# "All the Way with *OVJ*": Javanese theatre on Indonesian television – A case study of Trans7's *Opera Van Java*

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours.

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I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed

Liam Merrifield Prince

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# Abstract

This dissertation examines the performances of *Opera Van Java* (*OVJ*), an improvised comedy show currently airing on Indonesian commercial television. *OVJ* is analysed in this dissertation as a contemporary case study of the way in which Javanese *wayang* shadow theatre and the repository of myth and legend from which it draws is being redeployed to create meaning in the twenty-first century. This study is multifaceted in its approach, exploring both the cultural and commercial forces that have helped to put *OVJ* on Indonesian television. *OVJ*'s links to indigenous Javanese theatrical forms is scrutinised, as are its ties to modern Indonesian and European dramatic traditions. The forms specifically addressed include *komedi stambul*, *ketoprak*, and the modern television comedy of *Srimulat.* In addition to tracing *OVJ*'s artistic and cultural lineage, this dissertation also analyses *OVJ* as a product of the contemporary Indonesian television industry. It examines current market conditions and the prevailing taste culture among Indonesian audiences, both of which play a part in shaping the production and programming decisions of Indonesia's commercial television networks. Through a closer examination of *OVJ's* use of multiple languages and dialects in its improvised performances, this dissertation sheds light both on the source of the show's appeal for contemporary audiences and on broader attitudinal shifts occurring within Indonesian public culture.

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# Glossary

Note: This dissertation uses both Indonesian and Javanese terms. For general terms such as *wayang* and *dalang*, which exist in both languages, I have adopted the Indonesian spelling. All other terms are specifically Indonesian or Javanese, as indicated below.

| | |
|---|---|
| *adipati* | noble; prince; heir to the throne; head of a regency during the Dutch colonial regime |
| *bahasa* | language |
| *Bahasa Indonesia* | Indonesia's national language; Indonesian-Malay |
| *beskap* | type of formal jacket warn by Javanese men on ceremonial occasions |
| *blangkon* (Jv.) | ceremonial headdress made of batik fabric worn by Javanese men |
| *dalan gecul* (Jv.) | the comic interlude between scenes of *wayang kulit* or *ketoprak* performance |
| *dalang* | the puppeteer of a Javanese shadow theatre performance |
| *dangdut* | genre of Indonesian popular music that combines elements of traditional Malay, Arabic and Indian music |
| *gamelan* | traditional musical ensemble featuring metallophones, xylophones, gongs, and bamboo flutes common to Javanese and Balinese culture |
| *gendang* | two-headed drum used in both *dangdut* and *gamelan* performances |
| *kain* | long length of batik fabric worn as a skirt with a *kebaya* by Javanese women on formal or ceremonial occasions |
| *kebaya* | traditional blouse worn by Javanese women |
| *ketoprak* | form of Javanese folk theatre that draws its primary repertoire from Javanese mythology and legend |
| *krama* (Jv.) | High Javanese; the higher of two fundamental registers of the Javanese language |
| *keroncong* | genre of Javanese popular music that traces it origins back to folk songs brought to the archipelago in the fifteenth century |
| *lakon* (Jv.) | story; storyline; plot; basic narrative unit of the Javanese *wayang kulit* shadow theatre repertoire |
| *ngoko* (Jv.) | Low Javanese; the lower of the two fundamental registers of the Javanese language |
| *pesinden* | female singer within a *gamelan* ensemble |
| *punakawan* | traditional clown-servant character of Javanese *wayang* mythology |

| | |
|---|---|
| *sarung* | sarong; large length or tube of fabric – often batik – worn by Javanese men |
| *satria* | knight; noblemen; warrior |
| *sinetron* | form of Indonesian soap opera or television melodrama |
| *stambul* | nineteenth-century, Malay-language musical theatre genre |
| *wayang* | Leather puppet used in Javanese *wayang kulit* shadow theatre; general term that refers to several related indigenous Indonesian theatrical forms that all draw their narrative content from the same body of primarily Hindu mythology. |
| *wayang kulit* | traditional Javanese shadow theatre performance art in which stories drawn from Javanese myth and legend are presented by a *dalang* manipulating leather puppets from behind a backlit screen |
| *wayang wong* | Javanese courtly dance tradition in which the stories of the *wayang kulit* repertoire are performed by live actors |

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# Introduction

> *"[W]ayang is not merely entertainment: it is a reflection of the mental and spiritual life of a whole people."* – Prince Mangkunagoro VII (1932)[1]

In 1932, Prince Mangkunagoro VII, crown prince of the royal court of Surakarta, delivered a now famous lecture to a group of scholars on the subject of Javanese *wayang* shadow theatre. In it he argued that the *wayang kulit* performance was an expression of "the deepest stirrings in the hearts and minds" of the Javanese people. *Wayang's* repertoire of stories (or *lakon*), drawn from Javanese myth and legend, Mangkunagoro suggested, contained within them "the secret Javanese knowledge concerning the deepest significance of life."[2]

This dissertation began as a project to determine whether the storehouse of *wayang* mythology and legend of which Mangkunagoro spoke in the 1930s is still a potent source of meaning for Indonesians in the twenty-first century. In particular, it set out to discover manifestations of *wayang* mythology in contemporary Indonesian popular culture and entertainment. In searching for appropriate examples, the focus of this inquiry came to rest on one particularly prominent instance of *wayang's* reinvention in contemporary Indonesia; an improvised comedy show currently airing on Indonesian national television named *Opera Van Java* (*OVJ*).

*OVJ* debuted in 2008 on one of Indonesia's newest commercial television networks, Trans7. Produced in the network's Jakarta studios and broadcast six nights a week to a national television audience of millions, *OVJ* has been one of the most consistently high rating shows on Indonesian television for the last two years. The show's format – a troupe of comic actors improvising scenes over storylines taken from Javanese mythology and legend – clearly traces its cultural lineage back to modern Indonesian and Javanese live theatre genres such as *komedi stambul* and *ketoprak* and to the clowning traditions of even older forms such as *wayang kulit*.[3] The repertoire of stories that form the basis of *OVJ's* performances are, by

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[1] Mangkunagoro, *K. G. P. A. A*. VII of Surakarta, *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and Its Symbolic and Mystical Elements* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1933), p.1.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.1.

[3] *Komedi stambul (*or simply *stambul)* was a Malay-language musical theatre form developed during the late nineteenth century in the East Javanese port city of Surabaya, particularly among the city's Eurasian community. For a full account of the history of *stambul's* development see Matthew Isaac Cohen, *The Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2006), pp.1-85. *Ketoprak* is a Javanese folk theatre form that developed in the late nineteenth century among the rural villages surrounding the Central Javanese court cities of Yogyakarta and Solo. For an

and large, drawn from same repository of myth and legend identified by Mangkunagoro in 1932.

The influence of Javanese traditional arts on national Indonesian culture is not a new phenomenon, and nor is the presence of Javanese theatre on Indonesian television. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the Javanese comic troupe, *Srimulat,* enjoyed considerable fame and success via television broadcasts, first on state broadcaster TVRI, and then on commercial networks Indosiar and RCTI. *Srimulat'*s performances, much like *OVJ*'s today, were deeply grounded in Javanese theatrical tradition but managed to transcend their regional origins to gain the acceptance of a national audience.

The interaction of Javanese regional cultural forms and wider Indonesian culture is framed by the historically fraught relationship between "Java" and "Indonesia". Indonesia is a multi-ethnic nation of almost 240 million people. In the most recent census data available, approximately 84 million Indonesians or 41.7% of the population self-identified as ethnically Javanese.[4] The position of the Javanese as the largest of ethnic minorities within a nation of minorities has given rise historically to a host of socio-cultural and political tensions between Indonesia's Javanese and non-Javanese populations. Successive Indonesian governments have, since independence, attempted to suppress and efface ethnic differences for the sake of national unity and in order to foster a pan-archipelagic "Indonesian" identity.[5] A key component of this policy has been the promotion of the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, over the usage of regional languages such as Javanese in arenas of national public discourse – including on television. Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime was particularly active in ensuring that national

extended account of *ketoprak'*s origins see Barbara Hatley, *Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage: Contesting Culture, Embracing Change* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), pp.19-38. *Wayang kulit* (or *wayang purwa* as it is also referred to) is a Javanese shadow theatre form in which stories drawn from the Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are performed with leather puppets manipulated from behind a backlit screen. The precise origins of the form are unknown but there is literary evidence for its presence in Java going back at least to the eleventh century AD and epigraphic evidence suggesting its presence as early as the ninth century AD. See James R. Brandon, ed. *On Thrones of Gold: Three Javanese Shadow Plays* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp.1-9.

[4] Leo Suryadinata, Nurvidya Arifin Evi and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), p.7

[5] Gareth Barkin, "Producing Indonesia: The Derivation and Domestication of Commercial Television" (PhD Diss., Washington University, 2004) pp.186-7, 209; Webb Keane, "Public Speaking: On Indonesian as the Language of the Nation," *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003), pp.514-516; Peter H. Lowenberg, "Language Policy and Language Identity in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 3, no. 1 (1992), p.66.

television content was broadcast in a state-approved standard form of the national language.

Many authors and observers of Indonesian cultural life, both domestic and foreign, have examined the influence of Javanese cultural forms on an emergent Indonesian national culture. Benedict Anderson and Virginia Hooker have analysed the influence that Javanese language and cultural sensibilities has had on the development of the national language*, Bahasa Indonesia*, in the years since independence.[6] Barbara Hatley has charted the evolution of Javanese theatrical traditions such as *ketoprak* from regional beginnings to national audiences.[7] Goenawan Mohamad and Anwari meanwhile have examined the particular role that *Srimulat* played in the 1980s and 1990s in mediating between Javanese culture and a still emergent Indonesian national identity.[8] All these scholars have explored the ways in which Javanese culture, as the most prominent of the archipelago's regional cultures, has influenced wider Indonesian national culture.

The examination of *OVJ* in this dissertation will draw on the work of such scholars, and will similarly investigate the way in which Javanese cultural heritage is reinvented within *OVJ*, for national audiences and in an Indonesian idiom. This investigation is multifaceted in its approach, and analyses both the cultural and the material factors that account for *OVJ*'s presence on Indonesian television. The dissertation is comprised of three chapters, which focus on: the cultural lineage of *OVJ's* style of comedy; the commercial circumstances that have given rise to the show's appearance on Indonesian television; and the cultural politics surrounding the type of language and languages used in *OVJ'*s improvised performances.

Chapter I situates *OVJ* within a lineage of similar Indonesian and Javanese forms of entertainment. Indonesia has, for over a century, represented a meeting point of diverse theatrical traditions drawing on European, Indian, Middle-Eastern and Chinese influences as well as on numerous indigenous theatrical forms such as *wayang kulit* and *ketoprak*. Chapter I argues that *OVJ'*s style of improvised comedy traces its ancestry back to two culturally hybrid theatrical forms that first emerged in Indonesia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; *komedi*

[6] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.123-151; Virginia Matheson Hooker, "New Order Language in Context," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.272-293.
[7] Barbara Hatley, *Javanese Performances.*
[8] Goenawan Mohamad, "Srimulat: Translating/Not Translating..." in *Between Tongues: Translation and/of/in Performance in Asia*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay (Singapore Singapore University Press, 2006), pp.68-87; Anwari, *Indonesia Tertawa: Srimulat Sebagai Sebuah Subkultur* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia, 1999), pp.151-188.

*stambul* and *ketoprak*. Finally, this chapter posits that *OVJ* represents a new chapter in the history of the translation of Javanese cultural forms into an Indonesian idiom – a process that has its most immediate precedent in the work of *Srimulat* during the late twentieth century. Chapter I is indebted to the dramatic criticism and Indonesian theatre history of Barbara Hatley and Matthew Isaac Cohen and to the cultural criticism of Goenawan Mohamad and Anwari in respect of *Srimulat*.

Chapter II examines *OVJ* as a product of the contemporary Indonesian television industry. Due to successive waves of industry liberalisation beginning in the early 1990s, Indonesia now has a highly competitive television industry comprised of ten national commercial networks. Chapter II explores the rise of one of the most successful Indonesian media companies to emerge in the post-Suharto era – Trans Media Corp (TMC) – and its two television networks, Trans TV and Trans7. This chapter argues that TMC has achieved a rapid capture of market share – both in terms of audience and advertising revenue – by challenging conventional programming practices that have held sway during the first decade of commercial television in Indonesia. In particular, it argues that TMC has innovated away from the soap opera or *sinetron* format that has been the staple form of local content on Indonesian television for over a decade. [9] The company has instead pursued a strategy based on in-house produced, purposefully non-*sinetron* forms of local programming. This chapter contextualises *OVJ* as a particularly successful example of TMC's programming strategy. Chapter II draws on Philip Kitley's historical work on the development of the Indonesian television industry and on Gareth Barkin's ethnographic account of Indonesian television production culture.[10]

Chapter III examines the patterns of comedic wordplay and language-use in *OVJ* performances. This chapter argues that *OVJ*, whilst heavily indebted to Javanese theatrical and comedic traditions, particularly *ketoprak* and *Srimulat*, exhibits some significant differences to these antecedent forms. While regional languages – especially Javanese – are frequently used in *OVJ* performances, the predominant language of the show is *Bahasa Indonesia*. This chapter argues that the

[9] *Sinetron* is an Indonesian soap opera format that blends elements of Indian melodrama, Western soap, and Latin *telenovela*. The term "*sinetron"* is a portmanteau of the Indonesian words *"sinema"* and *elektronik"* or "cinema" and "electronic". The format has dominated primetime programming in Indonesia's commercial television industry since the early 1990s.
[10] Philip Kitley, *Television, Nation, and Culture in Indonesia* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000); Philip Kitley, "Closing the Creativity Gap - Renting Intellectual Capital in the Name of Local Content: Indonesia in the Global Television Format Business," in *Television across Asia: Television Industries, Programme Formats and Globalization*, eds. Albert Moran and Michael Keane (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp.138-156; Barkin, "Producing Indonesia".

performance language of *OVJ* is neither the heavily Javanese-inflected Indonesian employed in *Srimulat's* performances during the 1980s and 1990s, nor the standard form of the national language propagated by the New Order state. Rather, *OVJ* employs a heteroglossic and – as this chapter argues – more authentically contemporary version of the *Bahasa Indonesia* that exhibits the influences and infusions of numerous regional languages and non-standard dialects. Performed by a multi-ethnic cast of comedians to a national television audience of similarly diverse ethnic composition, *OVJ* represents a new phase in the process of accommodating Javanese cultural forms to a wider Indonesian audience, and a new development in the relationship between notions of regional ethnic identity and Indonesian national identity. Chapter III is informed by the cultural criticism of Goenawan Mohamad and by Benedict Anderson's analysis of the role of Javanese "cultural modalities" in shaping Indonesia's national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*.[11]

This dissertation concludes by drawing together the threads of the preceding three chapters to argue that both the recent changes to the political economy of Indonesia's television industry outlined in Chapter II and the socio-cultural factors examined in Chapters I and III need to be taken into account to fully explain *OVJ*'s presence on Indonesian television. Specifically, it argues that in the post-Suharto era a pent-up demand has been unleashed among Indonesian television audiences for television programming that looks and sounds more authentically "local" than previous industry offerings (most notably the *sinetron* format). This cultural shift in audience taste has been matched by supply-side changes within Indonesia's television industry which have given broadcasters, such as Trans7, the freedom to cater to this new audience demand for a different type of local programming. In their search for novel offerings Indonesian television producers have turned to old sources, most notably in *OVJ*'s case, to the stories of Javanese *wayang* mythology. Thus *wayang* mythology – that repertoire of stories that Prince Mangkunagoro identified in 1932 as containing "the secret Javanese knowledge concerning the deepest significance of life" – are once again finding their way into the hearts and minds of new generations of Indonesian audiences. *OVJ*'s presentation of *wayang* myth and legend, however, has a distinctly twenty first-century flavour to it, one that is playful, irreverent, and that revels in reducing the gods and heroes of Javanese mythology to a quotidian and modern scale. *OVJ* is Javanese culture transposed into a contemporary Indonesian pop culture idiom that is both cognisant and reflective of the facts of Indonesia's modernity and national cultural integration, and of Java's place as but one cultural community among many. *OVJ* is

[11] Mohamad, "Srimulat: Translating/Not Translating…", pp.68-87; Anderson, *Language and Power,* pp.123-151, 194-237.

indicative of a new era of public discourse in Indonesia in which regional cultures and ethnic differences – long suppressed under Suharto's New Order regime – are now being openly displayed and revelled in within the public sphere.

# Chapter I

# The Cultural Context of Trans7's *Opera Van Java*

This chapter will posit that the improvised comedy style in *Opera Van Java (OVJ)* has its origins in live theatre forms that first emerged in Indonesia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Specifically, *OVJ* draws on the Malay-language musical theatre genre known as *komedi stambul,* and the *wayang*-inspired Javanese live theatre genre of *ketoprak*. This chapter further argues that the clowning routines in the comic interludes between scenes of both *wayang kulit* and *ketoprak* performances – the *dalan gecul* – represent a key influence on the style of comedic performance seen in *OVJ*. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate that *OVJ*'s exercise in reimagining traditional Javanese cultural forms within a national Indonesian idiom has its most immediate historical precedent in the late twentieth-century performances of the theatre troupe *Srimulat*. The chapter begins with a description of an *OVJ* episode, entitled "*Kresna Gugah"*, which aired in early 2010. The analysis that follows the episode description draws on the particulars of this episode in order to demonstrate how *OVJ* exhibits influences from the antecedent theatrical forms mentioned above.

On May 20th, 2010, the Indonesian television network Trans7 broadcast an episode of *OVJ*, entitled "*Kresna Gugah*" ("Krishna Awakes"), a standard play from the *wayang kulit* repertoire.[12] The story belongs to the *Baratayuda* cycle, a sprawling complex of tales derived from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*.[13] Although Indian in origin, the stories of the *Mahabharata* have been thoroughly integrated and indigenised within Javanese oral and theatrical traditions for well over a millennium. The story of "*Kresna Gugah*" relates Lord Krishna's efforts to discover, through meditation, the will of the gods with respect to the impending *Baratayuda* war. Krishna sits in a garden sanctuary located within his realm of Dwarawati, guarded

[12] "*Opera Van Java* [*OVJ*]: '*Kresna Gugah*'," [n.d], video clip, accessed July 7, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWEjcwtSabw. For a comprehensive scene-by-scene description of the episode see Appendix 1. For an Indonesian language version of the story of "*Kresna Gugah*" see Mujiono Sadikin, "Kresna Gugah", *Sepenggal Persinggahan*, March 7, 2008, http://moedjionosadikin.wordpress.com/2008/03/07/kresna-gugahbagian-pertama/ (accessed 8/08/11).

[13] The *Baratayuda* cycle tells the story of the conflict between two related clans of warriors – the Pandawa and the Korawa – and their competition for the throne of the kingdom of Ngastina. Both the bloody, fratricidal battle between the two clans that constitutes the climax of the story cycle, and the long prelude and build-up to the war, provide the narrative material for hundreds of the stories and episodes that make up the canonical *wayang* repertoire. For an abridged English translation see *The Mahabharata* trans. John D. Smith (London: Penguin, 2009).

by various warriors of the Pandawa clan to which he is allied. Krishna's efforts at discovering the gods' intentions are repeatedly disturbed by the efforts of the Korawa clan; the traditional antagonists of *wayang* mythology. Over the course of the play numerous Korawa agents attempt to wake Krishna from his meditation so as to persuade him to betray the Pandawa and ally himself with the their faction.

The *OVJ* episode begins with a musical introduction. As the episode happens to be airing on a national holiday – Indonesia's National Day of Awakening – the studio orchestra strikes up a lively rendition of the Indonesian nationalist youth anthem "*Bangun Pemudi-Pemuda*" ("Arise Young Men and Women").[14] The orchestra is a hybrid affair containing the fiddle, double bass, and bamboo flute of a Portuguese folk music-inspired *keroncong* ensemble; the *gendang* or tabla of the Arabic- and Indian-derived *dangdut* group; the drum kit and electronic synthesiser of a modern rock band; and the xylophones and metallophones of a Javanese gamelan orchestra. As the camera swoops down on the musical stage, two *pesinden* (the female singers of a Javanese *wayang kulit* performance) dressed in the Javanese manner of batik *kain* and colourful brocade *kebaya* begin singing the lyrics of the nationalist anthem in unison. As they do, they gesture with their hands; now with the slow, delicate movements of a Javanese ballet dancer, now raising their fists in imitation of a defiant independence fighter.

**Figure 1. *OVJ, Dalang* and *pesinden*, "*Kresna Gugah*"**

Seated between the two *pesinden* is a man similarly dressed in nineteenth-century Javanese courtly fashion (Fig.1), wearing a batik *sarung*, a mandarin-collared *beskap* jacket, and a batik *blangkon* headdress. He is the *dalang* or "puppeteer" of the show. The *dalang's* status is marked not only by his costume but also by the wooden puppet box sitting to his left and the gavel in his hand. As the musical introduction concludes, the *dalang* raps the gavel against the inside of the puppet box and greets the studio audience with the Arabic Islamic salutation of

[14] Known as *Hari Kebangkitan Nasional,* this annual commemoration on May 20th celebrates the founding of Indonesia's first nationalist youth organisation, *Budi Utomo,* in 1908.

"*Assalamu alaikum warahmathullahi wabarakathu*" ("Peace with you and may God's blessing be upon you").[15]

This particular episode embodies many of the traits that have contributed to *OVJ*'s popularity on Indonesian television. The show's lively and often wry invocation of Javanese tradition has attracted large audiences over the past two years, making it one of the most watched programs on Indonesian television.[16] Chief amongst *OVJ*'s achievements, and the key to its audience appeal, has been the transposition of the myths and legends of Javanese *wayang* shadow theatre into the format of a ninety-minute improvised comedy program and into the idiom of contemporary Indonesian popular culture. *OVJ* does not represent the first attempt to contemporise traditional cultural forms for a popular audience, but as will be argued in this chapter, it is a particularly successful incarnation of this idea.

### 1.1 The legacy of *Stambul*

The intermingling of European and indigenous theatrical traditions has a long history in Indonesia, a compelling analysis of which is provided by Matthew Cohen in his account of *komedi stambul*.[17] *Komedi stambul* (or simply *stambul)* was a Malay-language musical theatre genre that first developed in the late nineteenth century in the East Java port city of Surabaya. According to Cohen, during the nineteenth century the towns and cities of the Netherlands Indies – and Surabaya especially – were "transit zone[s] for itinerant performers [and] a stopover between mainland Asia and Australia".[18] Cohen paints a picture of a vibrant, cosmopolitan cultural thoroughfare in which touring Indian circuses and Japanese acrobat troupes competed with European music hall operettas, Parsi melodramas, and Chinese stage magicians for patrons and public attention.[19] The public culture of nineteenth-century urban Indonesia, argues Cohen, was never "genuinely colonized by the Netherlands" but rather "had its own independent cultural dynamics and momentum".[20]

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[15] "*Opera Van Java* [*OVJ*]: '*Kresna Gugah*',". See Video 1.1. for the video excerpt of this opening sequence.
[16] Yustina Pramita (Mita) (*OVJ* executive producer), interview by Liam Prince, Studio Guet, Pancoran, Jakarta, October 13, 2011. Mita claimed that for the past two years *OVJ* had been consistently placed by ratings agency AGB Nielsen among the top five most watched programs on Indonesian television. This claim is supported by publically available information form AGB Nielsen. See AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 20th Edition, August 26 (2011), p.1.
[17] Matthew Isaac Cohen, *The Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-190,* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2006).
[18] *Ibid.,* p.9.
[19] *Ibid.,* pp.9-10, 41-42
[20] *Ibid.,* p.9.

*Stambul* emerged, asserts Cohen, as a product of this cultural intermingling. He identifies the form as "the first theater to be performed on a proscenium stage in a language that could be understood by the majority of Indonesia's urban public" – namely, Indonesian-Malay.[21] Cohen characterises *stambul* as an "emblematic mestizo cultural form" which "actively involved participants from all of colonial Indonesia's major ethnic groups, including Muslims, Chinese, Europeans, Eurasians, Arabs, and others."[22] The form borrowed much of the technology of European musical theatre, as well as many of its dramatic conventions.[23] Its early repertoire was drawn primarily from European sources and included adaptations of *The Arabian Nights*, *Faust,* and selected works of Shakespeare such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. However, argues Cohen, *stambul* was not simply a colonial facsimile of European musical theatre; rather, it was a hybrid form in which European dramaturgy and theatrical technology were appropriated, localised, and translated into local language and idiom.[24]

*OVJ*'s debt to the legacy of *stambul* is readily apparent in the "*Kresna Gugah"* episode cited at the outset of this chapter. The proscenium stage, the elaborate set-designs, and the orchestral accompaniment are all dramaturgical legacies of *stambul*. The costuming – such as the *Arabian Nights*-inflected satin waistcoats worn by the actors (Fig.2) – harks back to the Parsi theatre-derived aspects of the form.[25] Although the story of "*Kresna Gugah*" has its

**Figure 2. *OVJ*, *Adipati Karna*, "*Kresna Gugah*"**

[21] Cohen, *The Komedie Stamboel,* p.4. Malay had been spoken as a *lingua franca* in a variety of forms and dialects throughout the Indonesian archipelago for centuries prior to colonisation. It was promoted extensively by the Dutch colonial authorities as a language of administration and adopted by nationalists in the 1920s as the language of Indonesia's struggle for independence, under the new designation of *Bahasa Indonesia*. For a fuller account of this history see Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.198-200; Webb Keane, "Public Speaking: On Indonesian as the Language of the Nation," *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003), pp.512-514; Peter H. Lowenberg, "Language Policy and Language Identity in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 3, no. 1 (1992), pp.62-65.
[22] Cohen, *The Komedie Stamboel,* p.344.
[23] *Ibid.*, pp.4, 41
[24] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[25] The cultural hybridity of *OVJ* is apparent in the show's costuming, where actors wear an eclectic mix of traditional Javanese, European, Indian and Arabic costuming. For example, in the opening scene of "*Kresna Gugah*", a burly male actor inhabiting the role of Krishna enters dressed in batik *sarung*, black cotton undershirt, and a sapphire-blue Aladdin-style satin waistcoat with gold trim. Topping his off his costume is a multi-tiered royal headdress

origins in Hindu-Javanese mythology, many other *OVJ* episodes exhibit a very *stambul*-like omnivorousness in the incorporation of popular and high culture material from a range of foreign sources. Appropriating and transposing foreign material into a domestic idiom, *OVJ* engages in the same sort of cultural hybridity and synthesis as did *stambul* in the late nineteenth century. In the three years that *OVJ* has been on air, the show has not only presented numerous stories from the canonical repertoire of Javanese *wayang* mythology but also performances based on *Romeo and Juliet*, *Beauty and the Beast* and more recent pop culture phenomena – Western and otherwise – such as *The Karate Kid, The Flintstones, Rocky,* the Chinese martial arts series *Drunken Master,* and the Japanese children's cartoon *Doraemon.*

**Figure 3. *OVJ*, Solo "duet", "*Kresna Gugah*"**

*OVJ's* synthesis of European and indigenous dramatic conventions is particularly evident in the opening musical number of the show's *"Kresna Gugah"* episode. Drawing variously on vaudeville, Hollywood musicals, and indigenous traditions of transvestism, a figure dressed in a European-style dinner suit and black trilby hat (Fig.3) sings the Broadway-style ballad, "Where Do I Begin", from the 1970s Hollywood film *Love Story*.[26] As the singer reaches the opening lines of the second verse he spins around. From this new angle the audience can see that the other side of the singer's profile is made up in the manner of a female diva with a women's bob haircut, long eyelashes, a rouged cheek, lipstick and a satin ball gown (Fig.4). The singer modulates his voice accordingly, moving from a resonant

**Figure 4. *OVJ*, Solo "duet", "*Kresna Gugah*"**

or crown of a type worn by the deities and kings of the *wayang* shadow play. Krishna is followed on stage by a similarly stocky female actress cast in the role of the fierce Pandawa warrior, Satyaki. The actress is likewise costumed in batik *sarung*, cotton undershirt, and waistcoat. She, however, wears a different type of royal headdress that curls up in a large loop from the base of the skull to the crown of the head (Fig.5). A pair of bright-blue, sequined high heels undergirds the actress' costume.

[26] For a particularly illuminating account of the role of the female transvestite singer in the Javanese folk theatre tradition of *ludruk* see James L. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp.167-182.

baritone to a breathy mezzo-soprano to sing the second verse. The singer performs the entire "duet" in this manner, swapping from side to side as he alternates between his "male" and "female" voices.[27] This insertion of elements of vaudeville and Hollywood into a presentation of Javanese mythology, is a very *stambul*-esque form of cultural pastiche.

The most obvious of *OVJ*'s similarities to *stambul* is of course the linguistic medium of its performance, namely, Indonesian-Malay, known since Indonesia's independence as *Bahasa Indonesia*.[28] While multiple regional dialects of Indonesian and even other regional languages, such as Javanese, are frequently employed on *OVJ*, the dominant language of performance is the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*. Cohen argues that the popularity of *stambul* in the late nineteenth century played a key role in propagating the use of Indonesian-Malay in public life in colonial Indonesia.[29] He asserts that as "the first performing art to emerge in the Indies with currency throughout the archipelago," *stambul* was pivotal to the formation of a pan-Indonesian "superculture" that united the diverse ethnic groups that make up modern Indonesia.[30] For decades, argues Cohen, nineteenth-century grammarians "had been struggling to define a transregional form of Malay."[31] In *stambul*, he suggests, "a panlocal Malay became a living reality spoken aloud in theatrical dialogues before and with mass audiences."[32]

### 1.2 Javanese clowning traditions – *Ketoprak* and the *dalan gecul*

In the early twentieth century, as *stambul* spread through Java via touring theatrical troupes, the form came into contact and intermingled with indigenous Javanese

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[27] "*Opera Van Java* [*OVJ*]: '*Kresna Gugah*'," [n.d], video clip, accessed July 7, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWEjcwtSabw. The singer's musical prelude begins at the 3:42 mark of the video.

[28] Cohen, *The Komedie Stamboel,* pp.3, 342. Cohen argues that *stambul* bequeathed to Indonesian-Malay and its associated pan-archipelagic public culture "a shared body of narrative motifs and a repertoire of gestures recognized and comprehended by all Indonesians" (p.3). He suggests that the legacy of *stambul* lives on in the "overwrought acting style" and "stagy gestures" of Indonesian film and television – most notably the genre of *sinetron* melodrama – but also in the mannerisms and inflections of Indonesian politicians and public figures and the public utterances of ordinary Indonesians (p.342). The national language, argues Cohen, is for many Indonesians still an "un-native" language, the performance of which requires the speaker "to dissimulate [and] to act" (p.342). The shift from regional mother tongue to Indonesian entails "a modulation of the self" and the habitation of the speaker to a different "linguistic worldview" (p.342). *Stambul*, argues Cohen, provided early Indonesians with a model for how to effect this modulation (p.342).

[29] *Ibid.,* p.341.

[30] *Ibid.,* p.3.

[31] *Ibid.*, p.341.

[32] *Ibid.* Chapter III of this dissertation contains a more comprehensive examination of the language and language-use of *OVJ* performances and of the attendant cultural politics of *OVJ*'s use of *Bahasa Indonesia* as its medium of performance.

dramatic forms such as *wayang kulit* and *wayang wong.*[33] Cohen observes the particularly close relationship between *stambul* and the Javanese folk theatre genre of *ketoprak* – an indigenous theatrical form that originated in the villages of Central Java. Barbara Hatley, in her detailed study of *ketoprak,* has similarly noted the formative influence that *stambul* had on *ketoprak*.[34] Hatley argues that under *stambul's* influence *ketoprak* adopted many of the same theatrical conventions and technological innovations that *stambul* had appropriated from European theatre, including staging techniques, sets and costume.[35] Unlike *stambul*, however, *ketoprak* continued to draw its core repertoire of storylines from Javanese myth and legend.[36] Significantly also, *ketoprak* performances were presented in Javanese rather than Indonesian-Malay. In these respects *ketoprak* remained closer in nature to earlier indigenous dramatic forms such as *wayang kulit* than did the more European-influenced *stambul.*

Comic improvisation over the plot-points of a well-known story of the sort evident in *OVJ*'s "*Kresna Gugah*" has its most identifiable precedent in the *dalan gecul* or comic interludes of *ketoprak* and to similar comic digressions in even older dramatic forms such as *wayang kulit.*[37] The *dalan gecul* – literally a "humorous road" scene – serves, in these forms, primarily as comic relief so as to sustain audience attention through the longer, more demanding dramatic acts of an all-night performance.[38] These comic interludes, usually performed by the clown-servant characters of Javanese-Hindu mythology – the *punakawan* – also serve an important philosophical function within Javanese dramaturgy.[39]

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[33] A Javanese courtly dance tradition in which the stories of the *wayang kulit* repertoire are performed by live actors. For a good description of this particular Javanese dramatic form see Th. Pigeaud, "The Present State of Theatre, Dance and Music in Java," in *The Kraton: Selected Essays on Javanese Courts*, ed. Stuart Robson (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), pp.300-302.

[34] Hatley, *Javanese Performances,* p.23.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Pigeaud, p.306. See also Hatley, *Javanese Performances.*

[37] Hatley, *Javanese Performances*, pp.41, 51-56; James R. Brandon, ed. *On Thrones of Gold: Three Javanese Shadow Plays*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp.79-80.

[38] Hatley, *Javanese Performances*, pp.41, 51-56; Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp.206-213.

[40] The complex function of comic interludes and clowning scenes in providing both comic relief and poignant philosophical statement is of course not unique to Javanese dramatic traditions. Lori Culwell has described the way in which Shakespeare's fool incorporates "familiar physicality" with "colloquial references, political commentary, and social critiques." Culwell contends that the figure of the fool or clown "floats" in a "non-representational performance space" – the platea – a liminal space distanced from the main action of a play but closer to the audience. From this position of liminality, the fool can establish a closeness and a rapport with audiences, commenting on the on-stage action "in the language of the common folk." The function of the comic interludes in Shakespeare's plays, Culwell argues, is "to provide an alternate viewpoint by interrupting the main action of the

Benedict Anderson's description of the *punakawan* offered in *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* is particularly relevant to the present discussion. According to Anderson, Semar – the foremost of the *punakawan* – "is probably the best loved figure in all *wayang*", a character whose presence on screen or stage elicits "a wave of deep affection and respect" from Javanese audiences.[40] An androgynous, flatulent clown-servant, Semar is a comical figure, generally subservient to the wishes and interests of his *satria* masters, the warriors of the Pandawa clan. He is also, however, an incarnation of the most powerful deity in the *wayang* pantheon, *Sang Hyang Ismaya*. Thus Semar is both all-knowing deity and eternal servant. His physical form and "his presence alone" agues Anderson, "offers an implied criticism of […] [the] satrya values" of his warrior masters whose words, deeds and thoughts otherwise drive the narrative action of the *wayang* play.[41] The figure of Semar is, adds Anderson, "the repository of the highest wisdom" contained within the *wayang* performance and his presence at the heart of Javanese mythology is a particularly poetic statement of Javanese moral and metaphysical belief regarding the quality and nature of wisdom.

As Anderson has observed in respect of *wayang kulit* and Hatley has pointed out with regard to *ketoprak*, it is the words and actions of the *satria* – the heroes and demigods of *wayang* mythology – that tend to drive the narrative action for most of the length of a *wayang kulit* or *ketoprak* performance.[42] The *dalan gecul* however is an exception to this rule and represents a demarcated, carnivalesque space in which the dominant cultural values of the *satria* can be safely and playfully subverted.[43] Hatley describes the staple comic routine in *ketoprak* as one in which

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play". By employing colloquial speech and contemporary references the fool can, through the use of oral tradition, "make the audience understand the themes being played out by the court-dominated characters in the play." Thus the fool's interruption of the play's narrative flow with routines drawn from oral and physical (i.e. pre-literate) traditions of entertainment, serve both to create on-stage diversity and "to provide a more complete understanding" of a play's theme. Ward Keeler similarly observes the "consistent personae" of the Javanese *punakawan* between plays, likening them to Buster Keaton or the Marx brothers whose screen characters are maintained from film to film. Keeler describes the *punakawan* as being "exempt from time and history" (*Javanese Shadow Plays,* p.209). They neither age nor die, serving as ever-loyal retainers to multiple generations of Pandawa warriors. The *punakawan* are likewise exempt from all constraints of social propriety and decorum and are consequently afforded a degree of frankness and communicative freedom in their on-stage gestures and utterances not permitted to the heroes and demons of the *ketoprak* and *wayang kulit* performance. See Lori Culwell, "The Role of the Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, no. 1 (2005).

[40] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 1965), p.22-23.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] See Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance*; Hatley, *Javanese Performances*.

[43] According to Hatley, the *satria* moral code and value system is preoccupied with displays of "manly strength and valour" as well as the accumulation of power and worldly status.

two clown-servants parodying their *satria* superiors are caught out in the act. Hatley observes the dual appeal for Javanese spectators in such a scene: on the one hand there is a transgressive pleasure in seeing social hierarchies subverted; and on the other, upon the clowns being discovered, a sense of relief that it is the clowns not they, the spectator, who have been caught out in this manner.[44] Status games are integral to clowning routines in many, if not all, dramatic traditions but Hatley suggests that these routines are particularly resonant for Javanese audiences given the historically high degree of social stratification within Javanese society.[45] Describing the form of the *dalan gecul,* Hatley writes:

> Very frequently the clowns stage some kind of show, such as a competition, an excerpt from another dramatic genre or role-play. [...] Favourite scenes are the formal court audience and the battle between the refined knight and his demon opponent. [...] In each case the farcical humour derives from the incongruity of the casting. Bumbling clowns in their humble village attire act out the parts of king and courtier; in the battle fragment a hugely fat female clown may dance the part of the delicate and refined satria, Arjuna, while a skinny, woebegone actor plays the crude and volatile fanged monster, Cakil. The characteristics of performers clash bizarrely with the codes of physical appearance, gesture, movement and speech by which these dramatic figures are usually portrayed.[46]

The parallels between Hatley's description of *ketoprak* and *OVJ*'s contemporary performances are striking. The use of comic miscasting, for example, which Hatley highlights in the foregoing quote, is a common source of comedy in *OVJ.* There are numerous instances of this type of humour in *OVJ*'s *"Kresna Gugah",* where an actor's physical appearance is deliberately made to clash with audience preconceptions of how a particular dramatic figure or character should be portrayed. Hence, in *OVJ's* "*Kresna Gugah"*, the character of Karna – the young

**Figure 5. *OVJ*: A middle-aged Karna and Satyaki in high heels, "*Kresna Gugah*"**

Hatley, *Javanese Performances*, pp.51-54. See also Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance*, pp.22-23.

[44] Hatley, *Javanese Performances*, pp.55-56.

[45] *Ibid.,* pp.51-56.

[46] *Ibid.,* p.55.

and virile champion of the Korawa clan – is played by a decidedly middle-aged actor with a stooped posture. The fearsome Pandawa warrior Satyaki meanwhile, is played by a female comedian in high heels (Fig.5). In both cases the performers' physical appearances clash incongruously with the roles they are attempting to inhabit. The disparity makes fertile comic material for both viewers and for the actors on stage who mock each other mercilessly about their attire and appearance throughout the course of the performance.

The casting of actors against type, and the ongoing status games between *dalang* and performers – the goading, baiting and frequent role reversals – that form the basis of *OVJ*'s core comic dynamic, are all evocative of the *dalan gecul* in *ketoprak*. There are differences however; where the clowning of conventional *ketoprak* primarily relies on status games and role reversals between master and servant characters, in *OVJ* this primary comic tension is reconfigured in the relationship between *dalang* and actors. *OVJ*'s *dalang* is notionally charged with keeping the on-stage action moving forward according to the key plot points of the story at hand. The *dalang* often pursues his directorial responsibility with mock severity – much to the delight of the audience – though he just as often abrogates his role to equally great comedic effect and to similar audience delight; the biggest laughs are reserved for the frequent occasions when roles are reversed and the "puppets" step in to admonish the *dalang* for *his* extended digressions.

Common to both the *dalan gecul* of *ketoprak* and *OVJ* is a high-spirited playfulness and irreverent approach to the presentation of the myths and legends of oral tradition. There is clearly a pleasure in *OVJ*, relished by actors and audiences alike, in seeing the heroes and gods of Javanese high culture brought down to a quotidian scale – hence a middle-aged Karna complaining about sore knees and muscle pain or the fearsome Pandawa warrior Satyaki decked out in high heels.[47]

[47] *OVJ* performances also share many structural similarities with *ketoprak* performances. Hatley, in *Javanese Performances*, asserts that all *ketoprak* performances "are played out through [a] pattern of standard scenes" (p.40). This pattern of standard scenes "in standard locations and marked by particular kinds of interaction" Hatley argues, "form a kind of grid through which every *lakon* is interpreted" (p.40). She lists five major scene types found in *ketoprak* which are, in order: the '*Ton Alus* (the refined/"good" court scene)*;* the *'Ton Gagah* (bold/strong/"evil" court scene)*;* the *Dalan Gecul*; the *Adegan Taman* (garden scene)*;* and the *Alas Perang* (battle scene). Every *ketoprak* performance, suggests Hatley, is constituted from a combination of these four elemental scene types (pp.40-63). This basic structure and taxonomy of scene types is evident in *OVJ's* performances, including in the "*Kresna Gugah"* episode discussed in this chapter. For a comprehensive scene-by-scene description of the episode see Appendix 1. *OVJ*'s performance of "*Kresna Gugah*" begins with a sequence of palace scenes to establish the play's plot premise, key characters, and central conflict. A comic interlude then follows involving Arjuna and his *punakawan* servant, Bagong. Set against a forest backdrop, the comic scene segues into a romantic encounter between Arjuna and Banowati. The performance concludes with a battle scene between Arjuna and Baladewa. As in Hatley's description of *ketoprak* each "kind of [on-stage]

The literary trope of recasting *wayang* figures in contemporary settings is a well-established one in modern Indonesian drama and literature. Prominent examples include the dramatic works of W.S. Rendra and the novels of Yudhistira Ardi Noegraha both of which engage in this exercise of modern transposition.[48] But whereas both Rendra and Noegraha contemporised *wayang* mythology for the purposes of political satire, OVJ's pop culture invocation of *wayang* is distinctly non-ideological beyond a rather playful assertion of the liberation and distance from tradition that modernity affords both individuals and society.

### 1.3 Javanese theatre on Indonesian television – From *Srimulat* to *Opera Van Java*

*OVJ*'s project of adapting and contemporising Javanese folk theatre traditions such as *wayang* and *ketoprak* for mass consumption on national television is not without precedent. The pioneering work of the Javanese comedy troupe *Srimulat* during the 1980s and 1990s is the clearest and most obvious forerunner to *OVJ*'s success. Originating from the court city of Surakarta in the 1950s as a touring dance and theatre troupe, *Srimulat* was founded by Teguh, a musician-turned-troupe-manager of mixed Chinese-Javanese descent. The troupe took its name from Teguh's wife, Raden Ayu Srimulat, a famous *keroncong* singer and *ketoprak* performer of the 1930s and 1940s. Over the course of five decades, under Teguh's leadership, *Srimulat* grew from its origins as an itinerant regional theatre troupe to become a regular feature on Indonesian television.

Like *OVJ*, *Srimulat* had strong ties to earlier Javanese theatrical traditions such as *ketoprak* and the more proletarian theatrical form of *ludruk*.[49] Indeed over the decades of troupe's existence, Teguh continued to refresh *Srimulat*'s ranks with performers drawn from the *ketoprak* and *ludruk* communities of the traditional centres of such performance arts in Surakarta, Yogyakarta and Surabaya.[50] *Srimulat*'s performances, much like *OVJ*'s, involved a group of comedians improvising a comic performance over a simple storyline. Indonesian cultural critic Goenawan Mohamad describes *Srimulat*'s performances as "a feast of orality" in which "improvisation is the rule", in which "dialogues tend to digress, the story's

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interaction" in *OVJ* is clearly identified by and associated with a particular scene setting or location.

[48] Rendra, *The Struggle of the Naga Tribe*, transl. Max Lane. (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1979); Yudhistira Ardi Noegraha, *Arjuna Mencari Cinta,* (Jakarta: Cypress, 1977).

[49] For a detailed description of this particular form of Javanese folk-theatre see Peacock's *Rites of Modernization*.

[50] Anwari, *Indonesia Tertawa: Srimulat Sebagai Sebuah Subkultur* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia, 1999), pp.45-49.

focus is tentative, and the denouement, like the plot, beside the point."[51] While acknowledging *Srimulat*'s deep roots in other similarly improvisational Javanese theatrical traditions such as *wayang* and *ketoprak*, Mohamad asserts that *Srimulat* played a key role in adapting Javanese theatrical forms both to the condition of modernity and to a new national idiom.

The 1950s and 1960s were decades of rapid change in Indonesia, during which many aspects of society and culture were being transformed by rapid urbanisation and economic modernisation. *Srimulat*'s success lay in its modification of Javanese theatrical forms to reflect new cultural sensibilities, namely the democratic and egalitarian impulses that accompanied Indonesia's encounter with modernity and national independence. To this end, one of *Srimulat's* key innovations, writes Mohamad, was to turn the conventional structure of the master-and-servant comic routine – and the implied status hierarchy therein – on its head. Where previously, in *wayang* and *ketoprak*, servant characters had been figures of ridicule, in *Srimulat* performances, Mohamad asserts, they were imbued with nobility and dignity; their words and actions were assigned narrative significance previously reserved for gods and warriors.

Key also to *Srimulat'*s cultural transposition was the move from Javanese to *Bahasa Indonesia* as the linguistic medium of performance. In the first two decades of its existence, *Srimulat*'s fame was confined to the cities and towns of Central and East Java. In 1971 however the troupe travelled to Jakarta to perform for the first time in front audiences at the national art centre, Taman Ismail Marzuki. This move to performing in front of national (and, significantly, often non-Javanese speaking) audiences required considerable adaptation on the part of *Srimulat*'s performers. They were required to translate their comic routines from the familiar Javanese into the new – and for many *Srimulat* performers – somewhat alien national language of *Bahasa Indonesia*. Given the quick-fire improvisational nature of *Srimulat*'s comedy routines this was no easy feat and the difficulty of the transition is described in Anwari's account of the troupe's rise to national prominence.[52] Anwari cites Teguh's foresight, entrepreneurial nous and insistence that his performers make the switch from Javanese to *Bahasa Indonesia* as being central to *Srimulat's* achievement of national success.[53]

[51] Goenawan Mohamad, "Srimulat: Translating/Not Translating..." in *Between Tongues: Translation and/of/in Performance in Asia*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay (Singapore Singapore University Press, 2006), p.77.
[52] Anwari, pp.45-50, 63-70, 153-183.
[53] The linguistic shift was, however, a gradual one and the 1970s were a period of continuous experimentation in which the troupe explored how to create comedy in the new national idiom. Anwari, pp. 45-46.

By the early 1980s, *Srimulat* was performing regularly in Jakarta at the city's Senayan Amusement Park. Then, beginning in 1982, the state television broadcaster TVRI began, on a monthly basis, to broadcast *Srimulat's* performances on its national television network.[54] With the introduction of commercial television to Indonesia in the early 1990s, *Srimulat* moved over to commercial network Indosiar where its performances were now broadcast weekly to a national audience.[55] The considerable commercial success of *Srimulat* on Indosiar inspired numerous spin-off and imitator shows on rival commercial networks.[56]

If s*tambul*'s achievement half a century prior had been to create the first identifiably modern Indonesian theatrical form and modelled, for the first time, the use of Indonesian-Malay as a linguistic medium of theatrical performance, *Srimulat* built on this foundation to provide a bridge between Javanese regional culture and a still emergent pan-archipelagic national Indonesian culture. In doing so it also bequeathed to the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia,* an expanded repertoire of comedic possibility by infusing it with the Javanese comic sensibilities of *ketoprak's* clowning.

*OVJ* is deeply indebted to the work of cultural synthesis and innovation embodied in *Srimulat's* performances. The links between the two troupes are manifold. *OVJ* not only borrows much of *Srimulat's* verbal and gestural vocabulary but performs in front of Indonesian audiences who share a collective cultural memory of this vocabulary largely due to *Srimulat's* national popularity in the 1980s and 1990s. That it is even possible to conceive of finding a national television audience for *OVJ*'s comic interpretation of Javanese myth and legend is due to *Srimulat*'s prior success in translating Javanese comedy into *Bahasa Indonesia* and popularising Javanese cultural forms within a national pop culture idiom.[57]

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[54] Mohamad, p.79.

[55] Anwari, p.75.

[56] Most significant of these was perhaps *Ketoprak Humor*, a *Srimulat*-inspired improvised comedy program featuring several ex-*Srimulat* personnel that screened weekly on Indonesia's preeminent commercial network, RCTI, well into the early 2000s. For a more extensive discussion of *Ketoprak Humor* and other *Srimulat* spin-offs see Anwari, pp.76-78 and Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.223-230.

[57] *OVJ* is linked to *Srimulat* not only culturally but also in terms of its personnel. One of *OVJ*'s regular performers, the comedienne Nunung, is a long-time former *Srimulat* troupe member and the show frequently features other ex-*Srimulat* personnel. As a case in point, the actor playing Karna in the *"Kresna Gugah"* episode, Eko DJ was also formerly a longstanding member of *Srimulat. OVJ*'s producer, Mita, told me that the show even hosted special joint *Srimulat* and *OVJ* performances in which personnel from both troupes competed on stage together for laughs. Mita explained that in addition to being a novelty drawcard for audiences such shows provided a public forum in which *OVJ* could acknowledge its debt (Mita used the phrase "*tali silaturahmi"* or "kinship ties" ) to *Srimulat*. Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince. (Translation author's own.)

This chapter has argued that *OVJ* sits within a tradition of similar Indonesian and Javanese forms of live theatre entertainment. *OVJ's* style of improvised comedy traces its lineage back to two culturally hybrid theatrical forms in particular that first emerged in Indonesia during the late nineteenth century – *komedi stambul* and *ketoprak*. In particular the comic interludes – the *dalan gecul* – occurring between scenes in both *wayang kulit* and *ketoprak* performances represent a key influence on *OVJ*'s style of comedic performance. Finally, *OVJ* represents a new chapter in the history of the translation of Javanese cultural forms into a national Indonesian idiom – a process that has its most immediate precedent in the work of *Srimulat*. Further discussion of the ways in which *OVJ* continues this work cultural synthesis as well as the ways in which it departs from these antecedent forms is presented in Chapter III. For now though, Chapter II will now turn to an examination of *OVJ* as a product of the Indonesian television industry and a discussion of the commercial context out of which *OVJ* has emerged.

# Chapter II

# "Buoyant Times": The Commercial Context of Trans7's *Opera Van Java*

While Chapter I contextualised *Opera Van Java* (*OVJ*) within a lineage of Javanese and Indonesian theatrical traditions, Chapter II situates *OVJ* as a product of the contemporary Indonesian television industry. As a result of successive waves of industry liberalisation starting in the early 1990s, Indonesia now has a highly competitive television industry comprised of ten national commercial networks. Chapter II explores the rise of one of the most successful Indonesian media companies to emerge in the post-Suharto era – Trans Media Corpora (TMC) – and its two television networks, Trans TV and Trans7. This chapter argues that TMC has achieved a rapid capture of market share – both in terms of audiences and advertising revenue – by challenging conventional programming practices that have held sway during the first decade of commercial television broadcasting in Indonesia. In particular, TMC has innovated away from the soap opera or *sinetron* format that has been the staple local content format for over a decade. It has instead pursued a programming strategy characterised by in-house produced, non-*sinetron* local content. As will be demonstrated, *OVJ* is a particularly successful example of TMC's non-*sinetron* programming strategy.

### 2.1 The commercial context of *OVJ:* An interview with the program's producer, Yustina Pramita.

In an interview conducted at one of Trans7's rented studios in Pancoran, South Jakarta in October 2011, *OVJ's* producer, Yustina Pramita (Mita), described the path by which *OVJ* hade made it on to Indonesian television. In early 2008, Mita explained, she and a team of senior production staff at Trans7 were approached by the network vice-president, Wishnutama Kusubandio, and given the challenge of developing a new program for a primetime slot. "I've got this slot to fill; you guys come up with a good program", Mita recalled Wishnutama saying; "That was the extent of his instructions."[58] For Mita, who had previously worked as a producer for eight years at rival network Indosiar, the project represented her first assignment for Trans7. Given the openness of the brief and the creative freedom given to them by senior management, the small team of production staff were initially, Mita confessed, somewhat unsure as to what direction to take. The team met for a series of long brainstorming sessions in which concepts and ideas were

[58] Yustina Pramita (Mita) [*OVJ* executive producer], interview by Liam Prince, Studio Guet, Pancoran, Jakarta, October 13, 2011. (Translation author's own.)

canvassed, including many which were, by Mita's own admission, "crazy ideas for shows that were just totally impossible."[59] Mita recalled the moment of creative inspiration that ultimately lead to *OVJ* as follows:

> I think we already had a notion that we wanted to do something that was funny…a comedy show. But we just weren't sure what kind of comedy […] And then one night we had this idea […] Indonesia has *wayang.* Why don't we take that concept of the *dalang* and his puppets? The idea was really to have the *dalang* there as a director figure and to give him the right to order the other actors around. That was the basic concept, the relationship between the *dalang* and other actors or "puppets". Then we had the idea of packaging it up as an "opera". The "van Java" bit of the name just sounded kind of catchy. I guess the word "opera" has that association with music, and we knew we wanted an element of traditional music in the show. […] Really the initial idea was to create a "traditional" comedy but packaged up as a contemporary looking variety show.[60]

The process from conception to the show's realisation – which included market research, production design and casting – took Mita's team nearly a year. Station management were initially confused by the show's proposed format. Mita described the meeting attended by both station vice-president Wishnutama and station owner and managing director, Chairul Tanjung, at which Mita's team first pitched the idea for *OVJ*:

> I'm pretty sure they liked the idea. I think they liked the name *Opera Van Java* and thought we had a good show on our hands. We'd already shot a pilot episode, which we screened for them. But they didn't like it. We had to strip it all down and reconfigure the format. We had to shoot a couple more pilots until eventually they gave it the green light.[61]

Mita admitted that although it was frustrating process, she believed that the additional time initially spent tweaking the show's format had been, in light of *OVJ'*s success, well worth the effort. The show first aired on Trans7 in November 2008. Initially occupying a weekly slot in primetime (8pm-10pm), the show quickly gained a large following. Encouraged by the show's reception, station executives increased the frequency of *OVJ*'s airings from weekly to nightly broadcasts in 2010. *OVJ* presently airs for two hours every evening from Monday through to Saturday. Additionally, for the last two years, during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, the show has aired twice daily with Trans7 broadcasting an early morning spin-off show – *OVJ Sahur* – aimed at early-rising viewers preparing for the daily fast.

[59] Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince. (Translation author's own.)
[60] *Ibid*. (Translation author's own.)
[61] *Ibid*. (Translation author's own.)

Despite its ubiquitous presence in Trans7's schedule, *OVJ's* ratings have been consistently high, regularly garnering between six to seven rating points and an audience share of twenty percent.[62] While special, one-off events such as live broadcasts of international sporting finals can achieve figures of twenty to twenty-five ratings points and audience shares of seventy percent amongst Indonesian viewers, for a regular program – particularly one screening as regularly as *OVJ* – the show's ratings are striking.[63] For the past two years *OVJ* has consistently been placed within the top five most watched shows on Indonesian television and has regularly taken out the weekly number one spot.[64] This is a significant achievement for a comedy show – a "traditional" comedy show at that – in a country where primetime has long been dominated by the indigenous form of melodrama, *sinetron.* To properly contextualise *OVJ's* commercial success, a brief history of the Indonesian television industry and the type of content that has dominated its primetime programming is in order.

### 2.2 History of the Indonesian television industry and description of current market conditions

Since the introduction of television into Indonesia in 1962, Indonesia's television sector has experienced three significant periods of growth. The first of these was initiated by the launch of a domestic communications satellite by the Indonesian government in 1976. The "Palapa" satellite gave the then sole television network, state broadcaster TVRI, a new capability to relay its signal across the breadth of the archipelago and to reach vastly more Indonesian households than it had previously been able to.[65] TVRI was now able to beam program content to viewers in locations as remote from each other as Banda Aceh at the western-most tip of Sumatra and Jayapura in Indonesia's eastern-most province of West Papua. Despite this

[62] Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince. Mita's claim of an average rating for *OVJ* of six to seven points is supported by (albeit limited) publically available information form AGB Nielsen. See AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 20th Edition, August 26 (2011), p.1.
At time of writing, one AGB Nielsen ratings point equals approximately 522,000 viewers in Indonesia. Each rating point represents one percentage point of AGB Nielsen's monitored "TV Population" – that is the total television-watching population in the ten Indonesian urban centres in Indonesia regularly surveyed by the company. According to the information available on the company's website at time of writing, AGB Nielsen's "TV Population" for Indonesia is currently calculated at 52.2 million viewers. Thus in 2011 a rating of six to seven points represents between 3.1 million to 3.6 million viewers. Audience share is calculated as a percentage of the total number of people watching television at any given time. An audience share of twenty percent means that of out of all the households watching television during the 8pm-10pm primetime slot, one in five were watching *OVJ.* For further explanation of the AGB Nielsen ratings system see Gareth Barkin, "Producing Indonesia: The Derivation and Domestication of Commercial Television," (PhD Diss., Washington University, 2004) pp.78-84; AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 27th Edition, November 2008, p.2.
[63] AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 12th Edition, December 30, 2010, p.1.
[64] Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince.
[65] Philip Kitley, *Television, Nation, and Culture in Indonesia* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), pp.46-63

significant advance in the capacity of television to reach the Indonesian population, viewers' choices with respect to broadcast content remained extremely limited. Suharto's New Order regime, with its intense preoccupation with national security and cultural unity, maintained a strict state monopoly over programming decisions until well into the late 1980s.[66]

The second growth period, involving a limited liberalisation of the sector, was inaugurated in 1989 by the Ministry of Information's granting of Indonesia's first commercial broadcast license to network, RCTI.[67] Between 1989 and 1995, five commercial free-to-air television networks in all were established, namely: RCTI (1989), SCTV (1990), TPI (1991), ANTEVE (1993), and Indosiar (1995).[68] This first wave of sector liberalisation was largely driven by crony capitalism as family members and business associates close to the Suharto regime's "first family" pushed against the state monopoly of the airwaves.[69] In return for the lucrative opportunity of selling advertising to Indonesia's emerging middle class, the newly established commercial networks were obliged to support the government's political and cultural objectives.[70]

The third and most recent growth phase in Indonesian television was ushered in by the resignation of President Suharto in 1998 and occurred within the context of a slew of social and political reforms that took place under the rubric of *reformasi*.[71] Since the collapse of the New Order, five new national commercial networks have been granted broadcast licenses, namely: Metro TV (2000), Trans TV (2001), TV7 (now Trans7) (2001), Lativi (now TVone) (2002) and Global TV (2002).[72] Indonesia

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[66] The reasons for the New Order's close supervision of television content are explained in greater detail in Chapter III but, in short, pertain to the regime's preoccupation with preserving Indonesia's territorial integrity and promoting cultural unity amongst the archipelago's numerous ethno-linguistic groups.

[67] Philip Kitley, "Closing the Creativity Gap - Renting Intellectual Capital in the Name of Local Content: Indonesia in the Global Television Format Business," in *Television across Asia: Television Industries, Programme Formats and Globalization*, eds. Albert Moran and Michael Keane, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p.141.

[68] Kitley, "Closing the Creativity Gap," p.103. For a succinct account of the history of commercial television in Indonesia, see also Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.69-74.

[69] Kitley, "Closing the Creativity Gap," p.141.

[70] *Ibid*.

[71] *Ibid.*

[72] *Ibid.*, p.142; Rachmah Ida,"Reorganisation of Media Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: Ownership, Power and Influence of Local Media Entrepreneurs," in *Politics and the Media in Twenty-First Century Indonesia*, eds. Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, (London: Routledge, 2011), pp.13-15. Although Indonesia now has ten national commercial television networks for viewers to choose from, the industry is dominated by three large media groups that account for the ownership of seven of these ten networks. These groups are, in order of audience share: MNC (three networks), TMC (two networks) and Viva (two networks). For further details see Mark Savage, "Land of Opportunity," *The Asian Media Journal* Quarter 1 (2011): 16.

now has a highly competitive commercial television industry comprised of ten national networks and numerous smaller regional networks.[73] Total annual advertising revenue for the industry is estimated at US$1 billion and is predicted to increase to $US1.8 billion by 2015.[74]

With Indonesia's economy growing steadily and its middle-class consumer base expanding with it, demand for television advertising space is currently at a historically high level.[75] Recent industry analysis by Mark Savage has described "buoyant times" for the Indonesian television industry providing "a rich harvest for broadcasters".[76] Two thirds of the money spent on advertising in Indonesia, asserts Savage, is spent on television advertising.[77] Soaring demand from advertisers has allowed networks to raise their rates while continuing to sell out their advertising inventories.[78] Indeed, from a demand-side perspective – given the economy's as-yet unsated appetite for advertising space – Savage suggests that current market conditions could even support the entrance of several new players into the industry in addition to the ten established national networks.[79]

A recent industry estimate puts Indonesia's total television viewership at 170 million, equating to roughly seventy-two percent of the national population[80]. Gareth Barkin, citing the results of a "TV Establishment Survey" conducted by the ratings agency AGB Nielsen in 2004, suggests that the number of Indonesian households owning a television has more than tripled between 1994 and 2003 to the effect that, by 2003, 71.6% of surveyed households owned at least one television. Significant also, if one is to get a true sense of television's penetration of the Indonesian population, is the fact that 87.8% of respondents from households without a television said that they watched television every day or nearly

[73] See Savage, p.16.
[74] *Ibid.*, p.20. In global terms Indonesian is still considered an emerging television market. By way of comparison, Australian industry body Free TV Australia reported total advertising revenue for Australian free-to-air television at approximately US$3.7billion for the 12-month period July 2009 to June 2010. See "Advertising Revenue for Commercial Television Networks July to December 2009," Media Release, January 29 (2010), Free TV Australia website; and "Free TV Announces January to June Ad Revenue for Commercial Television Networks," Media Release, July 21 (2010): Free TV Australia website.
[75] Indonesia has experienced an annual growth rate in real GDP of between approximately 5-6% for the last ten years between 2001 and 2011. See Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Indonesia Fact Sheet," December 2011, Australian Government, http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/fs/indo.pdf (accessed 9/09/11).
[76] Savage, pp.15-16.
[77] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] *Ibid*., p.19.
[80] CT Corpora, Company Profile, May 2011, p.8.

everyday.[81] AGB Nielsen regularly surveys the viewing habits of approximately two thousand households in ten of Indonesia's largest cities and cites a total "TV population" for these urban centres of 52.2 million viewers.[82] This AGB Nielsen-defined "TV population" is of particular commercial significance to television industry participants as the ratings figures derived from the viewing choices of this surveyed population determine the respective networks' capacity to earn advertising revenue.[83] Ultimately, it has been *OVJ*'s ability to consistently attract large audiences in each of the ten urban centres monitored by AGB Nielsen that has made the show a going concern for TMC. That a comedy show with strong roots in regional theatrical forms has managed to achieve such a sizeable and widespread audience is all the more noteworthy given the kind of domestic content that has formerly dominated primetime in Indonesia, an account of which is provided in the following section. As will be discussed in due course, the sizeable viewing population of *OVJ* can be attributed to a number of factors, not least of which is its departure from the conventional *sinetron* format.

### 2.3 Local content and the dominance of the *sinetron* format

Although imported foreign content, particularly American television and movies, played an important role in filling broadcast hours during the early years of Indonesia's television industry, the expansion of domestic production capacity beginning in the mid-1990s largely displaced the dominance of foreign content on Indonesian airwaves, particularly during primetime.[84] Western and English language program content, Barkin argues, "while attracting a veneer of upper crust, have not proven sufficiently popular across the spectrum of upper-income viewers, who prefer domestic content".[85] It now appears to be well-accepted industry lore within

[81] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," p.73. The survey included nine urban centres: Jabotabek, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Makassar, Palembang and Denpasar.
[82] "Indonesia - TAM Overview", AGB Nielsen website (accessed 30/06/2011), http://www.agbnielsen.net/whereweare/dynPage.asp?lang=english&id=322&country=Indonesia. The areas regularly surveyed by AGB Nielsen are: Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Makassar, Palembang, Denpasar, and Banjarmasin. It is worth noting that AGB Nielsen ratings survey do not count children under five years of age.
[83] In 2007 AGB Nielsen increased its regular survey areas from eight to ten of Indonesia's major urban centres, with the addition of Banjarmasin and Makassar. AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 14th Edition, October 2007, p.2.
[84] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.204, 302. Barkin suggests that the early influence of American television and film on Indonesian broadcast content was not only due to the dominant market presence of American content during the 1970s and 1980s, but also, in part, reflected the New Order regime's Cold War-era political loyalties. In the mid-1990s however, both economic and cultural factors – such as the intersection of domestic production capacity with previously unexpressed audience preferences for local content, as well as the Asian financial crisis – intervened to the effect that "American programs became the least watched of nearly all foreign programs in the latter part of that decade" (p. 204).
[85] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," p. 306

Indonesia's commercial television sector that a network cannot hope to capture significant primetime audience share with purely foreign content.[86]

As in other markets, local and domestically produced content in Indonesia takes a wide variety of forms and formats, including quiz shows, talk shows, travel programs, infomercials, news and current affairs programs, and (more recently) reality TV programming. While some of these are truly home grown products, many are domesticated versions of foreign formats, such as recent Indonesian incarnations of global franchises like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, Big Brother*, and *Indonesian Idol.*[87] Historically, however, the format that has dominated ratings in the industry since the early 1990s has been a local form of melodrama known as *sinetron*.[88] A hybrid soap opera format that blends elements of Indian melodrama, Western soap, and Latin *telenovela*, the *sinetron* format is the creation of a small group of Jakarta-based production houses.[89]

There are several distinct types of *sinetron* – including drama, drama-comedy, epic, religious – but all of these variants tend to be united by common stylistic elements.[90] Most notable of these common characteristics is a melodramatic acting style that traces its origins to analogous soap opera forms in Western, Latin American and Indian television cultures. *Sinetron* programs have met with undeniable commercial success in Indonesia. Barkin notes that where an episode of an imported American television series might attract one or two ratings points, and Hong Kong and Latin American programs between five and seven points, domestically-produced *sinetron* programs consistently earn between fifteen and thirty points per episode.[91]

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[86] For a recent articulation of this view from an industry figure refer to *Tempo Interaktif* interview with Trans Media Corpora director, Ishadi SK: "TV Swasta Orientasinya harus Earning, Bukan Spending Seperti TVRI", *Tempo Interaktif* http://www.tempo.co.id/harian/wawancara/waw-ishadisk.html (accessed 16/07/11)

[87] For a detailed discussion on the rise of the "format" show on Indonesian television, see Philip Kitley, "Closing the creativity gap," pp.138-156; Penelope Coutas "Fame, Fortune, *Fantasi: Indonesian Idol* and the New Celebrity," in *Entertainment Media in Indonesia*, eds. Mark Hobart and Richard Fox (London: Routledge, 2008).

[88] The word "*sinetron"* is a portmanteau of the Indonesian words *"sinema"* and *elektronik"* or "cinema" and "electronic".

[89] Rachmah Ida, "Watching Indonesian *Sinetron*: Imagining Communities around the Television," (PhD Diss., Curtin University of Technology, 2006). According to Ida, one production company in particular – Raam Punjabi's PT Multivision Plus – presently accounts for around 80% of Indonesia's annual *sinetron* output (p.92.).

[90] Ida, "Watching Indonesian *Sinetron,*" p.85.

[91] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," p.11. The assertion that *OVJ* has been one of the highest rating programs on Indonesian television for the last two years is made on the basis of *OVJ's* average nightly audience of six to seven ratings points. While this claim initially appears to be at odds with Barkin's observation that, historically, *sinetron* programs regularly attracted audiences of between fifteen and thirty ratings points, this inconsistency

*Sinetron* programming represents a comparatively expensive form of local content for Indonesian commercial television networks to produce. Productions are lavishly costumed and set according to the latest and most expensive trends in fashion, consumer technology and interior design. Production houses frequently compete to outdo one another in terms of the luxury and wealth on display.[92] However, despite the high production costs involved, the proven ratings-drawing power of the *sinetron* form has continued to support the commercial logic of its production.

Yet despite – or perhaps because of – the commercial success that the format has enjoyed, *sinetron* programming has been the target of strong criticism.[93] Chief among the criticisms is that there is little that is authentically Indonesian in the *sinetron* form.[94] Concerns over this authenticity gap between representation and the lived reality of most Indonesian viewers has been the subject of intense public discussion involving media critics, social scientists, parliamentarians and the general public.[95]

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can be accounted for. Barkin conducted his fieldwork and the bulk of research for his anthropological study of the Indonesian television industry during a initial stint in Indonesia in 1999, and then during a second period in 2001. In the intervening decade since Barkin conducted his research, Indonesia's commercial television industry has undergone the second wave of liberalisation and expansion, as described in section 2.2 of this chapter. One of the outcomes of the effective doubling of Indonesia's commercial networks has been, predictably, significant audience fragmentation. With twice as many viewing choices, no single program or network is able to attract the audience numbers and ratings achieved by the industry's highest rating programs during the 1990s and no single program or network is regularly winning double-digit ratings. For further explanation of the phenomenon of audience fragmentation in Indonesia's commercial television industry see: AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 14th$^{th}$ Edition, October 2007, pp.2-3. For a recent example of what this audience fragmentation means for the respective ratings achievements of individual programs see AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 40$^{th}$ Edition, November 2009, p.2. It is important to note that for November 2009, none of the top ten highest rating programs on Indonesian television attained more than 7.4 ratings points. The highest rating *sinetron* program for the period, *Cinta Fitri,* garnered 6 ratings points.

[92] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.153-154

[93] Ida, "Watching Indonesian *Sinetron,*" pp.1-2.

[94] Barkin relates the story of President Megawati Sukarnoputri calling the leadership of the *sinetron* actors union into her office during her presidency "to scold them for making insufficiently Indonesian television programs". Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp. 173-174.

[95] Ida, "Watching Indonesian *Sinetron*," p.84; Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince. During her interview, *OVJ's* producer, Mita, emphasised her belief that a key element of *OVJ's* success was the widespread popular boredom and discontent with the *sinetron* format, particularly amongst Indonesia's upper-income viewers. A key contributing factor to *OVJ's* popularity has been that it draws on cultural sources that *are* perceived by Indonesian audiences to be more authentically Indonesian than other formats such as *sinetron*. In particular, *OVJ's* grounding in the antecedent indigenous theatrical traditions described in Chapter I such as *wayang, stambul* and *ketoprak,* its invocation of the symbols and narrative content of Javanese myth and legend, and its use of non-standard dialects of the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia* (as well as regional languages such as Javanese) all contribute to its apparent authenticity. Indeed, as will be explained in Chapter III, OVJ's use of a variety of regional languages and dialects in its performances is key to its

## 2.4 Trans Media Corpora, Trans TV and Trans7

The media company responsible for *OVJ*'s appearance on Indonesian television is Trans Media Corp (TMC), a subsidiary division of the Para Group conglomerate owned by Indonesian entrepreneur Chairul Tanjung.[96] TMC, as the corporate division charged with overseeing the conglomerate's media interests, is, in turn, a parent company of two national commercial television networks: Trans TV and Trans7.[97] TMC first began broadcasting in December 2001. Initially transmitting to the Greater Jakarta area and Bandung only, TMC's broadcast area was soon extended to other major urban centres including Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Semarang and Medan.[98] According to company publicity material, TMC now owns sixty-eight transmission stations across Indonesia, reaching two hundred and thirty towns and cities and more than 170 million people representing over seventy percent of the total Indonesian population.[99]

In the ten years since it began operations, TMC has grown to become Indonesia's second most significant television broadcaster in terms of both audience share and advertising revenue.[100] Savage attributes TMC's rapid capture of both audience

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popularity with audiences, as it offers Indonesian viewers a more authentically local viewing experience than that formerly offered to them by *sinetron* programming.

[96] Para Group, alternately referred to in company documents as "CT Corpora" or the "CT Corporation", was established by Tanjung in 1987. The group's commercial activities were originally confined to Indonesia's banking and financial services sector but it now holds combined assets of approximately US$7 billion in sectors as diverse as media, retail, and mining, and employs more than sixty thousand people across Indonesia It is comprised of three major corporate divisions: Mega Corpora; CT Global Resources; and Trans Corpora. For further information on Para Group/CT Corpora and its corporate structure see CT Corpora, Company Profile, May 2011.

[97] Ida, "Reorganisation of Media Power," p.15; "Chairul Tanjung to enter online media business," *The Jakarta Post* Tuesday 29th June 2010. In March of 2011 Forbes magazine estimated Tanjung's personal wealth at US$1.1 billion and ranked him the twelfth wealthiest individual in Indonesia. "Profile: Chairul Tanjung," *Forbes,* March 2011.

[98] "Trans TV becomes seventh private network on air," *The Jakarta Post*, Saturday 27th October 2001.

[99] CT Corpora Company Profile, May 2011, p.8. TMC acquired its second network – Trans7 – in August of 2006, obtaining a 49% stake in the then-named TV7. With the Kompas Gramedia Group (KKG) retaining a 51% stake in the network, the station was rebranded and re-launched as "Trans7" in December of the same year. See "Trans TV Kuasai 49 Persen Saham TV7", *Tempo Interaktif*, 4 August 2006; and "Trans7 – Corporate Overview," Trans7 website, http://www.trans7.co.id/frontend/aboutus/view/company/15 (accessed: 14/07/11).

[100] AGB Nielsen figures for 2010 put TMC's combined audience share at 24.1% (14.0% Trans TV, 10.1% Trans7), second only to the combined audience share of Media Nusantara Citra Ltd (MNC), the parent company of stations RCTI, MNC TV (formerly TPI), and Global TV. (AGB Nielsen figures quoted in Savage, p.16. In an interview in April 2011, TMC director Ishadi SK stated that Trans TV and Tran7's audience shares had risen to 15% and 11% respectively and revealed that TMC was targeting a combined audience share of 28% for the two networks in 2011. Muhammad Iqbal, "Ishadi SK, Komisaris Trans Corp: Kami Akan Membangun 40 Studio Televisi," *Indonesia Finance Today*, 11th April 2011. See also Muhammad Iqbal, "Trans Corp Anggarkan Rp 8 Triliun untuk Bangun 50 Studio", *Indonesia Finance Today,* 20th June 2011. With respect to advertising revenue and profitability, CT

attention and advertising revenue to its "breakthrough style of in-house variety programming", and a willingness to innovate away from the *sinetron*-heavy programming model of the older, more established industry players.[101] In contrast to the tendencies of stations such as RCTI and SCTV to outsource production to third-party production houses – most notably Raam Punjabi's Multivision – TMC continues to invest heavily in its in-house production capacity.[102] Currently possessing eleven studios and renting an additional ten,[103] TMC announced in early 2011 an investment of eight trillion rupiah (US$100 million) to finance the construction of a further forty studios, including facilities in Bandung and a large-scale production complex (dubbed "Trans City) in the Greater Jakarta satellite city of Bekasi.[104] According to company information, TMC produced 11,000 hours of in-house content in 2010 and earned more than seventy-three percent of its revenue from content produced in-house.[105] According to Ishadi, eighty percent of content broadcast on Trans7 and ninety percent of that on flagship station Trans TV is produced in-house.[106]

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Corpora company information claims, as of May 2011, to have captured 23% of Indonesia's total television advertising expenditure and to be "the second largest player in terms of gross TV advertising expenditure for the past four years" behind MNC. See CT Corpora Company Profile, p.8.

[101] Savage, p.16.

[102] Iqbal, "Ishadi SK," ; Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.61-131.

[103] Savage, p.16

[104] Myrna Riyanto, "Sembilan Bank Asing Beri Pinjaman US$ 1 Miliar kepada Trans Corp," *Indonesia Finance Today,* March 14, 2011. See also: Iqbal, "Ishadi SK," This studio construction project, according to Ishadi, is to be modelled on Universal Studios in Los Angeles and is motivated by the perceived need to meet the increasing demand for local content entailed in the switch to digital television. Based on the figures provided by Ishadi in this interview, this $US100 million investment in studio facilities would appear to represent the lion's share of the total US$167 million ear-marked for capital expenditure by TMC in 2011.

[105] CT Corpora Company Profile, p.8.

[106] Iqbal, "Ishadi SK." The influence of TMC company director Ishadi seems to have been particularly significant in overseeing TMC's corporate strategy of expanded in-house production capacity and preference for broadcasting non-*sinetron* local content. Ishadi is a 25-year veteran of state television broadcaster TVRI, and has occupied several senior management positions during his time with the agency, including the management of, at different times, TVRI's Jakarta and Yogyakarta operations. Ishadi left TVRI in the mid-1990s to serve for two years as managing director of commercial network TPI. In addition to his considerable industry experience, Ishadi is also a respected media scholar, a frequent commentator on media matters in the national press, and a faculty member of the University of Indonesia's Department of Communication Studies. Recruited from TPI by Tanjung in 1998 to oversee the development and launch of Trans TV, Ishadi has presided over the commercial rise of a television network that at the time of its launch was "largely staffed by recent college graduates with little or no experience in the industry." Gareth Barkin, "The Foreignizing Gaze: Producers, Audiences, and Symbols of the 'Traditional'," in *Entertainment Media in Indonesia*, eds. Mark Hobart and Richard Fox (London: Routledge, 2008), p.2. For further details on Ishadi's contribution to the rise of TMC see "TV Swasta Orientasinya," *Tempo Interaktif*; "Panasonic Gobel Awards: Ishadi SK," March 26, 2010, video clip, accessed July 14, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvM-oECAMRw.

TMC has achieved particular success amongst the coveted middle- and upper-class audience segments.[107] These are viewers designated by ratings agency AGB Nielsen as ”A” and ”B” market segment viewers.[108] They represent the upper and upper-middle income target households that are most attractive to Indonesian advertisers. TMC's primetime strategy based around non-*sinetron* domestic content appears to have been in part motivated by its initial inability to compete with the more established networks in the expensive exercise of *sinetron* production.[109] However, as TMC's in-house production capacity has increased it has persisted with its emphasis on non-*sinetron* domestic programming, which would suggest that the strategy is equally driven by a strong belief among TMC's senior management that Indonesia's A and B market segment viewers are bored with the *sinetron* format and hungry for a new type of local content.[110]

### 2.5 *OVJ*: Something borrowed, something new: A new kind of local content on Indonesian television?

*OVJ* is a particularly illustrative and successful example of TMC's "breakthrough style of in-house variety programming" observed by Savage, and of TMC's strategy of non-*sinetron* local content. During an interview, *OVJ's* producer, Mita echoed the network's senior management with respect to TMC's programming strategy and target audience:

> At Trans we're usually aiming to reach the A and B segments of the market. The reason we aim our content at these market segments is that these are the segments most attractive to potential advertisers. We know

[107] Leamnika Tanjung, Dewi Rahmarini, and Hambali Batubara, "Kejar Tayang Stasiun Baru," *Tempo Interaktif,* December 19, 2005.
[108] Ratings agency AGB Nielsen presently categorises Indonesian television viewers on the basis of what it terms "routine monthly household expenditure" – a measure that includes households' expenditure on certain categories of consumer goods but excludes expenditure on other goods such as durables. This measure is touted as an accurate predictor of a viewer's overall socioeconomic status. Utilising this measure, the company divides viewers into five basic income/expenditure bands, each of which is assigned a letter (A, B, C, D, and E). The actual raw expenditure levels that correspond to each letter in the system are updated yearly. The most recent publicly available information from AGB Nielsen regarding expenditure levels is found in a company newsletter from July 2008. Upper-income households (A and B band viewers) are defined as those whose routine monthly household expenditure exceeds 1,500,000 rupiah (US$169). Middle-income households (C band viewers) are those with routine expenditure between 700,000-1,500,000 rupiah per month (US$79 – US$169). Low-income households (D and E band viewers) are those households with routine monthly expenditure of less than 700,000 rupiah ($US69). As the C band represents forty percent of Indonesia's "TV population", the C band is often subdivided in AGB Nielsen's reporting into C1 and C2 viewers. For further explanation of the agency's rating system see Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp. 78-84 and AGB Nielsen Newsletter, 23rd Edition, July 2008, p.2.
[109] For a recent articulation of this view from an industry figure refer to *Tempo Interaktif* interview with Ishadi in "TV Swasta Orientasinya", *Tempo Interaktif*.
[110] *Ibid.*

> that segment A viewers really don't like *sinetron* programs. *Sinetrons* are most attractive to segment C and D viewers. For the purposes of attracting both audiences and advertisers Trans aims for those A and B segment viewers."[111]

When quizzed about the actual demographic breakdown of *OVJ's* audience, Mita responded:

> According to the AGB Nielsen figures, our segment A viewers narrowly outnumber our segment B viewers. Then, of course, our segment C viewers, numerically speaking, dwarf both of these market segments. But what's surprising is that initially *OVJ* was receiving very little attention from segment A viewers. It was the segment B and C viewers who were tuning in. I think we were still trying to find our feet in terms of the show's format. But then about a year after *OVJ* first went to air we started to attract the attention of segment A viewers. Once we captured some of that market segment we've worked hard to retain these viewers.[112]

With the buoyant market conditions described earlier and the show's solid ratings, particularly among A and B market segment viewers, *OVJ* has had little trouble attracting advertisers. According to Mita, Trans7 currently charges advertisers 40 million rupiah (US$4,500) for a 30-second advertising spot on *OVJ,* and total revenue per two-hour episode is approximately 2 billion rupiah (US$226,000). With production costs of 500 million rupiah (US$56,000) an episode – the largest of these costs being remuneration for the onscreen talent – the show is an extremely profitable enterprise for TMC.[113] Although *OVJ* represented a gamble for both Mita's team and for the network, it has paid off handsomely. *OVJ*'s nightly dose of "traditional" comedy is now, as Mita described it, "the backbone" of Trans7's nightly program schedule".[114]

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[111] Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince. (Translation author's own.)
[112] *Ibid*.
[113] In addition to an unmet demand for local non-*sinetron* content, TMC company director Ishadi has recently cited the significant cost savings involved in producing local content over the purchase of foreign product as another factor shaping TMC's commercial strategy and programming approach. In a 2011 interview, Ishadi stated that it cost TMC 450 million rupiah (US$50,000) to purchase an episode of foreign import but only 150 million rupiah (US$17,000) to produce an episode of local content in-house. See Iqbal, "Ishadi SK". By this reckoning, the production costs of 500 million rupiah (US$56,000) per episode cited by Mita would make at *OVJ* a comparatively expensive local show to produce, on a par with purchasing the broadcast rights for foreign content such as a Hollywood film. Mita herself described *OVJ*'s production costs as "average" for a variety show format program. Although data on the comparative per episode production costs of other forms of local programming such as *sinetron* could not be sourced for this dissertation, anecdotal evidence suggests that these formats are much more costly to produce than *OVJ* and comparable "variety show" programs. Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince.
[114] Yustina Pramita, interview by Liam Prince. (Translation author's own.) Interestingly, given the show's specific invocation of Javanese cultural tradition, *OVJ* has performed strongly

*OVJ's* commercial success as a "traditional" and even a "traditional Javanese" comedy program is not completely without precedent on Indonesian television. *Srimulat,* whose televised performances were discussed in Chapter I, attained a similar level of ratings success during the 1990s once the troupe had moved from the state broadcaster TVRI to commercial network Indosiar.[115] Similarly, the *Srimulat* spin-off show *Ketoprak Humor* achieved considerable commercial success on RCTI in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[116] However, neither of these earlier incarnations of "traditional Javanese" comedy ever attained the intensity of popularity that is presently sustaining *OVJ's* six-nights-per-week primetime regularity.

Mita put the success of *OVJ* down to the novelty of its format, in particular the presence of a *dalang* on stage and the comic tension between *dalang* and actors. She also cited the loose nature of the show's structure and the spontaneity this permitted performers:

> I think *OVJ's* strengths are not only in our storylines and the spontaneity of our performers but also [the looseness of the show's structure]. For example, say we're presenting a story where a king orders his son to go out into the forest, the way that narrative action is realised on stage is really up to the actors' own spontaneous impulse. Actors don't know if they're going to be the king or his son, they might suddenly cast as the son but then instructed to order the king around, there's frequent miscasting of actors in unsuitable roles. All of this helps to give the show that spontaneous feel. From the point of view plot and storyline also…for example we might have a story set in a historical kingdom of the past, and then suddenly a robot appears on stage…there's that constant mashing and mixing of storylines together. […] There's an element of slapstick to

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with audiences in all the urban centres monitored by AGB Nielsen, including in cities outside Java such as Medan, Makassar, Palembang, Denpasar and Banjarmasin. From one perspective, the broad national success could be attributed to the large populations in each of these cities who have either migrated from Java or possess Javanese ancestry. However, as this dissertation argues, *OVJ's* pan-regional appeal is rather a consequence of the show's deftness at translating Javanese culture into a national, broadly Indonesian idiom; see Chapter III for an expansion of this argument. In a recent conversation with a media scholar from the University of Indonesia, it was put to me that all the urban centres regularly surveyed by AGB Nielsen fell within a common "pop-cultural sphere" the dominant tone of which was set by the culture industry based in the national capital. *OVJ*, as first and foremost an artefact of Indonesian pop culture, could be read as primarily "Jakartanese" in flavour, rather than Javanese, making it, therefore, readily accessible to all viewers living within this Jakarta-driven common pop-cultural sphere. Inaya Rakhmani, conversation with Liam Prince, Pejaten Village, Kemang, October 12, 2011.

[115] Anwari, *Indonesia Tertawa: Srimulat Sebagai Sebuah Subkultur* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia, 1999), p.75. According to Anwari, from November 1995 to December 1999, *Srimulat* screened on Indosiar every Thursday night between 9.30pm and 10.30pm, regularly garnering nine ratings points.

[116] For further discussion of *Ketoprak Humor's* success during the late 1990s and early 2000s, see Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.223-230.

> the performances too. Indonesian audiences – particularly those segments B and C viewers – love slapstick. One of our key challenges is how to package slapstick and verbal comedy into a show that still has the look of a premium, high production values, market segment A-looking program.

Some of the elements cited by Mita as sources of *OVJ's* unique appeal are indeed novel, while others are undoubtedly new incarnations of very old comic devices, as argued in the discussion of *stambul* and *ketoprak* presented in Chapter I. Regular Indonesian viewers of *OVJ*, when interviewed, spoke of the naturalism of the show's improvised dialogue as being key to *OVJ*'s attraction appeal for them.[117] They described their appreciation of the program's lightness, humour and spontaneity, and the proximity of its spoken idiom to *"bahasa sehari-hari"* ("everyday language"). In these conversations, the colloquial vernacular of *OVJ's* dialogue was frequently contrasted with the standard dialect of the national language employed in most *sinetron* programming – a variant of *Bahasa Indonesia* that many Indonesian viewers find wooden, stagey and artificial.[118] As will be argued in Chapter III, *OVJ*'s use of a variety of regional vernaculars and languages in its performances is key to its popularity with Indonesian audiences, offering viewers a more authentically local viewing experience than that formerly offered to them by *sinetron* programming.

This chapter has analysed the cultural phenomenon of *OVJ* by examining the commercial circumstances that have contributed to the appearance of the show on Indonesian television. As demonstrated, *OVJ* is an example of a new type of domestic content on Indonesian television. *OVJ* has been popular with audiences in all segments of the market but especially – and most importantly for the program's profitability and longevity – with Indonesia's upper- and middle-income viewers. The key to *OVJ's* popularity with audiences has been its capacity to deliver viewers a more authentic variety of domestic programming than that provided by *sinetron*. This greater degree of authenticity is due largely to *OVJ*'s grounding in antecedent indigenous theatrical traditions such as *wayang, stambul* and *ketoprak,* its invocation of the symbols and narrative content of indigenous myth and legend, and its use of non-standard dialects and colloquial variants of the national language in its performances, as well as regional languages such as Javanese. Further analysis of the sources of *OVJ*'s appeal for a Indonesian television audiences and the show's adeptness at transposing Javanese cultural forms into a national pop culture idiom is presented in the following chapter.

[117] Interview with *OVJ* audience members, Pancoran, Jakarta, October 11, 2011.
[118] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.191-212

# Chapter III

# "Risky Encounters": Language, Wordplay and the Cultural Politics of Trans7's *Opera Van Java*

The three Indonesian theatrical forms discussed in Chapter I – *stambul, ketoprak* and *Srimulat* – all represented theatrical responses to the challenge of reconciling modernity with tradition within Indonesian culture.[119] These theatrical responses have all involved actors on stage engaging in, to borrow Goenawan Mohamad's term, "risky encounters" with new languages and cultural idioms. A key source of their appeal for audiences has been the spectacle of actors modelling and indeed discovering, through verbal humour and wordplay, a reconciliation of the old and the new.[120] Linguistic hybridity has been integral to the entertainment appeal of all

[119] Two key aspects of Indonesia's encounter with modernity are particularly important to the subsequent discussion in this chapter. The first involves the political unification of the archipelago's multiple ethno-linguistic populations within the modern nation-state of Indonesia and the efforts made throughout the twentieth century to synthesise the diverse cultures of these groups into a common national culture. For at least a century, the most important medium of Indonesian cultural integration has been the common national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*. The second aspect involves Indonesian society's ongoing encounter with foreign cultural forms and the country's integration within the global community.

[120] Matthew Isaac Cohen, *The Komedie Stamboel: Popular Theater in Colonial Indonesia, 1891-1903* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2006); Barbara Hatley, *Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage: Contesting Culture, Embracing Change* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); and Goenawan Mohamad, "Srimulat: Translating/Not Translating...," in *Between Tongues: Translation and/of/in Performance in Asia*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), pp.68-87. Cohen argues that *komedi stambul* played a key role in demonstrating the rhetorical and emotive possibilities of Indonesian-Malay as a language of national public discourse, suggesting s*tambul* was the first indigenous dramatic form to model a modern Indonesian idiom. (*The Komedie Stamboel,* p.345). Hatley similarly identifies the centrality of linguistic experimentation, wordplay, and actors' risky encounters with language in the comic interludes – the *dalan gecul* – of modern *ketoprak* performances, observing that:

> Competitions usually centre on language, tests of skill in language forms considered by village and kampung Javanese as prestigious but difficult to reproduce. These include high Javanese, the national language taught in schools, Indonesian, and the language of modernity and global outreach, English. One tricks the other by asking for high Javanese equivalents of low-level words for which no high form exists. The latter applies standard rules to concoct preposterous inventions. Javanese/Indonesian homonyms confuse both clowns hopelessly; English words are mispronounced in such a way as to resemble Javanese expressions." (Hatley, *Javanese Performances,* p. 55.)

*Srimulat* also relied extensively on language and register switching as the engine of its verbal comedy with the group's parodic humour cutting in a number of directions. Although for many viewers *Srimulat's* chief entertainment lay in the spectacle of Javanese actors mocking the "otherness" of modern languages such as Indonesian or English, *Srimulat* equally, as Mohamad points out, involved Javanese actors laughing at their own lack of

three of these previously cited forms and to their usefulness as vehicles of cultural synthesis. One of the most frequent ways in which this synthesis and hybridity has been played out on stage is through linguistic code-switching – not only between Indonesia's national language, *Bahasa Indonesia,* and regional languages such as Javanese, but also between different registers of a single regional language, and between indigenous languages and prestige foreign languages such as English.

This chapter argues that the complex cultural sensibilities around language in Indonesia that provided such fertile comic ground for *stambul* in the late nineteenth century, *ketoprak* in the early twentieth, and *Srimulat* in the 1980s and 1990s, still exist today and are evident in the performances of *Opera van Java*. The historical tension between speakers of the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia,* and speakers of significant regional languages, such as Javanese, continues. So too does the struggle for public expression of the numerous regional variations of *Bahasa Indonesia*. Additionally, Indonesian society's integration with the global community and its encounter with those foreign languages of – to borrow Hatley's phrase – "global outreach" persists.[121] This chapter contends that these socio-cultural processes remain potent sources of cultural tension and social anxiety in contemporary Indonesia and therefore continue to be played out in comedy. Finally, this chapter argues that *OVJ* is the latest incarnation of a process by which, through the medium of theatre, tradition is reconciled with modernity in Indonesia.

### 3.1 Indonesian, Javanese and English Language Usage in Opera Van Java

During an onstage exchange taken from an *OVJ* episode broadcast in early 2010 entitled *"Dilema Cinta Gatot Kaca"* ("Gatot Kaca's Romantic Dilemma"), a Sundanese comedian – one of *OVJ*'s regular cast members who goes by the stage name "Sule" – is playing the role of the Javanese *wayang* hero Gatot Kaca.[122] The exchange begins with the *dalang* instructing Sule to "speak Javanese" as the story being performed is a "*wayang* story" of Javanese origin. "*Mampus"* ("I'm dead

sophistication and familiarity with these ostensibly "trendy" and "modern" linguistic mediums (Mohamad, p. 77).

[121] Hatley, *Javanese Performances,* p.55.

[122]For the full video clip of this exchange see "*Opera Van Java – Main Basa Jawa dan Inggris,*" [n.d.], video clip, accessed August 12, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdvugg4yfUI. 'Sule', whose real name is Entis Sutisna, is one of *OVJ*'s regular cast members. As a result of his appearances on the on show, Sule has become a national celebrity and a household name in Indonesia. He stars in a number of other television programs and has recently appeared in several commercials on national networks. Born and raised in the West Javanese city of Bandung, Sule's mother tongue is Sundanese. Importantly, for the setup of this particular comic routine, Sule has only a passing acquaintance with the Javanese language while the other three actors on stage all speak it with some degree of fluency. For further background information on Sule see "Just Alvin: *Edisi Sule dan Aziz Gagap,"* [n.d.], video clip, accessed July 23, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-R1fvVMn5k.

meat" / "I'm a goner"), replies Sule in coarse colloquial Indonesian, eliciting laughter from the audience. The joke is a simple one, often repeated on *OVJ*, involving an actor being forced into a language game in which he or she is ill-equipped to participate; in this case a Sundanese comedian is being asked to perform in Javanese.[123] Simple as the routine may be, in a place of immense linguistic diversity like Indonesia in which mastery of a second, or even third language is a common social expectation, and in which the experience of finding oneself in a linguistic situation which one is ill-equipped to handle is a daily social peril, the routine contains particular comic potency.

Language games and wordplay lie at the heart of *OVJ*'s performances. Like *stambul, ketoprak* and *Srimulat*, *OVJ* performances are, to borrow Mohamad's term, "feasts of orality."[124] While *OVJ* is populist rather than political in tone, the show nonetheless exploits, to considerable comic effect, socio-cultural tensions existent within contemporary Indonesian society, most notably tensions relating to language and language-use in Indonesian public discourse. [125]

The manner in which these socio-cultural tensions are played out and played with within *OVJ's* improvised performances is evident in the exchange from the "*Dilema Cinta*" episode previously described. The comic dynamic of the exchange involves Sule, a Sundanese actor, being placed in a series of successively more difficult linguistic situations. The *dalang* initially commands the Sundanese actor to perform the scene in Javanese, something the actor is patently not able to do. When the actor attempts, and inevitably fails, to follow the *dalang's* instruction, he is chastised for his unresponsiveness. A scene, common to *OVJ* performances, ensues in which the *dalang* instructs the Sundanese actor on how to deliver the appropriate Javanese dialogue. The *dalang* feeds the actor the necessary lines of Javanese dialogue – line by line – literally making the actor the *dalang's* "puppet". When the humour of this spectacle is exhausted, a new iteration of the language game is initiated with the actor being invited to continue the scene in English. The audience is treated to the spectacle of the hapless actor fumbling his way through the scene in English. When the comedy from this spectacle similarly dries up, the

[123] Two major ethno-linguistic groups have historically inhabited the Indonesian island of Java. The Javanese – the larger of the two groups – has historically occupied the central and eastern thirds of the island. The Sundanese meanwhile have occupied the island's western third. Although both the Javanese and Sundanese languages belong to the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family, they are not mutually intelligible. For further details see: *Ethnologue* [Online] http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=243-16

[124] Mohamad, p.77

[125] In this sense *OVJ* is very close in spirit to the populism exhibited by *Srimulat's* performances in the 1980s as described by Mohamad. The tone of *OVJ* performances is always closer to vaudeville pantomime than agitprop theatre.

actor is invited once more to continue in Javanese. The climax of the comic routine arrives with the inevitable exhaustion of the actor's patience at being made the butt of the joke, his rebelling against the unfairness of the *dalang's* injunctions, and his appeal to be allowed to speak in the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia.* Clearly this routine affords viewers the immediate pleasure alluded to earlier; a mix of *schadenfreude* and relief that accompanies the spectacle of watching someone else, rather than oneself, caught in a confusing communicative exchange. However, in order to contextualise the particular cultural poignancy of a Sundanese actor being instructed to speak Javanese, and then rebelling against the injunction with an appeal delivered in the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia,* some knowledge of the joke's broader cultural and historical context is necessary.

### 3.2 The history and cultural politics of language in Indonesia

Tensions over language have a long history in the Indonesian archipelago. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Indonesia has a peculiar demographic make-up in which the largest ethnic group, the Javanese, constitute approximately forty percent of the national population.[126] It is estimated that some eighty-five million of Indonesia's two hundred and forty million inhabitants speak Javanese as their first language.[127] Tensions between the Javanese and non-Javanese segments of the population have been particularly significant in Indonesia's political history. Issues of language – especially the issue of a national language – were of central concern to the nationalists who founded the modern nation-state of Indonesia. Indeed, the decision taken by the leadership of Indonesia's nationalist movement in 1928 to make Indonesian-Malay the official linguistic medium of the nationalist struggle was primarily influenced by the need find a workable comprise between the Javanese and non-Javanese segments of the population.[128] Nationalist leaders were keen to

[126] Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin, and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), p.6. According to the most recent census data available on ethnic composition in Indonesia (collected during the national census in 2000) the Javanese constitute 41.71% of the national population. The second largest ethnic group, the Sundanese, comprise 15.41% of the national population. Besides the Javanese and the Sundanese, there are thirteen other ethnic groups in Indonesia that have populations greater than 1 million.

[127] *Ethnologue* [Online], accessed August 28, 2011, http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=IDJ

[128] Malay had been spoken as a *lingua franca* in a variety of forms and dialects throughout the Indonesian archipelago for centuries prior to colonisation. The Dutch colonial administration recognised Malay's usefulness for the purposes of administering the widely dispersed territories of their colonial holdings and the heterogeneous ethno-linguistic populations that inhabited them. Consequently, the Dutch authorities worked assiduously during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to entrench Malay as the language of government, education and formal communication in the Dutch East Indies. For Indonesia's nationalist leaders in the early twentieth century, Malay had the combined virtues of being widely spoken across the archipelago; of not being Javanese or indeed being affiliated with any one particular Indonesian ethnic group; of having a significant

unite the diverse ethno-linguistic groups that inhabited the Dutch East Indies by means of a single, common language. By selecting Indonesian-Malay, a widely spoken *lingua franca*, over Javanese – at the time a far more significant language in terms of numbers of speakers – the nation's founders emphatically indicated their desire to avoid Javanese cultural domination of any newly independent entity.[129]

As an important symbol and instrument of nationally unity, successive Indonesian governments have continued to entrench Indonesian-Malay (now called *Bahasa Indonesia*) as the language of government, education, and of most arenas of Indonesian public life. While the primary instrument of state-language policy has been the educational system[130], mass media, including press, radio, and television, have also been key tools of state language policy.[131] In the decades since independence, a tug-of-war has been fought over the evolution of *Bahasa Indonesia*. The struggle, in broad terms, has been waged between the state's top-down efforts to shape the language in accordance with its nation-building objectives and the bottom-up efforts of civil actors keen to prise the language away from strictures of state control.

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history of usage within government and state administration; and, finally, of being comparatively democratic in its structure and tone. Significantly, Malay lacks the complex system of speech levels and honorifics that are so prominent in the Javanese language. See Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp.198-200; Webb Keane, "Public Speaking: On Indonesian as the Language of the Nation," *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003), pp.512-514; Peter H. Lowenberg, "Language Policy and Language Identity in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 3, no. 1 (1992), pp.62-65.

[129] Anderson, *Language and Power,* pp.198-200; Keane, "Public Speaking," pp.512-514; Lowenberg, "Language Policy and Language Identity," pp.62-65.

[130] While regional languages such as Javanese are employed as the medium of instruction in the first three years of primary school education, Indonesian students undertake all their schooling beyond this point in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

[131] Suharto's New Order regime exhibited a particularly acute concern with effacing regional differences and ethnic loyalties for the sake of national unity. Under Suharto, the state's efforts to regulate the language of public discourse and mass media were especially intense. For the most part these efforts involved the suppression of conspicuous public expressions of ethnic identity and a largely tacit, although nonetheless effective injunction against the use of regional languages on television. All television broadcasters – state and later commercial – were encouraged to broadcast their content in the state-sanctioned standard variety of the national language known officially as "*Bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar*" ("Correct and proper Indonesian"). Additionally, broadcasting licences were contingent on broadcasters avoiding content that touched on areas of social and political life deemed too sensitive by the government. These taboo subjects – *Suku* (Ethnicity), *Agama* (Religion), *Ras* (Race) and *Antar-golongan* ("inter-group" – a New Order euphemism for class issues) were known collectively by the acronym SARA. For further explanation of SARA see Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.12, 119, 135.The term is still used by people working in Indonesia's television industry today and was employed by Mita, *OVJ's* executive producer, at several points during her interview. Yustina Pramita (Mita) (*OVJ* executive producer, interview by Liam Prince, Studio Guet, Pancoran, Jakarta, October 13, 2011.

Numerous observers have noted the negative and unusual effects that the state's efforts to regulate the national language have wrought. Benedict Anderson as early as 1966 observed a phenomenon he labelled "the Javanization" of *Bahasa Indonesia* in which he identified the distorting influence that Javanese was having on the national language. Anderson argues that *Bahasa Indonesia*, with its relatively democratic and egalitarian structure, was increasingly exhibiting signs of "Javanese modalities", most notably, signs of the hierarchic linguistic registers that characterise the Javanese language. Anderson goes on to suggest that "public Indonesian" – that mode of the national language employed in public pronouncements and political debates, newspaper editorials and television broadcasts – was increasingly coming to resemble the High Javanese register of *krama*.[132] This "kramanized" "high" Indonesian, as Anderson characterises it, is an archaising and dissimulative "language of political politeness" that functions more to indicate a speaker's membership of a politically sophisticated elite than as a medium for egalitarian, democratic debate. Anderson attributes this shift, not so much to an active Javanese cultural imperialism, but to an exhaustion of the revolutionary impulse that had ushered in *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language and animated its development in the early years of the republic. As revolutionary zeal waned, Anderson contends, people fell back on older cultural and linguistic traditions.[133]

Webb Keane, more recently, has echoed Anderson's sentiments, asserting that the New Order's obsession with promoting a standard form of the national language produced "an exclusive and controlling 'high' language of the state" that offered speakers "only the most notional of public identities and constrained rhetorical possibilities."[134] With respect to television broadcasting, Gareth Barkin meanwhile has asserted that the New Order's tacit pressure on broadcasters to propagate a standard form of the national language known as "*Bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan*

[132] *Krama* is the higher of the two basic registers of the Javanese language. It is the register employed by a subordinate speaking to their social superior. It is also used for ceremonial and religious purposes. For an informative discussion of the evolution of *krama* as distinct register see Anderson, *Language and Power,* pp. 205-209.

[133] Anderson, *Language and Power,* pp.145. Anderson's account of state language policy and its impact on Indonesia's national language involves two related though distinct elements, that may appear to be at odds with one another. On the one hand Anderson argues that the Indonesian state suppressed the use of regional languages, including Javanese, in national public discourse while actively promoting the use of *Bahasa Indonesia*. At the same time though, he also argues that the state – under the rubric of standardising and developing the national language – was responsible for importing large quantities of Sanskritic High Javanese terms into the official lexicon of *Bahasa Indonesia*. Although Anderson was observing this trend in the twilight years of Sukarno's Guided Democracy regime, it was a trend that would continue, if not accelerate, under Suharto's New Order.

[134] Keane, "Public Speaking," p.522.

*benar*" ("Correct and proper Indonesian") resulted in the exclusion of more colloquial varieties of the national language from television content.[135] This, argues Barkin, has ensured that for the most part, the language of television in Indonesia – that of the news broadcast and the *sinetron* soap opera – remains "a region-less language that no one is likely to feel comfortable speaking*."*[136]

It is only against this backdrop of New Order efforts to shape and constrain the national language that one can properly comprehend Mohamad's description of the potency of *Srimulat's* performances during the 1980s and 1990s*.* Indonesian audiences, argues Mohamad, were drawn to *Srimulat* by the spectacle of Javanese actors engaging in "risky encounters" with a national language – *Bahasa Indonesia* – that for many viewers was still alien and exotic.[137] *Srimulat* actors' often accidental but sometimes wryly intentional mangling of the state-mandated national language was not just comic, contends Mohamad, but also deliciously subversive.[138] He describes the glee with which audiences beheld the spectacle of the national language – that object of so much state vigilance – being reduced to nonsense in the actors' onstage interactions. On Mohamad's reading, *Srimulat's* comic wordplay was both compelling entertainment and poignant cultural political statement.[139]

Similarly, it is only against the backdrop of New Order-era commercial television broadcasting, the strictures the authoritarian regime placed on cultural expression, and the limitations imposed on all television broadcasters, that the innovation of *OVJ* and its appeal for Indonesian television audiences becomes apparent. In particular, *OVJ's* use of non-standard dialects of the national language in its improvised dialogue, as well as regional languages such as Javanese, has been integral to the show's success in delivering to viewers a more naturalistic idiom of expression on television.

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[135] Gareth Barkin, "Producing Indonesia: The Derivation and Domestication of Commercial Television," (PhD Diss., Washington University, 2004), p.198.
[136] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," p.198
[137] Mohamad, pp.68-87; Anwari, *Indonesia Tertawa: Srimulat Sebagai Sebuah Subkultur* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia, 1999), p.75.
[138] Mohamad, pp.79-80.
[139] Mohamad, p.77. For Indonesian audiences of Javanese background, *Srimulat's* performances held the additionally resonant subversive pleasure of seeing and hearing the vocabulary of the national language reconstituted comically within Javanese patterns of wordplay and as objects within a Javanese cultural system and worldview. But *Srimulat's* humour cut both ways, as previously noted. *Srimulat's* Javanese actors equally mocked their own lack of sophistication and familiarity with modern languages such as *Bahasa Indonesia* and English. Mohamad eloquently describes this latter aspect of *Srimulat's* performances as "a burlesque of self-mockery by the uneducated for the uneducated, almost like an inside joke of the non-cosmopolitan" (p.77.)

### 3.3 A post-Suharto thaw: A new, more authentic language of public discourse

Amidst his concerns in 1966, Anderson saw signs of hope for the future of *Bahasa Indonesia*. He perceived possible avenues by which the national language might rediscover both its revolutionary democratic and egalitarian potential and some organic vibrancy. In particular, he identified what he called "the new *ngoko*" – *ngoko* being the most intimate register of Javanese – in a dialect of the national language native to the capital city of Jakarta.[140] Developed over decades by interaction of Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Buginese, and Chinese settlers, Anderson characterises the Jakartan dialect – *bahasa Jakarta* – as "a rough, lower-class urban speech" that is "brutally earthy and humorous in feel", full of "acrid onomatopoeia" and "totally without 'high' moral or status pretensions."[141] Anderson further argues with respect to this particular variant of the national language that:

> By an unexpected turn of history […] this lumpen-language has increasingly become the "in" language of the younger Jakarta elite, especially in the later fifties and sixties. Particularly for politicians, newsmen, and students, *bahasa Jakarta*, in slightly dressed-up form, has become a normal vehicle of social intercourse. Its popularity clearly derives from its intimate, jazzy, cynical character, which forms a satisfying counterpoint to the formal, official Indonesian of public communication. It expresses the danger, excitement, humor, and coarseness of post-Revolution Jakarta as not other language could do.[142]

Since Anderson first expressed the hope that *Bahasa Indonesia* might be saved from a fate of state-sponsored ossification by the counter-hegemonic forces of popular intervention, idiosyncratic street-usage, and informal variants of the national language, numerous observers of Indonesian cultural life have echoed this sentiment. Virginia Hooker, writing in the early 1990s, predicted that as the number of speakers of *Bahasa Indonesia* increased – particularly the number of young Indonesians speaking it as their first language – tension would arise between the state-mandated standard and various popular informal variants of the national

[140] Anderson, *Language and Power*, p.208. *Ngoko* is the most intimate register of Javanese, the language of hearth and home, and the register employed when one is speaking amongst peers. It is also, lexically speaking, by far the richer and more expressive of the two basic Javanese registers, *ngoko* and *krama*.
[141] Anderson, *Language and Power*, p.142. Such is the character of the dialect, Anderson asserts, that "it is virtually impossible to be pompous in *bahasa Jakarta*."
[142] Anderson, *Language and Power*, p.142

language.[143] Hooker identifies a hunger among young Indonesians for "a more emotive national language".[144] She suggests that the very notion of a "standard" language needs to serve as guide rather than prescription and must be broad enough to encompass "formal and informal modes as well as a variety of registers."[145] Hooker observes that young Indonesians who have grown up speaking Indonesian in both colloquial and formal settings are "already demonstrating their linguistic creativity."[146]

More recently, Keane has argued that despite the distorting influence that state forces have wrought on the national language under the Suharto's New Order regime:

> [T]he history of Indonesian still contains alternative futures, streams of heteroglossia lost underground that may yet surface as the post-Suharto state loses its centralizing ambitions or, at least, its ability to realize them.[147]

Keane further argues that "wordplay, subversive slangs [and] new vernaculars" suggest new linguistic possibilities and "alternatives to [state] engineered standardization" that might be able to inject some new life into the national language in the post-Suharto era.[148]

Writing in 2004, Barkin suggested that a post-Suharto thaw was occurring with respect to language-use in Indonesian television broadcasting. Barkin observed that without the New Order regime's suspicion of regional dialects and active promotion of standard Indonesian, a new readiness was apparent among programmers to use non-standard dialects of Indonesian (and even regional languages) in nationally broadcast television programs.[149] Barkin suggests that this

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[143] Virginia Matheson Hooker, "New Order Language in Context," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.289.
[144] Hooker, "New Order Language in Context," p.290.
[145] Hooker, "New Order Language in Context," p.290
[146] Hooker, "New Order Language in Context," p.289. When visiting the Jakarta studio where *OVJ* is filmed six nights per week, the youth and exuberance of the show's creative team was particularly striking. Most of *OVJ's* production personnel appeared to be, with the exception of Mita herself, under the age of thirty. Given this, it was hard not to recall Hooker's comment about a new generation of Indonesians "demonstrating their linguistic creativity." The *OVJ* cast and crew are indeed largely young Indonesians, who are, on a daily basis, crafting a more emotive national language whose richness and expressiveness has been a key ingredient in *OVJ's* cultural and commercial success.
[147] Keane, p.505.
[148] Keane, p.522.
[149] Barkin, "Producing Indonesia," pp.185-230. As Barkin notes:

> Because language is so closely tied to ethnic affiliation in Indonesia, controlling language was seen as an important step toward effacing ethnic loyalties, regional

"significant shift toward authenticity" with respect to the language of Indonesian television has been driven not by formal politics so much as by subtle shifts in taste, particularly among the young in Indonesia.[150] In the first half-century of independence, Barkin suggests, *Bahasa Indonesia* possessed a cache of prestige due to its association with both nationalism and modernity.[151] Now however, amongst "urban, affluent 'generation 'X' Indonesians in their twenties and thirties", for whom fluency in the national language is an established reality, there is a cultural imperative to impart some intimacy and soul into a language that too often still feels cramped and artificial.[152]

### 3.4 *OVJ*: A new kind of language on Indonesian television

*OVJ* is a particularly exemplary case of a new type of programming in Indonesia. On a nightly basis, through the very public medium of television, *OVJ* displays in front of national audiences a smorgasbord of non-standard Indonesian dialects and languages. The language of *OVJ* is naturalistic, idiosyncratic, often heavy with Jakartan street slang – that "intimate, jazzy, cynical" patois so admired by Anderson.[153] The show's improvised dialogue is a particularly illustrative example of those "streams of heteroglossia", alluded to by Keane, rising to the surface in a post-Suharto television environment.

An illustrative example of *OVJ*'s naturalistic idiom, and its use of multiple registers of the national language, can be found in the "*Kresna Gugah"* episode discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. The *dalang* and an actor playing the Korawa ally, Baladewa, engage in an argument over the correct pronunciation of the name of a third character, *Adipati* (or Lord) Karna.[154] The comic exchange – which works somewhat akin to Abbott and Costello's classic "Who's on First" routine – revolves around the deliberate confusion of the character name "Karna" with the Indonesian

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> identity and the inter-ethnic violence that has plagued the archipelago for centuries. (p.209).

Barkin further explains:

> In a sense, the industry is itself in transition from the stilted standard Indonesian that they were once required to use, thought enforcement was essentially unheard of, and common informal dialects that, while they tend to remain relatively regional within Indonesia, constitute a significant shift toward authenticity (p. 228).

[150] *Ibid.,* p.229.
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] *Ibid.,* pp.198, 209, 229.
[153] Anderson, *Language and Power,* p.142
[154] "*Opera Van Java: 'Pati Sebab',"* [n.d.], video clip, accessed September 9, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RT8zxz4CN8k. The Javanese honorific "*adipati"* signifies the title bearer's noble status, more specifically as the heir apparent of a royal line. The title was also employed under Dutch colonial rule as a designation for the head of a regency-level unit of administration – an official who in contemporary Indonesia is referred to as a *bupati.* See *Kateglo* [Online], accessed November 1, 2011, http://kateglo.bahtera.org/?mod=dictionary&action=view&phrase=adipati.

word "*karena*" meaning "because".[155] Additional confusion is effected by the actor through his substitution of the word "*karena*" for its close Indonesian synonym "*sebab*" in order to derive the comically erroneous character name, "*Adipati Sebab*" or "Lord Because". The humour of the routine lies, in part, in the actor's impertinent spiking of the *dalang* in daring to lecture him on matters of Indonesian vocabulary. But equally important is the actor's rapid switching between registers of the national language – from the highly formal synonymic phrases "*oleh karena itu"* and "*oleh sebab itu"* ("because of"; "therefore") to the highly informal, Jakarta street-slang inflected punch line, "*Ya udeh. Apa urusannya? Terserah saya, dong."* ("Well, there you go. What's your problem? [I can say it] however I want.")[156] The routine neatly encapsulates the varied registers of the national language available to *OVJ's* comedians and the comic potential inherent in their juxtaposition.

As much as *stambul* in an earlier era modelled theatrically the new emotive possibilities of a common national language in Indonesian-Malay, *OVJ* is now modelling the possibility of reinvigorated version of *Bahasa Indonesia* in the post-Suharto era. The language of *OVJ* is a version of the national language that clearly revels in its liberation from the strictures of state control. Its expressive power is enriched by the influence of multiple informal dialects and variants as well as by infusions from Indonesia's numerous regional languages.

When contrasted with similar shows from earlier eras, such as *Srimulat*, *OVJ* exhibits oddly paradoxical characteristics. Far more than *Srimulat* ever did, *OVJ* invokes the external trappings – the diacritical markers – of Javanese theatrical tradition, such as the gamelan orchestra, the *pesinden*, the figure of the *dalang*, and the use of *wayang* mythology. Yet the idiom of *OVJ*'s performances is noticeably more "Indonesian" than that of *Srimulat*'s. *Srimulat*'s performances always entailed – to borrow Mohamad's term – a "quasi-translation" between Javanese and *Bahasa Indonesia,*[157] and as such were perpetually shadowed by an unspoken Javanese "source text."[158] The idiom of *OVJ*, on the other hand, appears to be securely and unselfconsciously national, pan-regional and Indonesian in

[155] "Who's On First," [n.d.], video clip, accessed November 1, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfmvkO5x6Ng.
[156] Translation author's own. For a full transcript of this exchange see Appendix 2.
[157] Mohamad, pp.72-75. Mohamad illustrates this point with reference to a particular *Srimulat* master-servant routine that concludes with a master's threat to "asphalt" his servant's forehead. The punch line ends with the Indonesian word *"jidakmu"* or "your forehead", which, while not explicitly offensive in Indonesian, is for bilingual viewers a hairsbreadth away, associatively speaking, from the highly offensive Javanese expletive "*Ndhasmu"* ("your head").
[158] Mohamad here invokes the notion, also described in more detail by Anderson, of Javanese constituting a "prior text" to Indonesian, one that continues to shadow and inform many modern Indonesian compositions both dramatic and literary. Mohamad, pp.74-75; Anderson, *Language and Power*, pp.194-237.

nature. In this sense, *OVJ* represents a clear cultural progression from *Srimulat. Srimulat* provided a vehicle through which Javanese audiences could experiment with the new national idiom of *Bahasa Indonesia* and the condition of modernity with which it was associated.[159] *OVJ* , however, caters to insiders – those already at home with modernity and secure in the national idiom – harking back to a regional culture in a manner that is variously nostalgic, parodic, and ironic.[160]

While *OVJ* both makes use of past cultural tensions to fuel its comedy – such as those between Indonesia's Javanese and non-Javanese populations – the show ultimately transcends these tensions. In a very real way, the existence of *OVJ* on Indonesian television represents an expression of liberation from the cultural politics of past eras and a measure of the success of the nationalist project in bringing about Indonesian cultural integration. *OVJ*'s particular brand of comedy, based as it is on a humorous, irreverent invocation of regional (most prominently Javanese) culture, is only possible now that the fact of Indonesia's political and cultural integration is taken for granted.

The onstage exchange from *OVJ's* "*Dilema Cinta Gatot Kaca*" described at the outset of this chapter is particularly illustrative of this point. When the Sundanese actor Sule ultimately rebels against the *dalang's* injunction for him to perform the scene in Javanese and appeals to be allowed to speak in *Bahasa Indonesia*, the actor is appealing to a constituency among viewers that he can safely assume is there. He can expect viewers to be sympathetic to his plight – in modern Indonesia it *is* unreasonable that he be asked to speak Javanese. He can expect his appeal to be heard sympathetically as, after all, he is appealing to a sense of national unity that has the weight of a century of political struggle and cultural integration behind it. In contemporary Indonesia, speaking *Bahasa Indonesia* in the public context of a national television broadcast is the accepted normal, polite, and indeed, civic-minded thing to do.

*OVJ*'s comedy is best understood as a luxury afforded by the fact that Indonesian national culture is now well-enough established for many Indonesians to feel secure in basing significant portions of their identity on national rather than regional

[159] Mohamad, pp.75-77. In *Srimulat's* performances *Bahasa Indonesia* was positioned alternatively as an exotic object of both fascination and ridicule.

[160] Mohamad, p.68. Mohamad invokes a notion of irony as "a playful distancing from belief" (p.68). *OVJ*'s alternately nostalgic, parodic and ironic takes on traditional forms, could well be described as postmodern. Fredric Jameson's discussion of the relationship between parody and pastiche would be particularly germane to an analysis of *OVJ* as a postmodern text. See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.16-19. The undertaking of such an analysis lies, unfortunately, outside the scope of this present dissertation but would be a promising avenue for future work.

affiliations. For those viewers situated in a place of comfortable modernity, *OVJ* offers a sense of "playful distancing" from regional culture and tradition courtesy of the show's ironic and irreverent approach and affords them the novelty of being able to laugh at their own and others' regional idiosyncrasies.[161] That this is occurring in the very public forum of a national television program is measure of how far Indonesian public culture has shifted from the Suharto-era aversion towards public discussion of regional identity and culture.

This chapter has argued that *OVJ* is the latest incarnation of a long comedic tradition in Indonesia that draws its comic material and potency from complex cultural sensibilities concerning language and language-use within Indonesian public life, tensions over which have prevailed in the archipelago for centuries. In this respect, *OVJ* treads the same fertile comic ground as did *stambul* in the late nineteenth century, *ketoprak* did in the early twentieth century, and *Srimulat* in the late twentieth century. In an environment of good-natured comic exchange, *OVJ* models and explores, in a very public fashion, multiple strains of the national language as well as dominant regional languages such as Javanese, and prestige foreign languages such as English. In doing so, *OVJ* carries on a process of cultural and linguistic synthesis that has its historical precedent in *stambul*, *ketoprak*, and *Srimulat.* Like these antecedent forms, *OVJ* represents a theatrical response to the challenge of reconciling modernity with tradition. In particular, the linguistic hybridity exhibited in *OVJ* is integral both to the show's entertainment appeal for audiences and to its social usefulness in discovering new possibilities for cultural synthesis and reconciliation within Indonesia's ethnically diverse population.

[161] Mohamad, p.68.

# Conclusion

This dissertation set out to discover whether the myths and legends that populate the canonical repertoire of Javanese *wayang* shadow theatre still represent a relevant source of meaning for contemporary Indonesian audiences. In its search for signs of life and reinvention in the *wayang* tradition, this study was particularly keen to unearth manifestations of *wayang* mythology in contemporary Indonesian popular culture and entertainment. The project ultimately came to focus on the improvisational television show *Opera Van Java*; a particularly conspicuous example of *wayang*'s reinvention within contemporary Indonesian popular culture.

Chapter I situated *OVJ* within a lineage of antecedent theatrical forms, demonstrating that Indonesia has, for over a century, represented a site of confluence between European, Indian, Chinese and indigenous dramatic traditions. forms. *OVJ's* style of improvised comedy is particularly indebted to two culturally hybrid theatrical forms that emerged in Indonesia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, specifically *komedi stambul* and *ketoprak*. In so far as *OVJ* represents a new stage in the process of transposing Javanese clowning traditions into a modern Indonesian pop culture idiom, the show also has a more immediate precedent in the work of *Srimulat*.

Chapter II took a different approach in examining the cultural phenomenon of *OVJ* by analysing the commercial circumstances that have brought about its appearance on Indonesian television. The decade since Suharto's resignation has seen a number of new players enter into Indonesia's commercial television industry, of which one of the most notable has been the media company responsible for the production and broadcast of *OVJ,* Trans Media Corpora (TMC). Rather than following the conventional programming practices of Indonesia's more established television networks, TMC has pursued a strategy focused on innovative in-house variety programming, of which *OVJ* is particularly successful example. Key to *OVJ's* popularity with audiences has been the greater sense of authenticity the show affords viewers due to its grounding in indigenous theatrical traditions*,* its invocation of the symbols and narrative content of indigenous myth and legend, and its use of non-standard dialects and colloquial variants of national and regional languages.

Chapter III examined *OVJ*'s use of non-standard dialects and regional languages in its performances. This chapter argued that *OVJ* is the latest incarnation of a long comedic tradition in Indonesia that draws its comic energy from enduring socio-

cultural tensions over language-use within Indonesian public life. *OVJ* models and explores in its performances multiple strains of the national language as well as dominant regional languages such as Javanese, and high-prestige foreign languages such as English. In doing so, *OVJ* carries on a tradition of cultural and linguistic synthesis that has its historical precedent in the Indonesian theatrical traditions discussed in Chapter I. Like these antecedent forms, *OVJ* represents a theatrical response to the challenge of reconciling modernity with tradition. And like these earlier forms also, *OVJ* represents a promising theatrical medium through which new possibilities for synthesis and reconciliation between Indonesia's diverse regional cultures can be explored.

By critically analysing the cultural phenomenon of *OVJ*, this dissertation has provided an account of the way in which the symbolism and narrative content of *wayang* mythology is being deployed to create meaning in the twenty-first century. It has presented a contemporary case study of *wayang*'s relevance for a new generation of Indonesian audiences. The repertoire of stories that form the basis of *OVJ's* performances are, by and large, drawn from same repository of myth and legend that Prince Mangkunagoro referred to in 1932 as being "a reflection of the mental and spiritual life of a whole people."[162] However, *OVJ*'s invocation of *wayang* myth and legend has a distinctly modern – and even postmodern – bent. Playful and irreverent, *OVJ* transposes Javanese mythology and tradition into a contemporary Indonesian pop culture idiom. As such, *OVJ*'s invocation of Javanese culture is both cognisant and reflective of the facts of Indonesia's modernity, national cultural integration and Java's place as but one cultural community among many. Nevertheless, through *OVJ*'s performances the stories of Javanese *wayang* mythology are once again, albeit in this significantly transposed fashion, finding their way into the hearts and minds of new generations of Indonesian audiences.

[162] Mangkunagoro, *K. G. P. A. A*. of Surakarta, *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and Its Symbolic and Mystical Elements* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1933), p.1.

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# Appendix 1

## Episode Structure Analysis: *Opera Van Java*: "*Kresna Gugah*" ("Kresna Awakes")

**Original Broadcast Date: 20/05/10**
**Duration: 74min 11s**

**Cast:**
**Dalang** - Parto Patrio
**Baladewa** – Sule
**Adipati Karna** – Eko DJ
**Banowati** - Asty Ananta
**Bagong –** Asiz Gagap
**Arjuna -** Andre Taulany
**Satyaki** - Nunung
**Kresna -** Shreeraj

| Scene # | YouTube Part # | Time Code: | Scene type | Action # | Action Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PRELUDE** | | | | | |
| **PRELUDE;** | 1 | 00:03 | Intro | 1. | Musical Intro: |
| | **1** | **01:37** | **Narration** | **2.** | ***Dalang*'s greeting and introductory narration: In his kingdom of Dwaraswati prepares to meditate in order to discover from the gods the outcome of the impeding *Baratayuda* war.** |
| | 1 | 03:38 | Musical interlude | 3. | Guest female impersonator performs a duet with himself (singing both the male and female parts) performing "Where Do I Begin" from the film *Love Story.* |
| | 2 | 00:03 | Musical Interlude contd. | 4. | OVJ actors interview and joke with guest female impersonator |
| | 2 | 06:39 | Commercial break | 5. | Musical Outro |
| | 3 | 00:01 | Commercial break | 6. | Musical Intro |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SCENE 1**<br>**Setting: A garden sanctuary within Lord Kresna's realm of Dwaraswati** | | | | | |
| SCENE 1 | 3 | 00:29 | Narration | 7. | *Dalang'*s Narration: Repeats introductory explanation of Kresna's intention to meditate in order to discover the outcome of the impending *Baratayuda* war. |
| | **3** | **00:49** | **'Ton Alus** | **8.** | **Enter: Kresna and Satyaki.** |
| | 3 | 01:04 | 'Ton Alus | 9. | Slapstick gag involving the actor playing Kresna sitting on a foam "rock" that collapses under his weight. |
| | **3** | **01:34** | **'Ton Alus** | **10.** | **Kresna takes up a meditative position. Satyaki stands guard, watching over him.** |
| | **3** | **01:51** | **'Ton Alus** | **11.** | **Enter: Adipati Karna** |
| | 3 | 02:09 | 'Ton Alus | 12. | Miscasting Gag: *Dalang* interrogates the comedienne Nunung on her decision to wear high-heels while playing the role of Satyaki, a fierce warrior. |
| | **3** | **02:37** | **'Ton Alus** | **13.** | **Karna informs Satyaki that he is there to wake-up Kresna. Satyaki forbids him to do so.** |
| | **3** | **03:13** | **Alas Perang** | **14.** | ***Gara-gara* between Satyaki and Karna** |
| | **3** | **05:00** | **'Ton Alus** | **15.** | **Enter: Arjuna and Bagong** |
| | 3 | 05:29 | 'Ton Alus | 16. | Gag: "Eh, toprak, ya?" |
| | **4** | **00:13** | **'Ton Alus** | **17.** | **Arjuna intervenes and warns Karna not to disturb Kresna's meditation.** |
| | **4** | **00:45** | **Alas Perang** | **18.** | ***Gara-gara* between Arjuna and Karna** |
| | 4 | 03:33 | **Alas Perang** | 19. | Enter: Bajing Ireng (character from 1980s martial arts television series). |
| | 4 | 04:19 | **Alas Perang** | 20. | *Gara-gara* between Bajing Ireng and Satyaki |
| | 4 | **04:52** | **Narration** | **21.** | ***Dalang'*s Narration: Karna flees to report events to Lord Baladewa in the kingdom of Mandura.** |
| | 4 | 05:06 | Commercial break | 22. | Musical Outro |
| | 5 | 00:02 | Commercial break | 23. | Musical Intro |
| **SCENE 2**<br>**Setting: Lord Baladewa's palace in the kingdom of Mandura** | | | | | |
| SCENE 2 | **5** | **00:30** | **Narration** | **24.** | ***Dalang'*s Narration: Baladewa sits alone in his palace waiting for the return of Karna who he sent to awaken Kresna.** |
| | 5 | 00:52 | 'Ton Gagah | 25. | "Pati Sebab" routine between *dalang* and actor playing Baladwa. N.B. "Benang Merah" ending to this routine. |
| | **5** | **04:18** | **'Ton Gagah** | **26.** | **Enter: Karna**<br>**Karna informs Baladewa that he has been unsuccessful in his efforts to wake-up Kresna.** |
| | 5 | 04:56 | 'Ton Gagah | 27. | Slapstick Gag: The actor playing Karna is enticed to sit on foam "throne" which collapse under his weight. |

| SCENE 2 (continued)<br>Setting: Lord Baladewa's palace in the kingdom of Mandura | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCENE 2 | 5 | 05:20 | 'Ton Gagah | 28. | Role-swap routine: The actors playing Baladewa and Karna swap roles. The actor formally playing Karna feeds the actor formally playing Baladewa, Karna's lines to be said back to the actor now playing Baladewa. |
| | **5** | **06:46** | **'Ton Gagah** | **29.** | **Karna explains to Baladewa that if Kresna cannot be woken and persuaded to join the Korawa, the Korawa will surely lose the *Baratayuda* war.** |
| | **5** | **06:49** | **'Ton Gagah** | **30.** | **Baladewa asks Karna where Queen Banowati is. Karna asks explains that she has been "left behind" in Dwaraswati.** |
| | 5 | 06:56 | 'Ton Gagah | 31. | Prop improvisation: The actor playing Baladewa makes use of an antique clothes iron prop to improvise a scene imitating a village laundry service. Both the *dalang* and the actor playing Karna join in the scene. N.B. "Benang Merah" ending to this gag. |
| | **6** | **00:32** | **'Ton Gagah** | **32.** | **Enter: Banowati** |
| | **6** | **00:44** | **'Ton Gagah** | **33.** | **Baladewa interrogates Banowati as to where she has been. Banowati replies that she has been "out the back."** |
| | 6 | 00:52 | 'Ton Gagah | 34. | The *dalang* instructs the actress playing Banowati to use a "*wayang orang"* voice. This develops into a role-swap routine involving the *dalang* speaking Banowati's lines in a high-pitched *falsetto*. |
| | 6 | 01:16 | 'Ton Gagah | 35. | Fart Gag: The *dalang* standing just off-stage close behind the actress playing Banowati, farts loudly. The actress playing Banowati clamps a hand over her nose saying that "It really stinks!" and flees to the other side of the stage. The *dalang* points to prop statue and says "He did it." |
| | 6 | 01:34 | 'Ton Gagah | 36. | Innuendo routine: Banowati explains that she hasn't been able to awaken Kresna yet but (wiggling her hips) that there are plenty other "things" she has been able to "awaken." The other actors respond with ribald replies. |
| | 6 | 01:52 | 'Ton Gagah | 37. | *Pantun* competition between actors playing Banowati, Karna and Baladewa with the *dalang* providing assistance with rhyming lines. Routine centres on goading the actor playing Baladewa about his "flat" nose by composing couplets rhyming the Indonesian word *pesek* (flat) with the work *kresek* (plastic bag.) |
| | **6** | **04:42** | **Narration** | **38.** | ***Dalang*'s Narration: Banowati informs Baladewa of her intention to wake-up Kresna and to spy on Arjuna.** |
| | **6** | **05:53** | **'Ton Gagah** | **39.** | **Baladewa interrogates Banowati as to her plans to awaken Kresna.** |
| | **6** | **06:35** | **Narration** | **40.** | ***Dalang*'s Narration: "And so Banowati volunteers herself to go spy on Arjuna…"** |
| | 6 | 06:48 | Commercial Break | 41. | Musical Outro |
| | 7 | 00:02 | Commercial Break | 42. | Musical Intro |

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| **SCENE 3**<br>**Setting: Forest scene but somewhat incongruously set up as a village *bensin* or petrol stand complete with petrol pumps and a Yamaha motorcycle. A thatched petrol kiosk is bedecked with Yamaha logos and bunting.** | | | | | |
| **SCENE 3** | **7.** | **00:36** | **Narration** | **43.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: Arjuna is puzzled by Kresna's prolonged meditation and wonders about its purpose. Bagong, his clown-servant, reminds him though of Kresna's purpose.** |
| | 7. | 01:04 | Dalan Gecul | 44. | The actors playing Arjuna and Bagong improvise a scene involving the actor playing Bagong purchasing *bensin* (petrol) from the actor playing Arjuna. The routine centres on a humorous notion of purchasing petrol "by the kilo" rather than according to the usual litre measurement. |
| | **7.** | **05:43** | **Adegan Taman** | **45.** | **Arjuna expresses his confusion as to why Kresna is taking so long with his meditation. Bagong explains that Kresna is mediating in order to discover the outcome of the impending Baratayuda war.** |
| | **7.** | **06:28** | **Adegan Taman** | **46.** | **Enter: Banowati** |
| | **7.** | **06:30** | **Narration** | **47.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: Banowati's purpose is to spy on Arjuna but lo-and-behold, she actually falls in love with Arjuna.** |
| | 7. | 06:44 | Adegan Taman | 48. | At the *dalang*'s instruction the actors playing Banowati and Arjuna engage in a *pantun* competition the underlying premise of which is Banowati's attempts to seduce Arjuna and Arjuna's repeated rebuffing of Banowati's advances. |
| | 8 | 01:02 | Adegan Taman | 49. | *Pantun* competition between the actors playing Banowati and Arjuna turns into a competition whereby the actors trade songs with opening lines relevant to the conversation at hand. |
| | 8 | **02:22** | **Adegan Taman** | **50.** | **Arjuna explains to Banowati that he cannot be her lover as she is married to Dursasana, King of the Korawas.** |
| | 8 | **02:52** | **Narration** | **51.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: And so Arjuna rejects Banowati's advances and leaves her weeping, broken-hearted in the forest.** |
| | 8 | 03:15 | Adegan Taman | 52. | Actors on stage engage in a series of pratfalls destroying many of the foam props – including the prop petrol pumps – in the process. |
| | 8 | **04:32** | **Adegan Taman** | **53.** | **Exit: Arjuna and Bagong.** |
| | 8 | 04:44 | Adegan Taman | 54. | Enter: Karna |
| | 8 | 04:59 | Adegan Taman | 55. | Re-enter: Bagong<br>The actor playing Bagong sheepishly admits that he wasn't supposed to leave the stage yet. |
| | **8** | **05:10** | **Adegan Taman** | **56.** | **Karna inquires as to why Banowati is weeping.** |
| | **8** | **05:30** | **Narration** | **57.** | ***Dalang*'s Narration: Karna listen's to Banowati's account of her rejection by Arjuna and declares that war between himself and Arjuna is inevitable.** |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SCENE 3 (continued)**<br>**Setting: Forest scene but somewhat incongruously set up as a village *bensin* or petrol stand complete with petrol pumps and a Yamaha motorcycle. A thatched petrol kiosk is bedecked with Yamaha logos and bunting.** | | | | | |
| **SCENE 3** | **8** | **05:40** | **Adegan Taman** | **58.** | **Karna instructs Bagong to return to the Pandawa to communicate his challenge to war.** |
| | **8** | **06:00** | **Narration** | **59.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: And so the Korawa declare war on the Pandawa…** |
| | 8 | 06:17 | Commercial Break | 60. | Musical Outro |
| | 9 | 00:02 | Commercial Break | 61. | Musical Intro |
| **SCENE 4**<br>**Setting: Garden sanctuary within Lord Kresna's realm of Dwaraswati**<br>**On stage: Kresna remains in his meditative positions with Satyaki standing guard.** | | | | | |
| **SCENE 4** | **9** | **00:36** | **Narration** | **62.** | ***Dalang'*s narration: Meanwhile back in Dwaraswati, Kresna has still not awoken from his meditation. The Pandawa remain on guard in order to prevent the Korawa from disturbing him.** |
| | 9 | 01:09 | 'Dalan Gecul | 63. | Enter: the actor playing Bagong enters stage right towing an older man in army uniform behind him. The older man is a veteran of Indonesia's war of independence and a regular viewer of *Opera Van Java* who has been brought on the show to mark the occasion of *Hari Kebangkitan Nasional* (National Awakening Day). |
| | 9 | 01:13 | Dalan Gecul | 64. | Actors playing Bagong and Satyaki interview and clown around with guest army veteran. |
| | 9 | 03:02 | Dalan Gecul | 65. | Enter: Actor formerly playing Baladewa now dressed as an army veteran. |
| | 9 | 03:38 | Dalan Gecul | 66. | Actor dressed as veteran improvises a scene in which he nostalgically reminisces about "his experiences" with the guest veteran during Indonesia's war of independence. The scene culminates in the actor singing a children's nursery rhyme about ants while the guest war veteran gyrates along to the music. |
| | 9 | 05:43 | Dalan Gecul | 67. | Actor dressed as veteran and guest war veteran exit stage left. |
| | 9 | **06:01** | **'Ton Alus** | **68.** | **Bagong and Satyaki discuss the importance of ensuring that Kresna remains undisturbed by the Korawa.** |
| | 9 | **06:21** | **Narration** | **69.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: Karna and Baladewa arrive looking for Arjuna…** |
| | 9 | **06:36** | **'Ton Alus** | **70.** | **Enter: Karna and Baladewa** |
| | 9 | **07:06** | **'Ton Alus** | **71.** | **Baladewa informs Satyaki that he is here to challenge Karna to war.** |
| | 9 | 08:42 | **'Ton Alus** | **72.** | **Satyaki informs Baladewa that if he wishes to meet Arjuna in battle he must first fight him (her).** |
| | 9 | 08:54 | Alas Perang | 73. | The *gamelan* begins playing the quick tempo music that indicates the imminence of a *gara-gara* between Baladewa and Satyaki. |

| SCENE 4 (continued)<br>Setting: Garden sanctuary within Lord Kresna's realm of Dwaraswati<br>On stage: Kresna remains in his meditative positions with Satyaki standing guard. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCENE 4 | 9 | 08:56 | Alas Perang | 74. | Prop-improvisation: The actor playing Baladewa picks up a near-by prop – a painted hobby-horse of the sort used in the Javanese trance-ritual dance *kuda lumping* – and instead of initiating the *gara-gara* begins improvising a *kuda lumping*- like dance. The actor playing Bagong grabs another near-by prop that turns out to be a large model goldfish. He proceeds to "ride" the goldfish like a horse. The routine is brought to an abrupt halt by the actor playing Baladewa who questions the cultural authenticity of his fellow actor's decision to "ride" a fish in a *kuda lumping* dance. |
| | **9** | **09:36** | **Alas Perang** | **75.** | **Baladewa challenges Satyaki to a *gara-gara*.** |
| | 9 | 09:38 | Alas Perang | 76. | Slapstick routine: The actor playing Baladewa attempts to remove his hat in preparation for combat miming an inability to do so. The actor playing Karna joins in the mime, attempting to remove the hat which appears to be "stuck" on Baladewa's head. There is much pulling and shoving until the hat "comes unstuck" sending the actor playing Karna tumbling into the foam props stage right. |
| | 9 | 09:59 | Commercial break | 77. | Musical Outro |
| | 10 | 00:02 | Commercial break | 78. | Musical Intro |
| | **10** | **01:08** | **Alas Perang** | **79.** | ***Gara-gara* between Baladewa and Satyaki.** The fight scene turns in to a "fort war" between the two groups of actors involving numerous props including a foam "cannon" and a rifle. The "battle" proceeds with much destruction of foam props and backdrop scenery. |
| | **10** | **02:32** | **'Ton Alus** | **80.** | **Enter: Arjuna** |
| | **10** | **02:37** | **'Ton Alus** | **81.** | **Arjuna commands the warring parties to cease fighting and demands an explanation as to what they are fighting over.** |
| | 10 | **02:54** | **'Ton Alus** | **82.** | **Baladewa exlplains that he has come to challenge Arjuna to war on account of Arjuna's callous treatment of Banowati.** |
| | 10 | **03:16** | **Alas Perang** | **83.** | **Baladewa challenges Arjuna to a *gara-gara*. *Gara-gara* between Baladewa and Arjuna ensues.** |
| | 10 | 04:12 | Commercial break | 84. | Musical Outro |
| | 11 | 00:03 | Commercial break | 85. | Musical Intro |
| | 11 | 00:43 | Alas Perang | 86. | *Gara-gara* between Arjuna and Baladewa continues until the actor playing Baladewa exerts an *ilmu* (magic power) of such force that he knocks himself out. |
| | **11** | **01:11** | **Narration** | **87.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: Hearing the sounds of Arjuna and Baldewa's combat, Kresna suddenly awakens enraged that someone should have disturbed his slumber.** |

| SCENE 4 (continued)<br>Setting: Garden sanctuary within Lord Kresna's realm of Dwaraswati<br>On stage: Kresna remains in his meditative positions with Satyaki standing guard. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCENE 4 | **11** | **01:21** | **'Ton Alus** | **88.** | **Kresna "awakes" and stalks to the centre of the stage.** The mood is suddenly lightened as the orchestra strikes up the theme song to the well-know Bollywood fillm "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai". The entire cast breaks into song and dance to the tune. |
| | **11** | **02:19** | **'Ton Alus** | **89.** | **Kresna challenges the assembled warriors, asking who among them is brave enough to fight him.** |
| | **11** | **02:22** | **'Ton Alus** | **90.** | **Baladewa explains to Kresna that he is brave enough but that he is Kresna's brother and therefore will not fight him. Moreover, he adds, it wasn't he who disturbed Kresna's mediation but Bagong (pointing out the hapless clown to the enraged Kresna).** |
| | **11** | **02:58** | **'Ton Alus** | **91.** | **The burly actor playing Kresna turns on the diminutive actor playing Bagong and a humours *gara-gara* ensues between the two** culminating with the small actor playing Bagong piggy-backing the large actor playing Kresna across the length of the stage. The actors playing Karna and Baladewa follow suit, the one piggy-backing the other, until, stumbling across the stage, they crash into the backdrop up stage left. The action is interrupted by the *dalang*'s narration… |
| | **11** | **03:19** | **Narration** | **92.** | ***Dalang*'s narration: Awakened from his meditation, it is Kresna who knows how this story ends…so it is up to him to explain how the Baratayuda war concludes...** |
| | 11 | 03:28 | 'Ton Alus | 93. | The entire cast of actors exit stage left leaving only the actor playing Kresna standing somewhat confusedly in the centre of the stage. |
| | **11** | **03:35** | **'Ton Alus** | **94.** | **(Put on the spot and clearly unsure of how to end the show), the actor playing Kresna simply says *"Akhirnya…Krensna pun….menang!* ("Eventually….Kresna…wins!)** |
| | 11 | 03:45 | 'Ton Alus | 95. | The actor playing Kresna closes the show with *OVJ*'s well-know catchphrase "*Di sana gunung, di sini gunung. Di tengah-tengahnya pulau Jawa. Wayangnya bingung. Dalangnya lebih bingung. Yang penting bias ketawa. Tetap di Opera Van Java…Iyoiiiii!!!"* (Mountains here, mountains there. In the middle, the island of Java. The *wayang* puppets are confused. The *dalang* is even more confused. (But ) what's in important is we have a laugh. Stay tuned to *Opera Van Java…iyoiiii!!)* |
| | 11 | 04:05 | End Credits | 95. | End credits roll while musical outro plays. |
| | **11** | **05:16** | **Finish** | **96.** | **Show ends.** |

# Appendix 2

## "*Pati 'Sebab'*" Dialogue: *Opera Van Java* "*Kresna Gugah*"

| Indonesian | English<br>(Translation author's own) |
|---|---|
| *Dalang* (Parto): (Narrasi) Di istananya Prabu Baladewa sedang menantikan Adipati Karna yang diutus untuk membangunkan…yaitu Kresna. Langsung saja kita lihat di TKP[164]. | *Dalang* (Parto): Meanwhile in his palace, Prabu Baladewa awaits the return of Adipati Karna who was sent to awaken Kresna. We straight to the scene to see what happens. |
| *Camera cuts from the dalang's stage to the performance stage. Sule playing the role of Prabu Baladewa sits disconsolate on the floor of his place thrown room, in front of his thrown.* | |
| 1. *Baladewa (*Sule)*:* Aduh. Ini Si Adipati "Sebab" ke mana lagi ya dia? | 1. *Baladewa* (Sule): My word. Where has that Adipati "Sebab" gotten to? |
| 2. *Dalang*: Siapa 'le? | 2. *Dalang: (rapping impatiently on puppet box)* Who, le? |
| 3. Pa…Pati "Sebab". | 3. Pa…Pati "Sebab". |
| 4. *Dalang:* Kamu dengar narasi saya, nggak tadi barusan? | 4. *Dalang*: (*impatiently)* Did you hear my narration just before or not? |
| 5. Sule: Saya nungguin siapa di sini? | 5. *Baladewa*/*Sule*: (no longer in character): Who is it I'm waiting for? |
| 6. *Dalang*: Tadi saya narasi…Prabu Baladewa sedang menantikan Adipati Karna. Itu sudah ketahuan, kan? | 6. *Dalang*: (*with increasing irritation*) Just now in my narration I explained that Prabu Baladewa was waiting for the arrival of Adipati "Karna". Got it? Are we clear? |
| 7. *Sule*: Sekarang saya tanya, kata lain dari "sebab" apa? | 7. *Sule*: (*somewhat defiantly*) Wait just a second…what's another word for "*sebab*"? |
| 8. *Dalang*: Karena. | 8. *Dalang*: (*confused)* "*Karena"* |
| 9. *Sule*: Ya, udeh. Apa urusannya? Terserah saya, dong. | 9. *Sule:* Well, there you go. What's your problem? I can say it however I want. |
| *The audience cheers and applauds the wordplay involved in Sule's deliberate* | |

[164] TKP=*Tempat Kejadian Perkara* roughly translates to "scene" or in non-theatrical contexts "scene of the crime".

| | |
|---|---|
| *confusion of the character name "*Karna" *with the Indonesian word "*karena*" meaning "because". They appreciate also the additional leap of imagination involved in Sule's substitution of the word "karena" with its close Indonesian synonym "*sebab" *by way of which Sule derives the comically erroneous character name, Adipati* "Sebab". | |
| 10. *Dalang*: Eh…Ini bukan masalah "udeh", 'le. | 10. *Dalang*: (*looking put out)* What do you mean "there I go"… |
| 11. *Sule*: Sekarang kalau misalkan kosa kata… | 11. *Sule*: (*adopting the manner of a school teacher)* Now, in terms of vocabulary… |
| 12. *Dalang:* Mmmm… | 12. *Dalang*: (*going along with Sule for now)* Mmmm… |
| 13. *Sule*: …"oleh sebab itu"…nah, kan…itu bisa digantikan "oleh karena itu". | 13. *Sule*: (*growing in confidence*) Now, take the the phrase "*oleh sebab itu" (*consequently, because of), this can be replaced by the phrase "*oleh karena itu"* (as a result of, due to). |
| *Audience laughs* | |
| 12. *Sule*: Sekarang, "Adipati Karna" diganti dengan "Adipati Sebab"…sama! | 12. *Sule*: Now, if you take the name "Adipati Karna" and replace it "Adipati Sebab"…it means the same thing! |
| *Audience applauds. Dalang looks taken aback and directs a hard glare towards Sule.* | |
| 13. *Dalang:* Lain, lain… | 13. *Dalang:* (angrily) No! No! It's not the same at all… |
| 14. *Sule*: Kok lain… | 14. *Sule:* What do you mean its not the same… |
| 15. *Dalang:* Di wayang-wayang nggak ada itu namanya "Adipati Sebab". Nggak ada! Karna! Yang ada Karna! | 15. *Dalang*: (*still fuming)* There's no character called "Adipati Sebab" in *wayang*. Karna! There's only Karna! |
| 16. *Sule:* Ini cerita wayang? | 16. *Sule:* Is this a wayang story? |
| 17. *Dalang:* Wayang! | 17. *Dalang:* (*exasperated*) Wayang! |
| 18. *Sule:* Saya kirain judul Roma Irama tadi. | 18. *Sule:* Oh…I thought we were discussing a Roma Irama song. |
| *Audience applauds. Dalang slumps back against his puppet box, defeated.* | |