This attempt is deliberately made however to highlight the contrastive feeling evoked when people talk about them. While someone would be delighted to imitate Robin Hood, the other person may not be thrilled about likening himself to Ken Arok. Note should be taken here that behind the Sherwood Prince of Thief is the crowned prince of capitalism himself named Hollywood, for instance. Film industry has continually helped put Robin Hood in the limelight: the dashing outlaws from Errol Flynn to Kevin Costner are but everyman's dream. Conversely, the Singasari Prince of Thieves was lacking in such image-making supports, although in textual and visual representations, he too is portrayed as being an exceptionally robust good-looking man.

Interestingly enough, another "Ken Arok" is a character in the 1953 Hollywood movie *Road to Bali* featuring Bing Crosby and Bob Hope as Americans stranded in Australia. Murvyn Vye is the menacing South-Sea-island prince Ken Arok. This orientalist slapstick comedy tells of the two white vaudevillians' adventure in love and sports (deep-sea diving): they try to save the beautiful native Princess Lalah (Dorothy Lamour) from the sinister Ken Arok in his aborted attempt to dethrone her.

⁴¹ See Eric Hobsbawm's *Bandits* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 5-11.

⁴² The German educated Indonesian composer Paul Gautama Soegijo has planned to write a musical about Ken Arok. "Why Ken Arok?" is a question put to him to which his reply is his fascination with the unusual mixture of the hero's courageous and crafty attempts to cash his dream. See "Musik Rasional", *KOMPAS*, November 9, 2002.

⁴³ As I shall show later in the analysis, Ken Dedes' depiction is important here because the couple die one after the other upon the consent of Ken Dedes.

bargains with Mpu Gandring over the curse of death to his descendants in Roesli's satirical rock opera.

It is clear here that the Ken Arok story becomes a popular image due to the fact that it grows out of the concrete conditions of the Indonesian society across the realms of time. His multifaceted personality and life offer timelessly flexible appropriation by diverse groups or individuals to work out their own interests. The sum of the contradictory images of Ken Arok coupled with his marginalised position in official history and the open plot for twisting, pushing and moulding to suit the timing and purposes when the text is produced, have all made the Ken Arok story durable.

While the narration of Ken Arok is a subject of ideological contestations in official history, the popular representations of Ken Arok need not be dismissed as they could be regarded as palimpsests of Indonesian history, which have continued to give shape and colour to Indonesian cultural and political life to date. As a historical figure, Ken Arok's empire is important as the Singasari Kingdom denotes a time of competition between Hinduism and Buddhism – a topic which has not become obsolete in contemporary Indonesia.⁴⁴ Here, the multiple and ambiguous interpretations of “myth” and “history” behind this founder of the Singasari Kingdom can be treated as referential and meaningful when examined through specific cultural, religious and political environments that produced them. In fact we can argue that the issues of intra-religious rivalry, regional versus central debate and state formation in the 13th century have their modern parallels in Indonesian society. The way knowledge about the past is constructed can provide us with important clues about popular mindsets and ideological contestations in different eras of Indonesian

⁴⁴ On the competition between the two religions, see J. Miksic, *Ancient History* (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1999), p. 56; John N. Miksic, “Book Reviews” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25. 2 (1994): 442-4 and Slametmuljana, *A Story of Majapahit*, pp. 17-9.

social history. All knowledge constructions, with historical and chronological evidence or otherwise, should not merely be overlooked as they tell us about desires harboured within the society under investigation. Such a view can help us understand how Indonesians make use of images of rulers of the past to provide some form of common yardstick for contemporary models of leadership.⁴⁵

To conclude, Ken Arok can be seen as the Singasari King of East Javanese history, but he, too, is alive in present imaginations as a captivating symbol of a humble commoner defeating the powerholder. While historical representation is inevitably value-laden as explained earlier, myths, legends, history-based folklore seen in popular culture are even more susceptible to fabrication in order to fit the interests, pleasures and manipulations of various readerships at different historical moments. Ken Arok's image enthralled a society charmed by heroes of the folk tradition. In fact, operating outside the law, at the expense of the more powerful, the defiant fascinates us. I shall use Ken Arok's transitory historical/mythical status and his proletarian appeal here as my point of departure when analysing each work under study.

Reading Ken Arok: A Potpourri

This study combines description and textual/critical analysis via a contextualization of the texts/performing arts in historical and political processes as well as socio-biographical inquiry. Ken Arok is treated simultaneously as a real historical and imaginary figure, with twists and differences in each representation studied. Sometimes Ken Arok is the subliminal

⁴⁵ This study limits itself on the examination of Ken Arok's image. Thus, the image of Ken Dedes that forms the narrative and is certainly not a minor character will be discussed in connection with Ken Arok.

portrayal of another living, often political, figure in society at the time of depiction. At other times, Ken Arok appears as a skewed and disguised image of the producer of the text as the author reworks this historical figure. The picture of the respective authors appears to hover over the varied pictures of Ken Arok. By picture, I refer to the author's interpretation, aspirations and passion towards the subject, i.e. Ken Arok. This is to say that each author's rendition of the narrative of Ken Arok is the constituent of his life experience, history and biography. Theory of narrative recognises this incorporation of the author's story and that of his fictional character as "influence" or "intertextuality".⁴⁶ The many faces of Ken Arok seem to be carved, individually, with the image of their authors. In the light of the idea that "every author has but one story to tell" and "authorial surrogation of the character", this study will contextualise the history and story surrounding the cultural producers. Thus, this type of research is necessarily a combination of cultural studies and history rather than the kind of research one might strictly call "literary study", for example.

The source of data and devices used for gathering the data are inevitably eclectic. Besides the eight works selected, I utilised personal observation and interviews conducted during fieldwork in Singasari, Malang, Yogyakarta, Bojong Gede and Jakarta during the period from June to December 2002 as well as in Bandung and Jakarta from late April to June 2003. An initial observation prior to the field trip was made in order to obtain knowledge of the extent to which Ken Arok and Ken Dedes had figured in the popular Indonesian imaginary, through interviewing several primary school children and teachers in Yogyakarta, Malang and Singasari. Similar interviews were also conducted with local people residing in the Singasari temple complex and proprietors of two places of interests in the

⁴⁶ Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality" in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. Clayton and Rothstein (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 3-36.

vicinity, namely the swimming pool and recreation ground “Ken Dedes” and the Watu Gede water spring. Additionally, a one-day trip to the village of Ponowijen -said to be the birthplace of Ken Dedes- gave a preliminary picture of the local people’s perceptions of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes which proved useful in the subsequent field research.

Other informants and resource persons for this research were as diverse as members of ketoprak community (mainly in Yogyakarta), a novelist, a comic artist, a musician and a film actor. I made several contacts with the then living authors of the works (Harry Roesli passed away on 11 December 2004). In the case of the sacred dance I interviewed personnel involved in the production. Letter and E-mail correspondence with some of them was another technique of data accumulation.

Owing to the scarcity of published reviews or criticism of the ‘Ken Arok’ texts and performances studied here, I made use of local and national newspapers and magazines published around the period of the emergence of the works. While providing no aesthetic appraisals of the texts and/or performances, they often offered fascinating information about public reception/perceptions.

Finally, each work was examined by reading it against the social and political conditions within which it was produced as well as the biography and perceptions of its author alongside related social actors. The analyses of these texts and performances exclude technical concerns. For example, rather than discussing the aesthetic and artistic details of R. A. Kosasih’s comic books, this study instead gives attention to motivation of this King of Comics for taking the Ken Arok story.

By limiting the focus only on the producers of cultural forms, when referring to the “ordinary people”, this study has made an assumption that they are the target audience of the

texts – the ideal readers. Thus critical reading employed here allows us to see that the roles and perspectives of the cultural producers are representative of popular beliefs, given the socio-historical environment and political economy out of which they produced the texts. Indeed popular culture not only partakes in the formation of people’s ideology but it also blurs the distinction between the elite and the masses for which reason the production and the consumption of popular culture are interdependent. The voice of the cultural producers herein –who mostly belong to the elite group- can accordingly be treated as that of the “ordinary people” who are often socio-economically and politically differentiated. To quote only one definition, “popular culture is concerned with the everyday practices and beliefs of what have been called ‘the common people’ -- that overwhelming proportion of society that does not occupy positions of wealth and power”.⁴⁷ This study therefore deliberately omits areas such as in depth knowledge of the consumption of these images of Ken Arok across various means of representation.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 2 briefly reviews the different ways in which previous studies on Indonesia deal with political power, and how the bulk of the scholarship treats the New Order’s political culture. I propose to approach the issue by accessing Indonesian perspectives on politics through literature and popular culture, focusing on the historical and symbolic figure of Ken Arok. The argument made here is that by reading the intentions harboured in the diversified images of Ken Arok in the works under discussion, one may better understand the

⁴⁷ Jacquelin Burgess and John R. Gold, ed. *Geography and the Media Popular Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 3.

Indonesian conception of political power and its moral implications. Having laid the theoretical groundwork for the study, the rest of the chapters provide my analyses of the varied representations of Ken Arok. The chapters are organised chronologically in accordance with the pre-war nationalist movement, the first ten years of Suharto, the last decade of the New Order and the transformation following the demise of Suharto. In reading the different remakes of the Ken Arok story, I explain the reasons behind the various co-optations of the narrative to reveal how particular concerns about political morality and other social and political uncertainties have given each work its particular contour.

Chapter 3 describes the significance of Muhammad Yamin's play *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1928) in calling for the awakening of Indonesian nationalism in the 1920s. The discussion includes the political atmosphere of division that became the backdrop of the play, namely conflicting views over cultural, societal and religious orientations in Indonesian society. In response to this political tension, performances like Yamin's play, this chapter argues, appealed to people to set aside differences in the name of unity.

The focus in Chapter 4 is on the early decade of the New Order when images of Ken Arok were revived through two distinctively different works, i.e. the rock opera *Ken Arok* (1975) by Harry Roesli and R. A. Kosasih's comic books *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1977). In this time of doubt about the leadership of Suharto, the 24-year-old Roesli explored the rebellious side of Ken Arok to parody Indonesia's societal and political conditions, while taking advantage of the popularity of rock music among the youth of his generation. While supplying the demand of the flourishing comic industry due to the cheaper production costs, Kosasih drew the benevolent and malevolent face of Ken Arok and other characters in his two-part comic books, proving that the allegedly corrupting influence of comics was not

always true. This chapter shows that both authors shared their distinctive personal and political stance while taking advantage of the popularity of the different media with which they work.

In Chapter 5, I continue to discuss the representations of Ken Arok during the New Order through three performances, i.e. the ketoprak *Anusapati* (1985), the renewed rock opera *Ken Arok* (1991) and the dance *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* (1990). My argument is that these works can be better understood when contextualised within the political conditions of the 1990s when the leadership of Suharto began to crumble as a consequence of dwindling support from the military and the President's switching alliance to political Islam – a strategy that resulted in further exacerbation of religious and ethnic conflicts. The ketoprak and the now renamed 'disco opera' present the audience with a moment of chaos when a leader, in his moral blindness, resorts to everything to secure his power. Concerns over social chaos become another theme that differentiates the opera from the 1975 version of the performance, proving in this way the potency of time. Meanwhile, in contrast to the opera and the ketoprak, a particular moment of bliss is exemplified through the royal dance gracefully featuring the wedding of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes who are depicted as followers of two different religions uniting in harmony. This chapter hereby demonstrates different motives and socio-biographies of each of the cultural producers that shaped their different interpretations of the Ken Arok narrative.

Chapter 6 examines Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Arok Dedes* (1999) and George Rudy's TV serial *Ken Arok* aired in TPI (Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesian Educational Television) from December 2002 to April 2003, to explore what they have to offer on political leadership since the fall of Suharto. Appearing during the excitement of

rewriting history, the 'Ken Aroks' depicted in both works are devoid of menace and cruelty, emphasising instead the character's intelligence and tactical political astuteness. For all the non-formulaic portrayals of Ken Arok and the urgency of rewriting history, I argue herein, the demythologised Arok in Pramoedya's novel and the renewed mythical depiction of the Rebel King in Rudy's serials need to be interpreted differently, especially when read against the real political actor in the person of Suharto the embattled leader of the day.

Chapter 7 summarises the results of this study. I conclude with some speculations that Ken Arok may continue to explode into the Indonesian popular consciousness in times of leadership crisis and that the strong, sinister yet 'smiling' General Suharto, for example, may, in time, turn into a metaphor for future political leadership as well.

CHAPTER TWO: LEADERSHIP IN THEORY

Since the late twentieth century, there has been a growing body of literature on Indonesian statehood, leadership and political culture. This interest is inevitably related to the unresolved problems of power and morality in Indonesian politics, given the country's repeated ineffective political transformations since its Independence. The collapse of the New Order state, the ensuing violence and chaos that accompanied the regime change, the country's economic recessions worsened by corruption, collusion and nepotism, not to mention the threat of national disintegration as a result of continued ethnic and religious conflicts – have all become grounds for scholarly discussion. Numerous studies representing the disciplines of history, anthropology, social and political sciences have tackled the issue of political power and morality differently at different times. Most studies have tended to attribute the failure of the Indonesian state to inherent traditional/Javanese political cultural practices which undermine Indonesia's political culture and its ability to deliver a more democratic system of governance. Such things as absolute authority, oriental despotism, centralised power, mythical-charismatic political leadership, and more recently, the state-crime liaison, are common themes that have emerged in debates on Indonesian political life and culture. It is worth pointing out that the bulk of these discussions centre on the period after Suharto came to power in 1968 when political leadership seemed to replay the Javanese style of kingship. Among the central problems raised in the debates are parallels between the New Order regime and ancient Javanese kingdoms in terms of: the centralisation of power in the form of the king in the past and a President in the present; a reliance on aristocrats and regional/local administrators and the collaboration with powerful henchmen such as the local gentry in the past or the military during the New Order regime. While there have been

significant works on the subject of Indonesian political practices, systems and cultures, the questions of how, and the media through which people think of political leadership and power in Indonesia remain underdeveloped, as studies have predominantly focused on elite practices when analysing political power and leadership in modern Indonesia. This chapter establishes the theoretical framework of this thesis as it takes literary and popular representations as a way of understanding everyday perceptions of power, political leadership and morality in Indonesia. What follows is a survey of past scholarship in order to establish grounds upon which the present study is built.

Theorising Leadership: A Literature Review

While a number of past studies have become classical works on Indonesian political culture, since the 1970s scholarship has by and large explained political power and leadership in Indonesia in terms of the appropriation of historical, structural and cultural resources for political legitimacy and sustenance. The seminal work of Benedict Anderson (1972) on Javanese conceptions of power, for example, is useful to help understand the complexity of political morality in modern Indonesia. Analysing local logics through Western lenses is a complex exercise that Anderson handles with success when he argues for a division between Western concepts of power and what he conceives as Javanese “Power”. Contrary to the abstract, heterogeneous, necessarily self-limiting and morally ambiguous Western conception of power, Anderson argues that Javanese culture defines power as concrete, homogenous and constant in amount. There is a need not only to accumulate but also constantly to sustain a certain amount of power throughout a king’s rule to denote supremacy. The supremacy of the king here is evident through his benevolence and deeds to please his subjects, hence

enhancing his empire's reputation. This theory helps explain the modern leader's incongruence in appropriating the Javanese king's supremacy – taking up the rights but neglecting the duties. Political leaders in Indonesia have transformed this notion of power into forms of authoritarianism where a resort to execution and suppression has become a means to amass wealth and maintain power. Anderson's work has remained inspirational, referred to frequently by students of Indonesian culture and politics.

Clifford Geertz is another renowned scholar who has tried to define the operation of power and kingship in Indonesian society. Using past kingdoms in the island of Bali as his subject of study, Geertz argues that Balinese kingship was a version of the Javanese polity which is subsequently appropriated and manipulated by the modern Indonesian nation-state. Geertz coins the term, "theatre state" to illustrate the need for the display of power by a weak, if not untenable, "state" when interpreting authoritarian leadership.¹ The king's "Negara" is but a heritage museum of the past for the spectacle of present audience. The extensive display of regalia and re-enactment of the glory of the nineteenth century Balinese kingdom, according to Geertz, should not be construed as a situation of a king with abundant power. Rather, such opulent exhibitions suggest the reverse, that is, the absence of power. Anderson however criticises this conception of power as a form of romanticising the oriental despot.² In particular, Geertz's use of secondary sources from Dutch archives (hence an orientalist suspect) is a disturbing oversight for Anderson. Nevertheless, Geertz, like Anderson, continues to inspire later scholarship in which the growing despotism of the New Order government became too tempting a subject of scrutiny to be ignored by students of state-formation.

¹ Clifford Geertz. *Negara* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 3.

² Benedict Anderson, "Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali", Review author[s]: Benedict R. Anderson, *American Historical Review* 86. 5 (1981): 1137.

Hans Antlov, for example, is a Geertzian disciple.³ Studying the enactment of administrative policy in one village in West Java, Antlov compares the position of the village's local leaders and the outright penetration of the New Order bureaucracy with the history, machination and dynamics of Javanese leadership. This modelling of modern leadership upon past Javanese kingdoms is also the theme in his previously published co-edited volume of a collection of essays, *Leadership on Java* (1994).⁴ He argues that authoritarianism and the undemocratic legacy of Javanese kingship models have remained intact in Indonesian politics to date. It is hard to accept Antlov's argument because dynamics of Indonesian leadership has indeed changed throughout history although continuity with the past appears inevitable.

For John Pemberton however, Geertz's theory appears too simple, and he challenges it by observing Solonese court rituals and Suharto's symbolic appropriation of these rituals for the consolidation of his own power. Pemberton shows how the New Order reinvented the Javanese sultanate, regalia and ceremony to legitimate and consolidate the regime's power. The modern re-invention of a potpourri of Javanese pasts and Islamic traditions was encouraged by the New Order in order to maintain and legitimise its system of centralised political control. Here Pemberton argues that the state appropriates the mythic-cosmic symbols of Java in order to command awe, reverence and obedience towards the Indonesian state among the ordinary people.⁵

³ H. Antlov, *Exemplary Centre, Administrative Periphery* (Surrey: Curzon Press), 1995.

⁴ Hans Antlov and Sven Cederroth, ed. *Leadership on Java: Gentle Hints, Authoritarian Rule* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press), 1994.

⁵ J. Pemberton, *On the Subject of 'Java'* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 1994.

Toward the fall of the New Order, studies on Indonesian politics turned from a critique of an authoritarian state to problematise the violence and terror which characterised the New Order regime. These studies argue that resilient influences of Javanese kingship explain state-violence in Indonesian society. The collaboration between criminals and the state is the thematic link of a collection of essays *Roots of Violence in Indonesia* (2002). In the Introduction to the book the Editors state first and foremost “Indonesia is a violent country” before citing some incidents to show that violence is peculiarly distinctive of Indonesian political history in that the state has collaborated with the criminals - a practice done since pre-colonial times.⁶ They go on to say this: “Perhaps the trend [of partnership between crime and state] was set by Angrok, the founder of the kingdom of Singosari, who began his career as a bandit and murderer.”⁷ While thoroughly examined and well written, several issues raised by the editors are less persuasive. First, on the particular reference made to Ken Arok, the authors acknowledge Vlekke as the source of information. It should be noted that Vlekke is one of the Dutch historians sourcing C. C. Berg who is known for his outright objection to the old Javanese chronicles.⁸ Second, their clear-cut statement that violence is part of Indonesian cultural make-up needs to be validated. Although they also mention violence done in other countries, they maintain that the sheer scale of violence in Indonesia is exceptional. Third, it is hard to see how the book completes its self-set task of “reducing violence in Indonesia”.⁹ The theme of authoritarianism and the replay of Javanese

⁶ Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Linblad, “Introduction” to *Roots of Violence in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸ See Benard H. M. Vlekke, *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia* (translation), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1967, especially pp. 36-82.

⁹ Colombijn and Linblad, *Roots of Violence*, p. 25.

kingship under Suharto is equally found in various chapters on Indonesia in the volume *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam* (1999).¹⁰

Thus, approaches to Indonesian political leadership have largely explored the state and how it wields or uses power. Focusing on how the state's appropriation of local cultures and patterns of Javanese kingship, these studies have mostly paid attention to the roles played by political elites; primarily how Indonesian political leadership exploits dimensions of Javanese kingship to sustain or legitimise their rule. In contrast to these studies, scholars working on Indonesian arts and popular culture have contributed to an important missing dimension in the understanding of Indonesian political culture, that is, perspectives from the everyday and street levels. These studies have argued that a focus on state-controlled traditions and actions tends to neglect alternative "Java" traditions and other sites where political power is contested. Barbara Hatley, for example, argues that the folk theatre of ketoprak often becomes a medium to defy the Indonesian state's cultural constructions and discourses.¹¹ Indeed state hegemony over cultural practices was nowhere more obvious than during the New Order, providing rich topics, as it were, for studies on Indonesian politics, culture and literature.¹² In what follows, I shall discuss studies of Indonesian popular culture as negotiating space for the expression of Indonesian socio-political dynamics to lay grounds for my own study of the representations of Ken Arok as sites to grasp that popular notion of power, political leadership and morality in Indonesia. Studies of Indonesian popular culture

¹⁰ Vicente L. Rafael, ed. *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colonial Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: SEAP Cornell University), 1999.

¹¹ Barbara Hatley, "On the Subject of 'Java'": Review Article, *Asian Studies Review* 19: 3 (1996): 155-60.

¹² The central theme often taken up by these studies is that of oppressive political power out of which artists turned to become agents of critique of the state (Sears 1996). Some point out the imbrications of the New Order politics as in the growth of performing cultural expressions that contested the authorised cultures (Frederick 1993, Hatley 1991 and Bodden 1998). Others discuss the infiltration of the state ideology on cultural practices as varied as Indonesian children's literature (Shiraishi 1991) and cinema (Heider 1991, Sen 1994). Censorship and banning on books (Bardsley 1995, Hellwig 1995, Bahari 2003) and performances (Zurbuchen 1990, Bodden 1991) considered irreverent to the regime is yet another issue covered.

have shown how popular imaginaries and cultural practices help expose everyday visions, passions as well as socio-political tensions within society. Three studies on the performance arts in Indonesia exemplify these efforts.

Comparing the representations of one folk legend “Roro Mendut” in the traditional theatre of ketoprak and in its modern presentation through film, Barbara Hatley shows how the ketoprak is a more powerful medium in channelling the voice and apprehension of Indonesian society towards the country’s authoritarian leaders than the film genre.¹³ When depicted in ketoprak, the Roro Mendut legend of a strong-willed coastal young woman who challenges the brutality of the local nobility and even fights to death to prove loyalty to her village lover is more than a Javanese version of the Romeo-Juliet story, as it can also be seen as the ordinary people’s means of venting anger and dissatisfaction towards the domineering authority. On the contrary, targeting mostly middle class movie goers, the film version of this legend is more of a response to consumerism as it cashes in on the themes of love, sex and male superiority. Hatley affirms the necessity of contextualising the analyses of popular cultural forms such as the ketoprak and film within contemporary conditions. She argues that in the case of the ketoprak, the assertion of class struggle and identity is an important aspect of this traditional performance.

Just as the “Roro Mendut” story is popularised among the little, ordinary people in (Central and East) Java through the ketoprak form, so is the oft-reproduced tale of “Nyai Dasima” through the traditional Betawi comedy theatrical form called *lenong* as noted in a study by Keith Foulcher.¹⁴ Foulcher argues that in the *lenong* the depictions of this native

¹³ Barbara Hatley, “Texts and Contexts: The Roro Mendut Folk Legend on Stage and Screen” in *Histories and Stories: Cinema in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Krishna Sen (Clayton: Monash University, 1988), p. 14-24.

¹⁴ Keith Foulcher, “Community and the Metropolis: Lenong, Nyai Dasima and the New Order, Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series, No. 20, March 2004, www.ari.nus.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm.

mistress, who deserted her European ‘husband’ to fall into the arms of a native man only to be killed later by this man, are potent social commentaries of everyday life. Thus, like the ketoprak, the lenong –an often slapstick folk performance– is equally an effective channel whereby the true heart and soul of ordinary Indonesians could be deciphered. Like Hatley, Foulcher notes the expressions of class contestations between the little people and the ruling class of Indonesian society. However, the lenong which is performed on simple stages across local neighbourhoods is now under the threat of extinction given the rapid expansion of metropolitan Jakarta.

Michael Bodden equally detects the subversion of dominant culture in grassroots theatres through their use of the Brechtian method, i.e., a direct engagement with the audience in addressing social issues as crimes, human rights abuse and corrupt leadership.¹⁵ Bodden’s study is of Nano Riantiarno’s adaptation of Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* in portraying the character Kumis, a security guard-turned-leader of gangsters as a result of his retrenchment. Featuring a number of songs about hope and fear, this ala Broadway-Brecht style play satirises the oppressive regime and the corollary social problems.

Here we see that the three examples of cultural production here come from differing contexts in Indonesian history, yet they all display similar grounding in their respective role as channels for indirect criticisms toward the political ethics of the authoritarian regimes. The context of the legend “Roro Mendut” is the atrocity of power by the local leaders, Tumenggung, as an extension of power of the 17th century Mataram Sultanate. The historical context of the “Nyai Dasima” story is the abolishment of slavery in colonial Java of the late 1800s. Based on Brecht’s work which satirises the criminal underworld of the capitalistic

¹⁵ Michael Bodden, “Brecht in Asia: New Agendas, National Traditions, and Critical Consciousness” in *A Bertolt Brecht reference companion*, ed. Siegfried Mews (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 379-97.

eighteenth-century aristocracy, Riantiarno's play lampoons similar situation in Indonesia under the New Order. As it is, they all parody the fail relationships between the leaders and the led from time to time.

While these studies of popular culture have focused on various people and themes related to quotidian experiences, none have focused solely on a king like Ken Arok. Indeed there have been studies on traditional theatres featuring ancient kingdoms, because ketoprak, in particular, is among the *wong cilik*'s performance arts that most often uses either heroes of folk legends or rulers of the ancient kingdoms as backdrops.¹⁶ Hatley says that as a folk performance ketoprak is always about the ambivalence experienced by the ordinary people about the government (*pemerintahan*) – mixed feelings of “both awe and antagonism towards those who wield authority over them.”¹⁷ Hatley also mentions in passing the performance of the Ken Arok story by one theatre group in Surakarta Gidhag-Gidhig when discussing differing strategies adopted by modern and traditional theatres in Yogyakarta and Surakarta in facing the New Order's draconian censorship over their activities.¹⁸

Given the widespread images of one time ruler Ken Arok in popular culture, this present study is a further attempt to elaborate the discussion of this historical figure's representations in various forms of cultural expressions across time. Built on existing works, this study examines 'Ken Arok' in popular imagination as a way of exploring how people link past and present issues of kingship, political power and leadership in Indonesian society. The argument is that the way people perceive and understand the political and moral

¹⁶ See, for example, Budi Susanto, *Imajinasi Penguasa dan Identitas Postkolonial* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 2000) and *Ketoprak: the politics of the past in present-day Java* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius Publishing House, 2001).

¹⁷ B. Hatley, “Texts and Contexts: The Roro Mendut Folk Legend on Stage and Screen”, p. 17.

¹⁸ See B. Hatley, “Construction of ‘Tradition’ in New Order Indonesian Theatre” in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. V. M. Hooker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 63.

unaccountability of the leaders is often better expressed through popular imagination. The assumption is that under authoritarian regimes popular culture is an effective channel of observation on existing socio-political conditions.

Imagining the Ruler

This section is about the methodology used when analysing images of Ken Arok in literature and popular culture as sites to understand Indonesian political leadership and morality. The analysis will focus on both recurring narratives and iconographies employed in depicting Ken Arok, i.e. the kris as one contested icon that predominates in the representations of this historical figure.

This thesis argues that the varied portrayals of Ken Arok across different historical junctures in Indonesia can tell us much about Indonesian perspectives on the issues of political morality and leadership facing society today. Given the intertwining of culture and politics that helps shape people's understanding of the existing political situations, it is valid to read popular representations as sites to understand reflections as well as negotiations of power, leadership and morality.

Considering the persistent images of Ken Arok through the various periods before and after independence, there must be something potent about these representations. The oscillation of opposing values in his dual status as a King and Rebel alike, his historical location in a time of Hindu-Buddhist transition, and the manner with which he ascended to the throne, I would suggest, correspond with what the society think about political leadership and morality. Here, the diverse interpretations of Ken Arok occupy what scholarship in

cultural studies calls sites of ideological and cultural contestation as well as reflections of the-state-of-things.¹⁹ The Ken Arok figure can be seen as a flexible signifier for co-optation by different cultural producers from time to time because of its significance to Indonesian history and politics, hence opening up an arena of cultural and political contestations. With this in mind, the present study will approach Indonesian political culture by probing the popular imaginations of this ancient leader in the Singasari Kingdom as metaphors of modern political leadership and culture in Indonesia.

Examining street pageants and Christmas pantomimes in 17th century England, for example, Paula Backscheider (1993) finds that popular culture plays a role in the formation of a politically concerned and opinionated public.²⁰ In times of leadership crisis as when England was under the incapable George III, popular entertainment became a means to express people's anxiety over their ruler while offering a redeeming human portrait. Backscheider demonstrates how literature and popular culture take part in the society's struggle for ideological, moral, and philosophical terrain while fostering differing ideas about the future of the British monarchy.

Often, however, the state manipulates culture as a means of legitimation and sustenance of power. Popular culture, Hall claims, is a site of "consent and resistance...where hegemony arises and where it is secured."²¹ The New Order's cultural practices mentioned earlier in this chapter are evidence of this hegemonic co-optation and resistance to it – a phenomenon seen in previous eras of Indonesian history. For example,

¹⁹ See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" (1989) in *Popular Culture: production and consumption*, ed. C. Lee Harrington and Denise B. Bielby (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 123-32.

²⁰ Paula R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: theatrical power and mass culture in early modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

²¹ Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. John Storey (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 453.

while the Dutch colonial government made use of wayang kulit performances to resist the Islamic ideology,²² the Japanese use of the traditional theatre *ludruk* –a performance of everyday life of East Java origin- was intended as anti-Western propaganda.²³ Also during Dutch colonisation, the literary board and publishing house of Balai Pustaka was established to voice the colonial government’s views through the mouths of its Indonesian editors and writers.²⁴ Literary and cultural manoeuvring was a continuing practice throughout the pre-independent Indonesia and Sukarno eras so as to bolster nationalism.

As will be clear in the analyses, the representations of Ken Arok across different media involve the reworking of state hegemony and cultural discourses. The struggles between dominant and marginal discourses about power and morality are perhaps nowhere clearer than in the representation of Ken Arok’s kris – the Mpu Gandring kris – to which we will next turn.

Ken Arok and Kris

In his classic study, *Panji, the Culture Hero* (1959), Rassers tells us of how inseparable a Javanese man is from his kris as the kris is so central to his character.²⁵ Not only is the kris or *curiga* in Javanese language a prized property kept by some families as an heirloom to enhance their social status, but it is also man’s symbol of success alongside his other possessions such as *wisma* (house), *turangga* (horse), *wanita* (woman) and *kukila* (bird).

²² Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

²³ James L. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Javanese Proletarian Drama* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968).

²⁴ Keith Foulcher, “Dissolving into the elsewhere: Mimicry and ambivalence in Marah Roesli’s ‘Sitti Noerbaja’” in *Clearing a space: postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, ed. Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), pp. 85-108.

²⁵ W. H. Rassers, *Panji, the culture hero: a structural study of religion in Java*, 2nd Edition (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 24.

The symbol is further extended when the kris is seated next to a Javanese bride in the event that her bridegroom is absent on the wedding day. So intimate is the relationship between a man and his kris that sometimes the honorific title “Kyai” [Islamic religious leader] is given to the kris of his pride and admiration. The Javanese also believe that the kris has magical powers hence the other function of the weapon as a means of spiritual communication and resistance to any natural calamities.

The conviction of the Javanese that the kris is central to the exclusive world of Java is so deep that this principle developed into a myth.²⁶ It is therefore useful to look at the beliefs, values and aspirations of the Javanese with regard to the kris in order to read the representation of Ken Arok’s kris that is often called “Mpu Gandring”. The kris is named after the master blacksmith who made the weapon was killed by Ken Arok upon which a curse of seven-generation-revenge was laid upon Ken Arok as Mpu Gandring lay dying. The story behind what is often known as the cursed kris remains a mystery persisting in the Indonesian mind. Just as in the Western world Robin Hood is inseparable from his longbow and arrow, so is Ken Arok from his kris. Unlike Robin Hood, however, the Javanese counterpart does not use the weapon for the good of his community. Neither do the popular portrayals of Ken Arok with his weapon resemble the representations of the Malay hero Hang Tuah and his kris Taming Sari.²⁷ The image built for Ken Arok is that the kris is complementary to his cruelty, whereas in Hang Tuah’s case the weapon is associated with bravery as well as loyalty. Coincidentally, the word “kris”, according to Zoetmulder, comes

²⁶ The Javanese share the functions of kris as weapon, regalia and status symbol with other Malay societies. Noor has noted that the weapon is part of Malay civilization spreading from Patani to the Philippines. See Farish A. Noor, “From Majapahit to Prutajaya: The *Kris* as a symptom of Civilisation Development and Decline (Part 1) URL: www.kakiseni.com/articles/columns/MDExMA.html.

²⁷ The Malay literary classic tells us about this dagger which is said to have been made from the same metal as that of the Ka’aba. Taming Sari is said to be capable of carrying on the fight for Hang Tuah in times of danger, thus similar to the Javanese kris that rattles in its sheath under the same predicament.

from the Old Javanese word “binahud-aneris” which means a man who murders another to take possession of his wife.²⁸

Mainstream meanings associated with the Mpu Gandring kris are found in various forms of public discourse. For instance, fictional as well as factual social accounts in Indonesian society are often laden with the myth of this well-known kris. In the world of fiction, for example, the same kris inspired one novelist to write *Hunus* (literally means threatening someone’s life at the tip of a kris or other sharp pointed objects) that tells of the power of this lethal weapon that knows no bounds, mysteriously killing local people and Westerners alike.²⁹ According to Jan Mrazek, one character in this novel Ir. Darmosoegito, is named after a real person who happens to be an authority on kris in Javanese scholarship.³⁰ One yellow paper in Jakarta’s *Pos Kota*, as noted by Mrazek, once featured a story behind the baton called “tongkat komando” [swaying stick] belonging to President Sukarno which was said to have possessed a similar mighty power to that of the Mpu Gandring kris. Published not long after the death of Sukarno, the serial articles in this newspaper undoubtedly held the interest of its readers.³¹

The myth surrounding the whereabouts of the Mpu Gandring kris also makes enthralling stories. It is assumed that to avoid further revenge and rebellion the kris was thrown into the Java Sea and turned into a dragon. Some say that the Mpu Gandring kris has mysteriously disappeared. Others have alleged that it may have fallen into the hand of one

²⁸ Quoted in I Gusti Palgunadhi, *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1996), p. 79n.

²⁹ See Sunaryono Basuki KS’s *Hunus* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1991).

³⁰ Jan Mrazek, “Story: Act Four: (Hi)stories”, Unpublished Paper, NUS, 2003, p. 10-5.

³¹ Given that *Pos Kota* capitalizes on its sensational stories of crimes, scandals, love affairs and the like, the view of this publication is often questionable. To compare, the regular column “Pusaka Kraton” [Sultan Palace’s Heirloom] in *Merapi*, the supplementary edition to Yogyakarta’s *Kedaulatan Rakyat* presents subject-related articles and stories about kris from contributors that include historians, scholars, kris-collectors as well as lay people interested in kris. Both media thus show that the kris continues to be an engaging subject of discussion for particular segments of society.

important person in the government. Many yarns and tales about the mystery of this kris continue to thrive in Indonesian society.

Ken Arok's Mpu Gandring kris is often used to symbolise his victory, regalia and power but this weapon is also taken as a menacing icon of his violence. A belief in the vindictive capacity of this kris is so well established that it is often taken for granted. I shall therefore focus on the Mpu Gandring kris as an object associated with Ken Arok as part of my efforts to decipher the symbolic meanings associated with the narration of this figure when analysing selected texts and performance art forms.

Using this analytical framing, the next four chapters examine the diverse representations of Ken Arok by the different cultural producers to see if they harbour people's hopes and fears about the accountability of their leaders in fulfilling their tacit societal, moral and political responsibilities. By reading the various portrayals of this onetime Javanese leader, I shall argue that popular cultural forms act not only as metaphors and critiques of existing political reality but also as sites for the expression of varied perceptions of political leadership and morality. It is within this line of argument that this thesis hopes to contribute to the debate on Indonesian political structure and culture.

Concluding Remarks: In Search of the Model Leader

Studies of modern Indonesian political culture often allude to modern day leaders³² as "kings" with their charisma and deeds as a source of public admiration, adoration and

³² By modern day leaders, this thesis makes a reference to the first two presidents of Indonesia. Such "traditional" views as charisma, sekti, god-king quality and so on hardly apply to political leaders in the history of post-Reform Indonesia. It is the contention of this thesis that the prevalence of Ken Arok's images is

support, while their wrongs and cruelty serve as a source of condemnation and opposition.³³ Some works have offered interpretations on certain cultural characteristics of the Javanese kings that greatly influence modern Indonesian leaders' political performance through such reflections of inner souls as *alus* or refined, measured and satria-like character.³⁴ We may say that Indonesian society expects their leaders to be exemplary models. Political leaders like Sukarno and Suharto, for example, effectively played to people's aspirations, each in his own way, with different repercussions.³⁵ Sukarno, despite his fine grooming and elitist agenda of nationalism, successfully inspired and impressed his subjects from all social classes in Indonesia. He was a hero of the Marhaen when he alluded to himself as the extension of the people's tongue. Even if disastrous in the end, Sukarno's attempt to unite all differing political voices can be seen as appropriation of the *sekti* or supernatural power of a Javanese king in maintaining cosmic order.³⁶ Conversely playing the humble game by highlighting his non-aristocratic background, Suharto projected himself as a king through his reinvention of kingly power using, for example, accumulation of wealth and military forces.³⁷ It must be noted here that both Sukarno's and Suharto's use of military force is similar in substance but

inseparable from the negotiating space the images have created in presenting the ideal and the real in the definition of a good leader using as benchmark the traditional (Javanese) concepts of leadership.

³³ See, for example, Victor M. Fic, *From Majapahit and Sukuh to Megawati Sukarnoputri: continuity and change in pluralism of religion, culture and politics of Indonesia from the XV to the XXI century* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2003), pp. 88-103; George A. Fowler, Jr., Roggie Cale and Joe C. Bartlett, *Java: a garden continuum* (Hong Kong: Amerasian, 1975), pp. 236-59 and Jean Gelman Taylor, *Indonesia: peoples and histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 340-86.

³⁴ See, for example, Paul Stange, "The Logic of Rasa in Java" *Indonesia* 38 (October 1984): 110-20; Niels Mulder, *Inside Southeast Asia: religion, everyday life, cultural change* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2000) and James Ferguson "The Rasa of Leadership in Contemporary Asia" *The Culture Mandala: Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies* 5. 1 (2002): 1-22.

³⁵ Roger Kershaw, *Monarchy in South-East Asia: the faces of tradition in transition* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 73-80.

³⁶ Under the authoritarian regime of his successor, Sukarno was often recalled as the heroic model of Ratu Adil who saves the nation by Indonesian ordinary people longing for yet another Just King. See Raharjo Suwandi, *A quest for justice: the millenary aspirations of contemporary Javanese wali* (Leiden: KITVL Press, 2000), pp. 14-5.

³⁷ M. J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 41-3.

different in size. Given the appropriation of Javanese notions of kingship by these two modern leaders, their failures and not so much their success have been likened to the exploits of traditional rulers in the past.

We may ask why notions of Javanese kingship are important to the modern visions of leadership like Sukarno and Suharto. As we know, Javanese society, while profoundly influenced by Islam since the 16th century, still believes in and muses over magical powers, divine kingships, reincarnation, charms, cults and other animistic phenomena from Hinduism and Buddhism. It is not uncommon in present day Indonesia that power is still closely connected to mystical, supernatural, cosmic and religious powers such as the beliefs in the magical powers of rulers, or the coming of the ultimate “ratu adil” as a form of messiah, or in attaining supernatural powers through ascetic or religious practices.³⁸ Both elitist and popular conceptions of political power are inevitably in part influenced by this larger thought-world in Indonesia. One of the deeply entrenched notions about political leadership is that a leader has to be of divine character, standing apart from the ordinary people. Such things as charisma, linkage to the royalty and bloodline of past leaders are therefore important credentials of a model political leader. The genesis of this view, as it were, is the god-king concept found in many Southeast Asian countries. Characteristic of this concept is a social hierarchy whereby members of a society find their respective places according to their proximity to the sacred leader at the pinnacle.³⁹ One author attributes the hierarchical conception of society with class divides between the elite minority and the masses and the

³⁸ In post-Reform Indonesia, less traditional views of political leaders have become more prevalent. While Megawati Soekarnoputri’s was unable to ride on the popularity of her “charismatic” father, no divine attributes were given to Susilo Bambang Yudoyono.

³⁹ Lorraine Gesick, *Centers, symbols, and hierarchies: essays on the classical states of Southeast Asia*, ed. Lorraine Gesick (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), p. 2.

king at the apex to have come partly from the ideological legacy in the Indic caste system,⁴⁰ despite the fact that the influence of caste system in Southeast Asia has yet to be proven. Even when Islam changed people's loyalty to Allah, a leader continues to be seen as having privileged closeness to the Supreme Being. So resilient is this influence on Javanese culture that it gives root to twentieth century concepts of social leadership and political power in Indonesian society.⁴¹ Although it is true that colonialism interrupted ancient royalty, the earlier conviction of this cosmic-magical character of a political leader did not totally disappear under colonial rule.⁴² In fact, the hierarchical relationship of the leader and the led was integrated into class differences under colonial society. Class stratification continues to permeate politics in Independent Indonesia although with different manifestations during different political regimes. A strong reverence for the figurative power of the Sultans in Central Java in present day Indonesia is evidence of this historical legacy.⁴³

This being so, it is worth noticing that reverence towards a king also comes with a common expectation of social and moral accountability by the king. When the Javanese say that a ruler is *tedhaking kusuma rembesing madu*, that is, the most fragrant of the fragrant flowers and the purest of the pure honey, people count on the chosen king to be perfect. The commoners place their trust in nobility but watch with disquiet should the latter show signs of betraying their social expectations.

Indeed such an implied social contract guides the relationship between the ruler and the ruled has been held by any society. In modern Indonesia, for example, problems often arise because the country has seen more imbalance relationships than the harmonious ones as

⁴⁰ R. Suwandi, *A quest for justice*, p. 36.

⁴¹ R. Kershaw, *Monarchy in South-East Asia*, pp. 74-5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴³ Hughes-Freeland, Felicia. "A Throne for the People: Observations on the Jumenengen [sic] of Sultan Hamengku Buwono X" *Indonesia* 52 (October 1990): 129-52.

the leaders betrayed the trust of the led. It is important to see first why and how Indonesians construe leadership in terms of reciprocity between the leader and the led. To this end, I need to discuss further some leadership attributes of a model leader that could be seen as appropriations by present rulers in an attempt to emulate the ideal leaders in the past. I must state at the outset, however, that when pointing out this traditional notion of leadership I employ it as comparative socio-historical framework instead of appropriating it as “the ideal model for Indonesian leadership”, bearing in mind that Indonesian ideas about politics are never predetermined but are nevertheless in part shaped by historical structures of thought as people form ideas in response to conditions around them.⁴⁴ After all, especially for the Javanese community and for many Indonesians, their understanding of political leadership has been much informed by popular notions about leadership and relations between the ruler and the ruled that have evolved over time in Indonesian society.

In the Javanese thought-world, to say the least, harmonious relationship between the king and her/his subjects can be achieved when the king possesses the convergence of a five-fold supremacy – a point of reference that today’s leaders could appropriate to emulate the successful rulers in the past. The ruler has to be 1) in possession of *Sekti* (divine power), 2) bestowed with *Wahyu* (enlightenment/revelation), 3) exposed to different kinds of *Laku*

⁴⁴ In the wake of Indonesia’s independence, for example, Professor Soepomo, a Leiden-educated scholar of traditional laws and one of the architects of the Constitution, introduced the idea of the integral Indonesian state conceived as a family characteristic of Javanese philosophical thoughts. According to Soepomo, Indonesia should be a nation characterised by the unity of the people with their leader functioning as a *raja* for his people. This idea of unity was not without problems as it was challenged many times in the past. The Javanese ideal of a unified state itself, Ricklefs argues, is only an illusion given that Javanese political history in pre-colonial times did see disunity. See George McT Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970), pp. 34-46 and M. C. Ricklefs, “Unity and Disunity in Javanese Political and Religious Thought of the Eighteenth Century” in *Looking in Odd Mirrors: The Java Sea*, ed. V. J. H. Houben, H. M. J. Maier and W. van der Molen (Leiden: Vakgroep Talen en Culturen van Zuidoost-Azie en Oceanie Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1992), pp. 60-75.

(action), 4) capable of proving his *Agung Binantara* (celestial grandeur) and 5) deserving of the honorific title *Ratu Adil* (the Just Ruler).

To elaborate, first, a political leader must have *Sekti* and *Wahyu*. Being a divine ruler, s/he must possess supernatural power that makes him/her stand apart from the ordinary. S/he must be strong in character and mind, knowledgeable as well as visionary to complement her/his fortitude, so that it is possible for such a leader to envisage wisdom, impartiality and justice for all – such is the power that people expect to see in their leader.

Next, *Laku* looks at the ways in which the leader obtains leadership as a measure of her/his morality. In order to be acquainted with and subsequently able to overcome trials and tribulations, a would-be king needs to be engaged in different occupations, very often by toiling hard as a farmer – a common profession in Indonesia in not so distant past- so that s/he be fully prepared for various future challenges upon coronation.⁴⁵ This is to say that in time of political transitions, for example, the *Laku* of a prospective leader should not involve violence, fragmentation and, consequentially, suffering for the country; her/his actions should guarantee that people may live peacefully with one another despite their differences.

Further still, the duty of a leader is to prove her/his *Agung Binatara* or celestial grandeur. According to Moedjanto, a Javanese king is like the wayangesque king Yudhistira who owns greatness of this kind.⁴⁶ Such a king has, inclusively, a number of credentials as in

⁴⁵ The profusion of people's names linked with domestic animals may testify to this adherence to Shivaite cult during Singasari and later in Majapahit times where, for instance, people chose their names to create magical rapport with god Shiva's bull called Nandi. Building on the work of Pigeaud, de Casparis argues that names with words indicating animals are honorific rather than childhood names conferred to people with tremendous achievements usually in military (Gajah Mada) or even to king (Hayam Wuruk). See J. G. de Casparis, "Some Aspects of Proper Names in Ancient Java" in *Cultural Contact and Textual Interpretation*, ed. C. D. Grijns and S. O. Robson (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986), pp. 8-18.

⁴⁶ While such a utopian country characteristic of the wayang world was a profound conception in Hinduised Java, the idea of the celestially grand king was less persuasive with the later arrival of Islamic teaching owing to its blasphemous tone. According to Moedjanto, this idea of kingly authority, notwithstanding its incompatibility with Islam, remained in place and even became a doctrine sought after by the Mataram kings in 1550-1755.

maintaining the law in his ruling of the world and his incorruptible and just treatment of all creatures. Corollary to the king's *Agung Binatara* eminence is the earthly symbol of his greatness in such things as the size of his army, the vastness of his conquest, the number of his wives and the abundance of regalia to complement his peaceful and affluent country.

Finally, if it is true that this leader is the long awaited *Ratu Adil*, not only will the country prosper and people thrive, s/he will also gain trust and respect at home and abroad. Any mention of the Javanese theory of state and leadership is incomplete without the popular philosophy of the coming of the *Ratu Adil* or the Just King. This concept of rural politics similarly originates from the wayang world perspective on the schism between good and evil. There occurs a continual rhythm of change from times of chaos, i.e. periods of unrest, commotion and turbulence, to times of peace when a *Ratu Adil* finally arrives. Underpinning this traditional view is the cosmo-mythical predisposition that an ideal king ensures a just and prosperous country where order, peace, safety and happiness prevail.⁴⁷ Nature becomes the barometer of the authority of the ruler. Natural disaster, famine and turmoil are among the many signs that the king's legitimacy is shown as tottering. In this eventuality, a *Ratu Adil* should replace a flagging ruler to save the world from further chaos. As order and harmony are restored, a new dynasty thereafter reigns.

Attempts to show the greatness of the kings include the writing of babads in glorification of the statutory kings, accumulation of wealth through conquest and heavy taxation, contracting marriages of convenience with daughters of other kingdoms, and –Moedjanto's main thesis- creation of speech levels in the Javanese language to highlight their self-professed nobility while distinguishing themselves from the commoners. See his *Concept of Power in Javanese Culture* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ It is interesting to compare this concept of the righteous king to the Hebrew Melchizedek. Contrary to the view that Melchizedek is the awaiting Just King, one author argues that it is a title of honour derived from the Hebrew words *melek* (king) and *tsedeq* (righteousness). This being so, he had to be indeed a person of virtue with unsurpassed authority (The author herein refers to Jesus Christ). See Jim Bowen's "Who was Melchizedek?" URL: www.biblestudy.org/basicart/whomelcz.html. See also an interesting paper by Gani Wiyono on the cultural and theological reflection of the Javanese on Christianity, "Ratu Adil: A Javanese Face of Jesus?" *Journal of Asian Mission* 1: 1 (1999): 65-79. Here we see that the longing for the messianic figure has theological bases in both Great and Little Traditions, as the evocation of Ratu Adil in contemporary Indonesia is often connected with religion.

Thus, taken together, the five merits make up the basis of kingship, that is, the king has to be glorious and powerful, soaring above others in everything, because such an exalted, divine chosen character is to ensure prosperity, wisdom and justice. One Javanese maxim aptly depicts this unparalleled power holder thus: *Ngendi ana surya kembar* meaning there is the one and only sun in the universe.⁴⁸

These five criteria of Javanese kingship are somehow etched in public imagination so that people subconsciously use them to assess the social, moral and political responsibility of the modern leaders. Should the ruler fail to accomplish this implicit obligation toward the ruled as expected, tensions inevitably occur. In this eventuality, popular culture, as opposed to existing political conditions, becomes a symbolic site to reconcile the real and the ideal – a creative space to mimic and lampoon the existing reality while cherishing and yearning for the ideal future. People’s hope for a political leader with these five attributes, even if utopian, has often been satirised in literature and popular culture. The fulfilment of the social contract involving the ruler and the ruled or the lack of it will be read against the different evocations of Ken Arok as Noble Robber and Rebel King captured by the different media of popular culture studied within the context of the time when these images were produced. The rest of the chapter will discuss this negotiation between the actual and the idyllic visions of power, political leadership and morality as captured in the popular imaginations of Ken Arok.

⁴⁸ Moedjanto takes this as the totality of the king’s power while suggesting the reader compare his understanding with Anderson’s “The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture”. See Moedjanto, *The Concept of Power*, p. 104.

CHAPTER THREE: KING AND CHAMPION OF UNITY

This chapter explores the intimate ties between the representation of Ken Arok in Muhammad Yamin's play *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1928) and the socio-political milieu from which it sprang - a time of anti-imperial struggle led by Sukarno and other nationalist figures during the formation of Indonesian nationalism in the 1920s. I shall argue that literature and popular culture have the potential to contribute to our understanding of the political leadership and morality of the time, contending that this depiction of authority mimics society's condition whereby political ideology, social order and spiritual principles often converge. Appearing for the first time on 27 October 1928 on the eve of the Second Youth Congress in Indonesia, the play was later published in the literary journal *Pudjangga Baru* in 1934, and had been performed 39 times by 1950.¹ Yamin depicted Ken Arok as a heroic leader of unity in the play as an example of an ideal leadership of high morality at the time when issues of political unity and the future of Indonesian society became the concern of the country's leaders like Yamin.

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part outlines the socio-cultural, historical and political setting of the 1920s up to independent Indonesia under the leadership of Sukarno, in order to provide a context for understanding the significance of Ken Arok's portrayal during the period so covered. Also brought into the discussion are narratives of pertinent individuals who had substantial involvement in the construction of the young country so as to lay the background of the social conditions of this historical moment in Indonesian society. The second part of the chapter examines the play in depth in the light of

¹ M. Muhammad Yamin, *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1951), p. 6; All subsequent references to this work, abbreviated *KAKD*, will be used in this thesis with pagination only.

the socio-historical backdrop previously delineated. I argue that *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* can be read as an allegory of an Indonesian national agenda fostered by leaders who sought a unified movement.

The Birth of the Nation and Some Key Players

In 1924, Muhammad Yamin, the author of *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* delivered an important speech in Dutch, “The Future Possibilities of Indonesian Language and Culture” during the First Youth Congress.² He was among the Dutch educated young people in the Indonesian archipelago who were in pursuit of cultural unity in order to materialise their chief plan of establishing a political pressure group as a roadmap to independence. An urgency to move toward building a unified nation heightened in this period. In 1922 Mohammad Hatta established *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (Indonesian Association) in the Netherlands, followed by Sukarno in 1927 with his *Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian Nationalist Party). By the next year, Sukarno’s PNI began to incorporate symbols of national unity through the party’s adoption of a national flag the Red-and-White, the national language Bahasa Indonesia and Indonesia Raya the national anthem, hence nationalism gathered pace.³ The awakening of ‘Indonesian’ consciousness was finally expressed on 28 October 1928, now commemorated as Youth Pledge Day. At that historical

² Keith Foulcher, “‘Pujangga Baru’: Literature and Nationalism in Indonesia 1933-1942” Flinders University Asian Studies Monograph 2, (Bedford Park, S. Australia: Flinders University, 1980), p. 3.

³ Geoff Simons, *Indonesia: The Long Oppression* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd), p. 122.

moment, Yamin together with other nationalists stood up to uphold the language of unity which affirmed a speech he delivered four years ago on the necessity of national culture.⁴

Yet, differences seemed to impede the spirit of oneness in the nationalist project of creating what would later be called Indonesian culture. Foulcher has observed the emergence of two “camps” with separate ideologies about national culture.⁵ The first camp called for the use of Western culture to refine the existing culture that was largely borrowed from Malay culture. Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana was the main supporter of this view. The second camp, which Muhammad Yamin was supportive of, opted to reject Western influences because the West was seen to be complicit with colonial culture. Yamin’s proposal was to grow Indonesian culture out of indigenous seed; and, to him, the glory of the past kingdoms in Java could be a template for the national culture of Indonesia. Although Yamin had written about Malay culture to express Sumatran arts, customs and language by 1917, it was only in 1920 that his articles appeared in the *Jong Sumatra*, a journal published by the Jong Sumatranen Bond. This organisation was an emulation of the Jong Java set up by Javanese intellectuals initially for educational purposes before it became political and was renamed Budi Utomo on 20 May 1908. Another Sumatran writer Armijn Pane, for example, seemed to side with Yamin while offering such proposals as making the best of both global and local cultures.⁶

Yamin’s group appeared more assertive and influential, urging cross-ethnic cultural encounters instead of looking to the West. The utilization of ancient Javanese kingdoms as a backdrop for literary work prevailed during this period by Sumatran writers. Following

⁴ Keith Foulcher, “Sumpah Pemuda: The Making and Meaning of a Symbol of Indonesian Nationhood” *Asian Studies Review* 24: 3 (2000): 378-410.

⁵ K. Foulcher, ‘Pujangga Baru’, pp. 4-15.

⁶ William H. Frederick, “Dreams of Freedom, Moments of Despair: Armijn Pane and the Imagining of Modern Indonesian Culture” in *Imagining Indonesia: cultural politics and political culture*, ed. Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1997), pp. 54-89.

Yamin's play were plays of similar nature, for instance Sanusi Pane's *Kertajaya* (1932) and *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit* (1933) and Armijn Pane's *Nyai Lenggang Kencana* (1938). Together with *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes*, these are all plays about the magnificent Javanese monarchs of the Kediri (predecessor of Singasari) and Majapahit (successor to Ken Arok) kingdoms.

Performed several times thereafter in numerous events from social-political gatherings to school functions,⁷ the call for unity and liberty was central to Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* play. Notably, the theme of freedom appears to characterise works published at that time. *Bebasari* is the main character of a play written by Rustam Effendi in 1926.⁸ The strife for Indonesia's independence is at the heart of *Bebasari* that tells of a woman whose life is released from the atrocity of an ogre king, hence the name *Bebasari* drawn from *bebas* or freedom. Similar to *Bebasari*, *Ken Dedes*, the ancestress of many rulers of Java, was also liberated from her governor husband by Ken Arok without which the history of Javanese kingdoms would have evolved differently. In Yamin's play, after Ken Arok's passing, Ken Dedes kills herself in order to advocate unity and harmony.

Foulcher points out that the theme of most works published during this age of nationalist fervour is the individual's choice to move from her/his 'private' toward the 'public' sphere to further the nationalist cause.⁹ This is true in Yamin's play. Rather than stressing a romanticisation of the Ken Arok-Ken Dedes relationship, the main theme of the

⁷ This information is based on Yamin's Introduction to the later publication of the play by Balai Pustaka (Jakarta, 1951: 6). Documentation on the performance is regrettably scant. The latest is perhaps that of the 1994 newspaper article featuring one Ms. Ajati. She spoke to a journalist about her participation in the 1947 show of Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* in Gedung Kesenian Jakarta [Jakarta Art Centre]. See "Sri Ajati: Chairil Anwar Tak Pernah Menyatakan Cinta", *Suara Pembaruan*, December 12, 1994, p. 9.

⁸ I thank Harry Aveling for drawing my attention to this work.

⁹ Foulcher uses as an example the story of Damarwulan in Armijn Pane's *Nyai Lenggang Kencana* (1938). The hero has to leave his sweetheart in order to fulfill his duty to the country by marrying the princess. See Foulcher, 'Pujangga Baru', p. 151.

play is that of leaders uniting people. Both characters set aside their personal needs for larger social duty: their sacrifice was for the integration of the kingdom - a recipe for nation building in the modern sense. The theme of familial vengeance characteristic of the classic narration of the Ken Arok story however disappears,¹⁰ as the depiction of the family in Yamin's play is one of bliss and cohesion – an unusual narrative in tune with the time when nationalism was the order of the day and historical dramas based on ancient kingdoms were popular. Note should be taken here, however, that the audience of the play must have been an exclusive nationalist elite, even if Yamin's appeal for unity could have been addressed to the imagined Indonesian nation. A reading of Yamin's play which was performed in the early independent era must be read against the backdrop of the central theme of national unity whereby religious difference was understated.

To recap, the spread of Indonesian nationalism in the 1920s helped provide a kernel for the creation of an independent nation comprising people from different ethnic, class and religious backgrounds. However, this nationalistic venture had its own problems and remained unsettled for the good few decades to come owing to irreconcilable differences over cultural, societal and religious orientations in Indonesian society. Cultural expressions like Yamin's play thus became a negotiating tool used to reflect the then Indonesian society's aspirations for political leaders capable of uniting the people and of fulfilling the communal needs. The adventure of the heroes in this play is a metaphor of this kind of leadership. Accordingly, mindful of this political setting, Muhammad Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* needs to be read within the perspective of this specific time where culture and politics intersect, as I shall attempt in the next section.

¹⁰ The standard narration of the Ken Arok story usually centres on the seven-generation revenge caused by the curse of Mpu Gandring kris with the death of Ken Arok at the hands of Anusapati upon learning that the latter's father was killed by the former.

All for Nationalism

In order to read Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes*, I will first locate this play in the context of the author's political ambitions and ideology alongside the particular political circumstances under which the play was written and staged.

The Second Youth Congress on 28 October 1928 was one of the major events in Indonesian history and it was the more significant for Muhammad Yamin (1903-1962) with regard to his literary and political career. Not only did his play make its first national performance, his poem "Indonesia, Tumpah Darahku" was also composed for the congress. Indeed Yamin played an important role in the advancement of Indonesian literature.¹¹ His earlier published poem "Tanah Air" (1922) had made him the pioneer of Indonesian modern poetry although the motherland in question is his homeland in Sumatra. Here, it is worthwhile to look into the cultural and political involvement of this Sawah Lunto-born-scholar in the making of the Indonesian nation.

Yamin was a hard-core nationalist who grew up in the 1920s - a period when anti-colonial sentiment was at its height. Despite his Minangkabau background, Yamin was enchanted by almost everything belonging to the past kingdoms of Java and he proved this fascination by writing about them. While his two history books *Gadjah Mada* (1953) and *Tatanegara Madjapahit* (1962) were self-explanatory of his interests in the ancient kingdom,

¹¹ See A. Teeuw, *Pokok dan Tokoh dalam Kesusteraan Indonesia Baru* (Jakarta: P. T. Pembangunan, 1959), p. 8 and *Modern Indonesian Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), p. 11.

his play *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* was another cultural and political undertaking. Unity is the grand theme of his works: the Majapahit kingdom with its mighty prime minister was able to unite nearly the whole archipelago. Ken Arok, likewise, managed to unite two kingdoms in his time. For Yamin then, unity came before differences and this became the nationalists' aspiration to stick together to expedite freedom from colonialism.

Deliar Noer calls Yamin "a government writer, with a similar role to the court writers of past kingdoms".¹² This commentary might be an overstatement, but it is hard to deny that Yamin, on occasions, did display inconsistency in his political stand so as to satisfy the ruling power. One example would be when he helped Sukarno construct the country's philosophical foundation of Pancasila only to contradict it later. Flirtation with power, Noer argues, was clear when Yamin appeared acquiescent with Sukarno's Guided Democracy, which was at odds with Pancasila. At another times, Yamin was known as Sukarno's 'myth-maker'.¹³ While we need to substantiate both views further, what is more important to resolve for the present discussion is Yamin's role as a producer of his 1928 play, *Ken Arok and Ken Dedes*, and the circumstances leading him at that time to assume such a role. Yamin's notion of unity and nationhood along with his glorification of the past was inevitable given the socio-political situation within which he was embedded.

Indonesian nationalism that the play like Yamin's helped to promote was from the beginning plagued by incongruities such as: 1) the clash between local and foreign sources of national culture, 2) the aristocracy and proletarian divide and 3) sacred-secular tension over Indonesia's philosophical foundation. The first two divergences are interrelated as the East-West cultural debate was complicated by the elitist nature of Indonesian nationalism. While

¹² D. Noer, "Yamin and Hamka", p. 259.

¹³ "Muhammad Yamin: Historical Dramas" URL: www.kirjasto.sci.fi/yamin.html.

local cultural traditions became the foundation of Indonesian national culture, the feudalistic reminiscence of Javanese court culture made the otherwise egalitarian spirit behind the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) appear unattainable. It is a synecdoche to evoke the grandeur of the ancient kingdoms of Java to represent the whole of Indonesia. But the play *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* seemed to offer negotiation of some kind. Along with Sukarno, Yamin was among those who sought to popularise the political objective of nationalist intellectuals by appealing to the masses. One way in which Yamin tried to redress the elite-proletarian divide was through literature. His play about Ken Arok is Yamin's way of constructing a proletarian hero of freedom and unity and, at the same time, a great king and defender of the Singasari kingdom. Often, as pointed out by Bodden, efforts to enhance nationalism appeared too forceful at the expense of an individual author's creativity as in the case of Yamin's contemporary, Sanusi Pane.¹⁴ Pane's works beg to be read as a national allegory attempting to reconcile, on the one hand, the court tradition inherent in the nationalists' quest and, on the other, the utopian desire for the unity of all people regardless of their backgrounds. While Pane was at pains to pose this social and class tension as implied in his works, Yamin teased the dilemma out in the name of nationalism, as his choice of plot and characterisation in his debut play exemplified.

The third tension was the religio-politic contestation that can be seen as corollary to previous unresolved conflicts. As early as 1930, the Islamic part of Indonesian society had been more comfortable to identify themselves as Muslims than Indonesians, despite their awareness of nationalism, hence the ongoing tension separating them from the neutral nationalists. Here, Yamin was again drawn into the debate. Among the key players in the

¹⁴ Michael H. Bodden, "Utopia and the Shadow of Nationalism: The Plays of Sanusi Pane 1928-1940" *BKI* 153 – III (1997): 332-55.

controversy was the Minangkabau writer Hamka with whom Yamin has been compared, for example in Deliar Noer's article.¹⁵ Despite the similarities of the two notable individuals in terms of interests, achievement and contribution to Indonesian literature, history and politics, according to Noer, their respective educational backgrounds and attitudes toward their shared religion helped shape the differing orientations and perceptions of the past for the present picture of the country. For Hamka, the culture of Islam or Islamic kingdoms should be the basis of Indonesian culture considering the majority of Muslim adherents in the country. In contrast, Yamin was convinced that the grandeur of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Majapahit was the pristine platform for the national culture. The Muslim Javanese tended to side with Yamin's conviction. Earlier, Ki Hajar Dewantoro the Dutch educated nobleman from the Jogjanesse sultanate and founder of the Indies Party, for example, believed that the basis of Indonesian nationalism should be the total sum of cultures of Java and Outer Islands rather than Islam.¹⁶ It is important to add here that inclination to the cultures of the East as materialised in the Hindu Java spirit can be explained by the influence of the Theosophical Society on the Indonesian nationalist movement at that time. Among the members of the society were Yamin, Sanusi Pane, Sukarno and the wife of Ki Hajar Dewantara.¹⁷

Yamin was after all not the only writer who made use of the ancient kingdoms of Java as a literary backdrop. The story of Ken Arok story was a popular choice in providing not only sources of artistic pursuit but also as an avenue of furthering the nationalist cause. In the hands of artists, the story of this Singasari king was reworked in order to revive people's

¹⁵ Deliar Noer, "Yamin and Hamka: Two Routes to an Indonesian Identity" in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, ed. A. Reid and D. Marr (Kuala Lumpur: ASAA, 1979), pp. 249-62. See also Taylor's comparison of both figures, if derivative of Noer's in her *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 299-301.

¹⁶ Jean Gelman Taylor, *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 298.

¹⁷ See Iskandar P. Nugraha, *Mengikis Batas Timur dan Barat: Gerakan Theosofi dan Nasionalisme Indonesia* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu), 2001.

passion for independence and harmony through unity and oneness. For example, outlining the development of one Javanese-language magazine with nationalist leanings, *Penjebar Semangat* [Fountain of Spirit], George Quinn notes that in 1936 the editor of the magazine Imam Supardi wrote a Javanese drama titled, *Ken Angrok – Sri Rejoso*, while encouraging the readers to write scripts for ketoprak or traditional-based drama.¹⁸ This is to say that like Yamin's play, this Javanese language drama with compelling nationalism drummed into it, reaped the benefits of the time. The co-optation of Ken Arok here reflects the spirit of the time in searching for a leader who is competent to bring about people's liberation and unification - a shared aspiration of the Indonesian nationalists like Yamin in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century. With this in mind, Yamin's play can be better understood.

The plot in Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* leaves no room for the birth of Ken Arok, his wandering adventures, and his rise to kingship, because the play unfolds right near the termination of his reign. The king is about to name a successor and his choice is his own son Wong Ateleng against the wish of some members of the noble council who opt for the first-born Anusapati, the son of Tunggul Ametung whom Ken Arok killed and usurped. Friction within the Singasari court is worsened by the presence of the ghost of Tunggul Ametung that gives a lead to Ken Arok's crime in the past. In the next council meeting, the king accepts his death penalty at the point of a kris he once used to kill Tunggul Ametung. Upon his death, Ken Dedes who consents her husband's punishment kills herself to make a way for Anusapati to become the new king of Singasari.

¹⁸ George Quinn, *The Novel in Javanese: Aspects of its Social and Literary Character* (Leiden: KITVL Press, 1992), p. 154.

Within the limits of the plot, Yamin attempts to deliver a number of messages that can be summarised as follows. First, for the sake of unity and harmony, we need to put aside differences and, instead, show respect for one another. Second, leaders should be ready first to sacrifice themselves when the situation calls for it. Third, everyone –man and woman- is equal, all hold responsibility for the attainment of collective aspirations, thus none has the luxury of personal pursuits. I shall argue that given this loaded patriotic discourse, the narrative of Ken Arok was manipulated by Yamin for his own goals.

King of Old, Modern Mind

The depiction of Ken Arok at the beginning of the play is that of a typical Javanese king, as shown in the king's attention to the meticulous care of the court's regalia, heirlooms and for court literature for the maintenance of power. The play starts with Ken Arok seen on his way to the royal balcony while instructing the palace aides who are busy looking after the court regalia - keropak (lontar manuscripts), ringgit (leather puppets) and the kris- to complete their respective tasks well. The king reminds the kris man to dust the heirloom instead of giving it a good scrub, maintaining that the item is the one and only in the world he wants to give later to his son, Wong Ataleng. Here Ken Arok openly says that the kris is the property of the palace and likewise the symbol of the future king, "*harapan astana*" [hope of the palace] (*KAKD*, 17). Yet as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Yamin's Ken Arok (herein called Radjasa) is "modernised" in his leadership vision. Signs for succession are clear from the beginning as indicated by King Radjasa's plan to hand the memento kris to his son. Despite Ken Arok's choice for his future successor, the plot shows that the word of the

king is not irrevocable, receptive as he is to the meaning of democracy, collective discussion or, to use the local use of the word, *musyawarah*. Indeed the opening scene of the play is rich in explanation about the non-authoritarian image of the king. It presents, for example, a cabinet meeting on which occasion everyone is given a chance to speak and propose ideas, while the king lends a listening ear. In discussing the mechanism of the imminent leadership election, they exchange their views:

Hino: The voice of the assembly is indeed authoritative, but the more so is that of the crown.

Halu: It has been like that since long ago. The king's judgement is the final judgement.

Sirikan: Pardon me Your Majesty! You have the recognition of my loyalty to the throne and dedication to the Tumapel court. [...] Things [however] have changed ever since the Ganter War. From Sanaha and Airlangga to Djajabaja and Kertadjaja the voice of the people is the throne's voice: The tongue of the king, the people's tongue. But from the time when all subjects have been under Tumapel, the people's decision is the final decision. The tongue of the people is the throne's tongue.

Radjasa: Thus, excepting Sirikan, shall I take it that all agree to my choosing of the future king or crown prince to replace me?

Sirikan: I have already said Your Majesty; we are not shadows projected onto the screen following every single movement of the puppets.

Halu: That's right, that's right. We are the puppets, and the king, the dalang; thus it is only right for puppets to abide by the dalang.

Sirikan: Halu is confused; so am I. But, supposing the king is the dalang, then the oil lamp is the crown, and the audience, the people. Are we not allowed to request a story for the dalang to play?

Hino: Sirikan is wise indeed!

Sirikan: Should the audience disagree about which story to play, the dalang would then be left alone and the oil lamp may as well be extinguished.

Hino: Sirikan, the two of us are the only audience.

Djajasaba: With Djajasaba there are three of us.

Halu: A threesome that is.

Sirikan: Plus the people.

Halu: So... so ... Your Majesty, what is the best thing to do now?

Radjasa: Listen ministers! It is but proper, when a king passed away, the first-born is to replace him, that is Anusapati, Panji Anengah. Should we continue to uphold the tradition, then, certainly, there would be no need for this meeting, certainly. The crown, this crown on my head, is to be given only to my son named Wong Ateleng.

Halu: That's precisely what I was about to say. It's kept inside my heart, but unable to reach my mouth.¹⁹ (KAKD, 20)

I quote the above passage at length to show the cacophony of voices. Some are reluctant to change, opting for the status quo, whereas others believe that change is crucial. Tension

¹⁹ Hino: Memang tinggi suara rapat, tetapi lebih tinggi suara mahkota.

Halu: Sudah begitu dari dahulu. Putusan radja, putusan achir.

Sirikan: Ampun seri paduka! Kesetiaan hamba kepada mahkota dan kesukaan bagi keraton Tumapel, sudah seri paduka ketahui. [...]

Sirikan: Inilah lainnja sedjak peperangan Ganter. Sedjak dari Sanaha dan Airlangga sampai ke Djajabaja dan Kertadajaja jang mendjadi suara rakjat jalah suara mahkota: Lidah radja, lidah rakjat. Tetapi semendjak segala keradjaan berteduh dibawah pandji-pandji keraton Tumapel, putusan rakjatlal jang putusan achir. Lidah rakjat jalah lidah mahkota.

Radjasa: Djadi selainnja rakrian Sirikan, segalanja setudju, kalau kita jang memilih juaradja, atau putera-mahkota jang akan menggantikan kita?

Sirikan: Telah hamba katakan seri paduka; kita bukannya bajang-bajang diatas kelir jang menurutkan segala gerakan ringgit dalam wajang kulit.

Halu: Itu benar, itu benar. Kita mendjadi ringgit dan radja mendjadi dalang; djadi perlu ringgit menurutkan putusannja.

Sirikan: Rakrian Halu tentu tidak mengerti; kita djuga tidak. Tetapi sekiranja radja mendjadi dalang, maka belentjong menjadi mahkota dan penonton menjadi rakjat. Bolehkah kami meminta kepada dalang lakon apakah jang akan dimainkan?

Hino: Bidjak rakrian Sirikan!

Sirikan: Kalau penonton tak setudju kepada lakon jang dipertunjukkan, dalang tentu tinggal seorang dan belentjong boleh dimatikan.

Hino: Sirikan, penonton tjuma kita berdua.

Djajasaba: Bertiga dengan Djajasaba.

Halu: Djadi tjuma bertiga.

Sirikan: Bertambah dengan rakjat.

Halu: Djadi... djadi... seri paduka, bagaimana sekarang baiknja?

Radjasa: Dengarkan mahamanteri! Memang sudah lazimnya, kalau seseorang radja meninggal, jang menggantikan putera tertua, jaitu Anusapati, pandji Anengah. Sekiranja adat biasa jang akan diteruskan, tentulah rapat ini tiada berguna. Mahkota in, mahkota jang diatas batu kepala kita hanja akan diserahkan kepada putera jang bernama Wong Ateleng.

Halu: Itulah jang hendak hamba katakan. Tersimpan dalam hati, tetapi tak sampai kemulut. [My translation here and thereafter]

among the ministers is clear here: On the one hand, we have Halu, an obedient and loyal minister - likely to become what in today's language is the "Asal Bapak Senang" type, that is, a subordinate ready to kowtow at all times if it keeps the boss happy. On the other hand, Yamin gives us Sirikan, a non-compromising minister who appeals for reform in the kingdom, taking into consideration the age of change since the victory in the Battle of Ganter facilitated by an army comprising common people. Sirikan insists on giving the Tumapel people the opportunity to vote in the transfer of power. Reading the predicament of the succession, Sirikan is forthright to draw an analogy from the wayang kulit world - from the role of the dalang, puppets, and audience to the functional and philosophical meanings of the *kelir* (cloth screen) and the coconut oil lamp. In his opinion, the king like a puppet master needs to consider his audience. People are spectators who may choose to leave when they are not happy with the story. And Sirikan herein speaks about the possibility of having an unhappy audience in the likes of him and his supporters. Hence Sirikan appears displeased, cynical and suspicious when King Radjasa makes a unilateral decision by choosing his own story to play ignoring the wishes of the king's subjects.

Sirikan: This news had better be made known, inside the palace and out to the people, so that the entire kingdom sees it as just and right; it would be best to announce the reason of it.

Halu: Honourable Sirikan asks for the reason, Your Majesty.

Radjasa: The reason? [It is] the work of the heart, honorary minister. Indeed there are many things unexplained in this world, as long as people still have human feelings. The feelings of the heart and the desires of the blood, honorary minister! No other reason than that, Sirikan!

Sirikan: Djajasaba and honourable Hino! The three of us in this meeting have heard that the crown prince is going to be Wong Ateleng. He is the one to uphold the crown and by the next meeting this news shall be announced.

Djajasaba: This is absolutely out of the ordinary; this is far from the normal practice in the past.

Radjasaba: There is a reason for it.

Sirikan: The feeling of the heart and the desires of the blood! That has been heard already. But why follow the heart instead of the usual customary law?

Halu: Don't you forget rakrian! We must serve the people and be loyal to the throne.²⁰ (KAKD, 21)

By having the king and his ministers speak to one another as equals, Yamin challenges the dictatorial style of leadership. Given the manner in which the characters converse with each other and the substance of the conversation, what emerges is a court with a modern atmosphere. In addition to this, we are informed through the stage direction (KAKD, 9) that the king sits in the middle of the stage. To the king's left and right are three honorary ministers, three ministers, one Brahmin, one guest –the young king of Daha- and a few officials. No one is seated higher than the other, even the dancers, we are told, are performing right in front of the audience. We later learn in the subsequent scene that King Radjasa has no privilege to hold onto his opinion for in the end he has to comply with the consensus. Here we see that Yamin portrays Ken Arok as a democratic political leader ready for reform.

In fact, the historical Halu, Hino and Sirikan are mentioned in the chronicle *Nagarakrtagama* as three honorary high officials or Mahamantri in the Majapahit kingdom

²⁰ Sirikan: Patut disampaikan kabar ini, kepada keraton dan rakjat, supaja seluruh keradjaan merasa adil dan benar; baik dikabarkan jang menjadi alasanja.

Halu: Rakrian Sirikan meminta sebabnja, seri paduka.

Radjasa: Sebabnja? Gerakan hati, mahamanteri. Memang banjak diatas dunia jang tak dapat diterangkan, selama manusia berhati manusia. Gerakan hati dan kemauan darah mahamanteri! Lain tidak mahamanteri Sirikan.

Sirikan: Djajasaba dan mahamanteri Hino! Bertiga kita mendengar dalam rapat ini, bahwa jang akan mendjadi putera mahkota jaitu Wong Ateleng. Dialah jang akan mendjundjung mahkota dan dalam rapat lain akan dikabarkan selandjutnja.

Djajasaba: Berlain benar sekali ini, berlain dari jang sudah-sudah.

Radjasa: Karena ada sebabnja.

Sirikan: Gerakan hati dan kemauan darah! Memang itu sudah terdengar. Tetapi mengapakah hati bergerak dan tiada menurut lembaga jang sudah-sudah?

Halu: Djangan lupa, rakrian! Mesti kita berbudi kepada bangsa dan setia kepada mahkota.

who had the prerogative to meet the king directly for court matters.²¹ Yamin appeared to conflate Majapahit with the Singasari courts here. The reasons for this conflation could have been no other than Yamin's own fascination with Majapahit history. To achieve verisimilitude, these characters were named after the real historical actors. Given that a council of nobles in the past kingdom played important role in the election of a royal successor, Yamin depicted historical truth. Such is Yamin's creative concoction of historical past and the existing socio-political conditions. Ken Arok was co-opted here by Yamin to conform with the modern idea of democracy through the king's abandonment of autocratic system in order to make a point: Democracy is truly local, traditional, thus an Indonesian notion rather than an importation from the Western worlds.

In this play the idea of democracy is understood as a consensus for harmony that necessitated sacrifice of one's interests for the good of all. Written during Yamin's own political engagement in the construction of the nation, it would not be too much to suggest that the fictional ministers are modelled on men with whom the author himself came into contact, or with whom he had collaborated and exchanged ideas in real life. The possibility is high that Yamin modelled his modern Halu, Hino, Sirikan, Djajasaba, Radjasa and many others on real political actors of his time. In his pursuit of the nationalist project Yamin and his contemporaries mingled with other members of the nationalist elite with power and access to political and economic resources. Yet nationalism necessitated the participation of the poor, the proletariat and the peasant who, by default, were powerless. It is precisely this latter group of people that Yamin attempts to portray and speak for via the character Sirikan, for instance. They are talked about as a good cause, made a subject of concern, and seemingly regarded with respect and importance. But in reality, these people are never

²¹ See Slametmuljana's *A Story of Majapahit* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976), p. 150.

present in the political arena. For other writers of Yamin's time such as Sanusi Pane, this problem of, to borrow Anderson, "actual inequality and exploitation" is hard to deal with in writing. Yamin, conversely, appears to reconcile the elites and the masses with ease in this play. It would seem that for Yamin there is nothing beyond the reach of determination when it comes to the nationalist goal, even if the outcome is but vague. When the cabinet ministers and family members of Singasari in this three-act play gather in meetings, for example, they practice the techniques of Javanese village politics of *musyawarah* (consultation) and *mufakat* (compromise) – the model of the ideal society which Yamin has in mind for modern Indonesia.

The picture of a modernised king devoid of autocracy and believer in equality and Javanese-modelled democracy is made simpler in Yamin's play partly because of the use of the Indonesian language, which can be seen, again, as a literary and political strategy of the author. Bearing in mind that his speech delivered at the first congress was in Dutch, this play was meant to reach Yamin's fellow countrymen and women.²² This Javanese-based play was presented to coincide historically with the countrywide endorsement of the national language to all ethnic groups. The exchange of words, direct and equal, among the characters - be they officials of different rank or members of royalty- would be hard to imagine in Javanese language known for its *andha-usuk* [speech levels], for example. Here Yamin calls for nationalism while indulging his own penchant for Javanese culture through his choice of one

²² Although students of postcolonial theory might detect the strategy of not writing in the language of the colonial master, I would suggest that the Indonesian language and Yamin's privileged status make a different case from, for instance, Ngungi wa Tiong'o writing in his native language. First of all, the Indonesian language was a Dutch creation for communication purposes with the natives. Thus Yamin simply ignored, not deprived the colonisers of access to the play by targeting the colonised readership. See Ngungi wa Thiong'o, "The Language of African Literature" in *The Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin (New York, N Y, Routledge, 2000), pp. 427-433.

Javanese proletarian hero turned king as a model. Such is the passion of a leader for the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* Indonesians later dearly hold.

The youth of the 28 October 1928 in the then Dutch colony provided an embryo event for later historical ones, among which was the independence of Indonesia. As such, it is only proper that the backdrop of the play performed then was Singasari – the genesis of Majapahit- a model for the Indonesian state that Yamin and Sukarno both idealised. The two leaders worked hard as defenders of unity only to see that it was too enormous a task to handle as political reality proved otherwise in the later period: Under Sukarno's Guided Democracy, Indonesia, by then a country with nearly 100 million people, failed to fit together, let alone with no model leadership to look up to as the nation became too divergent to cohere. In the next section we will see how Yamin's play, *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes*, teaches us what it takes for a nation to stay cohesive as the death of our hero at the point of a kris testifies.

Death is a Victory

When associated with Ken Arok, the kris becomes an object pregnant with symbolic meanings, for instance, as regalia to complement his kingship, historical notions of his road to power and signs of rebellion as well as liberation. Therefore the kris and its association with Ken Arok do not necessarily carry the same meanings as the customary usage of the kris as one of the Javanese symbols of male power. No agenda is more important for Yamin than endorsing nationalism for which a major twist to the plot of the play is necessary, i.e. Ken Arok died of self-inflicted wounds using his kris. It was more than half a century later that the bonding through the national language which Yamin passionately helped to cultivate was

examined by Benedict Anderson when speaking of the profound emotional bonding that legitimates the creation of a nation in his celebrated *Imagined Communities* (1983). Interestingly, Yamin and Anderson seem to imply that life is sometimes the price to pay in order to cherish this sentimental connection among members of the community who may not know each other and perhaps will never meet. In fact, language solidarity is an important means through which nationalism prevails. Bearing this in mind, I would argue that implicit in Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* is the author's view of the virtue of death for the sake of unity. Yamin seemed to want to say that political unity -proven for instance by the same adoption of language, culture, ideology and many other shared experiences- is indeed a form of personal sacrifice one needs to make. And in this play, the heroic leaders Ken Arok and Ken Dedes show this solidarity and sacrifice by dying at the point of the kris for the sake of a unified society. This is a sacrifice well paid as it brings about the unity of Singasari- an allegory for the Indonesian nation. Given death of this kind, in what follows I shall unravel different levels of meanings when discussing the use of Ken Arok's kris in this play.

Let us first have a look at some important acts leading to Ken Arok's death with the Mpu Gandring kris, to see if the author repeats the common interpretation of the weapon as an indication of Ken Arok's immorality. From the very beginning, Yamin's depiction of Ken Arok is not that of a man inseparable from his kris. The kris, important as it is as the court's regalia is kept and taken care of by the maintenance officer, not by the king. We learn as the play unfolds that Ken Arok does not keep and look after the kris himself despite his respect for the weapon. Yamin, by implication, debunks the myth that the kris is a cursed object or curio to be kept hidden in private for fear that the curse gets its due. In this way, the kris begs

to be read differently from the conventional use of it as a symbol of impiety accorded to Ken Arok the owner of the weapon.

The audience is made aware of the presence of the kris via a mantra that Yamin puts in the mouth of different characters thus: “Who stabs; will be stabbed; who krisses, will be krissed. Lohgawe knows the secret!”²³ (*KAKD*, 30) We hear the magical spells for the first time in Scene 2 from the ghost of Tunggul Ametung when this victim of the kris tries to give a clue to his son, Anusapati, about the secret hidden in the family. The mantra is heard again for the second time from Tjandra Kirana, the girlfriend of Anusapati, who heard the story from her maidservant who heard a ghost chanting the same mantra in her dream the night before. Thereafter, the mantra is reiterated time and again when the play turns to the ghost of Tunggul Ametung. It can be argued that by making the kris ‘present’ in the imagination through the mantra, Yamin creates detachment between the kris and the user. In so doing the author helps to defuse the sinister association of the Mpu Gandring kris without denying its utility as a weapon. What the author demystifies is the magical power of vengeance of the kris. Next, the mantra is heard again through Lohgawe’s words: “So a [death by] kris for a kris. The Gandring kris continually does the work like that of Shiva”²⁴ (*KAKD*, 41). Making Lohgawe the high priest say that the kris is doing the Divine Destroyer’s work, the author does not depart from the idea that after the first two fatalities more will die at the point of the same dagger. The plot however diverges in that the casualties take a different form and fashion, i.e. the next victims are Ken Arok and Ken Dedes and the method of killing is, respectively, premeditated homicide and self-wounding. Being used by different hands for

²³ Siapa menikam kena tikam/Siapa mengeris kena keris/Lohgawe tahu rahsia!

²⁴ Djadi keris berbalas dengan keris. Keris Gandring terus bekerdja seperti perbuatan Sjiwa.

different reasons besides revenge, the kris here appears far less malicious, if not to say neutral. It is barely a supernaturally operated instrument of evil.

Discontinuity of the myth of the cursed kris of Mpu Gandring is essential in Yamin's play and is required to square with the technique of characterisation and tone of the work. Yamin peoples his text with righteous characters to be in tune with his nationalist project of character building. His Ken Arok is not flawless: he has to pay for his wrongdoings and he does so with dignity. Contrary to the overriding interpretation of the kris, familial retaliation is not the cause of Ken Arok's death in this play. Above all, Ken Arok bears the punishment of death for his people, hence a variation on the common seven-generation-killing theme often associated with the Ken Arok story. The corollary of this is that Anusapati too is averted from malice, unlike the usual narrative in which he uses the hands of Pengalasan Batil to do the treacherous work of killing his stepfather for him. Neither does the killing of the man from Batil follow in Yamin's play. The most astonishing transgression of all however is the suicide of Ken Dedes - an unusual plot development not evident in other texts under study.

However, Yamin's appreciation of everything Javanese prevents us from speculating that he is so ignorant of Javanese culture as to exclude myths widely held by the society in question. From stage directions we learn that the author is familiar with Javanese dances, gamelan and scores of different *tembang*, Javanese songs, that suitably accompany every single change of scenes (*KAKD*, 14, 16, 22, 24, 28, 32, 34, 35, 44, 46). Given his educational background, and his political strategy, Yamin must have kept in check any myths that might conflict with his nationalist sentiment in writing this play. Without attempting to go into the psyche of this law scholar, we may say that he is not in favour of the bizarre story of the

cursed kris. He simply could not afford to have Ken Arok, his hero of unity, die at the point of a kris used by one resentful family member. His own plot ensures that the kris is present not as an object of condemnation but instead a means with which the hero of the story proves his commitment to unity by dying with dignity. For Yamin, death is thus a victory. “This is the true victory of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes that has left us a deep impression”, Sirikan says as the curtain falls, “Long live the spirit of Tumapel.”²⁵ (KAKD, 44) Following this, a voice-over of Empu Barada is heard in praise of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes and their victorious death.

The presence of the Mpu Gandring kris in Yamin’s text therefore needs to be read from the context of the author’s political agenda, that is, his belief that unity is valuable and very often it requires one to surrender her/his self-interests. Obviously, Yamin wants the audience to see the death of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes by way of the kris as an act of sacrifice rather than vengeance. Unquestionably, sacrifice was not only a relevant but also inspiring message in the 1920s, given the exhortation to leave behind one’s self-centredness for the sake of embracing the shared unitary values. It was a period when Indonesian theatrical performances knew no economy of words and legend less important than the independence ideology.²⁶ I shall next discuss the maintenance of national aspirations arguing that this task is not an exclusively male pursuit as suggested in Yamin’s inclusion and treatment of his female protagonists – especially Ken Dedes, the companion of Ken Arok.

²⁵ Kemenangan Ken arok dan Ken Dedes jang sebenarnja dan jang meninggalkan tanda peringatan dalam hati kita. Kekallah semangat keradjan Tumapel.

²⁶ Aveling has noticed that in Pane’s *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit* (Twilight in Majapahit) acts of violence in the form of fights and executions quietly disappear from the stage, maintaining that, like the Grotowskian play, it is rich in script but lack in actions. See Harry Aveling, “Myth and Reality in Modern Indonesian Drama” in *Litteratures Contemporaines de l’Asie du Sud-est* ed. P. B. Lafont and D. Lombard (Paris: L’Asiatheque, 1974), pp. 99-108.

Woman of Wisdom

Equality, democracy and justice are values shared and pursued by all, and within the context of Indonesian nationalism, women formed part of this struggle. It is conceivable that Yamin's play also attempts to impart to his audience the role of female national heroes like Kartini, for example. The knowledgeable, active and independent woman is the model of Yamin's female characters, as women of this kind are needed for political leadership and national unity. Indeed, literature of the nationalist project always includes modern women: in the 1920s and 1930s, the Western concept of a hygienic and healthy lifestyle entrusted to homemakers was taken up keenly by educated women in a colonial society like Indonesia as a form of liberation – not confinement.²⁷ It is domestic women as such that Yamin adopts to cast his female characters rather than as women identifiable only for their submission and seduction to men. It is not difficult to imagine that a nationalist like Yamin would take every opportunity to promote character building through his writing – part of a literary and political strategy of male writers in peopling their works with women. In what follows, I shall show that we can identify the echo of Yamin's ideal women in the portrayal of the Singasari queen of the 13th century.

Yamin's recognition of women's role is clear as they all come across as playing a part in leadership continuity in Singasari: not until men in the play receive support and encouragement from the women of their lives, do they take action; all women including the maid-servant have useful opinions without which the men are not able to make shrewd decisions. Ken Dedes's characterisation is that of a respectable and consultative consort of

²⁷ Barbara Hatley, "Postcoloniality and the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature" in *Clearing a Space: Postcolonial Readings of Modern Indonesian Literature*, ed. K. Foulcher and T. Day (Leiden: KITLV, 2002), p. 168.

King Radjasa - a significant break from the stereotypical role often accorded her, i.e. wife and seductress with whom Ken Arok fell into temptation. At the end of the play we hear Empu Barada the narrator identifying Ken Dedes with “Pradjna Paramita” (the Goddess of Wisdom)²⁸ (*KAKD*, 45). No explanation for the mythical or supernatural association of the name follows vis-à-vis Ken Arok whom the author clearly names “god’s incarnation on earth”²⁹ (*KAKD*, 7). However the ways Ken Dedes is represented throughout the play indicate that this female character does embody such moral virtues such as dignity, compassion, discretion and courage or, in short, wisdom. First, a shrewd, truthful and respectable spouse of the king is the image the author gives to Ken Dedes by including her in the ministerial meeting where everyone present listens to Ken Dedes. Second, the next portrayal of Ken Dedes is that of a much-consulted mother by her son Anusapati. The latter was once appeased by the former’s consolation and advice not to resent Ken Arok’s unfair and indifferent attitude to him by simply revealing that his real father is the deceased Tunggul Ametung. To avoid familial conflict Ken Dedes withholds the true story about Tunggul Ametung’s murder by Ken Arok. Finally, what is distinctive about Yamin’s Ken Dedes is her fortitude to ensure justice –hence social duty before personal ambition. Let us briefly recount the series of happenings to see Ken Dedes’s development of characterisation that culminates when the play is about to reach the denouement.

That Ken Dedes is impartial is shown by her determination to disclose no more information about the past without preventing Anusapati from finding the truth by himself. Having obtained the knowledge about the way his father died, Anusapati decides to confront King Radjasa with this provocative question: “According to Mother, my father Tunggul

²⁸ This folk name was given to the statue thought to be the depiction of Ken Dedes.

²⁹ *Pendjelmaan dewa keatas dunia.*

Ametung did not die of illness. If forced to die, who forced him, if stabbed by a kris, who did that?"³⁰ (*KAKD*, 39). Ken Arok pretends not to know the answer, neither does Ken Dedes offer her knowledge, until Lohgawe volunteers, "Wounded by a kris, Anusapati. Stabbed by empu Gandering's kris"³¹ (*KAKD*, 40). Then, when asked about the whereabouts of the kris, Lohgawe points out Pangalasan Batil, an officer from the village of Batil, who then steps forward to show the kris to the people present. The king makes a move as if to arrest the assassin with Ken Dedes watching this unashamed behaviour of her husband in silence. But as Lohgawe claims that the criminal is present among them, asking Ken Dedes about the possible punishment for him at the disclosure of his identity, Ken Dedes has the oft-repeated mantra thus: "Who stabs; will be stabbed; who krisses, will be krissed."³² (*KAKD*, 41) She is determined that the killer should be punished accordingly. Next, upon the revelation of Radjasa's crime, Lohgawe consults Ken Dedes again about the verdict to see if she changes her mind:

Lohgawe: The sentence thus remains as previously set, doesn't it?

Radjasa: Ken Arok is ready to take the punishment.

Halu: Royal Queen Mother shall decide.

Anusapati: My dear mother, all is said, but would it be possible...

Sirikan: I leave it to the Honourable Queen.

Djajasaba: It is not for us to decide.

[After a while Ken Dedes speaks up loud and clear].

³⁰ Menurut keterangan Rena Ibu, bapanda akuwu Tunggul Ametung meninggal dunia tidak karena sakit. Kalau kena paksa, siapakah memaksanja, kalau kena keris, siapakah mengerisnja?

³¹ Kena keris, Anusapati. Kena keris empu Gandering.

³² Siapa menikam kena tikam, Siapa mengeris kena keris.

Ken Dedes: The word of a mother has power. As I previously said: Who stabs, will be stabbed; who krissed, will be krissed and Ken Dedes has her mind already made up.³³

No sooner has Ken Dedes finished her words when Ken Arok urges Pangalasan Batil to stab the kris into his body saying “Batil, why hesitate? Do your job!”³⁴ (KAKD, 43) The drama has not ended until Ken Dedes asks the Batil lad to hand her the kris, and with that, she kills herself. And with this the leadership torch in Singasari is passed on to Anusapati.

It is important to note here that allusion to women as Motherland or source and maintenance of life is common in the Indonesian (and Southeast Asian) literary heritage. The image of Ken Dedes given to us is thus one of a commanding and committed leader in ensuring that justice be seen in Singasari. It is Ken Dedes rather than Ken Arok who initiates reconciliation of morals, laws and politics as shown by the kingdom’s investigation of the crime, prosecution of the criminal, and execution of the verdict, prior to the transfer of power. But to stop at the portrayal of Ken Dedes as a woman warrior and to ignore the depiction of the ensuing death can nonetheless be problematic. Social subjugation of women to men is implied and this is characteristic of male-authored texts published in colonial times, the appropriation of which continued and prevailed strongly in the New Order times.³⁵ It would be giving Yamin too much credit to suggest that he is immune from the propagation of the so-called *kodrat wanita* or women’s inborn destiny to be men’s loyal supporters, reminiscent

³³ Lohgawe: Djadi tetap hukumannja seperti jang telah ditetapkan?

Radjasa: Ken Arok tetap siap menerima hukuman.

Halu: Rena Ibu jang akan memutuskannja.

Anusapati: Bunda, kata sudah terlandjur, tetapi kalau-kalau dapat...

Sirikan: Pulang kepada Ibu Dalam.

Djajasaba: Bukan timbangan kita.

[Setelah beberapa lamanja maka Ken Dedes berkata dengan njaringnja].

Ken Dedes: Perkataan ibu kata bertuah. Telah hamba katakan: *Siapa menikam kena tikam, siapa mengeris kena keris dan Ken Dedes hatinja tetap.*

³⁴ Batil, mengapa engkau terlambat? Kerdjakan kewadajibanmu!

³⁵ Barbara Hatley, “Postcoloniality and the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature”, pp. 151-72.

of Javanese court tradition in his writing.³⁶ It can be argued here that Yamin's efforts in promoting nationalism requires that he fill his work with 'modern' yet 'conventional' women as such.

In this way, Yamin gives certain necessary twists to the Ken Arok story to suit his political agenda. First, the author presents us with his court-style infused vision of democracy by having vengeance removed from the plot when approaching the subject of succession. Second, the death of victims here is made to fit the play's theme of national unification. Third, the characterisation technique of including men and women alike is to achieve the tenor of the play so desired.

Conclusion

Cultural, social and religious tensions have continued to overshadow Indonesia from post-independent times under the leadership of Sukarno. Amidst this situation emerged individuals whose access to power allowed them to navigate the nation in what they believed to be the right direction: Muhammad Yamin and Sukarno are such individuals. Both leaders were convinced that people, to use Sukarno's catchphrase for independence, "from Sabang to Merauke", with different cultures, languages and beliefs could be united into one single nation of Indonesia modelled on the glorious Majapahit kingdom of the past, the genealogical kingdom of which becomes the backdrop of Yamin's play. It is precisely through awareness of this milieu and Yamin's own political encounter during the formative years of the nation-state of Indonesia and thereafter that *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1928) can be better grasped.

³⁶ Tineke Hellwig, *In the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature* (Berkeley: Centres for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California Berkeley, 1994).

The play's enduring popularity for approximately twenty years after its premiere (1928 – 1950) can be partly attributed to the creative twist in plot and characterisation so as to contain the anxieties of the time, among which is the search for a charismatic leader capable of ensuring a cohesive society. That Ken Arok is a champion of unification and of a democratic system is plainly a message that Yamin would like to send to the audience of his play. Described not without flaws, as in his preference for a successor, Yamin's Ken Arok in the end acknowledges his past crime and subsequently takes his punishment for the good of all. Ken Arok's benevolence -a distinct mark of this play- is to match its central theme of unity, hence the absence of violence often symbolised by his kris. The other title character Ken Dedes is an inseparable part of the narrative from whom we hear about the necessity to give up personal pursuits including life itself for the sake of unity. Ken Dedes and other female characters are cast to challenge the idea that the only way women participate in the mainstream quest is through their sexuality. Figures of model characters as such can be understood without suspicion when contextualised with the socio-political situation available for the author and his response to it at the time of writing.

Yamin's cultural and political trajectory in his nationalist mission via his adoption of a court chronicle-based discourse here is similar to the ways in which nationalism was disseminated in Sri Lanka through the co-optation of the sixth century chronicles *Mahavamsa* to propagate modern Sinhala nationalism in the 1930s, as observed by Steven Kemper.³⁷ The chronicle records the story of Sri Lanka's three adventurers-turned-kings – clumsy Vijaya, ruthless Dutugamunu and unscrupulous Parakramabu- who seized power to create unity and defend Buddhism. The trio are extolled as heroic leaders in the nationalist

³⁷ Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

discourse to negotiate the diversity in ethnicity and religion as well as class that made up Sinhala society.

Through the Sri Lankan's use of historical accounts in the past and its naturalisation to suit the present agenda, Kemper's study shows that nationalism in Sri Lanka is not so much an imagined community than as an incomplete construction of a "past" for the presence. Here, Kemper is critical of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner for treating nationalism without historical depth. His own thinking is influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer's "fusion of horizon".³⁸ For example, when appropriating a historical figure in the past for some certain cause at present, one is to be prepared to allow fusion, anachronism and unreliability of historiography to garner the nationalist feelings.

Yamin was likewise persistent about making a construction of the past glory of the ancient kingdom of Singasari for the present and even the future Indonesia. He made use of Ken Arok's image to propagate nationalism through this "fusion of horizon" by constructing the figure in the past, if incomplete and anachronistic, for the present validation. But as we have seen in this chapter, tangible tensions within society, i.e. an indigenous-foreign conundrum of cultural sources, private force against public order, social class divide (elite v. *wong cilik*) and competitions between secular and sacred orientations in politics, were proved insurmountable. In reality, a unified society remained in the realm of imagination, hence the persistence of such a play with the unification theme. Here we see the function of literature and popular culture as sites to harbour people's aspirations and apprehensions.

In the end, Yamin gives us more than a work of fiction. He too gives us the sermon of a steadfast believer of Unity in Diversity. Thus, the gradual disappearance of Ken Arok's images with the dawning days of nationalism is evidence of the intimacy between literature

³⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

and politics that no one should overlook in analysing a play like *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes*. It is with this connection in mind that I shall pursue in the following chapters the different images of Ken Arok in different works appearing at different periods in Indonesian cultural and literary history.

CHAPTER FOUR: REBEL AND KING IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

This chapter examines the revival of Ken Arok's images that happened during the first decade of Suharto's government from 1968 to 1978 –a period of transition as well as of the establishment of legitimacy by the new, military-backed regime. As indicated at the conclusion of the preceding chapter, the popularity of historical-based dramas like Yamin's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* faded by the mid 1950s as new styles of writing and themes began to thrive for about a decade in the form of radical nationalist literature. But after the 1965 coup, this 'political' writing gave way to 'non-interventionist' literature,¹ and with this change, Indonesia saw Ken Arok's images resurrected in literature and popular culture. Various depictions of Ken Arok appeared at this particular historical moment when Indonesia had barely recovered from the pain of a violent political transition. One might hasten to attribute this resurrection to the uncanny resemblance of the narrative of the September 30 Movement that gave birth to the New Order with the genesis of the Singasari Kingdom. The gruesome coup d'état, the extermination of the alleged members of and sympathisers with the Indonesian Communist Party and the questionable transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto – all overturned people's understanding of political leadership, especially with regard to the morality of politicians and political power. As such, the Singasari saga whereby Ken Arok the assassin walked free and became a king while the innocents were punished for a crime they never committed became a narrative that made sense of, if not invoked, the then Indonesian political scenario. As the re-emergence of the Ken Arok narrative can be

¹ It should be borne in mind that the political cultural war of the 1960s –'socialist realism' versus 'universal humanism'- was yet to cease during this transitional period, although the consequential stalemate of the *Lekra* artist means the growth of the Generation of 66. See Keith Foulcher's "Politics and Literature in Indonesia: The View from the Left" *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 15. 1 (1987): 83-103.

understood in this light, it is imperative that we not only examine the connection between such texts and the social, cultural and political conditions but also the perceptions and cultural politics of individual authors during the first decade of Suharto's authoritarian rule. In times of political repression and distrust, popular culture often becomes a potent site for expressing and negotiating what were otherwise buried social and political apprehensions and aspirations at the everyday levels. I argue that the popular representations of the figure of Ken Arok help articulate the political morality of the existing leaders across different realms of time. The popular representations of Ken Arok, a controversial but legendary king and leader in Indonesian history and mythologies must be read as metaphors of the given political reality as well as repositories of ideals and hopes for a just, moral and better political culture and leadership. Given the authoritarian nature of Suharto's government whereby all kinds of artistic and social expression were heavily controlled, it is important to delve into the social and personal biographies of the authors and the social milieu within which their works were produced.

This chapter is divided into two discussing the different portrayals of Ken Arok during the early New Order era: the rock opera *Ken Arok* (1975) by Harry Roesli and the comic books/serials *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1977) by R. A. Kosasih. I would argue that the ways in which each author dealt with Indonesia's socio-political and economic conditions in the 1960s and 1970s influenced his depiction of Ken Arok. Coming from different generations, these two authors had their own agenda and narrative strategy in speaking about Indonesian political culture and leadership during the New Order era. As I shall show, the young Harry Roesli made use of the rebel ideology that had invigorated popular culture in the 1960s through his rock opera to voice the social discontentment about a corrupt

government. Meanwhile, the middle-aged comic artist R. A. Kosasih sought to challenge elitist belittlement of the comic genre as trash by using his Ken Arok comics to convey educational purposes about political morality and tolerance.

In order to understand the representation of a controversial figure like Ken Arok, we need to consider the potency of political atmosphere and how each of these cultural producers acted at a time when popular culture such as the performing arts and popular fiction flourished in Indonesia within the oppressive circumstances of the New Order regime. Only by understanding the political conditions of the time and the individual responses of these authors can we better grasp the political and social meanings of their portrayals of Ken Arok.

To Rebel, to Rally and to Rock: Ken Arok on Stage

Prior to the analysis of the rock opera *Ken Arok*, I shall discuss its author Harry Roesli and the condition within which the work was produced. It is the contention of this study that *Ken Arok* was born out of the inevitable global influence upon Indonesian cultural expressions and dissatisfaction with political leadership that quickly saw a popular culture like rock music as a channel for resistance.

My brief introduction to Harry Roesli is limited to aspects of his life which are related to his opera production since his activities ranged widely from musician to stage artist to those of an academic and columnist.

Born Djauhar Zaharsjah Fachruddin Roesli (1952-2004), Harry Roesli was brought up in a household of music and art lovers but became the only one to pursue a career in

music in contrast to the many doctors in his family including his four siblings, parents and about 20 other relatives plus his veterinarian grandfather -- the well-known novelist Marah Roesli. Roesli, who composed his first piece of music for guitar at 13, said that the combination of familial discipline by trained scientists and a passion for the arts made it easy for him to see social disorder, which he criticised through his music.² This admirer of John Cage, who studied music in Jakarta Arts Institute and percussion musical composition at the Rotterdam Conservatory in the Netherlands, had his own rock band “Harry Roesli and the Gang”. As an artist and dissenting student, music was for him a political expression.

People now remember Roesli not only for his Depot Kreasi Seni Bandung (DKSB), a non-conventional musical organisation that he established to groom young people interested in music and social issues whereby Roesli addressed Indonesia’s socio-political ills and the country’s corrupt leaders, but also his sharp, daring and witty ways in so doing. Nicknamed “*Pemusik Bengal*” [Wayward Musician], Roesli who at times worked together with some leading performing artists in Indonesian theatre like Rendra and Riantiarno³ often made sensational performances that ended with his detention. In 2001, for example, the Jakarta police arrested and summoned Roesli for his acerbic but amusing rephrasing of the lyrics of the national song “Garuda Pancasila”⁴ performed at the home of the just-unseated President Abdurrahman Wahid.⁵

² Harry Roesli, Personal Communication, Bandung, 11 May 2003.

³ In 1984, for example, Roesli took part as a music composer in a musical/play by N. Riantiarno entitled *Opera Kecoak* [The Cockroach Opera]. Known as Rendra’s ‘disciple’, Riantiarno satirised the corrupt government through his play. Portraying the life of the marginalized like prostitutes and transvestites, the play mocks the government’s misuse of foreign aid: infrastructure and urban development is carried out with the pretext of supporting national culture, while poverty is everywhere rampant. For an excellent discussion of this play see Mary S. Zurbuchen’s “Images of Culture and National Development in Indonesia: *The Cockroach Opera*” *Asian Theatre Journal* 7. 2 (Fall 1990): 127-49.

⁴ The following is part of the tweak Roesli put to the song. The first line “Garuda Pancasila, akulah pendukungmu” [Garuda Pancasila, I am your supporter] is twisted into “Garuda Pancasila, aku lelah mendukungmu” [Garuda Pancasila, I am tired of supporting you]. The last line “Pribadi bangsaku, ayu

It is important to know more about this holder of a Doctorate in music who called himself a social critic, as most of his works are forms of critique about social and political wrongs. The opera *Ken Arok* is one example of his early work when he was barely 24 years of age. Sporting a black velvet cap on top of his shoulder-length hair and dressed in black outfits for most of his life, Roesli used to feel inferior, sometimes dejected, about himself as a child. In my personal interview with him, he recalled that he was the biggest boy in class and, by his own admission, ugly looking. In fact he mused about himself by blaming his appearance for his troubles. He even suggested that this in part caused his perversely rebellious behaviour as in so doing he was making statements to prove his self-worth.⁶

For the young Roesli, a rebel character like Ken Arok was the most fascinating and inspiring of the figures that he had studied in history lessons in his junior school. It was Roesli's knowledge and appreciation of Ken Arok that underpinned the representation of this character in his opera. Undeterred by a brutal experience of detention due to his participation in a student demonstration a year before,⁷ Roesli proceeded with the performance of the rock opera *Ken Arok* in 1975. Shown twice that year, the third show held in Semarang was never completed as the authorities intruded half way during the performance and ordered its closing much to the disappointment of the mostly young audience. Performed under the watchful eye of the increasingly repressive New Order government, the understanding of the messages

maju...maju" [My national character, move onward] becomes "Pribadi bangsaku, tidak maju-maju" [My national character remains backward].

⁵ No sooner had President Megawati took office, than the authorities questioned several individuals accused of creating social unrest. About the same time as Roesli's incident was the arrest of the parliament member of the Bondowoso district and the local chairperson of the Partai Rakyat Demokrasi [Democratic People Party]. Here, Megawati's government, like Suharto's, was not immune either to impulsive arrests.

⁶ Harry Roesli, Personal Communication, Bandung, 11 May 2003.

⁷ Showing the permanent fracture on the left side of his head, Roesli told me about the 3-day torture during his detention at the Bandung police department. He was released after his doctor mother's plea for treatment in her clinic – confronting Roesli's father who was then a military doctor stationed in the province's capital. (Personal Communication), Bandung, 11 May 2003.

conveyed in the *Ken Arok* opera requires a contextualisation of its author's aspirations and audience as well as the socio-cultural and political milieu in the late 1960s to the 1970s in Indonesia.

The parallel between Ken Arok's political career and that of President Suharto, who was then half way through his second term in office, is a central theme of Roesli's rock opera. Being one of the activists of the Bandung Institute of Technology during the 1970s known for their daring opposition to the government, Roesli quickly recognised that the best way to publicise the political parallel of the two agents of history was to choose a genre of music which was sufficiently loose in aesthetic, in order, according to him, to allow "vulgar" lyrics to fit in the plot. Rock music was a good choice and for good reasons. Its association with rebellion and freedom of expression made it appealing to the young generation of Indonesians in the late 1960s who had, previously, been denied access to global culture by the anti-West Old Order. The then worldwide success of Tim Rice's musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" had inspired Roesli to use his 'Ken Arok's rock opera as a form of rebellion.

Roesli was among the Indonesian youth who were not at all happy with the political and cultural change from one regime to the next. The political transition from Sukarno to Suharto can be aptly described in one Indonesian proverb: *lepas dari mulut buaya masuk ke mulut singa* – jumping out of the frying pan into the fire in the English equivalent. Sukarno's Guided Democracy brought about not only polarisation within the society, but also slowed the growth of Indonesian cultural life, for artistic pursuits had to be nationalistic in spirit – they had to uphold the mission to enhance the character of the Indonesian nation. The fall of Sukarno and his anti-West policy opened the floodgate for cultural influences from Western countries. But with this global wave and its consequential rise of the 1960s generation, the

changing landscape of Indonesian arts and cultures was subject to the even more dictatorial censorship of the new regime. Not surprisingly, this repression gave rise to dissenting voices via popular culture. The 1960s can be compared to a period of crisis reminiscent of the rise of the Angkatan Muda at the outbreak of the 1945 Indonesian national revolution.⁸ Quoting the word of one revolutionary hero Sutan Sjahrir -*kegelisahan*- to describe the restless, anxious state of mind of the youth in Java of the war years, Benedict Anderson attributes the young people's rise to militancy to the rigidity of the traditional (Islamic) society, the severity of the Japanese occupation army and the deteriorating economy of the country. Likewise, about two decades later, Indonesia again experienced a similar crisis: while there was hope after the suspension of Guided Democracy there was also fear of the new military regime as it swore to eradicate its enemies, not to mention the economic hardship endured by Indonesians. Thus, the *gelisah* children of the ageing founding nationalist leaders created a cultural revolution in the late 1960s, the process of which was expedited by progress in world politics. This period coincided with a time of radicalism among youths and students worldwide snowballing from the 1968 students' protest in Paris. Like a raging fire, peaceful demonstrations and similar movements became rapidly widespread across the globe. It was indeed the coming of an age where the young generation became active in making political statements in their bid to define a future society as well as a culture of their own.

In Indonesia, a renewal in the field of performing arts was evident through the amalgamation of local and Western cultures whereby art became a channel for the expression of resistance to conventionality and order during this period. Many young Indonesian artists came to prominence this period. For example, upon finishing his three-year study in the

⁸ See Benedict Anderson's *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944-1946* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), esp. Chapters 1-4.

United States, a friend of Harry Roesli, the poet and playwright W. S. Rendra introduced his *Tradisi Baru* [new tradition], that is, the use of more action and sound rather than words on stage. Incorporating traditional dances and martial arts, his works became a challenge to the slogan-filled plays characteristic of the socialist-realist cultural tradition which used to dominate Indonesian drama. The *tradisi baru*'s integration of traditional elements here strikes a chord with attempts to include comments on current social and political issues – a representational technique common to indigenous theatrical performances whereby artists take the opportunity to address issues on power relations between the ruler and the ruled.⁹

New innovative genres were created during this era. Rendra, for instance, integrated wayang kulit, ketoprak and ludruk into his production of Shakespearean drama. Given the application of local cultural traditions instead of direct imitation of Western culture, this new generation of young artists preferred to label their cultural invention as “contemporary” and not as “modern”.¹⁰ Similarly, Putu Wijaya, once a student of Rendra, became a household name in Indonesian known for marrying Balinese and Western arts in his works.¹¹ The budding of the Indonesian art was in part due to the non-conventional Governor of Jakarta, Ali Sadikin, who in November 1968 established the TIM (Taman Ismail Marzuki, the Ismail Marzuki Arts Centre) on a six-hectare site in the heart of Jakarta to provide a venue for Indonesian artists and intellectuals across the country to collaborate, exchange ideas, develop

⁹ See Barbara Hatley, “Texts and Contexts: The Roro Mendut Folk Legend on Stage and Screen” in *Histories and Stories: Cinema in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Krishna Sen (Clayton: Monash University, 1988), p. 17.

¹⁰ Cobina Gillit Asmara, “Tradisi Baru: A ‘New Tradition’ of Indonesian Theatre” *Asian Theatre Journal* 12. 1 (Spring 1995): 165.

¹¹ See Ellen Rafferty, ed., *Putu Wijaya in Performance: A Script and Study of Indonesian Theatre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989).

talents and perform various cultural experiments.¹² The instant success of new emerging artists like Rendra became an impetus for the growth of Indonesian theatrical world.¹³

The late 1960s through 1970s was also a period when the same generation who helped Suharto topple Sukarno became disappointed by the shameful and corrupt practice of the New Order officials, the government's handling of foreign investments and the army's prevailing role in state affairs. The honeymoon was over between the military and the student demonstrators, as large protests took place in big cities like Bandung and Jakarta by 1973 shortly after Suharto was reinstalled for a second term. Social protest was often met with state repression. For instance, Rendra's satirical plays earned him a jail term in 1973. The culmination of the student protests was the riot of 15 January 1974 ignited by the visit of the Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka to Jakarta. Known subsequently as the Malari Affair, it involved the looting and burning of Chinese-owned shops that took the lives of eight students while hundreds were detained.¹⁴

The subject of bad governance became a popular theme in what was known as "protest music."¹⁵ Rock was the style of music often made use of by these "angry young men" as an outlet for their resistance while they kept up with the world music trend of the era.

¹² See C. G. Asmara, "Tradisi Baru: A 'New Tradition' of Indonesian Theatre", pp. 164-74; Goenawan Mohamad, "Dari Ramayana Sampai Rendra: Sebuah Eksperimen Bernama 'TIM' ", *TEMPO*, 10 November 1990, pp. 73-80.

¹³ In 1974, for example, Sardono W. Kusumo staged *Dongeng dari Girah* [Tale from the Girah country], a play based on the traditional Balinese legend of rangda as Calon Arang, the widow-witch of Girah. The setting is in East Java during the reign of King Airlangga (two centuries ahead of Ken Arok's). Like Ken Arok story, Calon Arang has been variously interpreted and no two Calon Arang stories are exactly the same. Other than Pramoedya Ananta Toer's version of Calon Arang is the recently performed *Membaca Calon Arang* [Reading Calon Arang] by the Solo-based theatre Gidhag-Gidhig in October 2002 whereby its patriarchal fetishism was deconstructed.

¹⁴ Harold Crouch, "The '15 January Affair' in Indonesia" *Dyason House Papers, Australia, Asia and the World I: I* (August 1974): 1-6.

¹⁵ Much earlier in the mid 1960s in the worlds of poetry, as observed by Aveling, what Jassin called "sajak demonstrasi" became the trend that helped boost public protests. The titles of the then published poems are self-evident, for example, Tirani [Tyranny], Mereka Telah Bangkit [They Have Risen Up], Perlawanan [Resistance], Pembebasan [Liberation], Kebangkitan [Uprising], and many others. See Harry Aveling, *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry, 1966-1998* (Athens: Centre for International Studies Ohio University, 2001), esp. pp. 3-31.

In the wake of the Vietnam War, distrust of the establishment was intensified among young people in Western countries. Youth subculture put this protest into the birth of rock music – a cultural innovation which enthralled Indonesian youth as with youth elsewhere. What Lull calls “cultural territorialization”¹⁶ occurred in Indonesian music through the merging of an essentially Western genre of music like rock and select elements of traditional music. Harry Roesli himself included indigenous musical instruments like the Sundanese *calung* in his music, a style characteristic of the so-called Progressive Rock fashionable in the 1970s.

His rock opera *Ken Arok*¹⁷ tells of the rise to kingship of a young ruffian named Ken Arok from Tumapel, thanks to his mentor Loh Gawe who has taught him to walk along the meaningful road of life before reaching the ultimate terminal called death. Rebellious against oppressive authority is among the paths taken by Ken Arok and his fellow thugs to make life ‘meaningful’ by helping out poor ordinary people at the expense of the rich. Later, Ken Arok is blessed in his journey by an encounter with Ken Dedes the wife of the local authority Tunggal Ametung. Later, blinded by the woman’s beauty, Ken Arok resorts to devious methods in order to achieve a life which he thinks meaningful: Having killed Mpu Gandring who made him a kris, he proceeds to kill Tunggal Ametung and then lends the kris to Kebo Ijo, Tumapel security official, who is next accused of and punished for the murder. The story closes with a ‘pact with the devil’, that is, Ken Arok negotiating with the ghost of Mpu Gandring about the weight of punishment to befall the Singasari king, hence the humorous twist of the author: Ken Arok begging for mercy from Mpu Gandring.

¹⁶ James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995; rpr. 2000), pp. 264-76.

¹⁷ I am indebted to Professor John Miksic for having brought this work to my attention at the beginning of my research as well as providing access to the material in the form of audio cassette recording of the rock opera.

Several types of socio-political commentary are carefully inserted in this rock opera. First, *Ken Arok* speaks of the corruptibility of Suharto's government. Roesli recalled with pleasure the 1974 student protest when he, standing on a van loaded with dissenters rolling through the city of Bandung, sang out loudly "Bapak Presiden, impoten!" [Mr. President, you are impotent!].¹⁸ Similarly, Roesli's Ken Arok is impotent too, symbolically portrayed by a toy kris made of rubber:

Beware the feel of my kris!

This kris [is in fact] a rubber knife

I bought from Sarinah [a supermarket in Jakarta].¹⁹

Having yet to recover from the post coup trauma, the bureaucrats and infrastructure of Suharto's Indonesia too suffered impotency. A crippled, corrupt and incompetent system made the mighty power of money either a friend or a foe. Criticism of the government's practice of bribery and money politics is clear in the rock opera. The song Ken Arok sings when meeting Mpu Gandring's ghost is replete with words of mockery addressing the practice of bribery in the courts and the justice system. Ken Arok's seven-year sentence referring to the sevenfold curse of the kris, for example, is negotiable upon the steadily increased amount of money paid to the 'Mpu Gandring Magistrates'. Justice is whatever the money can buy.

Second, the social gap is another issue raised in *Ken Arok*. The poor sell their lives for money, while the rich use money with ease and vanity to buy life. Inequity is herein parodied,

¹⁸ Harry Roesli, Personal Communication, Bandung, 11 May 2003.

¹⁹ *Awas rasakan kerisku/ Keris ini pisau karet/ Kubeli di Sarinah.* (Harry Roesli, *Ken Arok*, 1975) [My Translation here and thereafter]

putting in doubt the government's economic plan of alleviating poverty. Near the end of the story, another deal is done involving the palace guard Kebo Ijo and the new king Ken Arok. Here again is a reference to pay-offs in the judicial system whereby the innocent and the guilty can take each other's place. If at the back of Roesli's mind Ken Arok was Suharto, Kebo Ijo must have been Sukarno's palace guard Lieutenant Untung in the September 30 Affair. In his attempt to protect the President and abort the military-led coup, the "Council of Generals", Untung, like Kebo Ijo, was instead accused of masterminding the abduction and killing of the six generals on that eventful night of 30 September 1965, and this loyal commander of Sukarno was tried and executed two years later. But Roesli was astute enough to slip humour into his presentation of Kebo Ijo to avoid such a blatant parallel, as it would have been too dangerous given the New Order's loathing of the unofficial 1965 coup story. Hence Roesli altered the plot and characterisation by having Ken Arok and Kebo Ijo negotiate a deal upon the imposition of a punishment. Played by Didi Petet, a wellknown comedian, Kebo Ijo in this rock opera is of a different mould from the standard portrayal of him as being an unfortunate and stupid security official who was killed by the evil hand of Ken Arok. Instead, what we have here is a palace guard of an unlikely appearance for a profession in defence but armed with management skills of negotiation. "May I be excused, I shall go and die now, okay?" says the effeminate Kebo Ijo before dramatically uttering, in a drag queen style, the Dutch loan word for bidding farewell, "Dag!"²⁰ Considering the apparent amiable scene of Ken Arok and Kebo Ijo in the ending of the story, what emerged is a transaction between the powerful and the powerless, rather than treachery of the former towards the latter. But, the transaction that takes place here is a raw deal for the less fortunate

²⁰ Permissi dulu ya?/ Saya mau mati sekarang/ Dag! (Roesli, *Ken Arok*, 1975).

since the death punishment endured by Kebo Ijo outweighs the compensation paid to him. With this we now turn to the third issue addressed: Money.

Roesli's opera portrays the different levels of appreciation of money involving the poor and the rich through irony. Prior to his demise, Kebo Ijo says:

One thousand Rupiah:

Now this is enough,

To have a good time,

When [I am] in Heaven.

Cool...²¹

Certainly, even in the 1970s that amount of money was hardly considered handsome, let alone being paid in exchange for a life. To compare, earlier in the story, a singing narrator warns listeners that they might be cheated in paying as much as eight hundred Rupiah for 'the Ken Arok story according to Roesli' – the same money that could have bought them fruit salad. "But hey, it's too late", the narrator chuckles, "You cannot buy *rujak* now."²² In view of the comparison, the Ken Arok-Kebo Ijo business deal is thus not of the generous, charitable kind. Exploration of the subject of money here entails two possible meanings. First, it insinuates an actual crime committed by the government officials. The multi million-dollar-embezzlement by the retired General Ibnu Sutowo, Head of the state-run oil company Pertamina, for example, was still fresh in people's minds – a case of a high-rank offender

²¹ Seribu rupiah/ Ini baru lumayan/ Buat foya-foya/ Kalau di Nirwana/Cihuy! (Roesli, *Ken Arok*, 1975).

²² Tapi ha...ha, sudah terlanjur/ Seharusnya bisa untuk beli rujak. (Roesli, *Ken Arok*, 1975).

acquitted for having impoverished the country, thanks to Suharto's cronyism.²³ Another possible interpretation is the direct and clear representation of such a hot issue like money in popular culture in the 1970s as observed by William Frederick in his study of lyrics in Rhoma Irama's Dangdut song "Rupiah".²⁴ Deemed by the authorities as showing contempt for the national currency, the song was banned on television. This was followed by a crackdown on the sale of the cassettes to which the artist's explanation was but his concern about the misuse of money.²⁵ In today's culture where material gains have become a central goal and money continues to test people's ethical fibre, cultural workers seem to have no shortage of topics for satires on corruption and materialism. In Roesli's case, the money theme in *Ken Arok* is beyond anxiety and greed over money because he too made fun of what he believed as being the worthlessness of money.²⁶ The martyred Kebo Ijo in the play says, ironically, that he will squander his one thousand Rupiah in eternal life, a few hundred more than he would have spent on earth for one single meal, for instance.

Finally, if we believe that the word is mightier than the sword, then the performance of *Ken Arok* confirms this. When we observe the acerbic lyrics of about 14 different songs, it would seem that it was Roesli's intention to speak about existing Indonesian societal-political ills. Roesli himself confirmed that the 1965 coup resembled the 13th century takeover in East Java by Ken Arok, and that it took more of an astute political player rather than simply a

²³ Suharto gave Ibnu Sutowo an "honourable discharging" later that year in 3 March 1976 and left him to savour a comfortable retirement. See R. E. Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 214-7.

²⁴ William H. Frederick, "Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture", *Indonesia* 34 (October 1982): 117-8.

²⁵ Frederick suggests the influence on Irama of Pink Floyd's song released in 1972-1973 "Money", although the treatment of the subject in both songs differs from one another. I would consider instead that the Swedish pop quartet ABBA's hit of the same period "Money, Money, Money", is closer in terms of theme to the dangdut song.

²⁶ To the question put to him on his seemingly non-enterprising career as a musician over all the years, Roesli had this to say: I do not come from an affluent family, but very far from poor. To me, money is my fourth priority. Not that I have the first three. (Personal Communication, Bandung, 11 May 2003).

violent person with no strategy to carry it out.²⁷ As it is, the Ken Arok story is not a straightforward narrative as it is open to manifold views about leadership. In this rock opera, Ken Arok and his roadmap to power can be seen through many different lights, and Roesli made use of one to lampoon the contemporary leader of the day.

Popular Fiction and Pancasila: Ken Arok on Paper

The so-called “Golden Age of Comics” when R. A. Kosasih’s *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* was published in 1977 was referred to by critics as the peak era of the comic industry when Western and local comics flooded and competed with each other in the Indonesian market.²⁸ This marked an era when almost everyone read comics and comic rental kiosks mushroomed, especially in Chinese-Indonesian populated neighbourhoods.²⁹ Nevertheless, under Suharto’s draconian rule, comic books were among restricted textual and print forms of popular culture.³⁰ Scholarly attention on Indonesian comics seems to focus mostly on the necessity for authors to adopt political correctness in this popular fiction if they were to survive. Suharto, like Sukarno, was reportedly known for his disapproval of comics as part of the corrupting Western influence³¹ and the production of comics was specially geared toward

²⁷ Harry Roesli, Personal Communication, Bandung, 11 May 2003.

²⁸ Marcel Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, trans. Rahayu S. Hidayat (Jakarta: KPG Forum Jakarta-Paris, 1998), pp. 203-4.

²⁹ Leo Suryadinata quoted in Gary Nathan Gartenberg, *Silat Tales: Narrative Representation of Martial Culture in the Malay/ Indonesian Archipelago*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 2000, p. 132.

³⁰ Graphic representations such as paintings and mixed media, likewise hardly escaped censorship. The 1974 art biennale held at the Ismail Marzuki Art Centre, Jakarta, for example, was under military surveillance with one painting entitled “Presiden Tahun 2000” by a young painter Hardi removed from the exhibition.

³¹ L. Berman, “Comics as Social Commentary in Java, Indonesia” in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humour Magazines, and Picture Books*, ed. John A. Lent, (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), p. 20.

the reinforcement of the state's ideology.³² Challenging Bonneff who suggests that comic books may function as weapons of the weak, Gartenberg says that fantasy about warriors in silat stories has a parallel with modern Indonesia's military violence and the escalation of martial sports like silat after the 1965 coup, reflecting the inherent adulation for prowess and brutality.³³ It is important not to uncritically accept Bonneff's contention that comics are "literature of the oppressed".³⁴ It is also hard to agree with Gartenberg's claim concerning silat tales express a fascination with evil. This claim makes his study another contribution to the scholarship of violence in Indonesian literature,³⁵ but it does not reveal everything that can be uncovered about this popular fiction.

Considering that various subjects other than violence are often entangled in martial arts stories, and that the regime has been implicated in these comics, I would argue here that we could also read comics as a channel that negotiates, neutralizes and nurtures people's social fears and fantasies. As Backscheider observed, popular culture "is a powerful fusion of daydream and nightmare held together and rendered satisfying because for a brief time it articulates a fantasy-story that is a collective wish".³⁶ In Indonesia's case, comic books based on the theme of the silat-wayang-legend, have enjoyed huge success due to the appeal of their characters (hero and villain), plot (reward and punishment after series of trials and tribulations), morality (vice against virtue) and setting (magic/mythical kingdom or other

³² M. Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, pp. 15-45.

³³ G. N. Gartenberg, *Silat Tales: Narrative Representation of Martial Culture in the Malay/ Indonesian Archipelago*, p. 18.

³⁴ Boneff quoted in Gartenberg, *ibid*, p.126.

³⁵ For example Anna-Greta Nilsson Hoadley, *Indonesian Literature vs. New Order Orthodoxy: The Aftermath of 1965 –1966* (Sweden: Department of East Asian Languages Lund University, 2002). On state-violence, see James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: counter-revolution today* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Vicente L. Rafael, ed., *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colonial Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University, SAPP, 1999); Benedict Anderson, ed., *Violence and the State in Suharto's Indonesia* (New York: Cornell University, SAPP, 2001); Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Linblad, *Roots of Violence in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITVL Press, 2002).

³⁶ Paula R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 235.

esoteric places). Indeed comics have long been a popular pastime as well as a source of cultural enrichment for Indonesians and the wayangesque influence is significant in Indonesian comics.³⁷ Our comic artist Kosasih acknowledges that his enchantment with watching *wayang golek* (popular in West Java as is *wayang kulit* in Central Java) made an important contribution to his work.³⁸ Thus, it can be argued that the Indonesian fascination with *pendekar* [fighter] stories is inseparable from their delight in legends, myths and *dongeng* (i.e. fantasies) as explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis,³⁹ because such stories withstand the often reverse reality (i.e. fears). In addition, while print capitalism has enhanced the rise of comic industry, repressive censorship has largely forced artists to produce comics to meet the market demand of silat stories during this peak of the comic industry in Indonesia.

I will however show that the rendition of the Ken Arok narrative in Kosasih's comics falls outside the paradigm of silat tales that fantasize over bravery and ferocity of fighting warriors. The emergence of the Ken Arok comics must instead be understood as the attempt of an educationally inclined artist working within Indonesia's authoritarian environment to reclaim the morality of ancient leadership. The comics in question have all the necessary ingredients to satisfy the delight of the audience of comics, i.e. a tale of fighting/vengeance and romance with historical-mythical elements revolving around the transformation of a village

³⁷ As a form of graphic arts, many attribute stories from Hindu epics as the genesis of comics in Indonesia in terms of themes, although they have different views about sources of inspiration. For example, Marcel Bonneff maintains that the very first 'comics' of Indonesia are the bas-reliefs seen in the Hindu Buddhist temples scattered across the country, whereas John Lent, following Mair, says that the West Javanese *wayang beber* [wayang in unrolled scroll] is the origin of Indonesian comic. See M. Boneff, *Komik Indonesia*, p. 16 and John A. Lent, ed., *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humour Magazines, and Picture Books*, (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), p. 1-2.

³⁸ R. A. Kosasih, Personal Communication, Jakarta, 18 September 2002. See also "Raden Achmad Kosasih: Raja Komik yang Nrimo", *Republika*, December 9, 2001, p. 8.

³⁹ Gartenberg calls this genre "silat tales". See his *Silat Tales*, esp. Chapter 1.

scoundrel to a leader and founder of a kingdom. What follows is a brief look at the career of this celebrated comic artist in order to better understand his work.

Raden Achmad Kosasih was born on 3 April 1919 in Bandung, Bogor, West Java to a Sundanese father, Raden Wirakusuma, and Javanese mother, Sumarni. Beginning his career as an illustrator for the Bogor Botanic Garden in the late 1950s before taking up comics writing as a profession, Kosasih published prolifically from the 1960s to the 1970s and continued rewriting his old comic books –especially the best-selling Ramayana and Mahabharata series- for renewed publication until 1990 when he stopped for health reasons. Kosasih is the oldest author of comics and has experienced publishing under diverse media ethical codes and regulations set by the different regimes. Kosasih is renowned more for his Ramayana and Mahabharata comics, in addition to his famous fictional characters Sri Asih and Siti Gahara which appeared in the 1950s. It was because of their popularity that an astute publisher then asked him to rework the Ken Arok story.⁴⁰ His ‘Ken Arok’ comic books can be seen as a combination of the popularity and familiarity of popular fiction based on legend/history in the Indonesian imagination plus Kosasih’s own standing as the “Raja Komik” or King of Comics.

Bearing in mind that the history of Indonesian popular culture, like that of literature, is complementary to the country’s political history, to understand Kosasih’s writing is to understand different trends in the history of Indonesian comics. Bonneff makes a neat category of Indonesian comics in different periods based on their thematic patterns: ‘Pre-historic’ Comics; Western and Chinese Influence (1931-1954); Return to National Character (1954-1960); [City of] Medan Period (1960-1963); Sukarno’s Nationalism Comics (1963-1965); Teen Romance Times (1964-1966); Order in the Name of Pancasila (1966-1967) and

⁴⁰ R. A. Kosasih, Personal Communication, Jakarta, 10 September 2002.

Towards National Stability (1968-1971).⁴¹ Using this categorization as a guideline, it is clear that Kosasih's oeuvre saw almost every historical juncture in the Indonesian world of comics. The point is that Kosasih maintained his long working life because of his commitment to writing educative fiction while conforming to the authority's rules regarding content which I shall elaborate below.

Kosasih is devoted to the didactic purpose in his comic books. Interlacing his writing with moral teaching is characteristic of the artist. Throughout his career, Kosasih has been committed to educating young minds. Tolerance is among the values that he imparts through his work. To this end, he never attempted to fit in his personal views as a Muslim writing about Hindu-Buddhist culture. Kosasih's works reflect consistency and objectivity in viewing religions other than his own. To give evidence of his non-judgmental attitude, one Buddhist school in Bandung made use of Kosasih's Ramayana and Mahabharata serial comics as reading materials owing to the author's detachment in evoking these religious-tinged epics.⁴²

Kosasih has also earned a reputation for not disturbing national stability with his comics. In fact, the reverse is true. Kosasih spearheaded the production of national comics and continually produced during the glory days of comics responding as he did to the surge of imported comics that displeased the authorities on account of their contents. Kosasih's comic books are seen as compatible with Pancasila, in which respect and tolerance toward others' religions, for example, are among the values inscribed. Indeed, compatibility with Pancasila, as observed by Bonneff, appeared to be always the obligation of Indonesian comic artists. For example, during the period of 1963-1965, no less a figure than President Sukarno

⁴¹ M. Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, pp. 16-45.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

himself encouraged the publication of nationalist comics incorporating the national ideology with such special messages as: 1) character building, 2) patriotism and 3) anti-neocolonialism.⁴³ Kosasih's wayang and superwoman characters can be seen as adopting the first and second messages. Implied in his wayang comics, for instance, is the entanglement of good and bad characters, all for justice, truth and love of the country. Kosasih's attempt to Indonesianise or localise the image of the heroines in *Sri Asih* and *Siti Gahara* does the Indonesian comics world proud.⁴⁴ Although Kosasih has never explored blatant anti-neocolonialism in his works,⁴⁵ his preference for themes from Eastern culture as in wayang and local legends speaks for his inclination to Sukarno's Nationalism Comics.

Again, during Suharto era, Pancasila remained the stricture when assessing comics for which reason the comic industry had to play the game in order to survive. Comic artists, accordingly, had to conform to the nationalist ideology in order to get their work published.⁴⁶ Kosasih was no exception, but he was fortunate to have one publishing house in Bandung,⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., *Komik Indonesia*, p. 34-40.

⁴⁴ *Sri Asih* is the first work of Kosasih. Published in 1952, the protagonist is an indigenous superwoman modelled on the American Superman and Batman. The protagonist of the title sister-comic book *Siti Gahara* (1954) is another wonder woman wearing Middle Eastern outfits who flies from one imaginary country to the next to avenge enemies of all suffering citizens. Both comics earned competitive sales along with the Western and Chinese counterparts. See also Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, esp. pp. 203-4.

⁴⁵ To compare, one comic book published in the period in question, *Roket Pasiluum*, for example, tells of the adventure of Indonesian male and female astronauts on a rocket named Pasiluum (abbreviation for Pancasila untuk Umat Manusia) travelling across continents -praising Cuba and lamenting Malaysia- to call for liberation from the NEKOLIM (Sukarno's derogatory term for the neo-colonialists) of the Third World Countries. This comic is loaded with diverse messages attuned to Pancasila. Spawned in it is the happy ending love story between a female Catholic astronaut who had been previously unaware of the Papal decisions in the Second Vatican Council about religious tolerance and interfaith marriage until reminded by her Muslim astronaut boyfriend. See Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ The career of Ganes Th., a comic artist of Chinese descent who authored the celebrated *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu*, for example, was interrupted for some time in post-Sukarno times owing to his past occupation as an illustrator for the PKI's newspaper *Berita Harian*.

⁴⁷ When compared to Jakarta, Bandung was a haven for publishing comics owing to the relatively easier process in obtaining publication permits provided that endorsement from the Jakarta authorities, which was entrusted to one certain cultural commission in the Police force during the Suharto's government, had been granted. Given that no re-examination ever took place and that central authorisation was but a formality, many chose to publish in Bandung with which exodus the capital city's tax revenue was significantly reduced, hence the ensuing crackdown and renewed regulation. See Bonneff, *Komik Indonesia*, pp. 74-81.

Melodi, that recruited him for the first time in the 1950s, and continued to print and reprint his wayang and legend-based comics apart from a short break in 1967-1968 during which Kosasih wrote silat comics for the Jakarta firm Lokajaya. It is easy to understand Kosasih's continued existence due to his non-controversial position and the freedom of his comics from the themes of pornography, sadism and antitheism – values seen to be against the Pancasila ideology. Added to the 'safe' topic of his works was Kosasih's rare expertise in transforming mythology into comics with unbiased interpretations. As such, Melodi maintained business with Kosasih as did many publishers thereafter. After Melodi ceased to exist in the 1980s, Kosasih signed a contract with another Bandung publisher Erlina from which the artist receives royalties up this day.⁴⁸ Given that copyright was hardly an issue in Indonesia during Kosasih's writing career, many unauthorised publishers had Kosasih's works reprinted without his consent. Fortunately, Elex Media Komputindo of the leading publishing house Gramedia has recently republished Kosasih's wayang comics - its competitive market with the best-selling Japanese comics may help brighten the golden days of the now 85 year old artist who lives a simple life with his family in the outskirts of Jakarta.

As far as we can deduce from this biographical information, Kosasih seems to keep politics at bay, as he is but a simple man, trying to make a living to live a decent peaceful life. It calls into question why Ken Arok is also co-opted by apolitical writers like Kosasih? What can we make out from Kosasih's positive, unbiased portrayal of Ken Arok in his comic books? Does he insinuate that the modern leader of the day is likewise a man of balanced vice and virtue? Taking into consideration Kosasih's personal-professional narrative and the context of the time within which he produced his works, the rest of this section discusses his *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* with these questions in mind.

⁴⁸ "R. A. Kosasih", *KOMPAS*, March 25, 2000, p. 12.

The two-part comic series present readers with a pictorial version of the translated *Pararaton* which is the source of the serials.⁴⁹ Kosasih's comics portrayed the Ken Arok and Ken Dedes story in a way that is faithful to the *Pararaton* but leaving out most of its mythological dimensions. The first book tells of a local urchin Ken Arok from the village of Pangkur, Tumapel, a constituency of the 13th century Kediri kingdom, whose waywardness earns him expulsion from his birthplace and, thereafter, a peripatetic life of robbery and thievery to support his existence, until his meeting with a Brahmin Lohgawe. This guru's influence helps Ken Arok change his life by turning his fighting skills to the good cause of helping the poor, victimised and marginalised. Meanwhile, Tumapel is a chaotic, unsafe region rife with religious contestation between the Hindus and the Buddhists worsened by the recent kidnap of Ken Dedes, daughter of a Buddhist teacher, by the love-struck local head Tunggul Ametung. The now learned Ken Arok, carrying a mission to bring harmony to Tumapel, sets out for Tunggul Ametung's abode where he comes across the then pregnant Ken Dedes. Acting on desire, Ken Arok orders a kris from Mpu Gandring to kill Tunggul Ametung. Upon Tunggul Ametung's demise Ken Arok gains power at the expense of innocent actors like Mpu Gandring and the scapegoat officer Kebo Ijo. Ken Dedes, with the help of Ken Arok, takes over the leadership of Tumapel bringing it peace and prosperity.

The second part of the comic books opens with Ken Dedes returning to her parents' home for the imminent delivery of her baby. Ken Arok is appointed as deputy in her absence. Following the birth of her son Anusapati, Ken Dedes and Ken Arok marry after which Ken Arok is placed in control of Tumapel and makes subsequent attacks on Kediri in order to establish his Singasari kingdom. Internal tension within the new kingdom occurred when Ken Arok next weds another woman Ken Umang fathering four children in addition to the

⁴⁹ R. A. Kosasih, Personal Communication, Ciputat, Jakarta, 18 September 2002.

four children from his marriage with Ken Dedes. Rivalry among the descendants of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes appears after the murder of Ken Arok by his stepson Anusapati. The rest of the book tells us about the recurring chaos in the region after the passing of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes's withdrawal from the palace into a hermit life. The new king Anusapati is assassinated by order of Ken Umang's son Tohjaya, who is then killed in a battle involving the supporters of each political power. It is not until the respective sons of Anusapati and his stepbrother Mahisa Wongateleng reconcile and co-reign that the kingdom of Singasari is restored to order.

Here, rather than reworking the romantic and exotic aspects of the *Pararaton*,⁵⁰ Kosasih's work runs parallel to the old chronicle almost in every turn of the plot, exploring facets often ignored such as the virtuous side of Ken Arok, objective accounts of alternate assassinations between the royal family members and Ken Dedes' roles in dynastic continuation – all with mythical aspects removed. What emerges in this 'Pararaton renewed' are sympathetic images of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes and a "teaching manual for the later generation",⁵¹ to borrow from Wolters' description of the function of court writing in times of turbulence. There are at least three lessons to learn from *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* in connection with leadership issues, i.e. ethics, gender equity and tolerance.

I shall begin with the characterisation of Ken Arok. Meant to reach as wide a readership as possible, children in particular, Kosasih omits the mystical part of Ken Arok's birth by giving an aside at the opening of the story: Ken Arok is the son of a happily married couple but their joy evaporates because of his naughtiness. The author takes a while

⁵⁰ In his study of the kris, Mrazek makes mention of one comic book exploring the sensual almost pornographic representation of the story of Ken Arok and his Mpu Gandring kris. See J. Mrazek, "(Hi) stories", Unpublished Paper (National University of Singapore, 2002), p. 9.

⁵¹ Oliver Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1982), p. 63.

recounting Ken Arok's mischief (certainly with the omission of the rape scene)⁵² before presenting the protagonist's adventures as a grown-up to the reader. It is clear from the start that Kosasih avoids any mythical explanation of Ken Arok's genealogy by describing his ordinary qualities. Ken Arok is somehow extraordinary, when one considers his ill discipline as follows: "Alas, the boy is hard in character and mischievous. He is fond of fighting; even when attacked on all sides by many, never does he step back."⁵³ Added to this is the boy's inclination to lord it over his playmates: "[Ken Arok] is much feared by his friends who always do what he orders them to do. It is obvious already that he wants to reign and rule."⁵⁴ (KAKDA, 2) Implicit in the description is the statement that despite his humble background Ken Arok is as capable as the privileged few. An egalitarian message is evident in the complete title of the books *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes: Kisah Cinta Abadi Seorang Rakyat Jelata dari Perawat Kuda Sampai Menjadi Raja* [Ken Arok and Ken Dedes: A Story of the Eternal Love of a Commoner from a Stable Boy to a King].⁵⁵ Again, the panels at the opening of the story describe the lineage of Ken Arok as the son of Gajah Para and Ken Endok, thus a commoner working his way up to become a great king. Here Ken Arok is not begotten from the gods either. Written during the booming business of comics when consumers were absorbed with the world of fantasies in Superman and Batman comics,

⁵² To compare, the *Pararaton* mentions a part of Ken Arok's wandering experience that may make modern reader feel rather scandalised: while wandering he saw a girl and raped her; the venue at which Ken Arok had intercourse with the girl became fertile soil hereafter to grow food plants. See I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi, *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1996), p. 32.

⁵³ Namun sayang anak itu wataknya keras dan brandalan. Anak itu jago berkelahi walaupun dikeroyok oleh beberapa orang, ia tidak pernah mundur. [My translation here and thereafter] R. A. Kosasih, *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes*, A, Second Edition (Bandung: Yayasan Karya Bhakti, 1985), p. 2; All subsequent references to this work, abbreviated KAKDA, will be used in this thesis with pagination only.

⁵⁴ Ia sangat ditakuti oleh sebayanya dan selalu diturut segala perintahnya. Sudah tampak wataknya yang selalu ingin berkuasa dan memerintah.

⁵⁵ Kosasih is apparently mistaken here as he conflates the story of Damarwulan of Majapahit Kingdom to the Ken Arok story given the resemblance of both narratives.

Kosasih's 'Ken Arok' comics unexpectedly made no experiment with, for instance, the hero's supernatural power.

Next, Kosasih continues to demythologize Ken Arok and his kris. Like Roesli, Kosasih scarcely presents the image of an evil king with his menacing kris. But unlike Roesli's Ken Arok whose rubber kris symbolizes the incompetence of his leadership, Kosasih reveals Ken Arok's use of the kris as a means to gain power. Neither does the older author romanticise the kris as, for instance, a symbol of manhood, although an unsheathed kris bathed in blood appears on the jacket design of the comic books. If anything, a certain degree of exoticism of the kris is shown in the caption of Ken Dedes giving the kris "still stained with the dried blood of his [Anusapati's] father" to her son.⁵⁶ However, this detail makes the kris more functional as a weapon rather than as a curse-giving object. It appears that Kosasih would like us to see the serial killings in the family as cause-and-effect affairs instead of karma or the curse of the kris. Like in the *Pararaton*, the origin, procurement and use of the kris by different inheritors and the consequences of these actions are repeated faithfully in the comics. The rework slightly deviates from the original in terms of the motive behind the forging of the kris: Ken Arok needs a weapon to end Tunggal Ametung's cruelty that brings suffering to the woman he loves. Here Kosasih does not abide by the prevailing myth of the kris. In fact, when the kris appears again several times thereafter, the happenings take place as naturally as they are necessary to the progression of the story.

As such, the plot debunks the idea of Ken Arok's rebellion. It translates instead as a required path taken towards change of leadership. Here Ken Arok is patterned on the universal comic superhero whose mission is to save the planet earth from defilement, but not

⁵⁶ R. A. Kosasih, *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes*, B, Second Edition (Bandung: Yayasan Karya Bhakti, 1985), p. 34; All subsequent references to this work, abbreviated *KAKDB*, will be used in this thesis with pagination only.

quite like the superhero proper, banditry is his dark past. He is the admired hero fighting against criminals who plagued the Tumapel district as a result of the incompetent leadership of Tunggul Ametung. Kosasih is at pains to tell us that violence is uncharacteristic of Ken Arok. “A bandit though [Ken Arok] is”, one caption reads, “Never before has he hurt women, let alone exercised force over them [raped them?].”⁵⁷ (*KAKDA*, 48) Knowledge given to Ken Arok about Tunggul Ametung’s abduction of Ken Dedes, for example, arouses the anger of our hero – a reason to save Ken Dedes from further cruelty of her husband. The author goes on detailing Ken Arok’s kind treatment of the captured enemies, his care and concern about people’s welfare and other gestures that would make violence an anti-thesis.

Besides Ken Arok’s virtue, his good looks win the hearts of men and women –“none of them would ever think that the young handsome commander is an ex-robber.”⁵⁸ (*KAKDA*, 51) As a result, the casting of the violence-free Ken Arok makes other characters appear more violent instead. While Tunggul Ametung, for example, is appalling, no less rapacious is the younger generation. His only heir Anusapati is vengeful, deceitful and too spiritless to challenge Ken Arok face to face. Anusapati shares his cowardice and treachery with Ken Arok’s son Tohjaya. Given that the brutal actions of the younger men originate from no other reason than revenge, Ken Arok’s offence in the narrative, i.e. the murder of Mpu Gandring and Tunggul Ametung looks less deplorable. Kosasih also seems quiet about Ken Arok’s killing of Kebo Ijo as the text presents this brutality as an inevitable act of self-defence. In any case, Kebo Ijo is previously made known to the reader as being likewise a wicked person, hence the less lamentation of his death.

⁵⁷ Walaupun ia seorang bandit, namun belum pernah menyakiti perempuan, apalagi sampai memaksa.

⁵⁸ Siapa yang akan mengira punggawa muda yang cakap itu dulunya bekas perampok.

Despite his sympathetic portrayal of the protagonist, Kosasih does not give us a faultless Ken Arok. We know about Ken Arok's flaws through the dying Mpu Gandring saying this: "I didn't expect you to be so evil, Ken Arok. Wicked. Cruel. But remember. I'm not the only victim of the kris. You too one day will be killed with the kris in your hand, Ken Arok."⁵⁹ (KAKDA, 90) The next caption tells us, "Not the slightest remorse is shown on the face of Ken Arok."⁶⁰ (KAKDA, 91) The story continues with Ken Arok making a pledge that one day he will look after Mpu Gandring's family to recompense for the evil done to the old man. We see in the second part of the comic books Mpu Gandring's son occupying one important position in Ken Arok's kingdom – another faithful repetition of the plot in the *Pararaton* often absent in other texts.

At this stage, we can safely say that Kosasih adds compassion to Ken Arok's passion. Ken Arok is represented herein as a double man with more inclination to goodness than the reverse whose past actions can be justified because in the end he makes a good leader for the people of Tumapel. Indeed, Kosasih appropriates an ancient leader for modern use. Here, he interprets the logic behind his wrongdoings from a moral point of view, rather than following the *Pararaton*'s validation of Ken Arok's kingship as the personification of the gods as to annul his crimes in the past. Neither does Kosasih follow the God King theory - Ken Arok is in fact Robert Heine-Geldern's example of a divine incarnate king with which his authority is legitimised and whose usurpation of his predecessors is justified.⁶¹ Here we see that Kosasih made selective use of the *Pararaton* in his remake of the Ken Arok story, and the first lesson

⁵⁹ Tak kusangka tekadmu begitu busuk Ken Arok, jahat, kejam. Tapi ingat, bukan diriku sendiri yang jadi korban keris itu. Kaupun di kemudian hari akan mati pula oleh keris yang kau pegang itu, Ken Arok.

⁶⁰ Tidak terbayang rasa penyesalan sedikitpun dalam wajah Ken Arok.

⁶¹ See Robert Heine-Geldern's *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Department of Far Eastern Studies Cornell University, 1956), especially pp. 6-10.

his comics give us is the need to endure the binary often attached to human beings to enable us to accept the fallibility of a leader with more sympathy.

The second lesson is implied in the portrayal of Ken Dedes - a capable female leader who helps decide the destiny of a dynasty. The technique of characterising Ken Dedes helps support the plot's repetition of the *Pararaton*. It suggests neither a rebellion nor a Ken Arok-Ken Dedes conspiracy but a smooth transition from one leadership to the next. Kosasih presents the Ken Arok-Ken Dedes relationship as the outcome of inevitable attraction to each other rather than of seduction of one by the other. As such, Ken Dedes equally plays an important part in the narrative. She is depicted as a much-revered wife, mother, queen and religious devotee – every single role she plays effectively. Upon the death of Tunggul Ametung, Ken Dedes becomes a transitory ruler with full support from the people. The author describes the event thus: “All eyes are on [Ken Dedes] for her authoritative and dazzling appearance”; “Everyone present is impressed by [Ken Arok and Ken Dedes], as if a god and a goddess are descending from heaven”; “Ken Dedes speaks with a clear and sweet voice that captivates everyone present.”⁶² (*KAKDA*, 119) Upon returning to the palace after labour, Ken Dedes and her deputy Ken Arok reign cooperatively. Later, Ken Dedes appears dignified and sane notwithstanding her jealousy of the co-wife Ken Umang. The panels tell us the following: “Sometimes [Ken Dedes] feels like scolding her husband when she sees him exchanging intimacies with his younger wife”; “But she manages to calm down”; “She gives her husband the cold shoulder for having shared his love with another woman”; “Now

⁶² Semua mata tak berkedip menyaksikan penampilan Ken Dedes yang tampak berwibawa dan bercahaya/ Hadirin terkesan melihat mereka berdua seolah-olah sepasang dewa-dewi yang turun dari khayangan/ Ken Dedes berbicara dengan suara lantang dan merdu membuat terpesona semua hadirin.

she showers her love on her three sons, especially Anusapati.”⁶³ (*KAKDB*, 172) Next, Ken Dedes resolves to tell the otherwise kept secret about Ken Arok’s crime under pressure from Anusapati. A message implied in the depiction of Ken Dedes here is that we need not to give into vengeance in the face of defeat. Later, we learn that having entrusted the leadership to her offspring, Ken Dedes assumes the life of a female Brahmin. The final caption of the comic serials presents the Pradjanparamita statue dedicated to the heroine: “symbolizing a woman who has achieved perfection in Mahayana Buddhism. The statue is Ken Dedes the ancestress of the famous Majapahit kings.”⁶⁴ (*KAKDB*, 240) Given the many roles taken up by Ken Dedes here, Kosasih proposes the capacity of female leadership.

I would argue that a favourable depiction of female characters is inseparable from the author’s encounter with women in real life as well as the wayang worlds he often used as a source. First of all, Kosasih says that he always admires the mother figure. In fact, admiration for his own mother is the basis of inspiration when peopling his works with women, something that feminist readers would be delighted to see. Kosasih’s mother is the great grand cousin of Raden Saleh, the well-known Javanese painter. If it is true that artistic creativity is something inherited, there is no reason to doubt why Kosasih is proud of his mother. Respect for women helps explain why the female characters in his works are portrayed in a positive light. While his celebrated characters Siti Gahara and Sri Asih bear witness to this, Ken Dedes in Kosasih’s hands becomes an exceptional character. Secondly, Kosasih’s attention to wayang as sources of inspiration has made him aware of the gender

⁶³ Kadang-kadang ia ingin memaki suaminya bila melihat tengah bermesraan dengan istri mudanya/ Namun ia masih mampu mendinginkan hatinya yang mendidih itu/ Dia sudah tidak peduli kepada suaminya yang membagi dua cintanya/ Kini cinta hatinya hanya dicurahkan kepada ketiga putranya. Terutama kepada Anusapati.

⁶⁴[M]elambangkan seorang wanita yang telah mencapai kesempurnaan dalam aliran Budha Mahayana. Arca tersebut adalah arca Ken Dedes cikal bakal raja-raja Majapahit yang termasyhur.

power-relations sometimes implied in wayang. Kosasih has this to say on male heroes: “Since my childhood I have liked Gatotkaca because he is courageous, heroic and able to fly. As for Arjuna, I don’t like him. Since I was a child, I have detested him because he likes womanising. People too [I think] dislike Arjuna [for this habit]”.⁶⁵ The author implies herein respect for women when talking about inter-gender relationships; and such an attitude affects his creative imagination, as shown by the gender equality seen in his work. This is true for his representation of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes; both are portrayed as reliable leaders. In fact, the greater role of Ken Dedes in leadership is suggested through the cover of the books: the drawing of Ken Dedes is bigger, visible and prominent to the point of overshadowing Ken Arok, hence undercutting the subordinate role of Ken Dedes in conventionally patriarchal tellings.

The final message implied in the comic books is the importance of religious tolerance. The comics depict two events that spark tensions among devotees of different beliefs, Hinduism and Buddhism. While the first tension involves the insecurity of the Buddhists living under the sovereignty of a Hindu king, the second involves a Hindu local head abduction of a Buddhist woman to make her a wife. But in describing both events, the author maintains his detachment suggesting that it takes only a few irresponsible individuals not religion itself to trigger the conflicts. One particular episode recorded in the *Pararaton* but often neglected in the telling of the Ken Arok story is the tense situation when the Kediri king Dandanggenis, posing as the reincarnation of Shiva, orders followers of Shiva and Buddha alike to give their sole devotion to him. Kosasih goes on to describe this despotism of the Kediri king and the solution given by the Singasari king over the matter. “One day a

⁶⁵ See “Raden Achmad Kosasih: Raja Komik yang Nrimo”, p. 8. [My Translation]

throng of Brahmin and Buddhist priests come to pay a visit to Tumapel”, one panel reads, followed by another “Their number is increasing day by day. All receive a warm welcome from King Rajasa and receive adequate food.”⁶⁶ (*KAKDB*, 141,142) The author has Ken Arok say this “In my opinion, the religious issues are not to be contested for everyone has her/his own belief.”⁶⁷ (*KAKDB*, 143) And Ken Arok goes on -using modern jargon- “All religions receive protection here provided that they do not transgress the rules of the state.”⁶⁸ (*KAKDB*, 143) Here we see the role of a leader as the guardian of religious harmony.

In the Indonesian context, especially after the 1965 coup, religion and morality are reversible. A person without religion is an immoral person. Despite this tautology, Kosasih attempts to show the importance of portraying his protagonists in a positive light through the religions they embrace and the ways they respect other religions than their own. What the author does is to describe Ken Dedes through the eyes of Ken Arok: “[Ken Arok] realizes that in front of him is a woman who is devoted to her religion.” “He is cautious not to offend the woman he deeply loves”⁶⁹ (*KAKDB*, 122). Instruction in religious tolerance however is most pronounced in the union of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes with which religious harmony in the 13th century kingdom is achieved – one of the many lessons inscribed in the comic books for contemporary society to ponder upon.

⁶⁶ Pada suatu ketika datanglah para pendeta Brahma dan Budha berduyun-duyun ke Tumapel./ Jumlah mereka kian hari kian meningkat. Semua diterima oleh Prabu Rajasa dengan ramah dan diberi makan secukupnya.

⁶⁷ Menurut hematku soal agama itu tidak boleh diganggu gugat, oleh karena masing-masing memiliki keyakinan.

⁶⁸ Semua agama mendapat perlindungan di sini. Asal jangan melanggar undang-undang negara.

⁶⁹ Dia menyadari wanita yang dihadapinya itu seorang yang patuh kepada agamanya. /Tindak-tanduknya hati-hati agar jangan sampai menyinggung perasaan wanita yang dicintainya itu.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the socio-political and economic milieu in which each representation of Ken Arok reveals aspiration and apprehension about existing reality with regard to leadership and morality in politics during the specific period of 1968-1978. The aftermath of the 1965 coup and subsequent power transfer from Sukarno to Suharto made an impact on Indonesia's cultural and political life. Given the controversial and murky nature of the transition, the rising New Order regime put in place severe censorship on any cultural expressions deemed detrimental to its power.

With this political context in mind, I have discussed the two different representations of Ken Arok in Harry Roesli's *Ken Arok* and R. A. Kosasih's *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* that appeared during the insecure time of regime change as well as cultural transition. These works emerged in response to the authors' political consideration and the global wave of popular culture, in this case rock music and popular fiction. The repressive political climate of Suharto's government necessitated our authors either to accommodate or take hard-line approaches. The rock opera by Roesli combines theatrical innovation with social criticism in exploring the rebellious stance of Ken Arok to parody the existing political situation. In his status as one among the educated and privileged members of society, Roesli criticised the political ethics of the leaders of the day through his musical performance, while taking advantage of the popularity of rock music among his targeted audience, i.e. the (militant) youths. The rock opera *Ken Arok* can then be read as a caricature of 1) the corrupt judicial system, 2) the inequity as a result of social stratification and 3) use and misuse of money in modern Indonesia during the first ten years of Suharto's leadership.

Meanwhile, in contrast to Roesli, Kosasih opted for a cooperative approach with the power structure when expressing concerns about the morality of political leaders through the image of Ken Arok. Besides, his comic books arrived on the market scene to supply the demand for entertainment in printed form while seeking to make consumers grasp the moral messages of the Ken Arok story. Kosasih sketched the more sympathetic picture of Ken Arok with a sufficient balance of vice and virtue so that readers of *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* may learn about 1) the double-sidedness of a leader, 2) the equal competency of men and women for leadership and 3) religious tolerance.

Contextualisation with the ambience of the late 1960s-1970s Indonesia and familiarity with authorial background is important to access these works. Each author examined here presents the image of Ken Arok in accordance to his insight and discernment about morality of leadership in the changing time. Social criticism is the objective of Roesli. His opera needs to be read as a critique of the leader of the day who shows no remorse for his past deeds. Conversely, didacticism is the method used by Kosasih when presenting the story of the rise and fall of one political leader named Ken Arok. He appropriates an ancient leader to give us some kind of eulogy of a leader –imperfect but repentant- to imply, most probably, that modern leaders, likewise, should repent and be forgiven rather than condemned for his past failings for the sake of the nation’s future. The image of Ken Arok is employed by a diversity of cultural producers – both political and apolitical – to fit their own circumstances. Thus, it is within the context of historical, socio-cultural, political and economic contingency at the time of writing that Ken Arok’s images and their implications for the understanding of today’s leadership and morality can be better grasped. In the next chapter I shall explore the

portrayals of this thirteenth Singasari king's image in the last decade of the New Order Indonesia when the contemporary king, Suharto, was approaching his downfall.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MANY FACES OF THE KING

This chapter presents the images of Ken Arok that emerged between 1984 and 1992, namely the *Anusapati* ketoprak (scripted in 1984 by S. H. Mintardja and staged in 1985), the sacred dance *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* by Sultan Hamengku Buwana X (performed in 1990, 1991 and 1992) and the renewed *Ken Arok* opera by Harry Roesli (1991). It attempts to see what lessons on leadership and morality can be gleaned from these works which appeared at a specific historical juncture in Indonesia under Suharto's control: Despite a mounting public protest, Suharto was half way in his fourth presidency, safely elected for the fifth time and subsequently preparing for his sixth term. The machinery of the state-controlled election process made Suharto's victory look as if he had gained popular support.

Bearing in mind that concrete social contexts underpin creative expressions,¹ knowledge of Suharto's leadership in this particular period of time is important as it provides the backdrop for the diverse theatrical performances studied. Indeed, the Ken Arok story was performed in what we may call "the years of performing creatively" whereby cultural producers were keen on presenting something new and spectacular to the audience. As such, the medium through which we see the many faces of Ken Arok here deserves attention in itself. For one thing, unlike the ketoprak proper performed in Javanese, *Anusapati* was in Bahasa Indonesia. Next, capitalising on the adoption of modern technology, *Ken Arok* was a musical play/opera² considered a novelty in 1990's Indonesian theatre. Finally, the sacred dance *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* was the first of its kind to feature the story of a low-born

¹ Barbara Hatley, "Construction of 'Tradition' in New Order Indonesian Theatre," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. V. M. Hooker, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 50-68.

² Given the renewal in the style of music, the 1991 performance is known more as "disco opera", rather than "rock opera" as it was called in the 1975 version.

hero like Ken Arok, as sacred dances usually revolve around royal figures, hence the creative contrast here. I hope to show that the various images of Ken Arok portrayed in the performances under study are projections of people's hopes and fears about political leadership and morality in times of great doubt over the abuse of political power in Indonesian society.

By 1990 Suharto was the longest serving Asian leader. Student protests and riots occurred alongside Presidential Elections since the 1970s.³ This state of political unrest increasingly escalated with clear signs of public disaffection with Suharto's leadership. One example of public protest against the president took place in 1976 when an official at the Department of Agriculture, Sawito Kartowibowo, declared himself a "Ratu Adil",⁴ a Javanese-derived conception familiar to Indonesians of a long awaited "just" king who arrives in a time of calamity to restore order. Known henceforth as the Sawito Affair,⁵ the incident involved reputable individuals from politicians to religious leaders who became signatories to a document urging the replacement of Suharto with the "Ratu Adil" in question.⁶ In 1980, yet another form of opposition surfaced when a group of 50 participants

³ On student protests, see Edward Aspinall, "Student Dissent in Indonesia in the 1980s," Working Paper no. 79 (Clayton Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1993).

⁴ Prophecies of the return of the mythical king of the past began to gain momentum with the popularity of Islam in Java, as one version of Jayabaya prophecies is said to have been prepared by one of the Wali Sanga, the famous nine Islamic saints of Java. Evocation of hope in the coming of Ratu Adil helped precipitate the peasant movements in Indonesia. Later, a figure associated with Ratu Adil is the Islamic Prince Diponegoro known for his rebellion against the Dutch in the 1800s. Diponegoro's Java War was among the historical events which inspired the nationalist movements to escape colonialism in fulfilment of the Jayabaya prediction of the Just King. For more discussion on Ratu Adil and Rebellion, see Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Ratu Adil* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1986) and the same author's "Agrarian Radicalism in Java: Its Setting and Development" in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. C. Holt (Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 71-125 and *Protest Movements in Rural Java* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁵ Sekimoto Teruo argues that the concept of the anticipated mystical king has been continually politicised in modern Indonesia to explain the inextricably linked issues of power, authority and historical time. See his "A Cultural Analysis of the Sawito Incident," in *Millenarianism in Asian History*, ed. Yoreo Ishii (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of language and Culture of Asia and Africa, 1993), pp. 175-220.

⁶To compare, a similar incident was the "Ratu Adil" in the person of Embah Wali, a spiritual leader who mobilised a community called the Little Rock in one small village in East Java studied by Rahardjo Suwandi. No public figure was involved here and the mobilisation did not seem to make Suharto panic, but it was

including retired generals declared the *Petisi Lima Puluh* (Petition of Fifty), which criticised Suharto's abuse of Pancasila for his economic and political interests.

Despite these protests, thanks to the People's Consultative Assembly or the political elite in power, Suharto was given the honorific title of "Bapak Pembangunan" a day before his fourth Presidential inauguration on 11 March 1983. Paradoxically, soon after Suharto's reinstated rule and state-declared identification as the Father of Development, the notorious Petrus event -*Penembak Misterius* or the mysterious killing of criminals followed by the public display of their dead bodies heralded in an era of state violence and terror. Indonesia saw continual unrest in the years to follow coupled with an economic collapse that exacerbated people's dismay at their leader. The devaluation of the rupiah during Suharto's fourth term and the Tanjung Priok military-Islam clash,⁷ further eroded Suharto's reputation. Yet, the dictator remained adamant and resorted to oppression and violence to get his way such as requiring all social organisations to embrace Pancasila as *asas tunggal*, or their sole foundation.⁸

By the time Suharto was sworn in as head of the country for the fifth time in March 1988, Indonesia's hope for a leadership change appeared to have been totally vanquished. The country seemed resigned to having Suharto as their leader. As one critic said, "Most living Indonesians had never known any other leader" apart from Suharto.⁹ Indeed a popular joke among Indonesians was that the requirement to become the President of Indonesia is

indicative of people's distrust of him. See his *A quest for justice: the millenary aspirations of contemporary Javanese wali* (Leiden: KITVL Press, 2000).

⁷ The clash that resulted in hundreds of casualties including the young Islamic leader Amir Biki broke out when the security forces attempted to resist a crowd in the Tanjung Priok harbour area, North Jakarta, in September 1984. This bloody incident was ignited by an allegation that a number of soldiers had committed improper acts in the nearby Al-A'rat Mosque. A counter-charge ensued: behind the incident was a conspiracy by religious leaders and some members of the Petition of 50 Group.

⁸ Douglas E. Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* (London, Routledge, 1995), esp. pp. 35-40.

⁹ R. E. Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 255.

long working experience as one. Suharto's superb political ingenuity saw him overcoming various challenges to his leadership. For instance, once Suharto saw his loosening grip over the military, he began to court militant Islamic forces in the 1990s by promoting Islamic piety while simultaneously suppressing Islamic groups from gaining political power.¹⁰

It is against this state of socio-political conditions in Indonesia that the performances of *Anusapati*, *Ken Arok* and *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* should be read. Contextual analysis against the historical preoccupations of the time and individuals involved in the production of these performances will be attempted. (To convey the flavour of the performances, I detail them based on video recordings of the works).

Tale of Political Succession, Scheme and Spite

This section looks at the *Anusapati* ketoprak (1985) to show how this traditional Javanese play with modern presentation translates the anxiety of the time when lampooning the corrupting capacity of political power within the Singasari kingdom. Scripted in Indonesian by the master of Silat Jawa S. H. Mintardja,¹¹ *Anusapati* was from its inception

¹⁰ Among useful literature on this subject are Leo Suryadinata, *Interpreting Indonesian Politics* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998), esp. Chapters 2, 8 and 8; R. W. Liddle, "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation" *Journal of Asian Studies* 55:3 (August 1996): 613-34; C. van Dijk, "Political Development, Stability and Democracy: Indonesia During the Last Decade" Monograph no. 24 (Centre for South-East Asian Studies, University of Hull, 1993), esp. pp. 30-50 and Harold Crouch, "An Ageing President, An Ageing Regime" in *Indonesia Assessment 1992: Political Perspectives on the 1990s*, ed. Harold Crouch and Hal Hill (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1992), esp. pp. 55-7.

¹¹ S. H. Mintardja is also the author of thematically similar stories *Pelangi di Langit Singasari* [Rainbow in the Singasari Sky], published initially in the late 1960s in the Yogyakarta daily newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakyat* before its appearance in 75-part book form in 1969-1970. Three sets of serial stories about the descendants of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes appeared thereafter as sequels to *Pelangi di Langit Singasari*, namely *Sepasang Ular Naga di Satu Sarang*, *Panasnya Bunga Mekar*, and *Hijaunya Lembah* – making up a total of 183 books. In fact, the success of his serial stories predated his scripting of the ketoprak discussed.

an attempt to reach out to a wider audience through its use of the national language.¹² Nano Riantiarno's *Sukses* (1990) is so often cited in the discussion of Suharto's reluctance to step down and the lucrative business of his family¹³ that it tends to diminish the importance of other works like the Anusapati ketoprak discussed here. As Hatley has noted, Rendra's *Panembahan Reso* (1986), which is also about the struggle for leadership change, appears ignored given the proliferation of the more commercialised satirical comedies such as those of Riantiarno's Teater Koma.¹⁴ Although not as recognised as *Sukses*, for example, performed by renowned ketoprak director Bondan Nusantara and his group,¹⁵ *Anusapati* can be seen as a precursor of performances that openly criticise the New Order regime particularly on issues of political succession. Except for the use of the Indonesian language, the performance maintains the traditional templates for plot, characterisation and stage directions. The play tells of the corrupt leadership of King Rajasa (Ken Arok) in the eyes of his stepson Anusapati and the latter's reckoning of the king's past actions. It swirls around Anusapati's quest for his right to the throne by crushing the ploy by Ken Arok who has evaded the issue of succession, as the king prefers to crown his own son, Tohjaya. Being treated differently from his siblings by Ken Arok, Anusapati makes inquiries from his mother, Ken Dedes, only to be devastated by the revelation that Tunggul Ametung whom Ken Arok

¹² See the Foreword to the script of this play published under the same title in 1984.

¹³ See for example Michael R. J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto: Order, Development and Pressure for Change* (London, Routledge, 1993), p. 1. For an excellent analysis of the play and the Suharto government's banning of the performance, see Michael H. Bodden's "Theatre Koma's *Sukses* and Indonesian New Order" *Asian Theatre Journal* 14, 2. (Fall 1997): 259- 80.

¹⁴ B. Hatley, "Constructions of 'Tradition' in New Order Indonesian Theatre", p. 55 and n. 15. Similarly, Rendra himself when asked to comment on *Sukses* including his becoming a target of satire in the play opines that owing to the surge of materialism, the middle class audience of Teater Koma was too tired and lazy to digest intellectual performances (read: like his plays), but the renowned dramatist nonetheless agreed with the banning. See "Memang Jorok..." *TEMPO*, 20 October 1990, p. 40.

¹⁵ His group comprised of some members of Teater Gandrik, Indonesian Institute of Arts students and other Yogyakarta artists. It was not until 1993 that Bondan Nusantara established his *Dagelan Mataram Baru* of which the trademark is ketoprak *plesetan*/"slippery", i.e. ketoprak with a playful, subverted use of (Javanese) language, teeming with social criticisms. But *Anusapati* here is of a different mode, as it is experimental, i.e. scripted in Indonesian like that of modern theatre.

killed is his biological father. Anusapati is about to give up for fear of the king, until the prince's fiancé supports him to strike back and continue his quest.

Using Anusapati's lens to look through two major 13th century political manoeuvres – coup d'état and machination of succession- the play invites recognition of modern day historical parallels with contemporary events. The play captures such issues as political transformation, favouritism, conspiracy, loyalty versus betrayal, violence and vengeance – all the necessary contents for a technically and thematically successful ketoprak- while mirroring as it does the political reality of the 1980s. As Hatley observed, a folk performance like ketoprak is always about the ambivalence experienced by the ordinary people about the government.¹⁶ The analysis that follows is to show how *Anusapati* depicts three interlinked issues, i.e. transfer of power, devious plot and use of violence to help articulate the ordinary Indonesian people's uncertainty about Suharto's leadership and his political ethics. I shall also show how the ketoprak makes use of the kris as a symbolic device for thematic and technical purposes.

The play opens with Ken Arok, the king, giving Anusapati a kris as a token for his appointment as “Pangeran Pati”,¹⁷ that is, a title bestowed upon a crown prince just before his coronation as king - a gesture perceived by Anusapati as being another ‘play’ orchestrated by Ken Arok. And the gift of the kris in this ceremony is but a mockery, the younger man claims while likening it to a knife that is good for nothing but domestic use. “Yes. This is the very kris, no better than a kitchen knife for cutting cucumbers, or a sickle for gathering firewood on the edge of the forest,” says Anusapati, showing the kris to his aide, Sempana, to

¹⁶ Barbara Hatley, “Texts and Contexts: The Roro Mendut Folk Legend on Stage and Screen” in *Histories and Stories: Cinema in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Krishna Sen (Clayton: Monash University, 1988), p. 17.

¹⁷ In reality this tradition began in the Mataram Dynasty, and was bequeathed to the Jogjanese Crown Prince prior to his ascension to Sultanate.

compare it with the latter's farming tools.¹⁸ Here the kris alludes to the disempowerment of Anusapati: He has not been acknowledged yet as a Crown Prince –one step away from kingship- the conferment can thus be seen as a hoax; the throne accordingly is accessible to Tohjaya, Ken Arok's son with another wife, Ken Umang. The early presence of Anusapati's kris as an iconographic device is to draw the audience's attention to the deceiving design prepared by Ken Arok, the antagonist of the play. The fact that the kris in question is roughly finished is symbolic of the aborted plan of Ken Arok in bypassing the prince's direct line to the ascendancy should the king abdicate. And here is the satire: even a devious young king of ancient Java who did not reign for long¹⁹ was depicted in this ketoprak as being aware of the necessity to stand aside; the more so should have been the long-ruling ageing king of contemporary Indonesia. Commenting on the fact that all Vice-Presidents throughout the New Order had never been meant to become potential successors, Harold Crouch says: “[Suharto] always prevented the emergence of a ‘Crown Prince’ by balancing off rival generals against each other.”²⁰

Before the appearance of Ken Arok's kris, the play again contains a variant on the formulaic plot by having Tohjaya make an effort to kill Anusapati the stepbrother prior to the murder of Ken Arok by Anusapati. The usual standard plot tells us a different order of assassination within the family, whereby Anusapati -overtaken by fear after Ken Arok died at the point of the cursed kris- is killed in turn by Tohjaya with the same kris. Conversely here,

¹⁸ Ya. Inilah keris itu, tidak lebih dari pisau dapur menyayat mentimun, atau parang untuk mencari kayu bakar di pinggir hutan. /Kau lihat, Sempana. [My Translation here and thereafter]. S. H. Mintardja, *Anusapati* (Yogyakarta: n.p, 1984), p. 3; All subsequent references to this work, abbreviated A, will be used in this thesis with pagination only.

¹⁹ The historical Ken Arok ruled for five years only from 1222-1227. See Slametmuljana, *A Story of Majapahit* (Singapore: Singapore University Press Pte Ltd., 1976), p. 5 .

²⁰ Harold Crouch, “An Ageing President, An Ageing Regime” in *Indonesia Assessment 1992: Political Perspectives on the 1990s*, ed. Harold Crouch and Hal Hill (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1992), p. 45.

upon his attempted murder by Tohjaya's bogeymen, the offended, disappointed and rejected Anusapati proceeds first to see Ken Dedes for an explanation of Ken Arok's playing favourites with his siblings. At the same time, Ken Dedes is likewise distraught by the presence of the co-wife Ken Umang the mother of Tohjaya. Ken Dedes then resolves to speak the truth about her remarriage upon the death of her first husband, before finally granting Anusapati's pleading request to see the kris with which his natural father met his untimely death. In spite of this plot twist on the sequence of serial killings, the play, as all Ken Arok stories present, has the mighty Mpu Gandring kris as the instrument of revenge near the end of the play. Thus, the first kris given to Anusapati signifies the reason for revenge, while the second kris formerly kept by Ken Arok and given later to Anusapati symbolises the execution of revenge. Here, for all the novelty in terms of the language used and plot variation as in the assassination sequence, *Anusapati* presents a vengeance theme in the way the usual tellings of the Ken Arok story do. The fact is that as one genre of performing arts, ketoprak technically requires such a dramatic scenario as the presence of a fight or revenge (the more effective when it is done within the family) to help achieve its presentational/staging success. Here the vengeance motive in the play studied is also to keep up with the objective of satirising violence in Indonesian politics, hence the thematic necessity I shall firstly elaborate as follows.

A pattern of revenge in *Anusapati* is necessary to mimic the real violence of the time. The title of the play itself gives us a clue that the protagonist is the nemesis of Ken Arok with such title the audience would expect conflicts between the two. In the early part of the play Anusapati says that Ken Arok has an evil plan because of his orchestration of a fraud ceremony. A series of violent acts are soon to follow this initial clash. The first is the

assassination attempt on Anusapati on the order of his stepbrother Tohjaya. Prior to this is a rude, aggressive and hateful exchange of words between the two brothers, hence verbal violence on stage. The next violent scene occurs between Anusapati and Ken Arok following their quarrel that hurts each other's feelings. Before Anusapati finally stabs the deadly Mpu Gandring kris into Ken Arok's body, the preceding violence is the death of Anusapati's best aide, who is loyal to him and Tunggul Ametung, at the hands of Ken Arok. The play ends with Anusapati declaring himself 'killing the aide to protect the king', while Tohjaya suspiciously looks on waiting for vengeance. Arguably, the display of familial retribution, fierce conspiracy and mud-slinging here can be seen as a metaphor of the internal rift within the military, supporters versus opponents of Suharto and those racing to get as close as possible to the centre of power in time of leadership crisis. I shall now move on to discuss the theatrical-technical expediency of the use of iconography in *Anusapati*.

It is customary to associate Ken Arok with his menacing Mpu Gandring kris as the most enduring emblem of his cruelty. But, performed for the first time on 7 February 1985 in Yogyakarta, our ketoprak here deviates in that this work makes use of not only Ken Arok's kris but also Anusapati's as symbolic devices - the presence of weapons reminds the public of the incessant violence and vengeance since the mysterious killings and Tanjung Priok shootings. It was not a coincidence that the Petrus operation began in Yogyakarta as early as March 1983 before it spread across the country as a method the regime saw fit to employ to reduce crimes. Meanwhile, the snowballing effect of the 1984 Tanjung Priok affair was the bombing of the Borobudur temple in Magelang, a one-hour drive from Yogyakarta, in January 1985. Then, in July the same year, Jakarta saw the burning of major premises from a shopping complex to office buildings including the government's radio and television

stations. In addition to this traumatic reminder, the use of two weapons instead of one reminds us as well of the New Order's obsession with weaponry. Speaking at the establishment of the Council for Strategic Industries in August 1983, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces General L. B. Murdani claimed that the advancement of Indonesia's defence industry was meant to ensure self-supply so as to decrease outside procurement, hence the expansion of B. J. Habibie's many projects of aircraft assembly, shipbuilding and production of weapons and ammunition.²¹ Here we see that the two crises in the play have a thematic-symbolical function, i.e., to caricature the 1980's Indonesia as being a military regime with excessive violence.

Technically, ketoprak performances necessitate the use of symbolic devices like the kris, which is a potent symbol of power in Indonesian society. No ketoprak tools other than the kris can effectively convey the idea of power and the use and/or abuse of it to the audience. While easy and simple to stage, a kris-fighting scene often has direct and lasting impact on spectators. The story of Aryo Penangsang in Barbara Hatley's seminal study of ketoprak helps clarify how theatrically impressive it is to watch the death of the hero as his enemy's kris stuck him in the stomach and disembowelled him; and for this special effect to work well, real goat's innards are usually put to use to impress the spectators.²² As a comparison, another ketoprak script presents the mightiness of Ken Arok's kris by showing one character, Kebo Ijo, jab the kris into a banana tree upon which the tree withers.²³ Replacing a fresh green banana tree with the shrivelled dry one requires only a quick drop of

²¹ See Takashi Shiraishi, "Rewiring the Indonesian State," in *Making Indonesia: Essays on Modern Indonesia in Honour of George McT. Kahin*, ed. Daniel S. Lev and Ruth McVey (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 164- 79.

²² See Barbara Hatley's "Ketoprak Theatre and the Wayang Tradition" Working Paper no. 19 (Clayton Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1979), especially pp. 5-9.

²³ S. Pranoto, Widjaja, K. Sindunegara, Kusni Darmosudiro, "Ken Arok" in *Kumpulan Naskah Ketoprak* (Semarang: Proyek Pengembangan Daerah Jawa Tengah, Kanwil/Depdikbud Jateng, 1976), p. 29.

a curtain; hence it is quite a useful trick.²⁴ In *Anusapati*, similarly, Anusapati's kris and Ken Arok's kris carry respective tasks as overtures to violence which help achieve the intertwining symbolic and dramatic effects of the play.

Next, for a ketoprak performance to be successful, a *rame* effect should be present.²⁵ This means ketoprak seeks to stage melodramatic actions ranging from romance to retaliation. Indeed *rame* is also synonymous with *seru* meaning sensational. Here the structure of the story has to generate a mixture of joy, grief, anxiety, anger and poignancy as well as a pleasant state of mind. Bondan Nusantara the producer of *Anusapati* himself has always put three key ingredients into his work namely 1) visual effect, that is, the play has to be sequential and enjoyable to watch, 2) beauty and 3) practicality.²⁶ He mentioned one possible technical presentation of the dramatic meeting between Ken Arok and Ken Dedes: inspired partly by the story of David and Bathsheba, ketoprak may present a particular scene when Ken Arok unexpectedly spots Ken Dedes bathing, hence a substitute for the famous scene where Ken Arok sees Ken Dedes's glowing private parts in the *Pararaton*. This is a breathtaking scene that will make the performance *rame* and *seru* alike as it invites noisy comments and cheers for the thrilling presentation. Nusantara is always careful though, to keep such a presentation *seru* without necessarily being *saru* or obscene, because the essence of ketoprak is *tatanan* (a construction), *tontonan* (a show) and *tuntunan* (guidance). Thus, mindful of this technical requirement, we can argue that in *Anusapati* the presentation of the kris-giving scene and subsequent kris-fighting is necessary for the artistic reason of creating

²⁴ As a reminder, the traditional ketoprak does not actually use curtain-shifting technique in the progression of one act to the next, but simply the removal or installation of simple stage properties.

²⁵ B. Hatley, "Ketoprak Theatre and the Wayang Tradition", p. 26.

²⁶ Bondan Nusantara, Personal Communication, Yogyakarta, 25 July 2002. The translation of the three basic technical necessities here is mine, if grasped roughly from Nusantara's own coinage of each term being 1) *visualistis*, 2) *indah* and 3) *praktis*.

the indispensable *rame* effect, as this loud and gaudy display will make a delightful show to the satisfaction of the ketoprak community.

One might think that thematically speaking, there is nothing novel about this play, even when old themes like power-seeking, triangular romance and family feuding come in a new package. Here, these events unfold through the eyes of Anusapati, allowing Ken Arok a less central role as it gives way to the often passively cast character Anusapati to run the show in revealing Ken Arok's crimes. But, it is this change of subject position that is worthy of a second look especially when contextualised with the play's production time. Performed when the question of leadership succession was brewing in Indonesian politics, it is hard to ignore that the play persuaded the audience to associate fact and fiction.

Ken Arok is most probably cast with the Machiavellian Suharto in mind by parodying the character's seizure of power, his deceit of Anusapati so as to deny the latter's right to the throne and his partiality in grooming his own son Tohjaya. Ken Arok's infamous leadership here might be comparable to the New Order king Suharto, whose rule was associated with corruption, collusion and nepotism. Some other resemblances surface when we compare the Singasari king in the play with Suharto in such things as their attitude to violence, determination for success and pride in their origins. To elaborate on these parallels, the following conversation between the ghost of Mpu Gandring and Ken Arok is helpful.

Mpu Gandring: Now you are frightened. You killed your victims *in cold blood*, with your fingers unshaken at that.

Sri Rajasa: But I did all these things in my effort to achieve my goals. I am a *pidak pedarakan* (of low-birth) but I *have high aspirations*. I struggled with all my strength and ability, *single-minded* and knowing no surrender.

Mpu Gandring: I appreciate your struggle Ken Arok. You have proved the magnitude of your ideals.

Alas, you did not take the right path.

Sri Rajasa: I never gave up. *I had attempted all.* My principles stood on two choices. Mukti or Mati (Prevail or Perish).

Mpu Gandring: That's what I admire about you Ken Arok. But your mistake is that you justified everything to reach your ends. [...] You never contemplate how scheming you are. How sweet your lips are and how sinister your restless soul is. You have reached the apex of Singasari in a manner any man of chivalry would never attempt. But it was all done because of the darkness of your heart as to validate the most condemnable act incoherent with moral values.

Sri Rajasa: Which values? It is *I who set up all values* for Singasari.

Mpu Gandring: Moral values in your relationship with the Most High. He has never approved of assassins. This being so, the curse fell on you when you stabbed this kris here - right into my chest. You killed me with the kris. This kris too will kill you.²⁷ (A, 45-46) [Italics mine]

It is clear here that first, the portrayal of Ken Arok's intolerance towards his opponents reminds us of the chains of violence that occurred from the time of the aftermath of the 1965 aborted coup to the state-sponsored assassinations in the 1980s, to say nothing

²⁷ Mpu Gandring: Kau menjadi ketakutan. /Kau yang telah membunuh korban-korbanmu dengan jari-jari tanpa gemetar.

Sri Rajasa: Tetapi semua itu kulakukan dalam rangka perjuanganku untuk mencapai cita-citaku. /Aku adalah seorang pidak pedarakan, namun aku bercita-cita tinggi. /Aku telah berjuang dengan segenap kekuatan dan kemampuanku, tekun dan tidak mengenal putus asa.

Mpu Gandring: Aku hargai perjuanganmu Ken Arok. /Kau telah menunjukkan kebesaran cita-citamu. /Tetapi sayang, bahwa kau tidak menempuh jalan yang benar.

Sri Rajasa: Aku tidak mengenal menyerah. /Segala cara sudah kutempuh. /Dua pilihan yang aku genggam di dasar tekadku. /Mukti atau mati.

Mpu Gandring: Itulah yang aku kagumi Ken Arok. /Tetapi kesalahanmu adalah, bahwa kau telah membenarkan segala cara untuk mencapai cita-cita. [...] Kau tidak menghitung, betapa liciknya kau. /Betapa lamisnya bibirmu dan betapa kelamnya jiwamu yang bergelora. /Kau capai kejayaan tertinggi Singasari dengan cara yang tidak sewajarnya dilakukan oleh laki-laki dari darah kesatria. /Tetapi itu terjadi karena kau dibekali oleh hatimu yang kelam sehingga kau telah membenarkan cara yang paling terkutuk sekalipun, dan bertentangan dengan nilai-nilai yang luhur.

Sri Rajasa: Nilai-nilai yang mana? /Akulah yang menciptakan nilai-nilai itu bagi Singasari.

Mpu Gandring: Nilai-nilai luhur dalam hubunganmu dengan Yang Maha Agung. /Pembunuh-pemunuh itu bukannya sesuatu yang mendapat restunya. /Karena itu berlakulah kutukan atasmu pada saat kau menghujamkan keris itu di sini, di dadaku. /Kau bunuh aku dengan keris. /Kapun akan mati dengan keris.

about military aggression in East Timor and Aceh. Having examined Suharto's *My Thoughts, Words and Deeds* regarding the president's opinion of two successive mass killings under the Petrus campaign in 1983 and the Tanjung Priok incident in 1984, Elson says this: "[Suharto] expressed no remorse and considerable satisfaction in his autobiography at what had been achieved".²⁸

Secondly, the ketoprak depicts a scenario whereby nothing is beyond the reach of determination for Ken Arok. Defending himself from Mpu Gandring's accusation of awful crimes and ignorance of values, Ken Arok says that he alone has all the values established in Singasari. The same determination to succeed can be seen in Suharto. Eklof has this to say about the most powerful man in Asia according to the 1996 *Asiaweek* assessment: "He had six times been unanimously elected president [presiding] over a political system which had repeatedly proven its capacity to suppress any challenges to his leadership."²⁹ Thus, the manner in which both Ken Arok and Suharto seized power and consolidated it throughout their leadership are comparable.

Thirdly, speaking of genealogy, the two historical figures have one thing in common: a sense of pride in having a low-class background. Suharto favours people remembering him as a leader emerging from the non-elite who made use of his peasant origin to establish his official stance.³⁰ "It is precisely because of these sufferings since I was small that I have become a man," he says in his 1989 autobiography, "I have become a person who thinks,

²⁸ Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, p. 237.

²⁹ Stefan Eklof, *Indonesian Politics in Crisis: The Long Fall of Suharto 1996-98* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 1999), p. vii.

³⁰ Much earlier, his Dutch biographer O.G. Roeder, for instance, entitled his book *The Smiling General, President of Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1969), but the Indonesian edition of the book is called *Anak Desa: Biografi Presiden Suharto* [Village Boy: A Biography of President Suharto] (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1970). See also *Anak Petani Jadi Presiden* [Famer's Son Turned President] by Djamily Bachtiar (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu, 1969). From the last days of Suharto up to his downfall books proliferated with titles and contents that would give affront to the previously mentioned titles, for instance *Suharto: Indonesia's Last Sultan* by Keith Loveard (Singapore: Horizon Books, 1999).

who has feelings, because I have suffered.”³¹ When one 1974 version of his biography told of the President being the descendant of one noble family in Java,³² for example, Suharto purportedly refuted the story strongly preferring to disclose his family background through his own telling.³³ Again in his autobiography Suharto asserts that he needs to explain clearly the origin of his family descent. “In doing so I had to tell my family secrets,” he adds, “but I did this for the sake of my country and people, and I never regretted it.”³⁴ By giving his own account of his background Suharto managed to feed people’s curiosity with authorised information while simultaneously attempting to end any rumours about him. Here Suharto plays the Javanese game -revealing what one most wants people not to see- as his family history is truly not simple. Suharto is the son of Kertosudiro but was taken care by his maternal grandparents before first, staying briefly with the family of Atmosudiro, the man who married Suharto’s divorced mother Sukirah, and later with the family of his father’s sister. Like Ken Arok whose wandering allowed him custody of several parents, Suharto experienced different guardianships. Again, like Ken Arok’s father who was not the husband

³¹ Quoted in Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, p. 3.

³² So important is a noble link that most Javanese parents regardless of their social class would like to have their children marry persons of higher, if not equal, status. The traditional screening before giving their child’s hand in marriage to the prospective candidate is his/her possession of 3Bs, i.e. *bibit* (genealogy), *bebet* (wealth) and *bobot* (status, profession). Added to this is sometimes the fourth B, *babad* (personal history). However, such rules of thumb have gradually changed over time as the culture of courtship also alters in that young people nowadays have much greater freedom to choose their own future “soul-mates”.

³³ Two decades later, this incident drew the attention of James Siegel saying that Suharto reacted to this hagiography exaggeratedly particularly on Suharto’s conviction that misleading information about the leader of the country may lead to national disturbance. Siegel also claims that Indonesian presidents (Sukarno is the other) recall their poor childhood with bitterness unlike their American counterparts, and that illegitimacy is an obsession of the Indonesians. Contrary to Siegel, I would argue that the narration of childhood memory in the respective biography of Sukarno and Suharto is simply a story used by both leaders to impart to the nation that they live up the spirit of struggling from below, although the proletarian ring here manifests differently in the actual political history of each. Next, it is more about the obsession of Indonesians with tracing or tying knots with noble progeny as explained earlier, even if the link is of illegitimate status, rather than obsession with illegitimacy per se as Siegel sees it. See James T. Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: counter-revolution today* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), especially Chapter 1: Illegitimacy on “the People”, pp. 11-29.

³⁴ *Soeharto: My Thoughts, Words and Deeds: An Autobiography as Told to G. Dwipayana and Ramadhan K. H.* English translation by Sumadi; edited by Muti’ah Lestiono (Jakarta: Citra Lamtoro Gung Persada, 1991), p. 6

of his mother Ken Endok, but thought to be God Brahma, Suharto's real father is seemingly absent in his life.³⁵ The different upbringings experienced by Suharto might have shaped his attitude toward his own family, which obviously had implications for his leadership style as well.³⁶

Finally, what then is the implication of the play *Anusapati* when cultural and artistic activities operated under the New Order regime's control and oppression? It was not until five years later on the 45th Anniversary of Indonesian Independence that Suharto declared an "Era Keterbukaan", that is, a time of greater openness and freedom of expression – rhetoric at odds with the New Order's 1990s serial banning of various cultural expressions and publications.³⁷ Given this context, the ketoprak can be seen as a doorway into the increasingly critical world of Indonesian arts and culture. There is no record to date, however, as to whether the performance underwent censorship; this would have been quite important information considering that Butet Kertaradjasa, the actor who played *Anusapati* in the play is now famous for his satirical impersonation of Suharto in many of his irreverent performances.³⁸

³⁵ It is common for Javanese families to send children to their relatives in order to experience upbringing within the new family for a couple of years partly for such a practical reason as lessening the financial burden. This practice is called *ngenger*. Prawirowihardjo, an agricultural officer from the village of Wuryantoro located some kilometres away from Suharto's birthplace Kemusuk, Godean-Yogyakarta, is the husband of Suharto's aunt to whom Suharto was sent for his *ngenger* experience at the age of 8. It is this Prawirowihardjo who later became more involved in Suharto's life, one of which was arranging a courtship with the girl from one Solonese noble family, Siti Hartinah, Suharto's future wife. See *Soeharto: My Thoughts, Words and Deeds*, p. 9 and 36. More on *ngenger* custom, see Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 260.

³⁶ An interesting study by Saya Shiraishi shows how school textbooks, childrens literature and various activities in Indonesian schools, government offices and even private households all reflect the design of and direction towards the New Order family state ideology with Suharto the Bapak Pembangunan as Head of the great family, that is, Indonesia. See *Young Heroes: The Indonesian Family in Politics* (Ithaca, New York: SEASP, Cornell University, 1997).

³⁷ On 11 September 1990, for example, the Attorney General issued a decree banning the translated version of Yoshihara Kunio's *The Rise of Ersatz Capitalism in Southeast Asia* (1988) on the grounds that the book compares Marcos and Suharto in their cronyism in such a way that it "may create hatred toward national leadership".

³⁸ Known as "Raja Monolog" [King of Monologue], Butet Kertaradjasa has a unique specialty of accurately emulating other people's voice. During the last days of the New Order, the authorities often questioned him for

Apparently, things have changed since the co-optation of ketoprak by *Lekra* during the heyday of the PKI.³⁹ Hatley's observation on theatrical performances in Yogyakarta and Surakarta in the late 1980s shows that seen through the Hobsbawmian lens, modern theatres are critically engaged in societal and political environments, although some maintain their apolitical stance.⁴⁰ Budi Susanto has a similar view when saying that the ketoprak community comprising ordinary Indonesians is not a blind acceptor of destiny.⁴¹ It is true that those commonly called 'little people' are incapable of real revolutionary action such as bringing down the regime, Susanto maintains, but their aspirations can function as a destabilising force. This is to say that ketoprak in New Order times was able to manipulate the manipulators (pro-government sponsors), as the performance of *Anusapati* at the government-linked venue the Purna Budaya Building in Yogyakarta revealed. Inevitably, the regime of Suharto began to experience difficulties in maintaining control over people's cultural expressions, and instead held surveillance over these performances lest they turn explosive. In the next section, we will see how differences between the manipulated and the manipulator can become blurred by looking at another representation of Ken Arok -to which Suharto was likened- in a performance sponsored by a presumed crony of the dictator.

the display of his gift of downplaying the actual words or statements made by the bureaucrats of the day. On this artist and his performances, see Barbara Hatley, "Witty people's theatre flourishes on a political stage. Australians get to see it too" *Inside Indonesia* 58 (April-June 1999): 52.

³⁹ See Keith Foulcher, "Politics and Literature in Indonesia: The View from the Left" *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 15. 1 (1987): 93.

⁴⁰ B. Hatley, "Construction of 'Tradition' in New Order Indonesian Theatre", pp. 48-69.

⁴¹ Budi Susanto, *Imajinasi Penguasa dan Identitas Postkolonial* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 2000), p. 19. See also his *Ketoprak: the politics of the past in present-day Java* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius Publishing House, 2001).

The Enemy Strikes Back?

In examining the remake of the 1991 *Ken Arok* opera, this section aims to see if it pokes fun at power and political morality in modern Indonesian leadership in the context of the time as well as at the reasons and passions behind the opera production. Indonesia's political and religious atmosphere had changed in the 1990s with the rise of the middle class and of Islam. As such, in order to better contextualise our analysis of the work in question, understanding of Suharto's political detour on his regime's cultural policy is important. Equally significant is familiarity with Suharto's tactics in dealing with his potential enemies particularly Islamic forces given that the military no longer fully supported him and the declining leader became more concerned with protecting his family, whose amassed fortunes had "inspired public animosity" by the last decade of his leadership.⁴² My assumption is that the remake of the *Ken Arok* opera is still a parody about a corrupt leader, in this case, Suharto's lust for power. The progression of the narrative is basically similar to that of the 1975 production discussed in the previous chapter. In view of this similarity, to avoid repetition what follows will look at where the two versions differ from each other. To this end, I shall also discuss the importance of situating *Ken Arok* within the context of Suharto's handling of his political and economic interests as part of his strategy to remain in power; As it happened, the sponsor of the show was one of Suharto's business associates. It is only by contextualising it within the societal, economic and political situations of the day that the representation of Ken Arok in the show is clear and meaningful to our understanding of political leadership and morality in Indonesia.

⁴² S. Eklof, *Indonesian Politics in Crisis*, p. 9.

The 1991 Ken Arok opera by Harry Roesli, like its debut about 20 years earlier, is a parody on the leadership of the day. This renewed musical play gives more emphasis to the use of coercion, violence and deception within a corrupt regime. Presenting a total of 450 artists including the local budding Payung Hitam Theatre, Jakarta's famous comedians Bagito Group, well-known musicians, professional models, dancers and the use of laser technology, the opera's single show on 17 May 1991 in Bandung, was Roesli's most expensive show drawing an audience of more than 6,000 people.⁴³ Given that the success of the production seems to ride also on the glitz and glare of the multi-media industry made possible through businessman Setyawan Djody's 165 million Rupiah donation,⁴⁴ the opera is not as strong in criticising social injustices this time around, when compared to its debut. Haviel Perdana, the musical director of the show, for example, confirms that the use of laser technology (also sponsored by Djody), a video screen, sounds and special effects as well as a synchronized-system was to help explore a "new artistic zones" in order to refresh the 1975 shows.⁴⁵ It might have been a challenge for Perdana to make good use of Djody's handsome financial support to produce something novel for the audience in the 1990s.⁴⁶ However, for Roesli the producer and singer narrator, the Ken Arok opera would be more than an entertainment considering his commitment as a social critic rather than as a musician.⁴⁷ Together with those young people interested in music and social concerns he groomed in his Depot Kreasi Seni Bandung (DKSB), a non-conventional musical organisation based in his hometown, Roesli addressed Indonesia's socio-political conditions and the country's leaders;

⁴³ See *TEMPO*, 25 Mei 1991, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Ida Farida and Putu Setia, "Ken Arok yang Makin Puitis" *TEMPO*, 25 May 1991, p. 71.

⁴⁵ Haviel Perdana, Personal Communication, 18 June 2003.

⁴⁶ Politics is unlikely an area of interest for Perdana. He has been based in London since 1999 for his research on Children's Theatre while nurturing his other talent in painting. Personal Communication, 29 June 2003.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Four.

in fact, Roesli financed many of DKSB's irreverent performances.⁴⁸ Having said this, the glamorous aspect and sponsorship of the show need to be problematised further, but for now I shall show that *Ken Arok* does not ignore its socio-political message at the expense of artistic quality, staging sophistication and display of celebrities. The central message of the opera is that today's Indonesia is impoverished by the corrupt practice of its leaders.

The opera features two leaders, i.e. a gang leader by the name of Ken Arok and Tunggul Ametung the district officer of Tumapel. Unlike the old opera of 1975, the revenge theme is omitted in the new production, as the story ends with Ken Arok's seizure of the highest leadership in Tumapel. But, like the 1975 debut, the 1991 production retains the standard plot: In his wandering the young ruffian Ken Arok meets Loh Gawe and this guru lectures him about life as a preparation for the eternal life, i.e. death. Acting upon this advice Ken Arok and his gang of thieves take only from the rich to help the poor until he challenges the authoritarian local leader Tunggul Ametung whose charming wife has tempted Ken Arok. Lured by passion and power, Ken Arok starts his vicious work. Ken Arok kills the kris-smith after the latter hands him the weapon he ordered, lends the kris to his friend Kebo Ijo, steals the kris back and rushes to kill Tunggul Ametung. Kebo Ijo is blamed for the murder since everyone knows him as the owner of the kris through this scheme Ken Arok assumes kingship.

Thus, the depiction of Ken Arok is that of a powerful, scheming and uncompromising man full of flaws. This image of Ken Arok as a tough character is presented to the audience from the very beginning. The show opens with a lively dance and two disco songs, and on the screen is a projection of a volcano discharging lava and spewing clouds of ash,

⁴⁸ Harry Roesli, Personal Communication, Bandung, 11 May 2003.

interspersed with fireworks in awesome colours and explosions of crackers. Out of this image of a distorted universe rolls up a naga head spitting out the baby Ken Arok. This combination of theatrical and cinematic presentations continues during the work: the agitated crying baby is swirled out into a black hole, and with a big bang in tandem with loud music, the rocker Dani Java Jive appears on stage singing thus:

I am Ken Arok; a child of the world,

I was born in the company of lightning,

I am the Just King,

Power is my aspiration,

[For this] I use deception.⁴⁹

The character's unusual differentiation here, i.e., he is born out of lava vis-à-vis his mother's womb, calls attention to itself and signifies a point the producer might want to make. Rather than being described as being born poor and left in the cemetery, for example, Ken Arok is here portrayed like Tetuko - the baby Tetuko in the wayang world withstands the heat of lava and grows into a tough warrior for the Pandavas. But remaining aware of the fact that the performance discussed is a parody, the possible frame of reference to Tetuko needs to be interpreted cautiously as it can be part of the mockery. Tetuko was a name given to the IPTN (Industri Pesawat Terbang Negara)'s first airplane;⁵⁰ and considering that this extravagant project of Habibie was evidence of Suharto's nepotism par excellence, the depiction of a Tetuko-like-character here urges the audience to see that the arrival of the "Just King" so

⁴⁹ Aku Ken Arok anak dunia; /Aku lahir membawa petir, /Aku ini ratu adil, /Kekuasaan itulah tujuan, /Gunakan segala tipuan. [My Translation]

⁵⁰ Theodore Friend, *Indonesian Destinies* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 243.

described spells trouble, as the lyrics of the song above aptly describe. At this stage, one might think that this kind of reading takes the analogy too far. But, manipulation of the plot is common to Roesli's works. The fact is that faithfulness to the Story was never a concern for him; he was interested more in being a social critic through his music,⁵¹ hence the possibility of multiple readings of the depiction of Ken Arok in this work.

When juxtaposed with the other leader character *Tunggul Ametung*, for example, Ken Arok appears 'better', as one particular scene in the performance exemplifies: as the head of a criminal gang, Ken Arok is aware of the dictatorship of the mean district leader *Tunggul Ametung*; leaders of two respective bands of bandits thereby confront each other. Posing as street musicians,⁵² Ken Arok and his gang are caught red-handed as they are singing rebellion songs by *Tunggul Ametung*'s bogeymen who then threaten to report this offence to the authorities so as to forbid them to perform further. Again, this is an allusion to the New Order's stringent bureaucracy for issuance of "surat ijin pertunjukan" [performance permit certificate] as a prerequisite for public performance of any kind. This scene is reportedly successful in amusing the audience⁵³ - not surprisingly, as the controversial ban on *Sukses* and the ensuing prohibition of Teater Koma's Japan tour took place only several months before.

Indeed it was more relevant for this high-budget opera to lampoon the ailing leadership proven to have engaged in such malpractices as intimidation and partnership with criminals, rather than to satirise the ailing judicial system, social injustices and corrupt

⁵¹ Harry Roesli, Interview in "Cross Check", Trans TV, 19 November 2003.

⁵² Roesli must have drawn this scene from his own experience of employing street musicians and disadvantaged children in many of his performances. Aside from running his music school in Bandung, Roesli has long been engaged in his self-financed societal activity of educating the young street musicians in the city, and occasionally touring and performing across Java with them.

⁵³ Ida Farida and Putu Setia, "Ken Arok yang Makin Puitis" *TEMPO*, 25 May 1991, p. 71.

leadership the way it did in 1975. The late New Order's moral poverty was a more serious illness to parody. In fact, by the early 1990s, Suharto's government had achieved a measure of economic improvement in spite of its political instability, which we need to discuss in brief. Hal Hill's observation shows that despite the failure of crops and the oil price plunge, Indonesia made impressive progress especially in the manufacturing sector through the period 1980-91. Although the double digit growth rates of some neighbouring countries put Indonesia's 7% to shame, it was not too bleak a picture for the Indonesian economy. But, unless unequal development in poor provinces was addressed and the central government paid serious attention to cronyism and monopoly by privileged individuals, Hill concludes, the country's \$75 billion debt and poor development strategy would remain unresolved concerns.⁵⁴ If Hill's social-economic index is any guide, by 1990 the poverty problem was reasonably alleviated except in the eastern parts of Indonesia where social imbalance was aggravated by human rights abuses in the otherwise rich islands.⁵⁵

Considering the above socio-economic observation, the Ken Arok opera's depiction of reality is quite accurate especially with regard to human rights abuses and unequal prosperity: it is the inability of the government surrounded by self-seeking, corrupt and greedy individuals that hampered progress and social equity. Some observers, for example, liken this glamorous opera to a fashion show performed by, among others, beautiful girls of the Bandung Studio Inter Model.⁵⁶ And while it is in many ways a fashion show, it is also beyond just fashion. In the performance, men dressed in black like the "Ninjas" seeking trouble also appear. This representation clearly alludes to the mysteriously organised

⁵⁴ Hal Hill, "The Economy, 1991/92" in *Indonesia Assessment 1992: Political Perspectives on the 1990s*, ed. Harold Crouch and Hal Hill (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1992), pp. 17-42.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁶ See *TEMPO*, 25 Mei 1991, p. 71.

gangsters suspected of rape, abduction, murder and other forms of atrocity in Indonesia throughout the 1990s. These Ninjas were the government's henchmen for various jobs including exploitation in the outer islands to the alarm of the threatened and tortured inhabitants. It has been common knowledge that Suharto's son-in-law Commander Prabowo Subianto used such agents in East Timor.⁵⁷ Thus with the parade of Ninjas on stage, the opera mocks the crimes of the New Order. The nation-state was but the bandits' state whereby the ruling elites were busy enriching themselves through corruption, cronyism and nepotism, while leaving even the natural-resources-abundant-islands destitute.

The conventional hero-villain characterisation is thus absent in *Ken Arok*. Ken Arok is a hero to his underprivileged followers suffering at the hands of the authoritarian Tunggul Ametung. Yet the former can hardly be applauded for his scheming plan in overthrowing the latter. The ambiguity of good and bad, the leader and the led, the rebels and the law-abiding in the play can be said to be a reflection of a confused society where everyone can act badly but be taken as acting nobly or vice-versa depending on one's circumstances. The tough image of Ken Arok is however maintained throughout the show as this character survives to the end while having his enemies clash with one another. Tunggul Ametung's supporters bring the scapegoat Kebo Ijo to the execution ground – a sacrificial lamb for Ken Arok who subsequently proclaims himself the new leader.

The Ken Arok opera seems to imply that just as politics is bad so are the leaders - contrary to the maxim that says, "Amidst bad politics, a good leader is born". Indeed the birth of the bad leader is indicated right at the beginning of the show with a calamitous theatrical environment; the ending, likewise, is disturbing: video-clips of brutal war movies

⁵⁷ The massacre at Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor took place later in November 1991. On the military atrocity and its reference to Ninja, see Douglas Kammen, "Notes on the Transformation of the East Timor Military command and Implications for the U.S." *Indonesia* 67 (April 1999):

are flashed against the stage screen to the accompaniment of spine-tingling high notes from the famous jazz musician Indra Lesmana; and with this, Ken Arok ascends to throne holding his kris triumphantly. There is no justice, the innocent is punished and the guilty is made a king – everything comes across as bad. Indonesian politics in the 1990s is quite noteworthy in this present analysis because the better way to understand the performance is to read it against the politics of the time.

Just as grouping, rivalry, coercion and deception are at the heart of *Ken Arok*, they too figured in the final decade of the New Order. Suharto's perceived alliance with Islam coupled with the pressing need to accumulate wealth for his family -lest time should run out- bred factionalism within the military, the ruling party, Muslim groups and his own children.⁵⁸ Schwarz writes, "Lacking a vision of a modern state, Soeharto continued to wield power much like a village chief, doing out favours to friends, family and hangers-on".⁵⁹ As such, it is important to understand the wider implications of the dual chief interest of Suharto: courting potential enemies like Islam while garnering (new) bases of support. What follows will be confined to discussing one instance of Suharto's handling of both Islamic opposition and the urgency to salvage his personal fortune. On this basis we may be able to understand the sentiment behind the performance of *Ken Arok* sponsored by one who seemingly enjoyed the favours of "the village chief" Suharto.

But first is a brief description of Suharto's flirtation with Islam during the last decade of his presidency. As claimed by many observers, Islamic groups which had helped Suharto destroy the communist forces were never rewarded sufficiently, as were the military. Worse still, Islam was to be blamed for most unrest throughout the New Order, to say nothing of

⁵⁸ See S. Eklof, *Indonesian Politics in Crisis*, pp. 12-3.

⁵⁹ Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 2nd, 2000), p. 315.

various policies to curb Islamic power through the propagation of Pancasila that endorses a sole guiding ideology for all associations and the Presidential instruction to carry out the P4 (*Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*, Guidelines of the Internalisation and Implementation of Pancasila) courses in schools and offices. The time had come for Islamic forces to take action – a move Suharto was quick to neutralise by instead flattering his potential rival. While Liddle talks about Islam the President’s two-prong political strategy, i.e. sustaining Islamic piety while stifling Islam politically, Suryadinata contends that Suharto’s bid to uphold the Pancasila ideology modified his policy towards Islam. Suharto attempts to woo the Muslims in the following ways: opening Islamic-operated banks, increasing financial support for mosques, Islamic schools and related cultural activities, giving permission for girls in state-run schools to wear the head covering (jilbab),⁶⁰ approving Islamic courts, lottery bans, and the trial of a Catholic editor accused of blasphemy, the reduction in the number of non-Muslim cabinet members and the Suharto family’s pilgrimage to Mecca followed by the formation of the Association of Indonesian Pilgrims upon their return to Indonesia. To cap it all, Suharto appointed Habibie to chair the ICMI, Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals. Being Suharto’s political machine to control

⁶⁰ This Islamic dress controversy made its way to the domain of cultural expressions of the period. Citing Hatley (1993), Aveling makes a mention of “Syair Lautan Jilbab (A Poem about a Sea of Head Scarves) by Emha Ainun Nadjib performed in collaboration with Yogyakarta’s Islamic theatre group Sanggar Shalahuddin. Aveling noted that Islamic revivalism had tremendous effects on the emergence of a new generation of poets mostly born after the 1960s. The tone of their works is not always in a way expected by Suharto: reflection of increased piety towards Islam is not always followed by political ignorance as shown by Nadjib, who used to be a member of the disbanded politically critical Dinasti Theatre, through his ‘jilbab’ texts. Aveling, however, picks only works, including Nadjib’s other poems that illustrate purely spiritual renaissance for inclusion in his selection of poetry. Two poems “Walau” [Even] and “Berdepan-depan dengan Ka’bah” [In front of the Ka’bah], for example, are written by Sutardji Calzoum Bachri whose works after his pilgrimage to Mecca dramatically changed from absurd and sexually obsessive to poetry of repentance and submission to Allah. See Harry Aveling, *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry, 1966-1998* (Athens: Centre for International Studies Ohio University, 2001), esp. pp. 235-65.

the upcoming election so as to guarantee the victory of the ruling Golkar party, the members of the organization were mostly loyalists handpicked by Suharto himself.⁶¹

While all the above observations on Suharto's political strategy toward Islam hold true, I suggest that we also need to consider Suharto's own handling of his enemy in the light of Javanese culture's way of resolving conflicts. Traditional approaches to conflict solution are worthy of elaboration here as they help us to see the intricacies behind the *Ken Arok* opera whose financial patron is both a friend and foe of Suharto - the flamboyant entrepreneur Setyawan Djody, grandson of the founder of the Muhammadiyah movement, K. H. Achmad Dahlan. On the one hand, the public knows Djody as one of the few members of the elite whom the Suharto government helped made rich through their business relationships - his link to the Mangkunegaran royalty gave his family access to the lucrative oil and gas shipping business.⁶² Among the many joint ventures with Suharto's youngest son Hutomo Mandala Putra (Tommy) are Djody's shareholding in the defunk airline Sempati and the importation of the Italian car Lamborghini. On the other hand, Djody too is a descendant of one of the most important figures in the Muslim organization seen as a threat to the New Order's status-quo. Thus it was puzzling that Djody, who is a rock musician himself, gave mega funding to numerous rock concerts performed by critical artists such as Iwan Fals, Harry Roesli, Sawung Jabo and W. S. Rendra. Was Djody's sponsorship of these 'nonconformist' performances such as Roesli's *Ken Arok* opera meant to signify his

⁶¹ See, for example, Ingrid Wessel, "State and Islam in Indonesia: On the Interpretation of ICMI" Working Papers No. 3 (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Philosophische Fakultät III, Institut für Asien- und Afrikanwissenschaften, 1996).

⁶² Writing about the privileged Indonesians' economic interest in East Timor, George Aditjondro notes that Djody's brother, Budi Prakoso, was the Jakarta partner in the proposed Los Palos cement factory with Suharto's eldest daughter as the patron, the other partner being the elite East Timorese collaborators. See his article in the *Age*, 8 May 1999. On elaboration of this subject, see also Aditjondro's *Is Oil Thicker than Blood? A Study of Oil Companies Interests and Western Complicity in Indonesia's Annexation of East Timor* (USA: Nova Science, 2002).

departure from his cronyism with the Suharto family or was it instead a bid to downplay his connection with the Suharto family? In what follows I shall attempt to answer this question by looking at the Suharto-Djody relationship as part of the former's attempt to woo the latter, rather than as a form of cronyism by itself.

If Liddle suggests a two-pronged political approach by Suharto in dealing with Islam, Javanese culture knows of a better 'weapon' to handle an enemy of any kind. The Javanese, delighted as always in playing with puns, use the trio of *omong-omong*, *ameng-ameng* and *amang-amang* to deal with their opponents.⁶³ The first strategy, *omong-omong*, is 'Management by Conversation', i.e. talk nicely to your enemy to appease him. Mollified, he will change his mind about confronting you. Second, *ameng-ameng* literally means visitation in Javanese. Call on your enemy's home for a nice light chat and mention nothing about the confrontation. Put in an awkward situation, he may be more ready to settle the differences that keep you apart. We shall call this second method 'Management by Cooperation'. Finally, *amang-amang* is the Javanese word for intimidation. Such is the last resort if the previous two strategies do not work, hence 'Management by Conflict'.

It can be argued that Suharto made use of conversation, cooperation and conflict to survive his three-decade leadership. The state shootings in the 1980s and the Dili massacre in 1991 are examples of the implementation of the third step –coercion- in the Javanese guide of resolving conflicts.⁶⁴ Suharto's oft-quoted one-liner threat "I will clobber anyone who tries to unseat me unconstitutionally" was allegedly the president's rebuke to Murdani, his

⁶³ I thank Dr. Pranowo from the Department of Javanology Yogyakarta and Sanata Dharma University for sharing this homespun philosophy.

⁶⁴ Suharto has this to say about the Petrus killings: "Well, we had to use force. But this did not mean that we just shot them, bang, bang, bang, just like that. No! Those who resisted, yes, they had to be shot willy-nilly. Because they resisted, they were shot." Suharto's *My Thoughts, Words and Deeds* quoted in Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, p. 237

formerly loyal general. The journalist Vatikiotis, for one, who was fascinated by Suharto's statement, used it as an epigraph in a chapter of his book.⁶⁵ Vatikiotis finds it bewildering that such harsh avowal came from the mouth of a polite Javanese like Suharto. Indeed, nothing is unusual when considering the aforementioned threefold C management applied to the right rivals at the right time.

Suharto appeared to proceed with care though when dealing with Islamic opponents especially when it came from elements with elite status. It seems that he made use of the management by cooperation when dealing with individuals like Djody. Thus, it would not be wrong to assume that Djody, too, would be aware of Suharto's *ameng-ameng* or cooperation through their business relations. Having said this, Djody's financial support for the many ostensibly antagonistic performances may reflect his hidden opposition to the regime. The possibility is high that the outwardly mollified and manipulated businessman was able to manoeuvre his benefactor. Djody was playing his ace card well, knowing that being a descendant of the Mummadiyah pioneer he was somehow a potential threat to Suharto. To support this view, I shall now turn to discuss the *Ken Arok* opera itself within the context of Indonesia's cultural world of the 1990s.

The show in question had no problems with the censorship board. While a member of the production team in the show agreed that Djody's sponsorship of the show had an impact on the local authorities' decision to allow the show to go on, he did not elaborate on the matter.⁶⁶ It was rumoured that the local Bandung authorities did not dare to challenge their Jakarta superiors as they considered that the show belonged to Djody and his Jakarta elite circle. However, the fact that Roesli himself is an important public figure in his hometown

⁶⁵ Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.8. See also Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, p. 263 and Eklof, *Indonesian Politics in Crisis*, p. 73.

⁶⁶ Personal Interview (name withheld upon request), Fieldwork Notes, 19 December 2003.

Bandung made it understandable that the *Ken Arok* opera was safely performed. Here we see that the boundary between friends and foes blurred and the basis of the blurring is the gradually loosening grip of the New Order's control with the surge of various adversaries. It appeared that the more the regime coerced, the stronger was the resistance.

It should be borne in mind that *Ken Arok* was put on stage during the period when the New Order was facing another adversity, i.e. the unstoppable force of globalisation as a threat to the regime's cultural policy.⁶⁷ Faced with the increasing pressures of capital and cultural globalization, the New Order responded by declaring an era of openness which has been referred to as Suharto's ambiguous version of *perestrojka* and *glasnost*.⁶⁸

While openness was the New Order's rhetoric on one hand, the government's other response to the growing pressures of globalisation was by imposing even tighter censorship on the other hand. The government issued more stringent guidelines coupled with prohibition sanctions on publications, films and the performing arts. Just to take one example, the Minister of Research and Technology Habibie denounced rap music as decadent, inartistic and incompatible with the national character (*kepribadian bangsa*)⁶⁹ and called for its banning followed by the cancellation of what was supposed to be the first national festival of rap music in Indonesia. This indictment of unsuitability was a bureaucratic cosmetic argument as the real fear of the New Order government was that global culture, of which

⁶⁷ See Virginia M. Hooker and Howard Dick, "Introduction" in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. V. M. Hooker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 1-23.

⁶⁸ Cited in, respectively, Eklof, *Indonesian Politics in Crisis*, p. 17 and Aveling, *Secrets Need Words*, p. 267. See also Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics Under Suharto*, esp. pp. 142-43 and Max Lane, "'Openness', Political Discontent and Succession in Indonesia: Political Developments in Indonesia, 1989-91". Australia-Asia Papers No. 56 (Brisbane: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1991) On media under this period, see Angela Romano, *Politics and the Press in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003) and K. Sen and D. Hill, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ See Keith Foulcher, "The Construction of an Indonesian National Culture: Patterns of Hegemony and Resistance," in *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman (Melbourne: Centre Of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), pp. 301-20.

social criticism forms a part, might undercut its cultural domination. In a study that examines the production, consumption and lyrics of the rap songs, Bodden has concluded that the Indonesian urban middle class youth made use of rap to vent their criticisms of the government while singing along and dancing the night and day away to ease their boredom.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, accompanying the world music revolution in Indonesia, certain aspects of postmodernism as fragmentation, multiplicity and borderless of high/low arts had a tremendous influence on the work of Indonesian playwrights in the 1990s. Unlike the apolitical nature of postmodernism in North American plays, scholars have noted that social and political criticisms abound in Indonesia's theatre world in the current postcolonial period.⁷¹ It is clear here that Suharto's reluctance to step down after nearly twenty-five years in office became too important a topic to miss, as from then on, a number of allegorical plays about power-intoxicated leaders sprung up across the country, heightening the regime's anxiety.⁷²

Suharto too long ignored people's distrust of his leadership; he was blinded by his ambition to stay in power. Accordingly, by the 1990s, the already ailing condition of Indonesian politics was worsened by quarrelsome factionalism ignited by Suharto himself. Vatikiotis says that during his long reign Suharto shaped a political culture "bereft of

⁷⁰ Michael Bodden, "Rap in Indonesian Youth Music in 1990s: "Globalization", "Outlaw Genres", and "SocialProtest"(www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/english/media/workshop/papers/bodden/bodden_paper.pdf-67k).

⁷¹ See Michael Bodden, "Satuan-satuan kecil and uncomfortable improvisations in the late night of the New Order: Democratization, postmodernism and postcoloniality" in *Clearing a space: postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, ed. Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), pp. 293-324.

⁷² In 1995, for example, Bondan Nusantara's ketoprak group and Yogyakarta modern theatres presented a joint production of *Sumunaring Surya ing Gagat Rahina* (The Sun Rises in the New Morning) in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Indonesian independence. Notwithstanding its self-explanatory plot, i.e. succession is badly needed in Pajang, ancient Surakarta, given its ageing ruler, the ketoprak was staged in a state-linked venue and later broadcast by the national television. The date of the play is important here, two years ahead of the 1997 election. It is clear at this point that the Suharto government could no longer exercise its absolute power over the increasingly daring critics the regime tried to co-opt. For a detailed discussion, see Susanto, *Imajinasi Penguasa*, pp. 77-99.

institutional support” and conducive to perpetuation of conflict among its players who seemed incapable of uniting even against a common enemy.⁷³ Suharto’s long reign caused internal frictions not only within the ruling elites –the military and Golkar Party- but also within Muslim factions, and even within his own family. Djody’s sponsorship of the 1991 Ken Arok show was perhaps small, incidental evidence, but it could be read as an indication of dissatisfaction within the Suharto camp. The businessman’s backing of this critical opera showed his position as an opponent within the New Order partnership. Indeed Suharto seemed to have tried everything including the traditional Javanese approach of wooing his potential enemies like Djody, but this time the enemy seemed to strike back. But Suharto was as tough as Roesli’s Ken Arok. As Ken Arok sings when the play opens, “Power is my aspiration...I use deception”. Again, like Ken Arok, Suharto was the victor. The performance ends with the image of a chaotic universe and Ken Arok appearing again with the unsheathed kris in his hand ready to strike his enemy. Likewise, Suharto continued to stay for the next two terms resorting to all means possible and Indonesia was yet to see incessant waves of violent social, ethnic and religious conflict. Finally, the Ken Arok opera is but a representation, and the representation is that of a tough Singasari king as the alter ego of the one man that was Suharto, the ruler of the day with the trappings of materialism and power. In what follows I will discuss how another representation of Ken Arok can be seen as a totally different allegory of social unity and cohesion in the closing days of the New Order regime.

⁷³ M. Vatikiotis, *Indonesia Politics Under Suharto*, p. xvii.

Rough Outside, Refined Inside

Having discussed the co-optation of the Ken Arok story as a metaphor for the New Order's political chaos and declining leadership in the 1990s, this section examines one part of the same story, i.e. the union of Ken Arok and his spouse Ken Dedes in the sacred dance *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi*. Unlike the previous performances discussed, Ken Arok is depicted as a messenger of unity, a classless society and religious harmony in this present performance. This dance, of which the title is the crown name of Ken Arok, features the wedding of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes: two persons of different class and religion unite and establish the Singasari kingdom. The dance made its first performance in 1990 to grace the reception of the National Hero Award dedicated to Hamengku Buwono IX, the revolutionary hero and Vice-President during Suharto's second term. The next performance of this particular dance as was in 1991 for the recording of the BBC in conjunction with Hamengku Buwono X's birthday, followed by its public viewing in the Jakarta theme park Taman Mini Indonesia Indah in the same year. The discussion that follows will show that the *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* is the proclamation of the spirit or motto behind his leadership. I would also like to argue that the representation of Ken Arok as an icon of unity -reminiscent of the 1920s portrayal by Yamin- is to promote cohesion and religious harmony within society given the escalation of ethnic and religious conflict in Indonesia during the 1990s.

A brief explanation of the Bedaya dance is necessary here. The authorship of the Bedaya or Sacred Dance belongs to the traditional Javanese elite, i.e. the Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta.⁷⁴ The dance is one of the court's heirlooms alongside with the

⁷⁴ The two sultanates have their respective styles of this revered work of art. See H. J. da Silva, *Notes on the Royal Classical Javanese Dance-group of the Sultanate of Jogjakarta* (The Hague: [s.n], 1971) and Clara

kris, musical instruments and various properties kept inside the *kraton*, the Sultan's Palace. The idea for the dance comes from the sultan and he subsequently ordered the court's artists to compose and choreograph it accordingly. In colonial times, the Bedaya was performed only at special occasions before the royal family and their guests.⁷⁵ This aristocratic performance helps strengthen the legitimacy of the ruler; it serves as a symbol of the strength, prosperity and wisdom of the dynasty, hence its preservation. I shall now turn to discuss why the Sultan of Yogyakarta made available to the general public the otherwise restricted court performances when the *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* was shown three times in succession in the 1990s.

Sultan Hamengku Buwana X is known for his democratic character inherited from his father Hamengku Buwono IX. If the older sultan's principle was that his crown is for the people, the commoners, "Tahta untuk Rakyat,"⁷⁶ his successor's motto is "Tahta untuk Kesejahteraan Sosial Budaya Rakyat". By adding the "people's social and cultural life", he is determined to enhance the development of arts and culture. And this objective has been manifested through his own cultural interests: beside his 'publicised' *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi*, his other creation is the *Bedaya Jumenengan Dasarengga* – a dance for a special occasion. As observed by the Yogyakarta-based arts critic and academic Sumandiyo Hadi, the Sultan's decision in "secularising" the *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* provides evidence of his commitment to use culture as a channel to be closer to his people and to unite

Brakel-Papenhuysen, *Classical Javanese Dance: the Surakarta Tradition and its Terminology* (Leiden: KITVL, 1995).

⁷⁵ Felicia Hughes-Freeland, "Performers and Professionalization in Java: Between Leisure and Livelihood," *South East Asia Research* 9.2 (2001): 216, See also C. Brakel-Papenhuysen, *Classical Javanese Dance*, esp. pp. 121.

⁷⁶ Mohamad Roem Mochtar Lubis et al., eds., *Tahta Untuk Rakyat*, p. 59 quoted in Felicia Hughes-Freeland, "A Throne for the People: Observations on the Jumenengen [sic] of Sultan Hamengku Buwono X" *Indonesia*: 131.

them.⁷⁷ Secularisation of the dance here means that the court property is now shared with the populace without emptying it of religious meaning. Indeed, at the heart of this sacred dance, Hadi further maintains, is the unification of the king and his subjects. This is not a foreign concept in the Javanese world-view of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* or the Oneness of Self and God, with the former refers to the people and the latter, the king.⁷⁸ The following are the Sultan's own words when talking about the compatibility and relevance of the Javanese model of leadership nowadays provided that necessary modifications are made to fit in this era of globalisation:

Falsafah Kepemimpinan Jawa sendiri sebenarnya dapat kita telaah dari ajaran *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti*, yang mengandung dua substansi, yakni kepemimpinan dan kerakyatan. Hal ini dapat ditunjukkan dari perwatakan patriotis Sang Amurwabumi (gelar Ken Arok) yang menggambarkan sintese sikap *bhairawa-anoraga* atau 'perkasa di luar, lembut di dalam'. Hal ini dimanifestasikan dalam sikap yang selalu 'menunjuk dan berakar ke bumi' atau *bhumi sparsa mudra*. Intinya adalah kepemimpinan yang berorientasi kerakyatan yang memiliki komitmen *Setia pada janji, berwatak tabah, kokoh, toleran, selalu berbuat baik dan sosial*.⁷⁹

We can examine the Javanese philosophy on leadership from the *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti* concept as containing two kinds of substance namely leadership and democracy. This spirit can be seen from the patriotic character of Sang Amurwabumi (the crown name of Ken Arok) that displays the synthesis of the *bhairawa-anoraga* attitude or 'rough outside, refined inside'. This is manifested in his attitude which always 'points to and is rooted on the ground' or *bhumi sparsa mudra*. Its essence is a

⁷⁷ Y. Sumandiyo Hadi, *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi: Proses Simbolis Era Pemerintah Sultan Hamengkubono X* (Yogyakarta: Balai Penelitian ISI, 1992).

⁷⁸ P.J. Zoetmulder explores this transcendental relationship between God and human beings. See his *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

⁷⁹ Hamengku Buwono X, "Falsafah Kepemimpinan Jawa" in *Sabda: Ungkapan Hati Seorang Raja*, ed. Oka Kusumayudha and Ronny Sugiantoro (Yogyakarta: PT BP Kedaulatan Rakyat, 2003), p. 51.

leadership with a popular orientation and commitment: *Faithful to promises, persistent, strong, tolerant, eager to do good and charitable.*

The same sentiment echoes in the lyric of the song entitled “Sekar Gendhing Ketawang Hanjalagita” that accompanies the dance:

Wauta ing jaman Singasari,
wonten penget Lambang Sang Prabu Kertanegara.
Mindha Sang Ywang Siwa lan Sang Budha,
Madeg Abirawa-Anoraga,
ingkang amengku teges prakosa ing lahir, alus alembat ing batin.
Wondene tata lenggahira,
Ingaran Bumi Sparsa Mudra.
Puniku mengku pitedah,
Setya ing janji ateguh kyat sentosa,
Miwah berbudi bawa laksana.
Titi mangkana pangrengganing kandha.⁸⁰

The time was Singasari period,
the memorial was [erected by order of] King Kertanegara.
It resembles Lord Shiva and Lord Buddha,
Posing as Abirawa-Anoraga,
which means tough in look, tender at heart.
As for the seating position,
It is called Bumi Sparsa Mudra.
The paths [guiding principles] carried therein are

⁸⁰ Y. S. Hadi, *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi*, p. 44.

Determination persistence fortitude tolerance compassion generosity.

This is the song so composed.

Here we see that the Sultan uses Ken Arok's kingship to illustrate two main principles of his own leadership. The first is a vertical relationship, that is, the unity of human beings and the Supreme Being. He encourages recognition of the 'super' Leader of Life. The other essence of Ken Arok's kingship that the Sultan exemplifies is of the horizontal bond among people regardless of their origin - the spirit of democracy. The two principles are inextricably linked and supportive of each other.

Leaving the privileged place to the Transcendent, the Sultan of Yogyakarta situates himself among the People. In so doing he embraces the commoners, while making a call for piety at the same time. Sumandiyo's interview with the Sultan in 1992, for example, confirms the modern Javanese king's assertion in breaking the wall that separates the kraton from the outside world in order to adapt to the contemporary situation – a step spearheaded by Hamengku Buwono IX.⁸¹ This egalitarian spirit is present in the dance. Unlike other dances highlighting the greatness of the court tradition, the *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* is exceptional in that it shifts attention to the ordinariness of Sang Amurwabumi a.k.a. Ken Arok. The resemblance of the Sultan's own genealogy to that of Ken Arok - he is the only one among five siblings whose mother is a commoner- is a persuasive issue for further consideration. One critic concludes that Ken Arok's image as a commoner is significant for the creator of the dance to convey the following message: rather than judging an individual

⁸¹ Sumandiyo Hadi, Personal Communication, Yogyakarta, 19 December 2002.

from her/his parentage or ancestral heritage, the person's positive reputation and hard work should be the measurement of her/his standing and accomplishment.⁸²

As for the religious spirit, the devotion to the Lord Shiva and Lord Buddha in the aforementioned song is a prelude to the main theme of the dance that tells us of the union between the Hindu Ken Arok and the Buddhist Ken Dedes. The accompanying song continues as follows:

Gantya kocap Sangdyah Pradnya Paramita,
Inkang nut agama Budha,
Garwa Sri Amurwabumi,
Inkang nutgama Hindhu, Narendra ing Singasari,
Risang kalih tuhu samya asih,
Jumbuh ing lahir lan batin,
Hindhu lan Budha manunggil,
Antuk nugrahaning Widi Pan kalokaningrat, engge.⁸³

Told, in turn [is the story of], Sangdyah Pradnya Paramita,
A follower of Buddha.
[She is] the spouse of Sri Amurwabumi,
a Hindu follower, reigning in Singasari.
The two deeply love one another, so it is said
[love] growing outwardly and from the inner heart alike.
Hindu and Buddha become united,
bestowed with the blessings from God the Great.
This is the story.

⁸² Suryo S. Negoro, "Classical Court Dance"

⁸³ Y. S. Hadi, *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi*, p. 44.

The structure of the dance is so composed as to symbolise the fusion of the *lingga-yoni* energy indicating the combined power of the king.⁸⁴ However, the union of the two different devotees here signifies power beyond sexual fertility, instead extending to prosperity, unity, order and stability. The dance is not a depiction of a simple romance between Ken Arok and Ken Dedes. Rather, it highlights a relationship of a superior order: the wedding of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes symbolises the union of Hindu and Buddha.

It is significant that this theme of unity was raised by a king of the Jogjanese court at a time when the country was rife with ethnic and religious conflict for he was a respected symbol. First of all, especially for people from the Javanese community, court tradition and aristocracy remain a source of pride. They believe that all good things emanate from the Sultan's palace, and whatever comes from the Sultan is considered *Sabda*, "The Word".⁸⁵ They accordingly hold deep respect for their traditional rulers whose name tells us everything: Hamengku Buwana – Guardian of the Universe. But, they have more reason to be proud of their tenth king who -like his father revolutionary hero, Hamengku Buwana IX- is a respected figure nationwide. Indeed it was natural for Indonesians to look up to him, for later HB X often played the role of a neutral leader attempting to help solve Indonesia's political problems. While many in Yogyakarta during the final demise of Suharto in 1998 would remember the Sultan calling for a peaceful demonstration, he earlier made a mark as a dependable representative when he joined Amin Rais, Gus Dur and Megawati to promote an

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 42-6.

⁸⁵ Oka Kusumayudha and Ronny Sugiantoro, *Sabda Ungkapan Hati Seorang Raja* (Yogyakarta: PT BP Kedaulatan Rakyat, 2003), p. i-ii.

agenda for reform. His inauguration as the Governor of Yogyakarta Special Region⁸⁶ in 1998 is evidence of the respect and trust of the people of Yogyakarta. In his capacity as a Sultan and Governor, Hamengku Buwono X has received many cultural awards from various provinces outside Java as a symbol of harmony – the latest being the title “Opu Latu” or the Father King by people from both Islam and Christian communities in the conflict-torn Ambon on 11 January 2003.⁸⁷

Here we see recognition of the Hindu-Buddha spirit by a Muslim, a Sultan no less,⁸⁸ through the dance he authored, when national integration was under threat from Islamic versus non-Islamic conflicts, proving himself an acceptor of differing views. Thus, timing is imperative: *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* was performed for public viewing when respect for each other’s religion was a hard-fought battle in Indonesia. I need to reiterate here the tension of the military-Suharto-Islam nexus discussed earlier in this chapter to clarify the gravity of the inter-faith hostility partly exacerbated by Suharto’s reproachment with Islam at the dwindling of military backing. In particular, attention will be drawn to the Muslim and non-Muslim conflict in the country and how Suharto was implicated. Among the many attempts of Suharto to win Muslim support, two particular tensions need to be highlighted as they directly impinged on societal-religious relations: the Murdani case and the Monitor Affair. It can be argued that the religious disharmony in the 1990s was ignited by Suharto’s superficial slide to Islam and politicisation of intra-religious discontent for his own gain.

⁸⁶ This special status was given to honour Sultan HB IX for his support during the revolutionary war in making Yogyakarta the base for forces fighting the Dutch and temporary the capital of the Republic of Indonesia (1946-1949).

⁸⁷ Oka Kusumayudha and Ronny Sugiantoro, *Sabda Ungkapan Hati Seorang Raja*, pp. 95-100.

⁸⁸ The Sultanate of Yogyakarta recognises the king as the highest authority in military and religious affairs alike, hence the title “Ngarsa Dalem Sampeyan Dalem Ingkang Sinuwun Kanjeng Sultan Hamengku Buwono Senopati Hing Ngalogo Ngabdurrahman Sayidin Panoto Gomo Kalifatullah Ingkang Jumeneng Kaping [x] Ing Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat”. This corresponds approximately to Whose feet I am, Your Highness who firmly stands as to vow to bring victory in the battle to be followed by God’s acknowledgment as His Deputy reigning for the [x] time in the Sultan’s Palace of Yogyakarta.

Firstly, the Murdani affair refers to the case of Suharto not dismissing the Catholic general L. B. Murdani in favour of his Muslim competitors for the military top job. This four-star-general's gradual power reduction and eventually removal in Suharto's Sixth Development Cabinet was applauded by sections of the Islamic communities especially considering their resentment of Murdani's severe treatment of the Islam-linked riots. But being a quick thinking manipulator, Suharto took advantage of the ensuing religious tensions between impulsive fanatics by giving the impression that religion was indeed the reason for his dismissal. As widely observed, Suharto knew precisely that Murdani's location as a non-Muslim would never allow him to become a competitor for the presidency, hence his exit was attributed to Suharto's effort to balance power within the military⁸⁹ while obtaining the international community's trust,⁹⁰ not to mention a possible sour relations between Suharto and Murdani over matters other than religion.⁹¹ Thanks to the oppressive and discriminatory system that Suharto himself had created, Indonesians became easily provoked by sensitive issues pertaining to race and religion. And alas for the unlucky general that Indonesian politics turned from bad to worse.⁹²

⁸⁹ Crouch likens the relationship between Suharto and the military during the first two decades of his leadership to that of brothers or at least father-son. By the 1990s, the new military cohort with different military experience and training did not always agree with their "grandfather" but had to agree nonetheless out of respect or fear. Added to this generational gap, Suharto provoked resentment within the military for his appointment of civilian Sudharmono as Vice-President. See H. Crouch, "An Ageing President, An Ageing Regime", pp. 48-9.

⁹⁰ Elson offers a somewhat differing observation when saying that Murdani's removal from office has more to do with Suharto's effort to improve Indonesia's international image as a recently admitted member of the U N Human Rights Commissions, in view of the unforgiving handling of domestic crimes and East Timor's case under Murdani's authority. See Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography*, pp. 244-5.

⁹¹ It is commonly held that the cause of personal conflict between Suharto and Murdani is the latter's criticism about the business ethics of the former's children. But from his "generously long interview" with the general himself in 1997, Theodore Friend confirms that Suharto began to behave so erratically approaching his downfall especially decorating himself a five-star general that appalled Murdani as to say that the President will not change lest he "*dies*" [Emphasis in original] – something Murdani never saw as he died in 2004. See T. Friend, *Indonesian Destinies*, p. 224. See also Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 2nd, 2000), pp. 117-9 and C. van Dijk, "Political Development, Stability and Democracy: Indonesia During the Last Decade", pp. 22-5.

⁹² Here, I am tempted to compare this religious rivalry with Suharto's handpicking of three Catholics and one Protestant for high profile positions in the government's economic front - J. B. Sumarlin, Adrianus Moi,

The second religious tension that surfaced in 1990 was the trial of the *Monitor* tabloid's Catholic editor Arswendo Atmowiloto for publishing the result of a poll in which respondents were asked to name the most famous public figure. The Prophet Muhammad was in eleventh place right below the editor himself and other celebrities. Ramage takes the *Monitor* banning followed by Atmowiloto's imprisonment as one paradox of the New Order, that is, the emergence of new thinking in Islam was concurrently accompanied by religious intolerance.⁹³ Meanwhile Shiraishi sees the *Monitor* case as evidence of Suharto's patronising attitude: the *Bapak* sees the youths as being disobedient, immature and easy to provoke, hence punishment for the provocateur.⁹⁴

Here we see the injury that was done by the supposed healer of the country's social discord as he failed to handle the resulting resentment toward each other's religions across society. "We are all victims of Soeharto," said one critic, "He made us fight each other."⁹⁵ Thus, taking into account the cases of bigotry, to say nothing of the religion-linked riots and destruction in this period of social anxiety, it is only proper that the image of Ken Arok as a flag bearer of unity was resurrected without suffering anachronistic associations. Ken Arok is a figure susceptible to co-optation by different interest parties. The dance examined here is one instance of co-optation in challenging bigotry in political leadership. The performance of *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* therefore can be seen as a response to socio-political and inter-faith conflicts, at a time when the leader of the country ironically appeared to be prompting disharmony through his politicisation of religion.

Soedradjat Djiwandono and Radius Prawiro; Notwithstanding the different periods of service in the cabinet, their appointment did not create much stir among diverse religious communities, even if the Indonesian economy was not a cause of pride either.

⁹³ Douglas E. Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* (London, Routledge, 1995), p. 11.

⁹⁴ S. Shiraishi, *Young Heroes*, pp. 149-58.

⁹⁵ Salim Said quoted in Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, p. 308.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have first shown that Indonesia's political tensions began to accelerate in the mid 1980s as people grew impatient with the corrupt leadership of Suharto while the leader himself was unwilling to relinquish his power, adopting instead various strategies to linger, at the expense of social order, stability and harmony. The ethics of the Suharto political culture became questionable as it resorted to violence and dealt with its opponents cruelly, squashing any potential threat to the regime which led to unprecedented riots and regime authorised mass killings. By the 1990s, Suharto's power was threatened owing to disagreement with his military supporters upon which he switched alliance to Islam only to find that his political manoeuvring further exacerbated existing religious conflicts.

I have also shown the wider socio-political implications of Suharto's insatiable craving for power. Indonesians were appalled by his corrupt leadership as can be seen from the proliferation of mass demands for regime change in particular, ignoring as they did the government's draconian censorship and coercion. This leads to the third issue examined in this chapter namely the relationship between cultural producers and the authorities. It appeared that the harder the control, the more severe the resistance. The New Order could no longer restrain and manipulate people's cultural expression because the cultural workers began to get stronger and more single-minded while the regime was weakened by the competing elite groups who used to be Suharto's supporters.

Looking through the lens of the title character, the ketoprak *Anusapati* invites the audience to see the imprint of a scheming leader and his machination for succession. Favouritism, the use of tricks, and displays of violence are characteristic of Ken Arok's leadership in this Indonesian language ketoprak. The presence of Ken Arok's kris and

Anusapati's kris is a reminder of the excess violence and obsession with weaponry of this modern day military dictatorship.

The *Ken Arok* opera is yet another metaphor for a rotten leadership. Peopled with characters of all kinds, i.e. leaders from a criminal gang, local authority officials to king, the opera has this message to the audience: when in power, these leaders behave badly. The depiction of Ken Arok in this robust, loud and technology-filled performance is that of a brutal and deceptive leader. Tunggul Ametung is not depicted in any better light, as this district officer exercises coercion by hiring thugs to advance his personal interests. This is the closest as one may get to the prevailing anxiety over the behaviour of the powers-that-be throughout the final decade of the New Order.

Ken Arok is portrayed sympathetically in the *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* as an exemplary leader who promotes religious harmony. Together with his consort Ken Dedes who is a devotee of Buddha, the Hindu Ken Arok brings unity to the Singasari kingdom as they tie their hands in marriage. A call for mutual tolerance and inter-religious respect should not have been too late for conflict-ridden Indonesia when this sacred dance made three public appearances in the early 1990s.

Finally, the three works, each and in their own way, feature a strong propensity to cure the political ills that Indonesia suffered because the leaders indulged in unhealthy habits such as excess consumption of power and a lack of social conscience. One author borrows Ken Arok's conniving character from which a leader may learn a lesson about the price of greed. The other makes use of Ken Arok's milieu to mock a leader surrounded by a group of bandits. The third exploits Ken Arok's virtue so that a leader exhorts peace not war. Ken Arok's many faces are thus employed by producers of different kinds of texts to speak of and

negotiate with existing political and social concerns and doubts. The next chapter will further examine if Ken Arok's image remains useful and flexible to portray leadership and political morality in Indonesia's still volatile politics after the fall of Suharto.

CHAPTER SIX: LEADERSHIP REVISITED

In addition to Independence Day, the National Awakening Day on May 20 is important for Indonesians, as it is a commemoration of the founding fathers' declaration of unity to terminate the four-century-long foreign colonisation. But its celebration in 1998 was perhaps the most memorable because less than 20 hours later the postcolonial nation witnessed the termination of Suharto's 32-year rule. Prior to this defining moment, Indonesia was gravely stricken by economic collapse, and by the military's shooting of six university students, mass looting and burning of shops and the rape of Chinese women. It is interesting to note that May 20, 1998 fell coincidentally on a public holiday (i.e. Christ's Ascension Day recognised in the predominantly Muslim Indonesia) and millions of students, workers and people from different walks of life across the country marched in protest to bring about Suharto's resignation. Inevitably, it was a day of jubilation welcoming in a new era of transformation. "Reformasi" was the word on everybody's lips including, for instance, one Indonesian intellectual Mochtar Buchori who prefers using it instead of the otherwise English term "reform" to denote the euphoria and sudden change of political atmosphere with the resignation of Suharto.¹ The subsequent instalment of Suharto's successor B. J. Habibie gave hope to the country and one sign of hope was the relaxation of media control under his leadership. Corollary to this freedom of expression was the proliferation of published materials revealing the New Order's wrong doings. All these set forth efforts to revise Indonesian history among various social groups and actors.²

¹ See Mochtar Buchori, *Before and After Reformasi* (Jakarta: The Jakarta Post & The Asia Foundation, 2001), p. xiv.

² See Gerry van Klinken, "The Battle for History for Suharto" *Critical Asian Studies* 33.3 (2001): 323-350.

This chapter examines two different works which appeared within this period of excitement in the rewriting of Indonesian history. These are: *Arok Dedes* (1999), a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer and the *sinetron* or television serial *Ken Arok* produced by George Rudy (2002). Both look at the characterisation of Ken Arok in a way rarely attempted before especially as described in the New Order discourses of history found in history textbooks. From my conversation with Pramoedya, it would seem that the novelist saw the urgency of rewriting history through literature out of his concern about those myths and legends that have always suffocated Indonesian history.³ It took him more than twenty years before he could publish his historical novel *Arok Dedes* which he completed in 1976 during his imprisonment in Buru Island.⁴ Similarly, the *sinetron* *Ken Arok* can be seen as a remake of the 1983 film version *Ken Arok Ken Dedes* in which Rudy and Eva Arnaz played the protagonists. This *Ken Arok* *sinetron* was born out of Rudy's satisfaction with the film and his reading of several history books.⁵ Always charmed by Ken Arok, Rudy perceived distortion in official history in which this Singasari king is portrayed negatively in contrast to the *Pararaton*. Rudy, a karate-instructor-turned-actor, was enthralled by the character of Ken Arok which he played in the television serial. In this production Rudy again took up the role

³ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Personal Communication, Bojong Gede, 18 September 2002. Found in his home outside busy Jakarta, other than gardening, Pramoedya was preoccupied with composing his encyclopaedia on maritime life –another indication of his passion for rational explanation of the world and disapproval of the excessive use of myths. On Pramoedya's fascination with the encyclopaedia, see Henk Maier, "Stammer and the creaking door: The Malay writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer" in *Clearing a space: postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, ed. Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), esp. pp. 70-1.

⁴ Rewriting history remains a major force in Pramoedya's fine work appearing after the "Buru tetralogy" as his next set of novels *Arus Balik* (1995), *Arok Dedes* (1999) and *Mangir* (1999) testify. Together with the fourth novel *Larasati* (2000), these works are often called "the second tetralogy". Except for the last, he based the previous three on the history of the ancient Javanese kingdoms. Thematically speaking, Pramoedya's own classification of the other quartet appears neater whereby he adds one of his Buru novels *Child of All Nations* (1980) to the three books and slots them into the category of writing on "the great fundamental changes of the nation", as each work observes a moment of transition from one sovereignty to the next. See Chris GoGwilt, "Pramoedya's Fiction and History: An Interview with Indonesian Novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 9. 1 (1996): 147-64.

⁵ George Rudy, Personal Communication, Jakarta, 25 May 2003.

he played nearly twenty years before in order to realize his personal ambition - his self-assigned task of rewriting Ken Arok's history. While the novel has penetrated a lucrative print market, the sinetron has not been as fortunate. At the time of writing this thesis, *Arok Dedes* had seen its sixth printing, whereas the television audience never saw the completion of *Ken Arok*. After 4-month weekly broadcasts of 13 out of the 26 episodes of the full story, the series stalled, due to an internal disagreement with the broadcaster, the TPI (*Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia*, Indonesian Educational Television). This different measure of success however need not be our concern here, since this chapter aims to show that Ken Arok is an intriguing figure in history from whom the Indonesian people may have a better understanding about political leadership and morality. The discussion that follows will therefore deal with the two respective representations of Ken Arok without addressing the consumption process of the works.

Ken Arok and Ken Dedes: Deconstructing Dongeng

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, whose works have been translated into more than 25 languages, needs no detailed introduction. Several times a Nobel Prize nominee and recipient of the 1995 Ramon Magsaysay Award, Pramoedya is a household name in Indonesian studies. His life, his works and his critics have talked much about his contribution to Indonesia. For instance, Benedict Anderson quotes Pramoedya's name and works when discussing the creation of communities, race, patriotism and language in his path breaking theory on the

imagination of nations.⁶ Elsewhere, examining one short story by Pramoedya, James Siegel expounds the force of national language and (failed) revolution in Indonesia.⁷ Scholarly writing on Indonesian literature is full of discussion on Pramoedya's work, contributing as it does to the understanding of Indonesian history and literature, as in the works of Keith Foulcher and those dealing largely with feminist writings.⁸

As such, Pramoedya would be too great a writer to be adequately discussed within one single section of a thesis chapter. Thus, with a primary focus on Pramoedya's conviction that his writing is a combination of literature, history and biography, my discussion will examine *Arok Dedes*, to see what the novel has to offer in understanding leadership and political morality in Indonesia. Heinschke, for example, is in disagreement with my earlier view that *Arok Dedes* can be seen as a bitter fruit of Pramoedya's ordeal and violent experience in the island penal colony,⁹ arguing instead that the novel speaks, among other things, of male character's hope and female character's failure.¹⁰ While accepting Heinschke's argument, I shall herein maintain that firstly, *Arok Dedes* embodies the total sum of 1) Pramoedya's criticism of myth-laden Indonesian history, 2) his mission as a writer

⁶ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [1983], Revised Edition (London and New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 147-8, 184-8.

⁷ See James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 231-54.

⁸ See, for example, Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian "Institute of People's Culture", 1950-1965* (Centre of Southeast Asian Studies at Monash University, 1986); Tineke Hellwig, *In the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature* (Berkeley: Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies University of California at Berkeley, 1994) and Barbara Hatley, "Nation, 'Tradition' and Construction of the Feminine in Modern Indonesian Literature" in *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture*, ed. Jim Schiller and Barbara Martin-Schiller (Athens: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1997), pp. 90-120. On his Buru novels, see for example, Rizal Bahari, "Remembering History, W/Righting History: Piecing the Past in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Tetralogy" *Indonesia* 75 (April 2003): 61-90.

⁹ Novita Dewi, "Surviving Legend, Surviving 'Unity and Diversity': A Reading of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes Narratives" *Antropologi Indonesia* 27. 72 (September-December 2003): 131-41.

¹⁰ I thank Martina Heinschke for sharing the draft of "Kecemerlangan masa lalu dan harapan masa kini: adaptasi cerita Ken Arok dalam sastra Indonesia modern" which she recently presented at UNESA's Eighth Lustrum Conference, Surabaya, 6 December 2004.

in enhancing nation building and 3) the projection of his own sufferings. Secondly, the novel deconstructs the shape of traditional narratives by showing that political power is no longer understood as male, for leadership is likewise a female pursuit. To frame my discussion, I shall make use of existing scholarship on Pramoedya as well as a biography of the author compiled from various reports, interviews and my own conversation with him.

Foulcher argues that despite the changing modes in Pramoedya's early writings, the novelist finally secures his one best style when he presents his works in "realistic narrative based on observed experience, together with a taste for irony and satire, often found in brilliantly drawn caricature and culturally subversive parody".¹¹ While displaying his awareness of social inequalities, Pramoedya shows a resemblance to writers of international standing like William Saroyan and especially Steinbeck from whom he borrowed non-authoritative style, free flowing of action and dialogue.¹² Pramoedya has also accredited the important influence upon his writing to the Dutch author Eduard Douwes Dekker alias Multatuli whose masterpiece *Max Havelaar* (1860) made him more convinced that Dutch colonial and postcolonial historiography of Indonesia is in need of revision, and literature can be an avenue to achieve this. On being asked about his famous Buru quartets and the relationship between history and novel writing, Pramoedya has this to say: "Historical facts emerge from literature the way water, flowing through different channels, comes to shape a stream or lake. Embedded in literary form remain the facts of history".¹³ Thus when writing, it would appear that the views of the aforementioned 'mentor' Multatuli helped Pramoedya

¹¹ Keith Foulcher, "The Early Fiction of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, 1946-1949" in *Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia* edited by D. M. Roskies (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1993), pp. 191-220.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 200-4.

¹³ Chris GoGwilt, "Pramoedya's Fiction and History: An Interview with Indonesian Novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 9. 1 (1996): 155.

respond to a series of historical portrayals that seemed unfair to him. Pramoedya further explains that autobiography and the circumstances of the author may result in the ways history is reinterpreted in literature. To quote the words of another critic, “[Pramoedya’s] memoir, full of death, is a testament to life”.¹⁴

Pramoedya’s disenchantment with the ruling power’s injustice has become more pronounced in his later works from which one can read the progression of Indonesian history from colonial times to the present. His writing reflects long experience of suffering as a well-meaning citizen often misunderstood by the powers-that-be. In this way, he helps vocalise the sufferings of his fellow oppressed members of society. Pramoedya’s 1995 Ramon Magsaysay’s speech sums this up:

I myself, although the scion of a family of freedom fighters in the fifty years of our independence, have been deprived of my personal freedom for thirty-three and a half years which were seized by the Dutch, nearly one year was taken by the military during the old regime (1961), and thirty years under the present government, of which fourteen years were spent in a penal colony on the island of Buru and sixteen years as a detainee outside of the physical prison walls. The code “E. T.” (meaning Ex Tapol, i.e. “Former political prisoner”) ensured that all doors were closed to me.

As a writer, of course, I rebel against this reality. In my works, I therefore try to tell stories about certain phases in the journey of this nation while grappling with the question, “How could people become like this?”¹⁵

¹⁴ Stan Persky, “A Prisoner’s Paeon: Memories from Suharto’s Prison” *Vancouver Sun*, May 22, 1999. URL: www.radix.net/_bardsley/paeon.html.

¹⁵ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, “Sastra, Sensor dan Negara: Seberapa Jauhkah Bahaya Novel” in *Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Perahu yang Setia dalam Badai*, ed. Shohifullah (Yogyakarta: Bukulalela, 2001), p. 92-93. Here I follow the English version in “Literature, Censorship and the State: How Dangerous are Stories” translated by Marianne Katoppo. URL: www.antenna.nl/wvi/eng/poet/pram/magspee.html.

Here we see that for him, literary writing should be a response to the particular politico-historical situations that an author encounters. It could be no more obvious that Pramoedya turned his agony into a subject of concern as well as inspiration for him, as explained in his essay “My apologies, in the name of experience”.¹⁶

In detention for 14 years and 2 months, stripped of everything altogether, I reflected on all this past experience from underneath the military boot that trampled on me. It all became clearer, that all of this was nothing but a material experience, a sort of historical vicious circle of “*kampung*” civilization and culture without reorientation inward, or outward either. Meanwhile the birth of whatever it is they call the New Order is nothing other than the repetition of historical events from the second decade of the 13th century, mythified by Javanese poets several centuries later as the legend of Gandring.¹⁷

Mimicking the climax of the Mahabharata story where the Pandavas and Kuravas “bathe in the blood of their own brothers”, Pramoedya affirms his disapproval of “*kampung*” civilisation with which he begins the essay, i.e., the backwardness of people who sacrifice their own fellows. In his view, this “*kampung*” mentality prevails because of proclivity within Javanese society for such things as myths and babads. It is clear here that the Blora born writer has no hesitation of becoming self-critical of his own Javanese background, hence the apology. “I am a critic of Javanese culture. While I have consciously used Javanese elements, I have done so with a critical eye, not under its influence”, Pramoedya has said, “On the other hand, I have received the good values of Java, those that are decadent I have

¹⁶ Written by the novelist in 1991, this essay is published in *Kabar Seberang* 23 (1992): 1-9 and subsequently republished in different journals and books. See, for example, *Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Perahu yang Setia dalam Badai*, pp. 74-87. This much quoted essay is translated and footnoted by Alex Bardsley and appears in *Indonesia* 61, April 1996.

¹⁷ I follow the English version in Pramoedya Ananta Toer, “My apologies, in the name of experience” translated by Alex G. Bardsley. URL: www.radix.net/~bardsley/apolog.html.

rejected”.¹⁸ Certainly, Indonesia’s Java-centric power structure does not escape his critical eye. His works can be seen as an allegory of the factual battles for sovereignty during colonial as well as postcolonial Indonesia in which power remains concentrated mostly in Java. The centralised regime of Suharto destroyed Pramoedya’s belief in the country’s motto “Unity in Diversity”. Nevertheless, the novelist still has faith in the idea that the common experience of colonialism will enable the multiethnic society of Indonesia to unite. He has suggested that Indonesians “set aside our old, dead culture and use reason as our sole means of building the future, thus actively creating a modern national culture.”¹⁹

Therefore, in the light of Pramoedya’s literary style, approach to history and literature writing, political experience and duty as a writer,²⁰ his novel *Arok Dedes* begs to be read as the product of an author who himself is the product of the politics of his time. Naturally, when the novel emerged, people took it as a satire on the regime that had tortured him. Published in the wake of the reform era following Suharto’s fall, the novel, as its editor himself blatantly points out, is a political allegory for the rise of the New Order.²¹ Another similar comment is that of the once exiled writer and friend of Pramoedya, Hersri

¹⁸ “An Interview with Pramoedya Ananta Toer by Sebastian Tong and Fong Foong Mei”, 26 December 1996.

¹⁹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, “The Role and Attitude of Intellectuals in the Third World” (Translated from the Indonesian Language by Harry Aveling) *Tenggara* 23 (1989): 25.

²⁰ African writers seem to have no influence on Pramoedya. But in his view on history, literature and autobiography, Pramoedya is similar to, for example, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe who believes that literature is to help make right what went wrong in official history. Notwithstanding the different situation, affinity also surfaces on both authors’ ideas about the capacity of the formal/national language to expose and tell the world the burden of colonisation. For all the attempted parallels, it is interesting that Pramoedya does not seem to agree with Achebe’s racist interpretation of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (See GoGwilt, “Pramoedya’s Fiction and History”, pp. 147-64). On Chinua Achebe, see his “The Novelist as Teacher” in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), pp. 52-5 and “The African Writer and the English Language” (1975) in *The Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin (New York, N Y, Routledge, 2000), pp. 427-33.

²¹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Arok Dedes* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1999), p. viii. All subsequent references to this work, abbreviated *AD*, will be used in this thesis with pagination only. [All translations are mine unless otherwise stated]

Setiawan.²² In his open letter “Ken Angrok – Brandal Yang Menjadi Raja” to Henk Maier, Setiawan relates various characters in the novel such as Ken Arok, Kebo Ijo and Gandring to the real actors of the 1965 coup.²³ The publication of the novel *Arok Dedes* was thus timely, as the country was fixated on what was right and wrong with the passing regime by challenging the existing historical accounts, fabricated or otherwise, of modern Indonesian leaders.²⁴

Indeed amnesia about the past had been a long-standing condition engineered by the New Order regime, because the past hampers the illusory freedom from guilt the elite in power dearly held. One manifestation of selective remembering found irksome by a victim of the past like Pramoedya was the creation of myths to blur history. What Pramoedya refers to as “the legend of Gandring” quoted earlier reflects his criticism of the ways in which the account of a similar coup d’état was fabricated by the ruling elite to conceal their crimes.

In my interview with him, Pramoedya again debunked the so-called Mpu Gandring kris as one example of the Indonesian predilection for myths, doubting that such a weapon had ever existed then.²⁵ According to Pramoedya the word kris itself was derived from the word “kuros” in Portuguese – an assumption resulting from his ongoing research into maritime life. The subjugation of the Javanese kings by the Portuguese armada, he clarified, led to the construction of different myths. Pramoedya explained with ease this colonial

²² Hersri Setiawan used to be an active member of *Lekra*. Among his recently published books is *Aku Eks Tapol* [I, the Former Prisoner] (Yogyakarta: Galang Press, 2003), a grisly autobiography detailing his 7-year detention in Buru Island.

²³ At the time of writing the letter, Hersri had not read *Arok Dedes*. His comment was based on his discussing of the manuscript of what later became the published novel with Pramoedya when they were both in the Buru prison camp.

²⁴ Suharto’s 1989 biography “My Thought, My Words and My Deeds” is often considered hagiography as Hersri also mentioned in the letter. In fact, the profusion of the revisited Indonesian history books and projects dealing with a similar cause of correcting history has given evidence of the national awareness of unlearning the history of the country’s past atrocities.

²⁵ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Personal Communication, Bojong Gede, 18 September 2002.

connection of the Indonesian myths, repeating again what he had often used as an example the imaginary Goddess of the South Sea, i.e. the mystical consort of the Mataram kings in its connection to the defeat of the kings by the Dutch. But what Pramoedya detested most was the fact that postcolonial Indonesia appropriated myths of this kind not only to conceal the ruling elites' crimes, but also, in his words, "membodohi bangsa sendiri", that is, making a fool of the Indonesian nation. When I pressed him further on the resemblance of Ken Arok to Suharto, Pramoedya said that as a writer he had done his job leaving it to the readers to interpret his work at will; he did say however that if there were a comparison at all, Kebo Ijo could have been Colonel Untung the scapegoat, like himself, in the September Movement. However, referring to Ken Arok as "A great king... look at his shrine in Kagenengan", the novelist expressed an admiration of this historical figure Ken Arok that is hard to deny.²⁶ How he incorporated his interpretation of the historical figure of Ken Arok and the myths built around him into his work is the subject to which I now turn.

In the introduction of *Arok Dedes*, the novelist maintains that this work is a fiction lampooning no particular establishment in modern times because such a thing as power's gain and loss had frequently occurred in the past, ignoring as it does the foreword of the publisher that clearly states otherwise.²⁷ Nonetheless the novel digs into 13th century East Java to discover, among other things, the power of the ordinary people in fighting against corrupt authority and this remains relevant when read against present Indonesia. Pramoedya begins the Preface of the book by telling us about the recognition of basic human rights for

²⁶ Fieldwork Notes, 18-19 September 2002.

²⁷ The editor Joesoef Isak, together with Hasyim Rahman and Pramoedya Ananta Toer make up a trio ex-tapols and owners of the publishing house Hasta Mitra that began to republish Pramoedya's books after the exit of Suharto.

freedom and equality in the land of Java by King Erlangga²⁸ who reigned two centuries earlier than Ken Arok. The novelist maintains that a progressive view has long been established even before the imposition of the Magna Carta, known to be a cornerstone of liberty and justice by King John of England in the thirteenth century.²⁹ Human rights were later abused, we are told later, when Erlangga's descendent Kretajaya "improvised" slavery only to be removed subsequently upon his defeat by a certain lad named Arok – "a war strategist...politician and states-man in his own style" (AD, 2). Pramoedya goes on to say that such things as politicisation, conspiracy and takeover in leadership have been common practices since ancient times. He ends his introductory comments by saying that this "historical romance" of "Arok and Dedes" or "Dedes and Arok" is but an attempt to build "the socio-historical basis for the history of the life of Arok and Dedes" so that it sounds less like a fairytale [kedongeng-dongengan](AD, 3). Here, Pramoedya's arbitrary positioning of "Arok and Dedes" or "Dedes and Arok" in this history-based novel gives us a hint that they are both characters of equal importance as I shall argue.

The novel is divided into three interwoven parts: i) Arok's victory in seizing the leadership from Tunggal Ametung with the help of Dedes; ii) Dedes's attempt to bring down Tunggal Ametung's leadership for her own sake and because of her love for Arok and iii) Tunggal Ametung's desire to win Dedes at the expense of his loss of leadership to Arok. Pramoedya uses alternating chapters to illustrate the struggle, subterfuge and success or lack

²⁸ Airlangga is another spelling as it is used for example in Phalgunadi's *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1996). But I shall heretofore leave all other names as in Pramoedya's version.

²⁹ As the fountain of modern concepts from which The United Constitutions sprang, the Magna Carta compact was originally meant to recognize the rights of the nobles and the commoners alike for liberty and justice according to the law of the land. The peace talks between the King and the unsatisfied barons took place in the meadow of Runnemede by the Thames River on 15 June 1215. The mediator of the talk was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langston. The idea was to place limits on the King, as he was not above the ultimate power, i.e. the Law.

thereof that each (major) character goes through in vying for political power. Also thrown into the novel are Gandring (supplier of weaponry), Balakangka (the court priest), Lohgawe (the Brahmin), Kebo Ibo (the palace guard) and other characters – all of whom wrestle with each other in aiming for power and leadership. While these (minor) characters deserve special treatment, attention will be paid to the depiction of Arok and Dedes with the following twofold objective in mind. The first part of the analysis looks at how the characters are stripped of their mythical garbs to see what the novel says about political leadership as conceived in the past for the sake of the present. The second part will show that through this deconstruction of myths the novel implies that while everyone of whatever gender may aspire to and participate in political leadership, it is proven that the ‘little people’ can win and overthrow the patriarchal and elitist construct of power.

Arok the Architect

Deconstruction operates in this novel through the removal of myths especially in the characterisation of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes. As a result, the interaction of the characters and progression of certain events deviate from the standard narrative.

Contrary to the portrayal of Ken Arok as an outright villain ascending to the throne, Pramoedya’s Arok is not only someone who promotes knowledge but also the founder of a nation. As it is, his ascension to leadership is depicted as part of the liberation of his people from the bondage of having no knowledge as well as being oppressed by people in power. Meanwhile, female subservience is uncharacteristic of Dedes. Pramoedya invites the reader to see Dedes as being unyielding in her aspirations to resist those opposing her. The two

characters come across as astute and ambitious while inevitably self-serving and manipulative in their quest for power. In this novel, it is Dedes who is depicted as being deeply attracted to Arok.

I shall begin with how Pramoedya presents to us his version of Ken Arok in a way not found in the chronicles of *Pararaton* and *Nagarakratagama*, for example.³⁰ From these old sources we learn that born to an ordinary village woman by the name of Ken Endok, Ken Arok has no biological father other than the god Brahma who impregnated the woman. Later, we are told that Ken Arok met the Indian Brahmin Lohgawe who was in search of the god Vishnu and was informed that the god was at present reincarnated in a young man named Ken Arok. Later still, more mythical accounts follow of Ken Arok that make him stand apart from his fellow people: the strongest, boldest, and most untouchable in times of danger. Even at the most critical time, voices from heaven alerted Ken Arok's enemies that this young man was to be spared, for the gods had chosen him to rule Java in the near future.

In Pramoedya's *Arok Dedes*, we first meet Arok as a young man named Temu, the usual Javanese name given to a child with an uncertain birthright as his care-takers very often found him abandoned at odd places like in a cemetery, the side of the street or even in the market. Pramoedya adds a footnote about the unknown parents of Arok thus: "Some stories mention his parent is named Ken Endog. Endog, meaning egg, means that his parentage is obscure."³¹ (*AD*, 55) Here, having rejected the celestial conception of Arok's mother, the novelist further elaborates the depiction that Arok is indeed exceptional owing to his spiritual and physical stature. We know more about Arok through the diary – served as a letter of

³⁰ See I Gusti Palgunadhi, *The Pararaton: A Study of Southeast Asian Chronicle* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1996) and Slametmuljana, *A Story of Majapahit* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976).

³¹ Dalam beberapa cerita disebutkan orangtuanya bernama *Ken Endog*. *Endog*, berarti *telor*, artinya orangtuanya tidak jelas.

reference- written by his first teacher, Tantripala, describing Arok alias Temu as being a remarkably gifted student, so much so that Tantripala had nothing else to teach him. His next teacher, the Brahmin Lohgawe, gives him a new name “Arok” to mean *pembangun*, the creator/founder/architect (the opposite of destroyer) upon finishing his apprenticeship as a Brahmin. Prior to this conferment of a name, Arok who is fluent in Sanskrit, knowledgeable about the 100,000-verse-Mahabharata and the 24,000-verse-Ramayana as well as conversant with Hindu teachings at a young age delivers an eloquent speech to the astonishment and pleasure of Lohgawe. He says: “Enough. No need to continue now. There will be time for you to say all these things somewhere better. What I’ve heard comes not from the mouth of a future brahmana. These are words more appropriate to a future king, in a battle, in a debating forum, then on the throne.”³² (AD, 53) Invoking heavenly names as Hyang Bathara Guru, Hyang Ganesya and Hyang Durga Mahisasuramardini, Lohgawe next says this:

Listen all of you! From now on, in the name of Hyang Bathara Guru who combines all his syakti in Brahma, Syiwa and Wisynu, I bestow on this young man a name which will take him to reality as part of cakrawati [the supreme governance of the world]. That reality is up to this moment still burning in you. Arok is hereby your name. (AD, 53)³³

We are persuaded to see Arok’s worth as a future leader from Lohgawe’s admiration of his ability to absorb his teaching and use it to understand existing social, religious and political situations. This characterisation technique is present for a reason: sandwiched into the

³² Jangan, jangan teruskan sekarang. Ada waktunya kau ucapkan semua itu di suatu tempat yang lebih baik. Yang kudengar bukan lagi keluar dari mulut seorang calon brahmana. Itu lebih patut diucapkan oleh seorang calon raja, di medan perang, di medan tikai, kemudian di atas singgasana.

³³ Dengarkan kalian semua, sejak detik ini, dalam kesaksian Hyang Bathara Guru, yang berpadu dalam Brahma, Syiwa dan Wisynu dengan semua syaktinya, aku turunkan pada anak ini nama yang akan membawanya pada kenyataan sebagai bagian dari cakrawati. Kenyataan itu kini masih membara dalam dirimu. Arok namamu.

narrative is tension among followers of Wisynu, Syiwa and Buddha. Arok is entrusted by all Brahmans at the recommendation of Lohgawe in order to resolve the tensions - in contrast to the common myth of a heavenly voice pronouncing Ken Arok as the promised problem solver. In the novel, trouble starts when the king of Kediri, Sri Kretajaya, has imposed on the people under his sovereignty including those of the district of Tumapel, the setting of Arok's adventure, the order to pay their devotion only to Hyang Wisynu who is incarnated as a king of Satria origin. This disgust the Brahmans who accordingly become subservient to the lower caste ruler. This order is strictly undertaken by Tumapel's local district authority (Akuwu) Tunggul Ametung, also a Satria, by destroying all shrines and altars dedicated to Hyang Mahadewa Syiwa, the God of the majority – an act of bigotry that provokes their anger, while the Buddhist minority suffered this intolerance in silence.

Here, Pramoedya reveals the complexity of religion and caste through the main characters as they race for power. The class-conscious Dedes, a devotee of Syiwa, is a Brahmin who regards with scorn people of the lower classes, especially the likes of Tunggul Ametung who is uneducated and uncouth. Ken Dedes swears to help the elite Brahmana to put Hyang Syiwa back in his proper place. The Sudra-turned-Satria Tunggul Ametung is converted to Wisynu to please his Kediri superior who made him Akuwu of Tumapel - thanks to Erlangga's abolishment of the three-caste-system allowing people to upgrade their social class in accordance to the dharma (accomplishment) they have performed. But here Tunggul Ametung abuses the system as this power-extension of the Kediri Kingdom enriches himself from revenues which are supposedly to go to the central government. Arok is, in the words of Lohgawe, "an amalgamation of brahmana and satria of sudra origin" who is devoted to Syiwa while remaining Buddhist at heart as a result of Tantripala (his first

teacher)'s influence - Arok is the hope of the Brahmins as he is the key who can open the hearts and minds of people whose lives are locked in fear of the dictatorship and fanaticism of the king and his supporters such as Tunggul Ametung. This is indeed a powerful metaphor in modern times, i.e. a conflict-torn country under an authoritarian king with equally self-seeking military supporters.

Next, the standard narration of Ken Arok's rise to power is often romanticised. Usually the plot runs as follows: Ken Arok, upon seeing the dazzling beauty of Ken Dedes when touring with her husband in the Garden of Boboji, is overtaken by his unbridled lust for power, leading him to murder Tunggul Ametung and marry his wife, and after which he becomes a king. In Pramoedya's *Arok Dedes*, the 'revelation' occurs as follows:

Paramesyvari descends from the palanquin. [Arok] is mesmerised by her beauty. Her skin is like ivory. Gentle breeze brushes aside her skirt revealing her fair thighs. Arok lifts up his face staring at Dedes. Naturally, the ekagrata teaching from Tantripala works. His sparkling eyes diffuse waves of light overpowering the woman in front of him. Dedes is riveted to the earth. She bows her head, sensing the outpouring of influence on her from the eyes of the god. She trembles. Her hand shakes as she opens the door to the Forbidden Garden, but to no avail. Arok comes to help her, and she hears the voice of the god: "I am the one sent by the Holy Sang Dang Hyang Lohgawe." "Best Wishes to you, Arok." "Thank you, Your Highness"³⁴

³⁴ Paramesyvari turun dari tandu. Ia terpesona oleh kecantikannya. Kulitnya gading. Angin meniup dan kainnya tersingkap memperlihatkan pahanya yang seperti pualam. Arok mengangkat muka dan menatap Dedes. Dengan sendirinya ekagrata ajaran Tantripala bekerja. Cahaya matanya memancarkan gelombang menaklukkan wanita yang dihadapinya itu. Dedes terpakukan pada bumi. Ia menundukkan kepala, merasa mata seorang dewa sedang menumpahkan pengaruh atas dirinya. Ia gemetar. Dengan tangan menggigil ia buka pintu Taman Larangan itu, tapi tak mampu. Arok datang membantunya, dan ia dengar suara dewa itu: "Sahayalah orang Yang Suci Dang Hyang Lohgawe," "Dirgahayu untukmu, Arok." "Beribu terimakasih, Yang Mulia."

Clearly, Arok is attracted by Dedes, but the attraction is more powerful on Dedes' part. Dedes cannot withstand the spark radiating from Arok's eyes, contrary to the sensual evocation of Ken Dedes' flaming genitals in the classical epic *Pararaton*. Focus on Arok's eyes is important here as it crops up several times in the novel; almost all characters are either attracted or distracted by the brightness of Arok's eyes such as in the case with Bango Samparan as well as Arok's other teachers and Tunggul Ametung.

It is also mentioned in the old chronicles that Ken Arok's god-king quality enables him to use tal-leaves (as advised by god Brahma) to fly eastward when chased by his enemies.³⁵ This incident is rewritten by Pramoedya by describing Arok's disappearance through his skilfulness in jumping from one tree to the next, and sometimes bending the tree as a springboard. This skill alone invites the admiration of his playmates who unanimously want him to be their leader.

Unquestionably, Pramoedya downplays the role of the kris. In this novel, Gandring, the architect of the plan, is portrayed as being an accurate and astute politician, contrary to the legend that the kris-maker is the helpless victim of Ken Arok. Should Arok outwit Gandring, the novel implies, it is because the younger political actor is more accurate and more astute. To compare, Pramoedya's other work *Mangir* (2000) also counters the mythologisation of the weapon characteristic of the court literature "that extols the virtues of the ksatriya class" whereby "the evil rule of the kings, of their defeat was transformed into glorious myths."³⁶ Set in the Islamic Mataram Kingdom in 16th century Java, this play titillates the myth surrounding Kyai Baru Klinting, which is said to be a spear owned by Ki Ageng Mangir that caused his defeat as it broke into pieces in the enemy's hand. For

³⁵ I Gusti Palgunadhi, *the Pararaton*, p. 69.

³⁶ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Literature, Censorship and the State: How Dangerous are Stories".

Pramoedya, interestingly enough, Kyai Baru Klinting is but a mortal human being.³⁷ Any attempt to mystify this person (by the ruling elite), according to Pramoedya, only serve to blur historical reality. The deconstruction of the myth of the spear in *Mangir* operates in the same way as that of the kris in *Arok Dedes*. Here we see that the novel presents us with a new understanding of how one gains and loses political power, instead of the otherwise mythical explanation that power comes from the invincible *kesakten* or *sekti* of the king.

Women are Warriors; but the Survivors, the Sudras

The present discussion aims at showing that in *Arok Dedes* women play a role in the change of leadership and that those of low birth appear to be more successful in their roles. Indeed the thread running through in this novel is that the nobility and the proletariat are pitted against each other, with victory going to the latter.

I shall show first how women figure in Pramoedya's novel. Virginia Woolf says, "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman". But the maxim is only partly true in *Arok Dedes* for women characters made substantial contributions to the revolution which occurred in 13th century East Java. Besides Dedes, other female characters help in many ways in the defeat of Ametung and the rise of Arok. They are as varied as: the slave girl Oti who detests nobility and takes part in the insurgency to abolish slavery; Rimang - Tunggul Ametung's concubine who later becomes Dedes's confidant; Nyi Lembung and Nyi Bango Samparan - two loving foster mothers of Arok during his wandering years and Umang - Arok's first wife and a fierce fighter who helps to defeat Tunggul Ametung's soldiers. Here, the usually forgotten roles of women in history figure prominently as each of the women here helps alter the

³⁷ See Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Mangir* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2000).

course of the history of political power in Tumapel. As it is, the novel challenges the notion that the only way a woman might get mainstream attention is through her sexuality.

To compare with Pramoedya's *Gadis Pantai* [Girl from the Coast] (1987) in which the female protagonist is not named, in *Arok Dedes* all female characters are named. But as Hellwig shows, the characterisation of the un-named girl in *Gadis Pantai* is modelled after the novelist's grandmother Satima and his mother Saidah who are Pramoedya's self-sufficient heroes.³⁸ It appears that there is continuity of the presence of role-model female characters in Pramoedya's work. The following is Pramoedya's own statement that he looks no further for his model of (female) hero in his books:

Neither my grandmother nor my mother are [sic] forgotten. The literal meaning of the Indonesian word for hero, pahlawan, is a person –not someone necessarily grand, just regular person- whose life benefits others. My grandmother and mother benefited me. They are my role models. They live in all the people who have ever had to fight to be themselves.³⁹

But Pramoedya's female hero par excellence who is often recycled as the model for his female characters could have been Kartini about whom Pramoedya published the two-volume biography *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* [Just Call me Kartini] (1962) revealing this emancipator's role in educating the nation.⁴⁰ In the introduction to the volumes, Pramoedya writes:

³⁸ Tineke Hellwig, *In the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature* (Berkeley: Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies University of California at Berkeley, 1994), pp. 82-95.

³⁹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "What They Did with Their Lives", *TIME*, April 29, 2002, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁰ It should be noted here that regardless of Pramoedya's own view of Kartini as the national hero of emancipation, Javanese girls of the priyayi class were exclusively the main concern of Kartini's mission. On Kartini, see for example, Joost Coté, *On Feminism and Nationalism: Kartini's letters to Stella Zeelandelaar 1899-1903* (Clayton, Vic. : Monash Asia Institute, Monash University), 1995.

Thus far, Kartini has been mentioned in various commemorations as a mythological figure instead of an ordinary human being. This inevitably undermines the greatness of Kartini as to position her in the realms of deity. The less knowledge about her there is, the stronger her status as a myth stands. Her portrayal is thus distorted. As people ignore truth, they consume but the opium of myth. Indeed Kartini is far greater than the total sum of myths about her.⁴¹

Pramoedya then continues to state that “Kartini is an originator [konseptor], or someone from the Brahman class, to use the Hindu caste system” in explaining that she is the first modern thinker.⁴² In my interview with him, Pramoedya reiterated his admiration of Kartini and appeared concerned about people’s ignorance of history while challenging me to name other female heroes of Indonesia.⁴³ I shall argue that it is a woman like Kartini that Pramoedya used invariably as a template for Dedes and other female characters: individuals capable of becoming instigators for society at large - a leader. Dedes however deserves more mention than others as it is the position of Dedes that gives the novel its power.

The portrayal of a helpless and submissive wife of a more dominating spouse is not found in *Arok Dedes* as Dedes appears as daring, smart and more importantly, keen on being a person with power, just like her male counterparts. Angry and disgusted as she was at taking Tunggul Ametung as a husband, Dedes decided to do so in order not to repeat the

⁴¹ Sampai sedemikian djauh, Kartini disebut-sebut diberbagai hariperingatan lebih banjak sebagai tokoh mitos, bukan sebagai manusia biasa, jang sudah tentu mengurangi kebesaran manusia Kartini itu sendiri, serta menempatkannya kedalam dunia dewa-dewa. Tambah kurang pengetahuan orang tentangnja, tambah kuat kedudukannya sebagai tokoh mitos. Gambaran orang tentangnja dengan sendirinja lantas mendjadi palsu, karena kebenaran tidak dibutuhkan, orang hanja menikmati tjandu mitos. Padahal Kartini sebenarnya djauh lebih agung daripada totaldjendral mitos-mitos tentangnja. (Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Panggil Aku Kartini Sadjja*, Vol. 1 [Bukittingi, Jakarta: N. V. Nusantara, 1962], p. x.) [My Translation]

⁴² Kartini adalah seorang konseptor, atau seorang dari golongan Brahmana, menurut sistim kasta Hindu. Ibid, p. xii.

⁴³ As a personal note, Pramoedya was amused when during our conversation, my companion, a historian, mentioned the female hero Rohana Kudus –whose full name Pramoedya had forgotten until then- as I recalled with difficulty more known names such as Dewi Sartika, Cut Nyak Dien and Martha Tiahahu. All female heroes mentioned here are not of Javanese origin. Pramoedya was quick to notice that Javanese culture tends to reduce a hero like Kartini to a mythical figure. Fieldwork Notes, 18 September 2002.

experience of her countrywomen who were made wives of kings who all died either through poison or execution when they resisted. Her resentment at being Tunggul Ametung's captive turns into the determination to bring down the Wisynu influence in Tumapel – a mission all Syiwa religious authorities like her father attempt to undertake. Being a Brahmin solely taught by her father, Dedes is no less adept and learned than Arok who impressed the eminent guru Lohgawe, to say nothing of his first teacher Tantripala who admitted to having nothing else to teach the then Temu. Admiring Arok who is more or less her equal with regard to his intelligence, Dedes is scornful of Tunggul Ametung's coarseness and stupidity so as to undermine his capability as a leader who cannot read, much less write. Thus, upon becoming a Paramesywari and in charge of the Tumapel residence, Dedes begins to wield her authority as the Number One person in the household who can give orders and make others obey her. That she takes pleasure in becoming a person of power is clear:

She smiles in contentment having seen the evidence of her power as a Paramesywari. She walks around the pavilion. In her heart she unceasingly praises Hyang Mahadewa. Power is indeed sweet and satisfying. She'll never let it go, and she'll make it a refuge for herself, as well as for her anguish and anxiety. She encircles the pavilion for one more time, then turns back to the Royal Chamber and orders Rimang to stop the gamelan. The gamelan stops straight away (*AD*, 101-2)⁴⁴

And again:

⁴⁴ Ia tersenyum puas mengetahui wujud dari kekuasaannya sebagai Paramesywari. Pendopo itu dikelilinginya. Dalam hati tak henti-henti ia mengucap syukur kepada Hyang Mahadewa. Kekuasaan ini adalah indah dan nikmat. Ia takkan melepaskannya lagi, dan ia akan jadikan benteng untuk dirinya sendiri, juga terhadap dukacita dan rusuh hati. Sekali mengitari pendopo kemudian ia balik masuk ke Bilik Agung dan memerintahkan pada Rimang supaya gamelan berhenti. Gamelan itu berhenti seketika.

Infinite power is in her imagination like the cakra, the arrow belonging to Hyang Wisynu that can penetrate all. She senses the flicker of an oil lamp in all four corners of the room like the grace from Hyang Surya himself, who gives her strength, far greater than before, the strength to obtain all. Bowing her head, she smiles. She whispers: "God of Heaven, God of Earth." (AD, 102)⁴⁵

The depiction of Dedes as a woman of will is maintained throughout the novel as in her ability to exert influence within the palace. For example, when a series of calamities occurs, Dedes acts promptly to provide help to the needy and hastens to tell people to turn back to Hyang Syiwa and his consort Durga to appease their anger. The increasing number of shrines devoted to Hyang Syiwa built inside the palace is yet another proof of her unyielding effort to undermine Tunggul Ametung and the Wisynu forces.

Near the end of the novel the author's description of Dedes' yearning for power becomes more pronounced.⁴⁶ After the death of Tunggul Ametung, Dedes sees for the first time that people are loyal to Arok and not to her and she learns several things in rapid succession. Firstly, she is not as powerful as she thinks she is. Secondly, Lohgawe whom she trusts and respects highly is also in support of Arok's position at the helm of leadership. And finally, another woman –not of noble descent and ugly looking as well- also plays a role as the co-wife and second Pramesywari in Tumapel. Dedes' recognition that Arok, Umang and their family members are all devotees of Wisynu and not Syiwa like her is all but devastating; with this she knows that her mission to restore devotion to Syiwa is doomed. Dedes is distraught upon realising that Arok is after all the greatest winner. And such a winner takes

⁴⁵ Kekuasaan tanpa batas itu terbayang olehnya seperti cakra Hyang Wisynu yang mampu menembus segala. Nyala damar di empat penjuru ruangan ia rasakan seperti karunia dari Hyang Surya sendiri, yang memberinya kekuatan, jauh lebih besar daripada sebelumnya kekuatan untuk mendapatkan segala. Dalam tunduknya ia tersenyum. Berbisik: "Jagad Dewa, Jagad Pramudita."

⁴⁶ Novita Dewi, "Poskolonial, Pramoedya dan Pembangun-Paramesywari" *Jurnal Ilmiah Kebudayaan Gatra* 15. 20-21 (March-September 2000): 28-32.

all: Arok makes Dedes share her bed with his other wife. One might think that for all the consistency that the author has thus far demonstrated in characterising the non-stereotyped Dedes, the portrayal weakens by the end of the novel: “[Dedes] closes and flickers her eyes. She sees darkness right in front of her, and she is not prepared for that. For the first time she lets her tears stream down.”⁴⁷ (AD, 413) Here, the novelist uses her comment on the irony of political power. Dedes’ incomplete victory, rather than defeat, in the game is a high irony to be interpreted carefully, i.e. class-struggle to which I now turn.

Pramoedya plays down the social class issue and its political implications by showing that people of low origins have as much potential as the elite for leadership and for this reason the latter often attempt to impede the former. The presence of Umang and other family and friends of Arok –most of them Sudra and Wisynu alike- indicates the defeat of the high caste and Syiwa devotees like Dedes. Here the elite are undermined by the obstinacy and determination of those born in lower castes. Next, Dedes has been taught by her father that lacking noble blood, the present Isana Dynasty has continued to reign from Erlangga to Kretajaya by its reliance on military force, and that leadership of this kind is deplorable in the eyes of the Brahmins. The fact is that she is now kidnapped by a Satria and her Brahmin father and his followers cannot do anything to save her. Now that Lohgawe, the religious authority, the only person whom Dedes can count on, has promoted the Sudra Arok to change history, she becomes displeased at the prospect and at the same time doubtful as to whether her nobility has any meaning at all. Stealing a glance at Arok who appears as Sudra from head to toe, Dedes has this in her mind: “There is no drop of Hindu blood in him, proven by the high cheek bones and the inwardly curved nose. He is wide-mouthed and his

⁴⁷ Ia pejamkan dan kedipkan mata. Ia lihat kegelapan di hadapannya, dan ia tidak rela. Untuk pertama kali ia biarkan airmatanya berlinang.

face is broad too, perhaps not much different from Tunggul Ametung when he was young,”⁴⁸ (AD, 244) But then a sudden surge of admiration overwhelms Dedes on seeing the young man, and this makes her ponder:

Would a Sudra with no single drop of Hindu blood be able to do great things? Looking at her reflection on the bronze mirror, she caresses her long, straight nose, her not very high cheek bones, and tries to convince herself: this Hindu blood of mine should enable me to do great things. If Arok can be appointed by the Holy One, I should be able to appoint myself too. (AD, 244-5)⁴⁹

Here, Dedes finds it hard that in order to win back her class supremacy, she needs the help of the class she consistently treats with contempt as being inferior. Should one wonder why Pramoedya adds some kind of caste prejudice to Dedes' characterisation all the way through the novel, the answer to this suspicion is the power of irony. In his biography of Kartini, for example, we can deduce Pramoedya's view of social class. He says that “nobility is no longer a divine blessing bestowed upon the chosen people, it is but a coincidence which remains to be tested on its merits”.⁵⁰ The novelist's attention to the characters' body parts such as eyes and nose in *Arok Dedes*, likewise, can be better understood when, again, we look at his appreciation of Kartini as a paragon of women leaders who in his view destabilized the tyranny of class. Pramoedya makes an observation on the way Kartini is often depicted in painting as follows:

⁴⁸ Tak ada sedikit pun darah Hindu dalam dirinya, nampak pada tingginya tulang pipi dan lengkung hidung ke dalam, mulut yang agak lebar dan mukanya yang lebar pula, tak jauh berbeda dari Tunggul Ametung sewaktu mudanya barangkali.

⁴⁹ Adakah seorang sudra tanpa sedikit pun darah Hindu bias melakukan hal-hal besar? Ia pandangi wajahnya sendiri pada cermin perunggu, membelai batang hidungnya yang tinggi dan lurus, pada tulang pipinya yang tidak begitu tinggi, dan meyakinkan diri: darah Hindu ini semestinya menjamin diriku untuk juga bias lakukan hal-hal besar. Kalau Arok bias ditunjuk oleh Yang Suci, semestinya aku bisa juga menunjuk diriku sendiri.

⁵⁰ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Panggil Aku Kartini Sadja* 1, p. 38.

At first glance, people will be impressed by her round face – the face of her grandfather. Then to her eyes, which are not set too deep, even quite protruding, so to speak. This shape of face and eyes is inherited from her grandfather, especially those eyes, unmistakably characteristic of a noble Native. But when people next look at her nose, this time they may imagine something else. That type of nose is rarely found in the upper class, but more among the Commoners. Neither its angle, height nor width is that of Tjondronegoro [Kartini's grandfather] or Sosroningrat [Kartini's father]. That very nose is inherited from someone whose picture is never publicised to date, the nose of Kartini's mother, a woman of low birth.⁵¹

While Kartini's paternal grandfather, her father and her husband were all nobility, her mother was a commoner scarcely mentioned in the official history. Pramoedya believes that Kartini was a proof of an individual balancing both worlds – a semi-aristocrat whose heart goes out to the commoners.⁵² Kartini did not have a nicely shaped aristocratic nose like Dedes in Pramoedya's novel, but she did great things. Dedes is therefore not a Kartini for the protagonist here is conscious of her class and behaves accordingly. Having said this, I argue that through the character of Dedes the novelist expresses his objection with the idea of noble superiority. While the populace is described in the novel as occupying the winning side, Dedes is 'defeated' because she was oblivious to the power of the masses, believing that her high-born status and education would reign supreme. Through the lens of Erlangga, the king

⁵¹ Mula-mula orang akan terkesan pada wajahnya jang bundar – wajah kakeknja. Kemudian matanja, jang djuga tidak dalam terpasang pada rongganja, bahkan boleh dikata agak keluar. Bentuk muka dan mata ini adalah warisan kakeknja, dan terutama mata itu, tidak meninggalkan tjiri kebangsawanan Pribumi. Tetapi kalau perhatian orang sampai pada hidungnja, sekaligus orang telah mendapat gambaran lain. Hidung itu tidak biasa pada golongan bangsawan, tapi lebih umum pada Rakjat djelata. Baik kemantjungannya, ketinggiannja maupun ketipisannya bukan lagi hidung Tjondronegoro ataupun Sosroningrat. Itulah hidung warisan seseorang jang gambarnya tidak pernah diterbitkan sampai dewasa ini, hidung ibunda Kartini, seorang wanita jang berasal dari Rakjat djelata. (Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Panggil Aku Kartini Sadja* 1, p. 38). [My Translation].

⁵² In view of historical accuracy, Kartini's nobility is a social fact that gave her the privileged access to the Western cultural encounters which helped her to further the cause of emancipation for Javanese girls of the priyayi class – not commoners as in Pramoedya's view.

introduced to us in the Preface of this novel, Pramoedya says: “It is not true that people are different and classifiable according to their secular and sacred powers” (*AD*, xi).

In the end, this novel’s proletarian ring of having Arok come victorious undercuts one popular Javanese dictum: “*raja turun raja*” meaning only kings can beget a king. As such, there is no one-to-one parallel between the characters in *Arok Dedes* and the modern real political actors -for instance making a comparison between Arok and Suharto. The novel exhibits a high degree of intertextuality and must be interpreted cautiously. For Pramoedya, leadership is not inheritable but fought for with a good fight. And through the representation of Ken Arok in the novel, we may assume that Pramoedya gives us a story about a fair procurement of political power and about quite a noble leader for us to consider. Pramoedya’s belief in the inheritability of leadership is nowhere more obvious when he spoke this one word: “Disgraceful [*Memalukan*]” when I asked for his opinion on the leadership of Sukarno’s daughter.⁵³

I shall now move on to another portrayal of Ken Arok in this period of heightened awareness of reinterpretation of Indonesian history through the medium of *sinetron*.

The Right Message in the Wrong Medium

The present discussion will focus more on the reason and passion of the artistic director and movie actor George Rudy⁵⁴ that underpinned the production of the *sinetron Ken Arok*, rather than detailed analysis of the work, given that this television serial is yet to be

⁵³ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Personal Communication, Bojong Gede, 18 September 2002. See also his calling Megawati “a princess” instead of a president in “I Just Don’t Believe in Her,” *TIME* August 6, 2002, p. 25.

⁵⁴ Given the intense involvement of George Rudy in the production of this television serial in terms of thematic and artistic idealism, finance and marketing of the product, thereafter this work will be treated as Rudy’s text.

completed. As previously explained, Rudy's sinetron was broadcast by the private-run TPI (*Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia*) [Indonesian Educational Television] every Friday at 08.00 PM from 4 December 2002, but was discontinued by mid April the following year owing to unsettled problems involving PT Elang Buana Sakti, the producer of the sinetron and the owner of TPI.⁵⁵

Behind the production of the serial *Ken Arok* was the communal commitment to rewriting history by George Rudy because the venture involved several parties who were in search of cultural novelty to take advantage of the reformasi momentum. It began in 2002 with the then Mayor of Surabaya, Sunarto Sumoprawiro, who decided to promote local stories from East Java nationwide.⁵⁶ Then there was a producer and businessman, George Handiwiyanto, whom the Mayor approached.⁵⁷ This George Handiwiyanto, owner of the film industry PT Elang Buana Sakti then passed the task to George Rudy as they used to work together as karate instructors in Surabaya in the 1970s.⁵⁸ The *Ken Arok* story to which each party agreed was the choice of George Rudy. Based on the script written by Yamin Azhari, the serial *Ken Arok* looks at the Singasari saga from a different angle: the emphasis is on the cruelty of Tunggul Ametung, hence *Ken Arok*'s positive sides are emphasised. Apparently, one prominent national newspaper subscribes to this view in the coverage of the sinetron; quoting Rudy's promotional statements, the report adds that history should become a lesson in facing the uncertainties [*kabut*] in current Indonesian politics.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ George Rudy, Personal Communication (Telephone Conversation), 10 May 2002. In accordance with Rudy's request, matters related to this discontinuation are not discussed here.

⁵⁶ "Ken Arok, lahir kembali", *Surya*, October 6, 2002, p. 9.

⁵⁷ "George Kuasai Semua Lini Pemkot: Mulai Ken Arok hingga Reklame", *Jawa Pos*, October 1, 2002, p. 12.

⁵⁸ "Akhirnya, George Rudi Jadi Titisan 'Ken Arok'", *Jawa Pos*, October 3, 2002, p. 12.

⁵⁹ "Sinetron Ken Arok: Agar Bangsa tak Mengulang Sejarah", *Suara Pembaruan*, October 10, 2002, p. 11.

The plot of the Ken Arok story in the serial was born out of the suggestion of George Rudy especially with regard to the narration of Ken Arok's violence and his Mpu Gandring kris. The kris does not feature a great deal in the narrative - in fact the curtailment of the series meant that viewers never saw the scene featuring the revenge of the Mpu Gandring kris. On the kris itself, Rudy has his own story shared during my interview with him.⁶⁰ Rudy told me about Mr. Mustajab, a historian and antique collector from whom Rudy sought advice prior to making the film. According to Mustajab -somewhat different from the popular view- Mpu Gandring had practically finished making the kris when Ken Arok came to collect it, but he had not yet filled the weapon with spiritual mantra, hence the inevitable destruction caused by the eventual use of the weapon. Mustajab told Rudy that Ken Arok hardly used the kris as he used a *gobang*, a dagger of different make and shape, to arm himself. Rudy was so convinced of the lesser importance of the kris in the depiction of Ken Arok through a painting in Mustajab's collection. Rudy said that he felt the touch of a mystical aura emanating from this painting which Mustajab later gave away to a high-ranking officer in the army.⁶¹ The painting shows an image of Ken Arok holding a gobang and not a kris! As it is, Rudy was convinced that aggrandizing the Mpu Gandring kris was not necessary because he had his own vision and mission in his work. And Rudy's self-set mission is to rewrite history. "The colonial sourced Indonesian history textbooks are full of errors," said Rudy whose maternal grandfather is a Dutchman, "I need to do something about this."⁶² One way to rectify what Rudy believed as colonial inaccuracies in most history books is by painting a good picture of Ken Arok in his sinetron.

⁶⁰ Interview with George Rudy, Jakarta, 25 May 2003.

⁶¹ The official is the retired general R. Hartono. I failed to pursue further whether this Madurese military man wanted to keep the work for decoration or for other 'mystical' reasons.

⁶² George Rudy, Personal Communication, Jakarta 25 May 2003.

Another ambition of Rudy was to edify young people with “healthy” entertainment as a substitute for the trivial teen flicks and spooky thrillers that have currently dominated the Indonesian film industry.⁶³ The hype of ghost stories on the big screen and television alike was unprecedented at the turn of the decade. Haunted-house-themed soap operas received high ratings and horror films became box office hits whose audiences are mostly teenagers.⁶⁴ Should the viewers need more thrills, a legend-based sinetron could do the job provided that it sufficiently promises a certain degree of sensuality and of spooky scenes along the lines of *mak lampir* serials.⁶⁵ Given the situation, Rudy believes that historical dramas are a better choice as movies of this kind have already had a nationwide market. The still running sinetron *Angling Dharma*, for example, has made the highest rated entertainment programme on television for more than a year. Besides, the poor reception especially in terms of picture clarity of the TPI broadcasting in remote areas like Purwodadi, which was the setting of the *Ken Arok* sinetron, caused otherwise potential viewers to watch other programmes offered by different television channels.

If staging history or legend is a formula for success during this period, the sinetron *Ken Arok* demonstrates that such efforts are not without problems. Rudy’s attempt to reconcile idealism and economic ability in his work did not work out as expected. His *Ken Arok* hit the wrong key as it strove to educate the audience while riding on the back of the popularity and success of other television serials that he sought to challenge. As a comparison, other sinetrons like *Gajah Mada* and *Angling Dharma*, to mention but two, have no pretensions other than pure entertainment. While excelling in cinematic technique,

⁶³ George Rudy, Personal Communication, Jakarta, 25 May 2003.

⁶⁴ “‘Tusuk Jelangkung’: Hantu yang Gemar Gentayangan”, *KOMPAS*, April 13, 2003, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Based on the Javanese tales of old, Mak Lampir is the blood-sucking, hideous, revengeful old witch who is out to destroy her enemies. This bare-breasted granmother –hence the name- has become a love/hate character in the long-running television series.

for example by hiring directors from China to help with the fighting scenes, the two serials capitalise on celebrated actors and actresses familiar to Indonesian viewers. Conversely, except Rudy as the protagonist Ken Arok, supporting characters in *Ken Arok* were newcomers in the film industry chosen because of the producer's principle of promoting local talent. Yet despite the less profitable outcome, the remake of *Ken Arok* has gained recognition as a challenge to the often imposed, biased and one-sided views of history⁶⁶ – a gesture that struck a chord with public sentiment during the age of Reformasi.

While brawls and skirmishes are good thrilling ingredients to put into a live performance such as ketoprak, so much more of these effects can be achieved in electronic cinema through media technology. But Rudy's sinetron *Ken Arok* did not explore this possibility. George Rudy is inspired by the similarity between the superhero in his film and the depiction of heroes in comics.⁶⁷ Rudy's *Ken Arok* is cast no differently from Kosasih's *Ken Arok* comics especially with regard to the hero's benign characteristics.⁶⁸ Having said this, viewers who looked for gritty violence and blood-splattering scenes in the sinetron *Ken Arok* were disappointed. Known more for his action movies in the 1980s whereby he regularly played the 'good guy',⁶⁹ Rudy is a *Ken Arok* aficionado and what emerges in this sinetron is a character combining Rudy's imagining of *Ken Arok* and the persona of the actor himself.

The first six episodes appear unnecessarily lengthy. They are all about the journey in the forest of Karautan (East Java) of *Ken Arok*, like that of Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest.

⁶⁶ See, for example, my "Ken Arok and Ken Dedes: A Construction of History Textbooks" presented at the Inaugural NUS Graduate Students Symposium 2003, Asian Research Institute, Singapore, October 16-17, 2003.

⁶⁷ George Rudy, Personal Communication, Jakarta, 20 May 2003.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 4.

⁶⁹ "Penata Laga: Agar Tak Asal Jotos", *Femina* No. 41/XXIV, 17-23 October 1996, p. 24.

Against the forest background,⁷⁰ the hero's fits and fights appear realistic in comparison to the 1983 Ken Arok movie, thanks to the development of cinematography. Despite the display of thrilling movements, violent scenes are however scarce. Looting, stealing and killing certainly appear, but these brutal actions are the work of Ken Arok's followers and other criminals roaming the Karautan forest which Ken Arok condemns. Our hero here steals only from the rich to give to the poor. In Episode 9, for example, Ken Arok punishes one of his men for breaching this rule and committing other improper acts.⁷¹ Here, Rudy's interpretation of Ken Arok defies what the scholarship on violence calls the "jago", the hired thugs who helped local authorities to subdue any rivals.⁷² Neither is there any salacious tale of rape in *Ken Arok* to tantalize the audience. Again, Rudy enlarges the figure of Ken Arok. Like Kosasih, he complements Ken Arok's morality with gentleness and respect for women. Episode 12 illustrates this. A father, who out of gratitude gives his only daughter to Ken Arok to marry, receives a serious reprimand by Ken Arok, as this gesture would be an unnecessary courtesy to the hero. Rudy thus constructs the ideal Ken Arok. To what extent is he successful in conveying his message? If the poor rating and termination of the screening are any indication, George Rudy, the secret admirer of Ken Arok has found it hard to change the general perception of the Singasari king of thieves. It appears that Rudy's too glowing

⁷⁰ Upon my comment on the sombre, dull and uninteresting technicolour, Rudy said that he tried to match the background, costume wear and even the smallest panoramic details with the colours found in the nature worlds of Indonesia as in soil, vegetation, flora and fauna. He might be right, but the main viewers of sinetron, i.e. teenagers and homemakers, would be more interested in the trendy bright colours as seen in shopping malls and houses of the upper class being the usual setting of sinetrons. This is why 'family' sinetron is more promising than 'historical' sinetron, although exceptions apply. To mention one example, *Angling Dharma*, another legend-based sinetron shown on a different channel at about the same time as *Ken Arok* received a high rating. This more 'colourful' sinetron has all the necessary ingredients that sell in entertainment of this kind: illustrious stars, intriguing plot and a fair amount of sexually explicit scenes.

⁷¹ The video-recording of this episode is in my possession.

⁷² See, for example, Henk Schulte Nordholt, "A Genealogy of Violence" in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia* edited by Colombijn and Linblad (Leiden: KITVL Press, 2002), pp. 33-62.

picture of Ken Arok fails to outshine the typical and more known image of Ken Arok as a villain in the Indonesian imagination.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the representation of Ken Arok shortly after the fall of Suharto, a modern leader with whom this thirteenth century king is often compared. The novel *Arok Dedes* and the sinetron *Ken Arok* are similar to each other in that Ken Arok receives sympathetic treatment: an intelligent leader, a political strategist. However this is where the resemblance ends because the novel depicts Ken Arok as a parody of Suharto: Arok's takeover is less for his own gain than for the betterment of people of his class. Meanwhile, the plain presentation of Ken Arok as a 'good' leader in the television serial is hard to digest because the strong grip of the image of the wicked Ken Arok has continued to prevail.

I have shown that the Mpu Gandring kris was removed from both works on differing grounds. In the eyes of Pramoedya, the Mpu Gandring kris and the legend built around the weapon are proof of the indulgence of the ruling powers in creating myths to obliterate their weaknesses and crimes. As different as the novel, the sinetron employs two different weapons to help distinguish two sets of values inscribed in the story. While courage, honesty and loyalty are symbolised by Ken Arok's sword-like weapon *gobang*, the Mpu Gandring kris, which the television audience never saw due to the discontinuation of the program, is a symbol of the people's anger and the power of karma.

I have explained throughout the foregoing chapters, the role of the 'bad' Ken Arok is often addressed to Suharto in texts critical of his leadership. I would argue that the appearance of the unusually 'good' Ken Arok in this era of Reformasi has often been met with perplexity as Ken Arok is as dualistic as Suharto in the Indonesian imagination. Elson

writes, “[Suharto] presented himself as an infallible father of Indonesia, yet he remained a mysterious and puzzling figure”.⁷³ Indeed during the jubilant time of power transfer, people would be quick to associate the representation of any leaders –fictive or historical- with the just deposed leader Suharto if the representation in question is of ‘bad’ leaders. Accustomed to relating the malevolence of this thirteenth century king to the atrocities of the modern leader, some people might have been bewildered when Ken Arok seemingly received a ‘face-lift’ in the two works studied in this chapter. Pramoedya’s stance as an eminent writer and critic of the New Order has earned his novel *Arok Dedes* appraisals that seem to say that “Ken Arok is much better than Suharto”. As for Rudy’s sinetron, on the contrary, the blatant deconstruction of Ken Arok from his all vile characteristics being a rapist-robber-turned-raja in history books to an exemplary hero of the serials seems too hard to accept. George Rudy’s hero Ken Arok becomes ‘larger than life’ for the audience of the television serials who prefer non-taxing entertainment. The Ken Arok serial takes the pleasure out of the audience’s fascination with the usual binary character of Ken Arok the Rebel and the King. The clean image of Ken Arok seems to render the representation unrealistic, unimportant and uninteresting. Having said this, I do not dismiss the possibility that people may eventually decide that Suharto was, after all, not so bad a leader having seen such a depiction of Ken Arok in this sinetron, as after Suharto’s downfall Indonesians have continued to grapple with issues of leadership.

To conclude, representations of Ken Arok are indeed potent sites where people pour out their apprehension about as well as their appreciation of the morality of their political leaders.

⁷³ R. E. Elson, *Suharto: A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. i.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

One thread of argument running through the preceding chapters has been the intimate link between the different representations of Ken Arok across time and politico-cultural changes within Indonesian society. I discussed the popular imaginations of Ken Arok, the 13th century Singasari king of East Java in various types of textual and performance art to show how these representations are sites that reveal undercurrent tensions, contradictions and critiques of political power, leadership and morality in modern Indonesia. The popular images of Ken Arok are contemplations as well as imaginative horizons that mimic and lampoon Indonesian political reality while relishing utopian visions of leadership found among ordinary Indonesians. This study shows how the images produced are in part shaped by wider popular imaginings and by the perceptions of political leadership in Indonesian society held by the different cultural producers. Political instability is a repeated theme that binds the works together from the early work of Muhammad Yamin's play, *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1928), to the recent television serial *Ken Arok* (2003) by George Rudy. Through a span of 75 years, portrayals of Ken Arok repeatedly appeared during times of political and social upheaval such as anti-colonial resistance, leadership transitions, rising authoritarianism and political uncertainties.

This thesis opens with an introduction to the figure of Ken Arok explaining why he has become a symbolic site for the differing expressions, interpretations and negotiations of political power in Indonesian society. As explained, Ken Arok remains "alive" in people's imaginations as both a disparaged and admired character in so many different ways. On the one hand, in official history, for example, he is evoked as a dissident, deceitful, cruel, and even criminal character. Authorised historical

representations often paint Ken Arok as a symbol of immorality. On the other hand, literature and popular culture depict Ken Arok in a variety of representations which are not always as negative as those of historical discourses. Located on the margins of history, the figure of Ken Arok is appropriated as an allegory of Indonesian political leadership in various popular cultural imaginaries. The enigma of a combination of myth and history encapsulated in the Ken Arok narrative becomes an object of fascination for a society consumed by tales and myths of the *dongeng*. The Ken Arok story appears to withstand time as it is reworked and reproduced across different eras since Indonesia's Independence, offering glimpses of people's perplexity at the political culture and at the morality of political leaders in their country. The revival of the Ken Arok story across the different historical periods demonstrate the human capacity to conjure up diverse visions of the past to relate to present realities of their time.

In Chapter Two, I introduced my theoretical framework explaining how popular culture, functioning as it does as a negotiating space for the expression of socio-political dynamics, may help expose everyday visions, passions and tensions over the otherwise suppressed issues of power, leadership and morality in an authoritarian state like Indonesia. I argued that studying the images of a controversial historical figure like Ken Arok in various cultural expressions across different junctures in history may contribute to a rethinking of Indonesian political culture, bearing in mind that existing scholarship has tended to focus more on elite practices rather than on ordinary Indonesians' perspectives. This present study's attempt to look at literary and popular representations of Ken Arok –a figure in history of moral and political ambiguity- may open up a new way of understanding everyday perceptions of power, leadership and morality in Indonesian politics.

I explained that political power and leadership are often conceived of in terms of a tacit social contract between the ruler and the ruled found in common sayings and beliefs in Indonesian society. A king's success is measured by the justice, peace and prosperity experienced by the society that the king rules alongside the admiration, respect and support that the people have for the king. Despite this unspoken social contract, the various political leaders in Indonesia's modern history have failed to live up to this social expectation. I argue that the ways Ken Arok is imagined often reflect what people make of their political leaders' failure in fulfilling this implicit contract as expected. The representations of Ken Arok in the works chosen for this study are media or channels that convey both the common and the particular perspectives of political power held by each cultural producer. By contextualising the images of Ken Arok against the socio-biographies of these cultural producers, this study reveals the complex understandings of political life and political leaders expressed in the popular recuperation of the Ken Arok figure. Within a multicultural and religious society such as Indonesia, the issues of class, background, age and political choices can make one author's reproduction of Ken Arok very different from the next. The authors' individual perceptions of Indonesia's historical past help shape the templates of their respective works. Working during different eras of political and ideological preoccupation, some authors became more politically affected than others. Both larger social and personal circumstances experienced by the cultural producers helped shaped their representations of Ken Arok. Using this approach, I sought to examine the different representations of Ken Arok in the subsequent chapters with the aim of better grasping the meanings produced within the particular contexts of each reproduction of Ken Arok.

This study shows how in the hands of Muhammad Yamin, Ken Arok is portrayed as the embodiment of a unified Indonesia in his play *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1928). In

Yamin's play, the contrite Ken Arok is excused for his vices while his virtues are extolled. Addressing nationalists' concerns in the 1920s about the constitution of the national culture and social equality between elites and commoners as well as over the issue of secularism vis-à-vis Islam in the making of an independent Indonesia, Yamin's play reflects his aspirations for a collective and sovereign Indonesia. The play harbours the enthusiasm of the author –who himself was a Muslim- in drawing on the grandeur of the Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms of Java as a model for the Indonesian nation-state, although this view inevitably annoyed Yamin's political contenders like the Islamic nationalist Hamka. By depicting Ken Arok as a proletarian hero of social unity in his play, Yamin, who came from an educated and elitist background, aimed to capture the hearts of Indonesians to further the nationalist cause. Thus Yamin –a privileged nationalist waiting in the wings of power- made use of Ken Arok's image to propagate nationalism by appropriating this figure of the past kingdom and presenting him as a heroic symbol of Indonesian unity in order to express his own ideal of a united, if utopian, Indonesia comprising people of different class, religion and cultural backgrounds.

Besides Yamin, I also analysed the representations of Ken Arok in two other popular cultural media, i.e. the debut rock opera *Ken Arok* by Harry Roesli (1975) and R. A. Kosasih's comic books *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* (1977) which appeared during the period understood by many as 'extended' transitional government of an even more despotic character. Suharto's second Presidential inauguration was met by public protests and riots against which background the rock opera and the comic books respectively appropriated Ken Arok to convey both antagonism and appeasement for the politicians' behaviour and morality at that time. Sentiments of anxiety-turned-anger were conveyed by Roesli's *Ken Arok* which rode on the popularity of rock music in the 1970s among young radical Indonesians. The rock opera made use of Ken Arok's image as symbol of

political leadership in the past to draw a parallel with the leadership of the day. As different as can be from Roesli's political radicalism via his rock opera, the comic series by Kosasih instead depict a sedate picture of an ancient ruler with malevolent and benevolent persona, pointing to a reverence rather than condemnation of flawed kings. For Kosasih, his Ken Arok serials conveyed the message that political leaders can be faulted, but they are never too late to repent for the good of all. Published in response to the consumerism of popular fiction, the serials *Ken Arok dan Ken Dedes* reflect Kosasih's political conservativeness in portraying Ken Arok (and Ken Dedes) as the archetypes of unity and harmony in correspondence to the nationalist ideology of Pancasila. However, using comics to depict the exemplary tolerant society in the past, Kosasih's representation of Ken Arok was radical in the sense that the comic artist wanted to prove wrong the elitist denunciation of comics as a low form of popular culture that eroded the morality of Indonesian youth as well as the allegation of the genre's indulgence in fantasizing boldness and brutality. These different portrayals of Ken Arok can be better understood by understanding the contexts and ideals within which these works were produced. The rock opera made good use of Ken Arok's plasticity as a site for a critique of Indonesian state politics whereas in the comic books, there is conciliation with the regime's cultural policies.

I continued describing Ken Arok's images toward the end of Suharto's ruling period in the 1990s at which his reluctance to step down and his switch to form alliance with Islamists plunged Indonesia into further chaos as ethnic and religious conflicts erupted all over the country. The three different performances examined during this era: the ketoprak titled *Anusapati* (1985); the renewed rock opera *Ken Arok* (1991) and the sacred dance *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* (1990) again evoked the Ken Arok figure for different purposes. The story of Ken Arok was used by the ketoprak and rock opera to

mimic the social anarchy and angst which hovered over Indonesia as a consequence of Suharto's refusal to give up power and the moral conduct of leaders of the New Order regime. The royal dance instead recuperated a redemptive facet of the Ken Arok story in showing that two differing sets of philosophy can amalgamate into one strong unity. My discussion shows how in Roesli's *Ken Arok* of 1991, the re-enactment of the story of this 13th century king became even gloomier than that of the 1975 version of the performance. By depicting Ken Arok as a leader of a band of bandits who were opposing a local figure of authority of equal atrocity, the opera presented a world of anarchy, confusion and pessimism where corrupt leaders were fighting their equally corrupt enemies. Likewise, the ketoprak *Anusapati* featured the story of Ken Arok but focusing on the struggle between Ken Arok and his stepson, Anusapati, to parody social apprehension over malicious and untrustworthy leaders. The satire conveyed here alluded to Suharto's persistence in wanting to run for President for yet another term after being installed for the fourth time and having been named 'Father of Development'. In this ketoprak Ken Arok is not represented as a father figure nor is Ken Arok portrayed as an exemplary leader or creator of the country in the rock opera. What emerged in both performances is a topsy-turvy world of uncertainty filled with corrupt and conniving leaders. The representations of Ken Arok in Roesli's 1991 rock opera and the ketoprak *Anusapati* must thus be read in the context of the existing politics of the time. On the contrary, during the same era, Ken Arok was evoked to portray religious harmony and unity by the Jogjakartan ruler Sultan Hamengku Buwono X in his sacred dance the *Bedaya Sang Amurwabumi* featuring the union of Ken Arok and Ken Dedes as a symbol of Hindu-Buddhist harmony. The Sultan, a Muslim himself, made the unprecedented gesture of appropriating the Ken Arok story for a court sacred dance – an unusual move considering that the ambiguous social location and moral character of Ken Arok as a historical figure

had never seen him portrayed in royal dances. The depiction of the Ken Arok story in this dance by the Sultan during this time of chaos in Indonesian society was not to caricature the corrupt state but to recuperate a history of peaceful coexistence between different religious groups and communities.

Representations of Ken Arok equally abound after the fall of Suharto and the best of these examples are found in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Arok Dedes* (1999) and George Rudy's sinetron *Ken Arok* (2003). The fall of the New Order saw a fascination with the rewriting of Indonesian history. Pramoedya's *Arok Dedes* was an attempt by the novelist to use art for social critique and rewriting the official history cast by the Indonesian state. Pramoedya argues that official versions of history "deny the progress of the people and burden people unnecessarily with an imaginary past" while extolling the ruling elite class.¹ His novel takes on issues of social injustice, power of domination as well as the mystery of human life through the portrayal of Arok and the various figures associated with him such as Dedes, Tunggul Ametung, Gandring and others who were competing for power. *Arok Dedes* can be read as a subconscious meditation and interpretation of power and triumph of a grassroots-based political leader like Arok in resolving conflicts and staying in power. Published after the fall of Suharto, the novel paints a much more humane and less gory story of political transformation in the story of Arok than we find in the 1965 coup d'état and its aftermath. In the meantime, the portrayal of Ken Arok as a dualistic character more good than bad was found in the television serial *Ken Arok* by George Rudy who also attempted to rewrite history. Just as Kosasih responded to the consumerism pervading the comic industry in the 1970s, so did Rudy hasten to use sinetron –Indonesia's flourishing entertainment genre since the late twentieth century- to communicate his interpretation of Ken Arok. Instructive and

¹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "Sastra, Sensor dan Negara: Seberapa Jauhkah Bahaya Novel" in *Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Perahu yang Setia dalam Badai*, ed. Shohifullah (Yogyakarta: Bukulalela, 2001), p. 92.

moralistic, this sinetron aims to explore the dualism that often impacts people including leaders through an image of Ken Arok that embodies courage, loyalty and determination on the one hand and greed, anger and bad karma on the other. The heavy-dosed moralising nature of Rudy's serial outweighs the naturally dualistic persona of Ken Arok that would have enthralled the audience looking for entertainment rather than 'education'. Aired in the era of Reform, the sinetron, nevertheless, helped channel people's qualms about political leadership that still prevailed even after Suharto's demise, proving that all leaders are just as fallible as Rudy's Ken Arok.

Throughout the detailed discussion in the preceding chapters, I showed that the common portrayal of Ken Arok in the works studied is that of a Janus-faced mythical-historical character translated in various levels of significance by different authors. But in general there is an agreement that Ken Arok is an extraordinary figure. Some interpret his power through his might – vigour and violence, other capitalise on his mind – bravery, willpower and wit. While the ketoprak and the operas highlight the image of Ken Arok as a physically strong figure, Ken Arok's strength of mind was the focus of the novel, the play and the dance. The comic books and the TV serial navigate the physical and the spiritual capacities of Ken Arok to fit their purpose of disseminating the image. As shown, the evocations of Ken Arok changed focus across time because of the real socio-political context that provided the distinct milieu for each representation. What has remained unchanged, however, is the continual exploitation of this historical figure's flexibility by the diverse cultural producers to communicate their ideas about morality-state-people relationships. In a time of leadership crisis, this study suggests, figures of ambiguity like Ken Arok were and continue to be invoked to provide a better conception of the past, present and future state-of-politics in Indonesia from the people's side of the story in

contrast to what might otherwise have remained concealed in the rhetoric of the ruling elites.

Finally, this study has left several questions unanswered. What about other stories of the powerful and the powerless which also exist especially in performance arts? Do they also tell us about power, leadership and morality in today's Indonesia? In my view, they do, but to what extent they are as potent as Ken Arok's images remains to be seen. While it would be too much to say that Ken Arok does represent and encompass all we need to know about Indonesian political culture, the persistence of Ken Arok's images for more than seven decades as this study has observed is an indication that the evocation of Ken Arok as an anchor for the Indonesian public's desire and displeasure with regard to the spheres of power, leadership and morality in Indonesian politics is a timeless one. In a society upholding social hierarchy and patron-client relationships, open criticism of superiors is out of the question, hence criticism often takes a more subtle form via insinuation conveyed through the various media of popular imagination. To this end, the representations exploit Ken Arok's binaric dispositions as metaphors for the rise and fall of political leadership in Indonesia. As we know, Indonesian society still clings to the rural political concept of seeing the order of things as a continual rhythm of change from times of disorder and turbulence to times of peace when a *Ratu Adil* finally appears. This view corresponds with the idea of constant balance of *Sekti* at the centre (the ruler) and loyalty at the periphery (the ruled) that ensures stability, prosperity and security of the state. So long as this cosmo-mythical predisposition about an ideal king who ensures a just and prosperous country persists, Ken Arok will continue to become a phantom in theatrical performances that allude to issues of political stability, social harmony and

prosperity.² The recurring images of Ken Arok beat the old aphorism, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Given this adage, who knows if Suharto may one day become another symbolic vessel signifying political aspirations and criticism? Does not Mircea Eliade remind us that myth is religious for the archaic but the modern looks at it with so much contempt as they need it to justify their actions? If the arguments in this present study are correct, then literary texts, creative art and performing art forms such as the selected works discussed may be potent sites for understanding Indonesian political sensibilities at everyday levels as alternatives to the official visions.

In the end, there is no political actor that the authors under study laud more than Ken Arok. No matter how he is portrayed, whether as a romantic rascal in Kosasih’s comics and Rudy’s sinetron, an utter Ruffian-turned-Raja in Harry Roesli’s rock opera, a scheming supreme ruler in ketoprak, a righteous king seeking for harmony and unity in Yamin’s drama and the Jogjanese Sultan’s dance; or a tactical architect of state in Pramoedya’s novel, Ken Arok never fails to fascinate us with his contradictory characteristics of love, hate, cruelty, vice, virtue and so on. Ken Arok makes every text here interesting as his character has the potential to reveal the blurred boundaries of morality and immorality in politics. The various ways in which Ken Arok is portrayed disclose how the presumptions people hold with regards to the leaders may change as they confront the entrapments of power that ensnare their political leaders and as they contemplate their own failings.

² When discussing the durability of stories or legends from ancient kingdoms and the wayang worlds, Jan Knappert argues that when Islam later embraced Java, the decline of the kings finds explanation in the Holy Koran stating God is the Postponer. This continuity of the ancient belief, if modified, shows that the predestined history has remained strong in Indonesia, as morality and spiritual cosmology tend to prevail over sociopolitical reality. See *Myths and Legends of Indonesia* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977), p.8.

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