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Producing the local: Javanese performance on Indonesian television

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Citation

Bogaerts, E. M. (2017, December 20). *Producing the local: Javanese performance on Indonesian television*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/58689>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Title: Producing the local: Javanese performance on Indonesian television

Issue Date: 2017-12-20

5 Kethoprak on television and television kethoprak: two case studies

Taking into account all the changes, what has made the genre remain ‘kethoprak’? In particular, what was the reason televised kethoprak and television kethoprak kept the connotation ‘traditional’? How does the genre function within the discourse on tradition? How should kethoprak be categorized, as it has differentiated itself into various subgenres and styles over the course of time; some of these approximate more traditional forms of this Javanese theatre genre; others tend to resemble soap series or modern Javanese drama? To answer these questions, I focus on the constraints that determine whether or not a production belongs to the sphere of tradition/convention, as this was delineated by Handung Kus Sudyarsana and Bondan Nusantara.

Presenting two case studies, I explore two of Bondan Nusantara’s categories: kethoprak on television, with the televised play *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda*, and television kethoprak, with the genre *kethoprak sayembara*. On the basis of this exploration, I proceed to some major effects of televising on kethoprak. The two case studies illustrate my point that innovation of so-called traditional performance genres has resulted in their preservation. They also illustrate that TVRI Yogyakarta and the genre kethoprak and its practitioners have been inextricably linked to each other. TVRI has contributed to the presentation, development and preservation of the genre and offered kethoprak practitioners ample opportunities to perform on television; kethoprak has contributed significantly to TVRI Yogyakarta’s branding. The case of kethoprak is an outstanding example of how TVRI Yogyakarta has utilized proximity in the production of the local.

1 Kethoprak on television: The Installation of Prince Mangkubumi⁹⁶

In 1993 TVRI Stasiun Yogyakarta produced a *kethoprak* version of the story of the accession to the throne of Prince Mangkubumi as the first sultan of Yogyakarta. It broadcast *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda* (The Installation of Prince Mangkubumi) in two episodes, on 20 September and 11 October.

That same year, the story of Prince Mangkubumi’s elevation was also staged in Yogyakarta on several occasions. In January 1993, the group Sapta Mandala performed the play in the audience hall of the sultan’s palace (Pagelaran) to commemorate the founding of the Mataram court by Prince Mangkubumi, later Sultan Hamengku Buwana I.⁹⁷ R.B. Soedarsono (1993) has claimed this was the first occasion on which the reigning sultan of Yogyakarta had assented to the representation of Javanese court history in *kethoprak*, ‘a theatre form of the common people’ (Hatley 2008a:169), within the palace walls. Built by the first monarch, for two-and-a-half centuries this palace had been a political centre. However, in

⁹⁶ Part of this chapter was published in *Wacana* in a more elaborate version, presenting an analysis of the storytelling and narrative techniques in this programme and of the intermedial character of the *lakon* (Bogaerts 2016).

⁹⁷ The performance took place on 16 and 17 January 1993.

the 1990s in its role as a centre of traditional Javanese culture, the staging of dance and theatre other than court genres was unusual. The 1993 kethoprak performance was presumably an allusion to the reigning sultan of Yogyakarta, Sultan Hamengku Buwana X, as it depicted Mangkubumi as a wise leader who enjoyed a close relationship with his people (Hatley 2008:169).

In September 1993, members of the Gadjah Mada University Art Unit (Sekber Unit Kesenian UGM Yogyakarta) performed the *lakon* in the Balairung building of the university, to celebrate the foundation day of the university (Utami 1993:11). It was a televisual adaptation of this version of the performance that TVRI Yogyakarta recorded and broadcast in September and October that same year.⁹⁸ The purpose of the recording and broadcast was to offer the general public (*masyarakat umum*) the opportunity also to enjoy the Balairung performance that had been staged for an invited audience.⁹⁹

Bondan Nusantara directed the three versions of the play, all based on adaptations of a script written by Handung Kus Sudyarsana. I have not been able to trace either Handung Kus Sudyarsana's original script or the copy used for the 1993 television performance. Recently I did come across a photocopy of a script by Handung Kus Sudyarsana in a reworked version (*dipun rakit malih*) by Bondan Nusantara.¹⁰⁰ The copy is undated but it seems highly likely it was used for the January 1993 performance in the Yogyakarta *kraton* – it contains references to the sultan's palace as a performance location. The division into scenes, the dialogues and the stage directions very closely resemble those of the 1993 TVRI version.

Most of the actors and musicians involved in the performance were members of the Gadjah Mada University Art Unit, not professional kethoprak actors. Nevertheless they were well trained, some having studied dance or acting elsewhere. Wicaksono Haryo Putro, who took the role of Prince Mangkubumi, won praise for his performance. An acknowledged court dancer, and considered to be a serious actor, he was thought 'weighty' enough to play the role of Yogyakarta's first sultan.¹⁰¹ He was said to have exuded the aura of a traditional Javanese ruler, embodying the requisite and becoming behaviour and body language.

The students were honouring an old tradition as their forerunners had a hand in the development of kethoprak. For instance, in 1963, the amateur troupe Among Mitra, consisting of young people including students, gave an innovative performance of the story *Nagasasra Sabuk Inten*, written by S.H. Mintarja (Wijaya dan Sutjipto 1997:42). At the second Kethoprak Festival and Congress in 1964, the Gadjah Mada University student kethoprak troupe took second prize in the kethoprak competition with their performance of the story *Geger Gunung Sewu* (Yuliantri dan Dahlan 2008:347-348).

The central theme of all these *Pangeran Mangkubumi* stories is the enthronement of Prince Mangkubumi. The main events leading to this climax are the following: Chief Councillor

⁹⁸ Hatley (2008: 168-169) suggests that the three performances of the *lakon* were all staged by *Sapta Mandala* actors, but according to the data I obtained, this was not the case.

⁹⁹ Personal communication Bondan Nusantara, Yogyakarta, 2 July 2012.

¹⁰⁰ This copy is kept in the library of the Studio Teater PPPG Kesenian (PPPPTK Seni dan Budaya) in Yogyakarta. I am very grateful to Eko Ompong Santosa who sent me a digital copy of the text.

¹⁰¹ In 1993 he danced the role of Yogyakarta's ninth sultan in Kristiadi's dance drama *Sang Prawara*.

Pringgalaya, who sides with the Dutch, persuades Susuhunan Paku Buwana II to sign an agreement with the latter. Upon hearing news of this capitulation, Paku Buwana's younger half-brother, Prince Mangkubumi, decides to take up arms against the Dutch, but he refuses to rebel against the king, his liege lord. Mangkubumi and his soldiers attack the Dutch headquarters (*loji*). When news of this assault reaches his ears, the monarch collapses. Prince Mangkubumi is installed on the throne as the first ruler of Yogyakarta, Sultan Hamengku Buwana I. Although this theme runs through all the versions of the story, each individual performance offers a different approach and divergent presentation of the story (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).



5.1 Prince Mangkubumi



5.2 Sultan Hamengku Buwana I on the throne

The lakon of the 1993 television version, a reworked version of Kus Sudyarsana's script, presumably drawing upon a Javanese court chronicle (like the *Babad Giyanti* or *Serat Babad Mangkubumi*) and oral literature, is unquestionably based on historical fact. Several rebellions raised against the vacillating Javanese ruler, quarrels with the Chinese, problems arising from land and Dutch interventions in internal politics eventually led to the division of the Central Javanese kingdom into the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta in 1755. Pangeran Arya Mangkubumi, the half-brother of Susuhunan Paku Buwana II of Surakarta, was acclaimed the first sultan of Yogyakarta. Lauded for the resistance he had offered his half-brother and the Dutch and his emergence as victor in the resultant struggle, he is depicted as a hero and the founding father of Yogyakarta.¹⁰²

The theme belongs to a series of very popular motifs, namely: the struggle of members of the aristocracy in collaboration with the people to achieve both independence from the Dutch and the inception of a righteous rule by the Javanese monarch. Brandon has remarked that this theme – 'depicting the evils of the enemy and the virtues of the local hero' – is not confined to Javanese kethoprak, but is a constant in other dramatic genres in what he calls the popular

¹⁰² Ricklefs gives a detailed account of the Dutch intervention in Javanese affairs between 1726 and 1754 in his chapter on the rebellion and the division of the kingdom (Ricklefs 1974:37-66).

tradition, both in other Indonesian and other Southeast Asian cultures. Brandon emphasizes the plays ‘appeal to nationalistic sentiments’ (Brandon 1967:103).

This lakon belongs to the so called *kejawen* stories, that kethoprak participants say constitutes the core repertoire of the genre (Hatley 1985:54). Hatley points out their ‘inherent Javanese-ness’ as they are ‘rooted in Javanese history, attired according to traditional, ongoing Javanese dress convention’ (Hatley 1985:54). The lakon is well known and loved as the story is inherently linked to the history of the city and its court. The show is a representation of both the historical event and the foundation myth of Yogyakarta. Representations like these in televised performance play an important role in the branding of the Special Region of Yogyakarta. They legitimize the power of the rulers of Mataram/Yogyakarta and strengthen the identity of the city and its inhabitants. The audiences know the stories and that is part of the fun. As I have shown elsewhere, the performance history of a *kethoprak* story influences the perception of the audiences (Bogaerts 2016). As local nationalism in Yogyakarta is strong and its native inhabitants consider Sultan Mangkubumi a local hero, the *lakon* has always been popular and attracted large audiences from all strata of Yogyakarta society. It has been performed by various groups at various times for various occasions and audiences, in villages, in a *kraton* environment by professional actors and elsewhere; it is still one of the most popular *kethoprak* plays. Therefore, the TVRI Yogyakarta programme *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda* is an outstanding example of the production of the local on multiple levels – the local in the sense of ‘a phenomenological property of social life’ and its inseparable link to ‘the actual settings in and through which social life is reproduced’ (Appadurai 1996:182) (see the Introduction).

Televising Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda

Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda was broadcast in two 55-minute episodes, the time slot available in the television schedule. Each episode consisted of a series of scenes (*babak*), defined by the locale in which the action took place, the characters present and the mood/atmosphere (*swasana*) of the scene.¹⁰³

In most traditional *kethoprak* performances, each scene is given form in a specific setting. Painted backdrops and stage props are used to represent the locale in which the action is taking place. In the broadcast of *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda*, this was not the case. The setting was a plain stage, with several platforms, one of them consisting of a series of tiered daises in the stage centre back, all black. The central platform had a cube on top, a curved back ‘wall’ and was topped by a royal umbrella. The *mise en scène* was very simple and abstract. The lighting was simple: a red glow behind the central platform; the stage plainly lit with white light. With the exception of the most important elements, like the royal umbrella, two lances and a magic whip, no properties were used. Other conventions belonging to traditional *kethoprak*, like the use of a *keprak* or *kenthongan*, were omitted, and the use of singing (*tembang*) instead of a dialogue to convey a message was restricted to the introduction to the story, when the credits were shown on the screen. Such simple and abstract staging

¹⁰³ For an elaborate description of the scenes, see Bogaerts (2016:484-486).

exemplifies one of the typical *kethoprak* styles of TVRI Yogyakarta. No audience was present in the studio during the recording of the play but the musicians took over part of the audiences' role in reacting to certain events on the stage.

The programme combined characteristics of a television production and a staged performance, as Bondan Nusantara himself remarked.¹⁰⁴ The story developed through a series of six scenes and began, following traditional *kethoprak* constraints, with an audience scene in the palace of Susuhunan Paku Buwana II of Surakarta. The greetings and courteous exchanges between the ruler and those in attendance were very brief; the reporting on the prosperity and tranquility of the kingdom, signifying the righteous rule of the king, was skipped. Contrary to tradition, Chief Councillor Pringgalaya addressed the Susuhunan – usually the ruler opens the dialogue –, reporting that everybody was present at the palace audience.¹⁰⁵ Almost from the beginning a problem (later it becomes clear that this is the main problem and the audiences watching the show know this, of course) was introduced: Prince Mangkubumi had failed to come to pay his respects to the ruler, and therefore the gathering will be extraordinary.

The broadcast was the result of an edited studio recording, using three cameras, one of the microphones hanging visibly above the stage. The cameras not only determined the points of view and scope (full view, close-up and everything in between), angle (left, centre, right) and movement (panning, etcetera). The camera-work and the editing enhanced the storytelling – for instance with a close-up shot at the beginning of the programme showing the royal umbrella that was closed, indicating the waning power of the ruler of Surakarta, and of an opening royal umbrella at the moment when Prince Mangkubumi was installed on the throne at the end of the second episode, a sign that the equilibrium had been restored. Camera focus also indicated space, working in conjunction with other parameters like the presence of specific characters and references in the dialogues. Lively switches between camera standpoints and certain editing accentuated the dynamics of the fight scenes, while the music supported the atmosphere. The opening audience scene, on stage a long scene with few dynamics and ample dialogue, was injected with tempo by edited camera shots, varying between points of view, scope and angle.¹⁰⁶ Flash-backs were embedded in the main storyline by means of fading in and out; the first episode ended with a cliffhanger.

Although these televisual aspects, the camera-work and gaze, the sound amplification and the editing added extra information to the *kethoprak* performance and functioned as the narrator, the broadcast gave the impression that it was closer to the world of theatre rather than that of television. Whereas televisual techniques were used for the flashbacks, other 'problems' were solved in a theatrical way. When the Susuhunan, Pringgalaya and Governor-General Van Imhoff (representing the Dutch) were watching what was happening outside the

¹⁰⁴ Personal communication Bondan Nusantara, Yogyakarta, 2 July 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Ngestokaken dhawuh timbalan dalem, para pengeran, pengeran putra, sentana, bupati, nayaka tuwin wadu wandawaning praja nuwun inggih sampun ngabyantara wonten ngarsa dalem.

¹⁰⁶ Kristiadi (2010:2) points out the dynamic character of the medium television versus the static character of specific *kethoprak* scenes on stage.

palace and the perspective changed to the soldiers fighting, this switch of perspective was solved as follows: the three protagonists watching the fighting (Figure 5.3) turned their back to the cameras/audience, but remained visible (Figure 5.4), while the actors representing the fighting soldiers appeared in the front part of the stage (Figure 5.5). When the focus of the story changed again to the Susuhunan and his escort, they turned their faces and bodies back to the camera/audiences. This type of approach is much closer to earlier kethoprak forms that used to be performed in villages and in *pendhapa*, than to the commercial kethoprak performances on a proscenium using backdrops and/or furniture or the style(s) performed and recorded in fully furnished studios.

If we examine the characteristics of the programme closely, we may conclude that the mediated kethoprak performance was traditional according to Sedyawati's criteria. The plot, the development of the story, the dialogues and the staging had a specific form, and the acts of the play as well as the representation of space, time and situation adhered to specific conventions (Sedyawati 1981:40-42, 48). Or, following Kus Sudyarsana's more theoretical view, the traditional elements prevailed. As a traditional form of drama, it focused on local Javanese theatrical conventions and aesthetics. Importantly, the use of the Javanese language, speech styles, etiquette and prosody, the focus of the story on court life and its protocol, the accompaniment of a gamelan orchestra featured prominently. The lakon also had a traditional origin. The respect for the history of the Yogyakarta court – whether accurate or not –, the high esteem for the sultan and the close relationship between Prince Mangkubumi and the villagers were paid a great deal of attention and augmented the overall traditional appearance.

However, the fully scripted play did not allow room for any improvisation, one of the main features of traditional kethoprak. Therefore, when the televisual adaptations are taken into consideration, the conclusion has to be different and the show has to be designated *kethoprak garapan*, following Bondan Nusantara's criteria (1997:55). One of the characteristics of kethoprak is its reflection on the circumstances, society and context in which it takes place. This allows contemporary issues to be embedded in the stories of past histories and legends. In the case of Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda, among the contemporary references raised were gender issues (women join the struggle against the Dutch and support Prince Mangkubumi) (Figure 5.6). The allusion to the ruler of Yogyakarta at the time of broadcasting is another example of a context-bound and contemporary reference. Nevertheless, in spite of all the changes, developments and adaptations, this mediatized kethoprak can still be called traditional. Possibly on account of its aesthetics imbued with a classical touch, evoking a palace atmosphere, but certainly also because the main characteristics of kethoprak had been maintained (Kristiadi 2001).



5.3 The Suhunan, Pringgalaya and Governor-General Van Imhoff watching what is happening outside the palace



5.4 Turning their back to the cameras/the audience



5.5 The actors representing the fighting soldiers appear in the front part of the stage



5.6 Women joining the struggle against the Dutch

2 Television kethoprak: *Kethoprak sayembara*

In August 1993 the *kethoprak sayembara* serial *Ampak-Ampak Singgelopuro* (Fog over Singgelopuro) was broadcast by producer TVRI Surabaya, in co-operation with TVRI Yogyakarta. In an article in the TVRI journal *Lensa* on the phenomenon, Tri Jauhari explains the overwhelming response to this serial: approximately 3.5 million postcards from audiences in Central and East Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta had been received by both broadcasters by the end of the last episode.¹⁰⁷ Other responses that reflected the popularity of the serial included the letters to the editors (*surat pembaca*) sent to *Jawa Pos* and *Memorandum*, the East Javanese print media that supported the serial, and the discussions of fans in buses, markets, the small shelters of nightwatchmen (*gardu ronda*) and at local community meetings during the period in which it was broadcast. Minutes before the expiration of the quiz's deadline, the guards of the television station in Yogyakarta were reported to have closed the gates when crowds of *kethoprak sayembara* aficionados tried to hand in their postcard at the last minute, hoping to win one of the prizes: a fan, a radio, a television set, a motorbike or a car. The author of the article links the success of the serial to the involvement of the audiences who during each episode were invited to take part in the quiz. This participation fanned their appreciation of the programme. Secondly, because the programme was broadcast in four episodes the eagerness of its admirers was stretched out over a longer period. Thirdly, the attention of the audiences was caught not just by the (familiar) narration about a kingdom in the past and the conflicts between the protagonists, they were also drawn in by aspects of mystery and suspense inserted to add flavour to the story. Fourthly, the role of the cinematic format cannot be overlooked. The *kethoprak sayembara* was presented as a teleplay – some people called it a soap serial (*sinetron*) –, shot outdoors to make it look more 'realistic' and more dynamic than a performance on stage. Every episode ended with a cliffhanger, whetting the audiences' appetite to watch the next episode. Last but not least, the prizes were tantalizing (Tri Jauhari 1994:21-22). In short, the combination of entertainment presenting both new and familiar elements, audience participation, ever-growing huge PR campaigns and the possibility of winning a prize all contributed to the success of *kethoprak sayembara*.

TVRI Yogyakarta's *kethoprak sayembara* was a new television genre. Several types of serialized *kethoprak* had already been shown before the creation of the *kethoprak sayembara*. Live *kethoprak* had been performed in a serialized form, when a story was spread over several nights, depending on the circumstances and the performance context. Cassette and radio *kethoprak* likewise used to be serialized. Therefore, a serialized presentation on television was well suited to the genre. An additional boost was that at the time serialized comics relating Javanese *babad*-based history (Figure 5.7), Hasmi's local comic on superhero Gundala and Asmaraman S. Kho Ping Hoo's silat stories were very popular, and these, together with S.H.

¹⁰⁷ According to Wicaksono et al. (2002), 800,000 postcards were received by TVRI, but the authors do not specify which TVRI station(s).

Mintardja's serialized historical novels, must have inspired the television producers when they created kethoprak sayembara. The success of battle dramas like *Saur Sepuh* (The Reply of the Elders) (see Chapter 6) on the radio and in movies sequels and television series) must have been influential as well.



5.7 Serialized comic *Arya Penangsang*

Williams defines televisual serialized drama as 'a dramatised action divided into pieces'. The serial on television has its precedents in the cinema and on radio and, in an earlier period, in serialized fiction (Williams 1990:60). Williams distinguishes serials, 'in which a connected dramatic presentation is offered in several linked episodes' from series, 'in which each play is normally self-contained but in which certain regular characters occur' (Williams 1990:80). Kethoprak sayembara belongs to the first type, the serial. Heidt argues that the serialization of television programmes might be seen as 'the main structural characteristic of the television medium' (Heidt 1987:184). Building up a reliable regular audience for their channel or station, television broadcasters needed to give their programmes continuity. In the case of commercial channels, the guarantee of reliable audiences would be interesting to advertisers. When he refers to the effects of 'habitualization through long-time exposure' on the viewers of the series, Heidt has long-running series with at least five episodes in mind (Heidt 1987:184-185). Kethoprak sayembara serials did not usually run as long. The majority consisted of four to six episodes. It was more the regularity in their broadcasting that effected the 'habitualization through long-time exposure'.

The regional TVRI stations in Yogyakarta and Surabaya characterized the kethoprak sayembara serials as traditional shows (*tontonan tradisional; paket tradisional*). This identifying of the television genre with the concept tradition attracted ample attention in public debate. The role of television in kethoprak was a particularly hot topic of discussion.

The debates ranged from the positive impact of television on local artists to the idea that televising kethoprak would lead to the extinction of traditional performance. In the section on the effects of television on kethoprak, I shall present some of these debates.

My historical overview in the next section shows how, as a creation of TVRI Stasiun Yogyakarta, kethoprak sayembara developed into a tried and tested format, both artistically and entrepreneurially. It was innovative and attracted large audiences. But when the formula had been repeated time and again it was drained of the allure needed to compete with the programmes of private broadcasters.

Serializing kethoprak: history

TVRI Yogyakarta had launched the new serialized programme in an effort to re-awaken the people's waning attention for broadcasts of traditional Javanese theatre performances in an era when competing television industries had entered the market. The serialized kethoprak performances, created especially for television, were invested with several strategies to ensure that audiences did not grow bored. The addition of the quiz format – hence the name kethoprak sayembara, *sayembara* meaning prize contest – ensured that audiences were directly involved in the programme. The possibility of winning a prize was part of the allure, probably the most important feature, as was often mentioned in local newspapers and magazines (NAR 1991). These *kuis berhadiah*, prize-winning quizzes, gave the television station the opportunity to take a new tack towards customer relations and to by-pass the ban on broadcasting commercials (from 1981 to 1989). The sponsors who provided the station with the prizes saw their business opportunities and sales figures grow.

TVRI Yogyakarta was simultaneously finding ways to make its broadcasts of traditional drama alluring to ensure there was a steady stream of attention from the public and to preserve the genre. TVRI Denpasar, for instance, had the same idea with its broadcasts of the Balinese drama gong, that was also sponsored indirectly by means of the quiz connected to the broadcasts (Darma Putra 1998:34, 38).

After the first broadcast of kethoprak sayembara by TVRI Yogyakarta in the 1970s – presenting the lakon (story) *Kidung Perenging Dieng* (Ballad of the Slopes of Dieng) that was directed by Handung Kus Sudyarsana – for almost two decades the new genre disappeared from the screen. At the end of the year 1988 when the station broadcast *Prahara*, the audience response was positive. Not least because of the involvement of well-known kethoprak practitioners, local artists and aficionados like Handung Kus Sudyarsana, Singgih Hadi Mintardja, Bakdi Soemanto, Bondan Nusantara and Setiadji, because of the outdoor recordings (instead of the former usual studio recordings), and the attention it was paid in the newspapers that supported it (Monel 1993:16).

In the following years kethoprak sayembara's popularity increased significantly. Therefore, in 1992, TVRI Yogyakarta launched a co-operation with TVRI Surabaya. *Siung Macan Kumbang* (The Fangs of the Panther), the first result of this co-operation, broadcast simultaneously by the two stations (Monel 1993:15), was a big success – two million postcards were received and the sponsoring newspapers, *Jawa Pos*, *Suara Merdeka* and

Kedaulatan Rakyat also benefited from the attention the programme attracted.¹⁰⁸ An article in the magazine *Tempo* remarked that this was not just an ordinary show. The authors of the article drew attention to the special format of the kethoprak serial, its commercial aspects and those whom it benefited. The format of the programme was based on the concept of a soap series (*sinema elektronik* or *sinetron*). In several ways the kethoprak performance had been modernized. In their discussion of this modernization, the authors borrowed a concept from the wayang kulit, the *pakem*. This term, used for handbooks containing synopses of wayang stories, also refers to the guidelines setting out how the stories should be performed. In this case, the *pakem* of kethoprak had been abandoned and the story was inspired by *silat* films (not by legends or the history of Javanese kingdoms, as was usually the case). The music illustrating the performance was modern. The dialogues had been actualized by inserting everyday language (*bahasa Jawa sehari-hari*). This new production introduced by TVRI Yogyakarta reflects the way the station kept its role as the barometer of the arts and culture of its surroundings while following the changes in society.

There was yet even more on offer. From the broadcast of the first episode in October, millions of people in Yogyakarta and Central and East Java racked their brains about who might have stolen the amulet (*jimat*) Siung Macan Kumbang. They sent their answer to the puzzle to the Yogyakarta television station on a postcard with a coupon (*kupon*), published in the newspaper *Jawa Pos*. *Jawa Pos*' circulation increased from 260,000 to 360,000 copies, wrote Chudori et al. in *Tempo*. It shared part of its profit with both television stations; Rp. 20 million went to TVRI Stasiun Surabaya, Rp. 15 million to the TVRI station in Yogyakarta. *Tempo* mentioned that *Jawa Pos* had been spending Rp. 150,000 million on the production costs of the serial (Chudori et al. 1992). Last but not least, the chance of winning one of the prizes – a television set, a bicycle (*sepeda* Federal), a refrigerator or a motorbike (*motor bebek*) – tantalized the audiences (Chudori et al. 1992). As *Tempo* mentioned, the success of the programme not only proved that the production of television serials had developed, but also that television had found new ways to earn an income other than by broadcasting commercials.¹⁰⁹

In August 1993 it was TVRI Surabaya's turn to produce a kethoprak sayembara serial. *Ampak-Ampak Singgelopuro* was the result of a co-operation with the newspaper *Jawa Pos* and the famous kethoprak troupe Siswo Budoyo from Tulungagung. It was to be broadcast by TVRI Surabaya and relayed simultaneously by TVRI Yogyakarta ((wa) 1993a). One new feature was the Indonesian subtitling of the dialogues, making the local production accessible to non-Javanese audiences. It was hailed as a first step on the road to 'nationalize' (*menasionalkan*) kethoprak sayembara. The subtitling had been inserted after a request made during a preview of the series, that TVRI Surabaya had organized in search of input and criticism from artists and prominent figures in the local community (*Ketoprak AAS diusulkan* 1993). The lecturer of the Airlangga University who had suggested adding Indonesian subtitles to the spoken Javanese - referred to as *bahasa Jawa Kromo Inggil* in the newspaper

¹⁰⁸ Other newspapers that had been or became involved as a sponsor were *Bernas*, *Monitor* and *Dharma Nyata*. Chudori et al. mentioned the same number of postcards.

¹⁰⁹ See also Sunardian Wirodono (1993) on the mutual profit of the kethoprak sayembara serials.

article – , argued that not all members of the audience in Surabaya were ethnic Javanese. In presenting this argument he was presupposing that only ethnic Javanese would have mastered the language and only residents of Surabaya would watch the serial, both assumptions being incorrect. The internal TVRI buletin *Lensa* claimed that kethoprak sayembara series like *Siung Macan Kombang* and *Ampak-Ampak Singgelopuro* could now easily compete with nationally produced and broadcast TVRI programmes inspired by well-known traditional local stories.¹¹⁰ When national film stars began to appear in kethoprak sayembara, the genre was said to be even more ready to ‘go national’. TVRI Yogyakarta hoped to be able to convey the contents and the message to Indonesians of all ethnic backgrounds, thereby stimulating the interest of younger generations in ‘traditional’ art. After all, the results of a small-scale survey conducted in Surabaya by Paramanidya, an institution specialized in social research, in August 1993 had shown that audiences who had previously not enjoyed watching kethoprak, had begun to appreciate this form of traditional theatre after having watched the kethoprak sayembara serials, not least because they could participate in the quiz (Tri Jauhari 1994:22).¹¹¹ Tri Jauhari’s own survey of 1988, before kethoprak sayembara was screened after a long absence, had shown that the interest in kethoprak among students at the Gadjah Mada University had been very low.

The producers of TVRI Yogyakarta assumed that the national broadcasting of kethoprak sayembara might provide a stimulus for other local traditional products to make their debut on the small screen. This tied in with one of TVRI’s aims, namely: to preserve the culture of the nation. The print press also had an interest, as sponsoring kethoprak sayembara spelled an increase in editions and in profit. The Surabaya-based *Jawa Pos*, for instance, had been able to extend its influence to Central Java, thereby bringing the inhabitants of the three Javanese provinces (East and Central Java and DIY) within its reach. Moreover, there was the possibility that kethoprak sayembara could Indonesianize (*mengindonesia*). In that case, however, it was questionable if *Jawa Pos* would continue to sponsor it, or whether other print media would take over the role (Tri Jauhari 1994:21-22).

A final kethoprak sayembara programme was broadcast in 1997.¹¹² About 4,000,000 postcards were received, and TVRI had to engage freelance personnel to sort them out. The raffle was broadcast live from the TVRI studio in Yogyakarta. The first prize was a house, provided by the Foundation of the Minister of Information Harmoko. The coupons were published in *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, *Bernas*, *Suara Merdeka* and other newspapers. This time, the broadcasting of the programme was not restricted just to the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Semarang and Surabaya, but also – and this is extraordinary because of the different vernaculars spoken in the regions – in Bali and Bandung.

The years 1997 to 2001 were blighted by a vacuum caused by a lack of finances. TVRI Yogyakarta was no longer able to produce and broadcast kethoprak sayembara

¹¹⁰ Such as *Kabayan* and *Malin Kundang*.

¹¹¹ The results of this survey had been published in Nugroho (1993a).

¹¹² Personal communication Heruwati (TVRI producer), Yogyakarta, 6 August 2001.

programmes.¹¹³ Since 2001, several efforts have been undertaken to revitalize the genre. These efforts have been part of a strategy to strengthen the existence of kethoprak and to foster and preserve traditional art genres ((M-5) 2016), as a heritage of the refined culture of the ancestors and original (authentic) Yogyakarta culture.¹¹⁴ In September 2001, TVRI Yogyakarta launched a new formula in co-operation with the daily *Bernas*. It bore the brand name *Kethoprak Berhadiah (TVRI Yogya tayangkan 2001)*. Although similar in format to kethoprak sayembara, the new title emphasized the prize (*hadiah*) winning character rather than the *sayembara*, the contest, thereby making it less weighty, said the producer of the serial.¹¹⁵ After 2002, new kethoprak serials have seen the light of day, but no longer on such a regular basis as in the past.

Whereas in the past coupons or postcards were used as medium to respond to the daily/weekly and the final quizzes, TVRI in co-operation with a local telecommunications operator made it simple for the public to react easily by means of the short message service (SMS), a more contemporary medium. Only messages sent by this operator would reach TVRI.¹¹⁶ Regularly broadcast advertisement spots and road shows were set up to inform and lure potential viewers. The idea was that the people in Yogyakarta would once again embrace this dramatic genre that was said to have rooted in all layers of local society. However, the poor results of a remix of an existing serial in 2011, playing nostalgia as an asset, generated fewer than 10,000 sms's and did not come anywhere near the overwhelming response of the public to the kethoprak sayembara quizzes in the 1990s.¹¹⁷ They showed that the format has lost its attraction to the viewers. Possibly it was no longer perceived as innovative. Neither the advertisements nor the road shows were able to create a similar kind of proximity between the audiences and the serials as had been the case in the past. It also shows nostalgia of itself did not work. Finally, it proved that more was needed to compete with other television stations and that the heyday of kethoprak sayembara, topic of the next section, had waned.

'A puzzling detective story':¹¹⁸ *Promoting kethoprak sayembara*

Seduced by the success of such TVRI Yogyakarta productions as *Ampak-Ampak Kaligawe* and *Siung Macan Kombang*, in 1993 TVRI Surabaya took its turn to produce a kethoprak sayembara serial. Ki Siswondo Hs, the well-known head of the famous kethoprak troupe Siswo Budoyo from Tulungagung, wrote the script and Siswo Budoyo actors performed the play. Guest actors were singer Ria Enes, famous for her radio show with the puppet Suzan, playing the role of Wulandari, and Untung Muljono, son of famous kethoprak performers,

¹¹³ Personal communication Heruwati, Yogyakarta, 6 August 2001.

¹¹⁴ 'warisan budaya adiluhung leluhur'; 'budaya asli Jogjakarta' <http://anangwiharyanto.wordpress.com/> [Last accessed 15 October 2010].

¹¹⁵ Personal communication Heruwati, Yogyakarta, 6 August 2001.

¹¹⁶ BUMN, PT Telkom Flexi RO Yogyakarta.

¹¹⁷ The broadcast of the sixth episode of the serial *Maejan Nagih Janji*, a 'remix' of the serial *Sawijining Dina Ing Sasi Rejeb*, generated a response of 9,396 sms's (competing for the Honda Revo motorbike and other prizes). Approximately 7,500 reponses were received for the main quiz (competing for the main prize, a Honda Supra X 125 motorbike) (<https://anangwiharyanto.wordpress.com/2011/01/15/undian-kethoprak-sayembara-berakhir/> (15 January 2011) [Last accessed August 2017].

¹¹⁸ 'Cerita detektif yang memusingkan' ((wa) 1993b).

artist and scholar, in the role of Tumenggung Sasadara. The four episodes of the serial were broadcast simultaneously on Monday evenings by TVRI Stasiun Surabaya and TVRI Stasiun Yogyakarta.¹¹⁹

TVRI Surabaya deployed several strategies to make the serial attractive. Its largest asset was its co-operation with the East Javanese kethoprak troupe Siswo Budoyo. The troupe was well-known and popular and identified with East Java. These factors enabled TVRI Surabaya to create an atmosphere of *akrab*-ness in the serial. Secondly, its co-operation with several local newspapers allowed for huge PR campaigns, supported by advertisements, previews and comments in these newspapers and on radio and television. Part of the PR campaign was a teleconference: during each broadcast, a presenter from TVRI Yogyakarta and one from TVRI Surabaya bid against each other to guess the number of incoming postcards (Monel 1993:15-17). Thirdly, as with the previous kethoprak serials, the sponsoring enterprises generated income for the TV station, thereby subsidizing part of the serial's production. Finally, the station co-operated with local officials and politicians.

The fictive story, based on the history of the Javanese kingdom Majapahit, was promoted as a puzzling detective story (*cerita detektif yang memusingkan*) ((wa) 1993b). This detective character was foregrounded in the PR campaigns that announced and accompanied the broadcasts. The entire serial evolved around the question 'Who is the brains behind the murder on King Kartiko Aji?'.

The *Jawa Pos* displayed hundreds of banners (*spanduk*) and billboards (*baliho*) in the streets of Surabaya. Both the *Jawa Pos* and *Memorandum* advertised the serial by placing large pictures, mentioning the prizes per participant category and the dates of the broadcasts. Participants were differentiated according to the type of link they had to the *Jawa Pos*: Category A for those with a subscription; Category B for those buying single copies. They could make use of the coupon that was published in a few editions of the *Jawa Pos*; Category C was specially for readers of *Memorandum* that also carried a coupon. Plenty of prizes were made available for each category. This differentiation led to protests: in their letters to the editor *Jawa Pos* readers who could not afford a subscription expressed their disappointment, as they felt they too had helped *Jawa Pos* to flourish by buying copies in shops (*toko eceran*) or on the corner of the street. The editors of the daily thanked all the letter-writers for their comments. They claimed this topic was connected to 'the problem of the preservation of traditional arts to which we all contribute'. Category A was meant to spoil (*memanjakan*) the subscribers and provide them with an extra service by means of this entertainment programme, broadcast by the TVRI stations in Surabaya and Yogyakarta. The *Jawa Pos* used the serial as a tool to communicate between the newspaper and the subscribers. The Marketing Director of the *Jawa Pos* added that for all three categories large prizes had been reserved ((Ita) 1993c).

While the television stations broadcast fragments of episodes as teasers for the audiences, daily features in the local newspapers stirred the fever. Focusing on *Jawa Pos*, I shall give a sense of how the excitement was built up. Two types of articles were published: those

¹¹⁹ On 26 July, 2, 9 and 23 August 1993.

containing synopses of the serial, heightening the suspense by dropping hints; and essays, based on research, offering analyses of what was happening in the serial. Among the persuasive techniques used in the former were repetitions (of the story contents, suspects, the puzzle) to build up the tension, unflagging references to the advantages of participating in the quiz, and the unravelling of the plot as if through the eyes of the viewers. The latter provided credible sources (Jowett and O'Donnell 1999:291; Pratkanis and Aronson 2001:51) to persuade the viewers, in the form of (results of) audience research presented in tables and interviews with experts who were involved in the production (the producer, Ki Siswondo and several actors).

The *Jawa Pos* newspaper articles of the first type provided readers with all kinds of information about the form and contents of the serial: the synopsis of the entire story and the synopsis of each episode was presented in more detail before it was broadcast; suggestions about who might be the guilty party behind the murder on the king. Six characters were mentioned as possible suspects and their putative guilt was backed up by insinuations about their ambitions and pointing out their conspicuously suspicious behaviour, the intrigues at the court and the problems arising from the succession to the throne ((ita) 1993b). The articles read like introductions to detective stories and they built up the tension, initially in the lead-up to the first broadcast, thereafter binding the public to the newspaper and the broadcasts by making insinuations about the potential murderer and the brains behind the murder (example: the murder weapon, a keris, is owned by the king's younger brother), by referring to the prizes to be won, totalling an amount of 60 million Rupiah, by repeating that the final opportunity to win a prize was fast approaching and that the only way to be sure of finding out was to watch all four episodes, thereby heightening the suspense (Figure 5.8). The journalists kept on repeating their persuasive message that sounded: from tonight onwards, those who want to win a prize could prepare themselves to discover the brains behind the murder of Prabu Kartiko Aji. Want to join the quiz? Please fill in the coupon – guiding the readers through the steps to be taken ((ita) 1993d).

Terungkap, Otak Pembunuhan



Surabaya, JP.-

Nanti malam penggemar ketoprak *Ampak-Ampak Singgelopuro* (AAS) dapat menyaksikan tayangan akhir. Sekaligus akan mengetahui jawaban siapa otak pembunuh Prabu Kartika Adji. Lima tokoh kuat yang putut dicurigai telah dimunculkan. Simak saja permainan watak Ratu Ampean. Selain ambisius, juga punya perangai ketus ditunjang dengan kedudukannya sebagai garwo ampai. Berturut-turut Patih Tamengyudo yang tiba-tiba masuk perut pembunuh sang raja. Juga ada Nyi Tumenggung Sosodoro, Bekel Badahu, dan Pangeran Lintang Premono.

Selain itu, tokoh yang tidak memiliki kans tetapi bisa saja sebagai otak pembunuh karena maksud-maksud tersembunyi.

Seperti Sosodoro. Meski demikian, mungkin saja ramalan ini meleset karena segala rahasia masih ada dalam penggambaran Siswondo selaku penulis ceritanya.

Memasuki episode IV ini, ternyata ayahanda Wulandari, yakni Sosodoro, sang penggak hukum kerajaan, dikeroyok massa. Tidak ingin orang tuanya celaka, Wulandari (Ria Enes) lantas membantu. Tentu saja dengan topeng dan busana samaran.

Seperti episode ke-2 diceritakan bahwa Wulandari adalah seorang pendekar. Bahkan, dialah yang berhasil meloloskan P. Taranggono dari sekapan begal utusan seseorang tokoh kerajaan. Tentu saja dia menggunakan ilmu *kadiklayan* yang dimilikinya dari seorang guru pertapa. Hanya saja, pagi ini *Jawa Pos* tidak menurunkan jawaban siapa otak pembunuhan tersebut. Dengan pertimbangan, jika diturunkan pemirsa TVRI tidak *surprise* lagi.

Sementara itu, jawaban sayembara terkumpul 3,5 juta kupon dan kuitansi yang terkumpul dari Jateng, DIY, dan Jawa Timur. Malam ini setelah tayangan ketoprak ini, akan diundi siapa pemenang sayembara AAS, baik dari paket C maupun paket A.

Siapakah peraih hadiah mobil sebagai hadiah utamanya? Ikuti saja penayangannya di layar gelas TVRI Stasiun Surabaya dan Stasiun Yogyakarta. Borngkali saja Andalah juaranya. (ita)

5.8 Brains behind the murder disclosed
(*Jawa Pos* 23 August 1993)

The participation of the troupe *Siswo Budoyo* was vaunted in the PR: a well-known group of reliable and experienced kethoprak actors, who were used to performing in the traditional manner, as an itinerant troupe on a temporary stage in a bamboo construction (*tobong*). They had the reputation for attracting large audiences. The fact that the leader of the troupe had written the script and played the role of the king who was murdered in the first episode was paid all due attention. The articles highlighted that the recording and editing of the first three episodes had already been completed, but that the recording of the last episode would have to wait until early August, in order to keep the answer to the puzzle undisclosed. Some of the viewers had been looking for leaks, it said, chasing *Jawa Pos* staff, calling or visiting Ki Siswondo, some of them even willing to bribe him in search of the answer to the puzzle ((wa) 1993a). The 'syuting' location of the last episode was kept secret, to prevent crowds from flocking there in their search for the answer (*Siswo Budoyo kehilangan* 1993; (ws) 1993b). Pride was certainly taken in the wide scope of the serial, as it would be broadcast in East and Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta ((wa) 1993b).

The essays by Priyono Adi Nugroho, published in the *Jawa Pos*, offer another example of the role of the print media in promoting the serial and heightening the suspense (Nugroho 1993a, b, c). Besides their commercial goals, they also offered a reflection on the position of the

traditional arts in contemporary Indonesia, on the need for preservation and on language use. The serial and the quiz were presented within the framework of a research project, offering academic support by means of three tables (Table 1). The research on the perception of the audiences of the AAS serial was conducted by the Centre for Socio-Economic and Mass Communication Research (Pusat Studi Sosial Ekonomi dan Komunikasi Massa, Pussekomp) Paramawidya Surabaya after the broadcast of the second episode. The centre carried out its survey in East Java (in Surabaya, Sidoarjo, Gresik and Mojokerto), by means of a questionnaire (*angket*). However, as only 200 people from various backgrounds and professions bothered to fill in the questionnaire, the academic scope of the facts could be called into question.

Nama Otak Pembunuh	Frekuensi
1. Ratu Ampean	102 (51 %)
2. Nyi Sosodoro	29 (14,5 %)
3. Patih Tamengyudo	20 (10 %)
4. P. Sindu Pawoko	14 (7 %)
5. Tumenggung Sosodoro	11 (5,5 %)
6. P. Lintang Premono	9 (4,5 %)
7. P. Tranggono	7 (3,5 %)
8. R. Setyoko	3 (1,5 %)
9. Nyi Lintang Premono	2 (1 %)
10. Nyi Ratu Kartiko Aji	1 (0,5 %)
11. Tidak menebak	2 (1 %)
Jumlah	200 (100 %)

Table 1. Third table, published in *Jawa Pos* (19 August 1993:8). It presents the names of the suspected brains behind the murder of the king and the number of votes they received from the audiences who responded to the questionnaire.

The second part of the essay focused on the contribution of kethoprak sayembara broadcasts to burgeoning interest in and love of traditional art forms, discussing the development of the genre and how audiences could be motivated to preserve it by the lure of prizes.¹²⁰ One conclusion is that, in its efforts to preserve traditional art, it competed with modern entertainment. Whereas the latter was supported by a strong financial backing, contemporary technology and good management, the traditional genres were sadly deficient in these. Audiences commented on several aspects of the programme and made suggestions for improvements. The majority thought that language use and the dialogues should be improved (49% very necessary; 35% necessary). The dilemma was: if refined and correct Javanese (*bahasa yang halus dan benar*) were used, audiences might not understand the message. However, if the Javanese is mixed with foreign terms (*istilah-istilah 'asing'*), although communication would improve, these might damage or destroy the language.

¹²⁰ 'memajukan kesenian tradisional' and 'memberikan rangsangan dan motivasi untuk melestarikan seni kethoprak' (Nugroho 1993b).

Just before the broadcast of the final episode, Wahas Shofyan, *Jawa Pos* journalist in Kediri, covered the experiences of several experts who were directly involved in the production of the serial in two articles. Offering a ‘backstage’ view, he focused on the professional approach of Ki Siswondo and the responsibilities he had shouldered during the production process, on the differences between playing in a film and acting on stage and on the valuable experience of the actors to be used to raising the quality of the troupe when they performed live. The extra value for the troupe was the *sayembara* character of the serial that had generated plenty of attention, ranging from those who only wanted to know the right answer to the puzzle, to the fans of traditional art forms who concentrated on the content. Among the topics debated were how to prepare the regeneration of the troupe and how to preserve the traditional art of kethoprak. This included kethoprak actors performing as film artists (Shofyan 1993 a, b).

‘Infatuated with traditional shows’:¹²¹ *Kethoprak sayembara presented as traditional culture*

The *Jawa Pos* addressed its readers as aficionados of traditional shows. What does ‘traditional’ mean in this context? Firstly, it refers to the involvement of the kethoprak troupe Siswo Budoyo, that was dubbed a traditional performing arts troupe (*grup seni tradisional*). This 60 million Rupiah production would mean the troupe would enjoy many advantages. An article in the *Jawa Pos* goes into the history of the troupe, established in 1958 – using the idea of tradition as heritage – and mentions an award the troupe received in recognition of its efforts to preserve and develop traditional arts ((ws) 1993a). Referring to the educative function of traditional art, Siswondo is quoted: the troupe goes beyond simply putting on a show (*tontonan*), it cultivates an aspiration (*tuntutan*) through an art form that is permeated with elevated values. As kethoprak was then still very popular in Tulungagung, with 75 percent of the 1,000 theatre seats sold every night, the head of the troupe Ki Siswondo was given the accolade maestro of traditional art (*tokoh seni tradisional*) ((wa) 1993c). The appearance of Siswo Budoyo in the television serial was framed as a special present for the thirty-fifth anniversary of the troupe. However, here again the meaning of traditional was not consistent. Siswo Budoyo had made its name for its innovations in the genre, despite the fact it used to perform kethoprak in the traditional way, an itinerant troupe that used a backdrop and theatrical make-up and costumes. Nevertheless, it had introduced innovations in the mise-en-scène, stage and lighting technique and the use of properties. Its costumes, still traditional in design, were made of more glamorous materials and were highlighted by splendid accessories. Western percussion had been added to the accompanying gamelan slendro and pelog (Kus Sudyarsana 1989:36).

Both TVRI Surabaya and the city of Tulungagung acquiesced in the traditional image of the troupe. The official account from the side of TVRI Surabaya in its vindication of the producing and broadcasting of serialized kethoprak ran as follows: by increasing the number of broadcasts of traditional programmes (*paket tradisional*), the station hoped to be able to break through the allure of programmes with a foreign content, watched by urban audiences.

¹²¹ ‘pemirsa yang gandrung dengan tontonan tradisional’ ((ita) 1993d).

Among the traditional performances mentioned were ludruk, a theatre genre said to be part of the station's identity, kethoprak and dhagelan (humorous skits) featuring famous comedians and local Srimulat artists (*TVRI utamakan* 1993). As Siswo Budoyo was based in Tulungagung and would bring profit to the city, the local regent (*bupati*) consented to allow the television crew to make recordings in his official residence, the 'grand and authentic' *pendhapa* Kongas Arum Kusumaning Banga ((ws) 1993a). The regent called Siswo Budoyo a consistent reservoir for the lovers and developers of traditional art, as well as an enormous asset to the city, a centre of industry, food and culture ((ws) 1993a).

Finally, the need to preserve traditional art genres and to retain their traditional character was expressed on several occasions, during which the public was invited to participate actively. Hence the preview of the serial, called a traditional soap ((ita) 1993a), and the suggestion that subtitles be added, as I discussed above. Ki Siswondo personally asked the audiences to voice constructive criticism about the shortcomings of the serial, 'for the purpose of retaining our traditional culture' ((wa) 1993a).

Nevertheless, the traditional stamp of Siswa Budoyo on this kethoprak serial also fuelled criticism. The stage format was said to be too prominent, tending to swamp the televisual character, in particular when it was compared to the kethoprak sayembara productions of TVRI Yogyakarta. Sunardian Wirodono (1993) states the latter had distinctly shown the dynamic development of the genre as it had actually succeeded in transforming it into a television genre in all its aspects.

3 Televising kethoprak: effects

The production and broadcasting of kethoprak programmes on television inevitably had impact on the genre itself and on its reception. Counted among these effects are an easier access to drama and a changing experience in watching kethoprak, the coming into being of new kethoprak styles and other ways of representing Javaneseness. Lastly, the impact of television on kethoprak can be assessed as negative (the discourse of loss) or positive, or both.

In a study of kethoprak, wayang wong and ludruk from the perspective of change, Umar Kayam and his fellow researchers Ahmad Adaby Darban, Ryadi Gunawan and Faruk (in both the research report and its reworked publication)¹²² underline developments in technological communication, in particular radio, television and film, and the changes in the social and the value systems in society as the main causes of alterations in the traditional performing arts genres (Umar Kayam et al. 2000:341, 380ff). Among the effects they list the increasing access to drama. In the early 1970s, kethoprak by amateur and professional troupes was broadcast weekly by TVRI Yogyakarta, whereas radio stations were broadcasting the dramatic genre on an almost daily basis (Hatley 1985:11). This media exposure led to a

¹²² The reworked version reflects a notable change in Indonesian society. What immediately strikes the eye is the introduction that in the reworked version no longer begins with 'national development' (*pembangunan nasional*). It stresses the diversity of traditional Javanese art (*seni tradisional Jawa*) and the diverse disciplines to which traditional art belongs: fine arts, dance, literature, and theatre (*seni rupa, seni tari, seni sastra, dan seni teater*) (Kayam et al. 2000:339). The second paragraph is identical to the one in the first version.

greater accessibility to various kinds of drama. Williams has drawn attention to this evolution. His contention is that television in most parts of the world changed the scale and intensity of dramatic performance drastically, causing ‘a majority of any population [to have] regular and constant access to drama, and us[ing] this access’ (Williams 1990:59). In the wake of their increasing reach, the media not only made drama ‘an intrinsic part of everyday life’ (Williams 1990:59), kethoprak was now brought within the purview of people in social classes beyond that of the *wong cilik*, farmers and labourers, in whose circles kethoprak is said to have originated. This assertion has been confirmed by the study of Umar Kayam and his fellow researchers, who conclude that the electronic mass media have made traditional performing arts more accessible to people in different social layers (Kayam et al. 2000).¹²³ Sedyawati (1981:39) calls this a shift in ownership. Hatley has also pointed out the effect of the television broadcasts on the broadening of kethoprak audiences because, once broadcast, the genre received ‘increased attention from and contact with people of some education and status’ (Hatley 1985:13). In Chapter 7, I shall demonstrate how the private television station Indosiar made clever use of the increased accessibility to televised kethoprak in its marketing strategies.

While televised kethoprak potentially reached a much wider and more varied audience, it was facing an uphill battle in its competition with alternative spectacles. Most of these broadcasts, often of foreign origin and significantly different to traditional performance broadcasts, swayed the audiences’ preference for certain programmes and whetted their taste, that, Umar Kayam claims, tended to diverge (Kayam et al. 2000:383). Competition among TVRI stations and later between TVRI and private television stations increasingly forced the public to make a deliberate choice in their most favourite programmes. In 1981, for instance, TVRI Yogyakarta’s kethoprak broadcasts after the world news (*Dunia Dalam Berita*) on Tuesday nights coincided with the US series *The Bionic Woman*, that was broadcast by TVRI Jakarta and relayed by TVRI Surabaya. As the residents of Yogyakarta were able to receive the transmissions of both stations, they faced a dilemma. *Tempo* signalled that younger audiences and audience groups from the middle and higher social classes ‘of course’ preferred *The Bionic Woman* (*Kini TVRI rajin* 1981).

The potentially wide access to televised kethoprak also had another effect. Those involved in the production and broadcasting processes grew more aware of the contents and form of presentation, and this awakening led to new kethoprak styles. Since the early 1980s, when kethoprak was still recorded in the studio, TVRI had tried to turn it into an interesting spectacle. As soon as technology allowed, recordings were made outdoors. The staging was adapted to facilitate the camerawork and produce an aesthetically attractive visual result for the television screen (Kristiadi 2010). The Javanese used in mediatized kethoprak was cleansed of its coarse humour, vulgar expressions and open criticism of the government. Pragmatically, the production of kethoprak became more efficient, easier and cheaper (Kayam et al. 2000:380-390).

Television changed the experience of watching kethoprak: it brought the spectacle into the people’s homes, enabling them to watch the programme in the comfort of their own homes,

¹²³ See also Wijaya and Sutjipto (1977:43).

ensconced in a safe, relaxed atmosphere, without any hassles or too much bother (Bondan Nusantara 1990:42).¹²⁴ The regular broadcasting of the genre increased the habituation of the viewers. Since the end of the 1970s, kethoprak broadcasts of TVRI Yogyakarta had built up a large following. This was due to the fact that the genre kethoprak itself was popular among the people, the stories were familiar, and because of the use of the Javanese vernacular. To its aficionados, kethoprak had therefore become a form of entertainment for which they had acquired a taste (*numani*) and to which they had grown attached (Monel 1993:16). The close interaction between performers and audiences, one of the main characteristics of live performances, also changed. As audience participation altered – direct interaction between the televised actors and the audiences at home was no longer possible – TVRI explored possibilities to engage its audiences in different ways and to enhance feelings of *akrab*-ness. It invited the public to attend performances in its studios, spiced up kethoprak broadcasts with competitions (in the case of kethoprak sayembara) or organized performances, to be broadcast either live or pre-recorded, to celebrate special occasions. In the case of studio recordings with no audience present, musicians accompanying the performance took over the role of the audiences, reacting to the jokes during the comic scenes, for example. This happened in the *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda* broadcast that has been analysed above.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the dissemination of traditional performance genres by means of electronic mass media, like cassettes, radio and television facilitated imitation (Sutton 1985). Certain kethoprak styles and performers achieved main-stream status and set the tone. Because of their prominence they were imitated by the others. The trends, set on television, were followed in non-mediated kethoprak performances. This pattern was most clearly visible and audible in the comic sketches, whose successful puns and jokes were imitated endlessly. This effect on the genre has led to the dichotomic perception among kethoprak actors, playwrights and directors that, while television has in some cases certainly strengthened the creativity of kethoprak performers, it has also had the power to transform it into a unilinear source of information (Bondan Nusantara 1990:42).

Another effect the medium television has had on kethoprak is that it now conveys a representation of the Javanese world that is perceived to be increasingly realistic (Hersri Setiawan 1998). The presence of television has made this realistic approach of kethoprak possible. When performed by village kethoprak troupes, the furnished studio settings and the abundant use of the stage props made the *mise-en-scène* function as simulacra (Baudrillard 1994), as in the classical battle dramas that I shall introduce in Chapter 6. When recorded outdoors and filmed in a natural setting, an even more realistic effect was obtained. Actors actually mounted a horse instead of mimicking horse-riding. Rather than use simple stage props or a backdrop to represent a typical Javanese aristocratic setting, recordings were made in historical buildings, like the *pendhapa* Kongas Arum Kusumaning Bangsa in the serialized

¹²⁴ ‘langkung gampil saha langkung sekeca anggenipun sami mriksani Kethoprak’.

For an account of watching kethoprak on television in a village with only one television set, see Hermawan Widodo, ‘Ketoprak sayembara “Mayat Hidup Lahir Dalam Kubur”.’ *Blogspot Pataba* <http://patabamembangun.blogspot.nl/2012/05/ketoprak-sayembara-mayat-hidup-lahir.html> [Accessed 2 September 2014]

kethoprak *Ampak-Ampak Singgelopura*. The costume design was more firmly based on historical reality (Kayam et al. 2000:x), although historical accuracy still did not seem to matter much. This realistic tendency has aroused the expectations of the viewers, who are quite prepared to comment either positively or negatively on the representation of the period depicted in the story. While traditional kethoprak performed on stage challenged the imagination of the audiences in their experience of the dramatic developments, this was less the case in the kethoprak sayembara productions, because of the more realistic representation that was said to be more aggressive and easier to swallow (Fadjri and Bujono 1992).

The discussions about this increasing filmic realism in televised kethoprak failed to take into account the abstract character of the setting in one of the main TVRI Yogyakarta kethoprak styles, in which artistic and aesthetic aspects prevailed. The broadcast of *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda* exemplifies this. While the mise-en-scène in the style as presented in *The Installation of Prince Mangkubumi* was minimalized and the use of properties reduced to only the most essential ones, mirroring the situation in live pre-independent kethoprak performances in rural areas, the mise-en-scène in kethoprak sayembara was extended, enlarged, made more exuberant and to appear realistic.¹²⁵ But actually, in the latter case, this had led to a blurring of the fictive and the real space. In spite of the fact the representations of an interior in the setting were substituted by a 'real' interior, the performance space remained fictive; the audiences, however, perceived it as real.

Discourse on the effects of the televising of kethoprak focuses profusely either on the usefulness of modern technology in advancing the art of kethoprak (Wijaya and Sutjipto 1977:44-45) or, jumping to the other extreme, on the loss of the traditional identity of the genre because of television. Although the televising of kethoprak at first was seen as hampering the development of the genre, later the influence of television was perceived as positive. Purwadmadi Admadipura has claimed that TVRI Yogyakarta not only contributed to the development and the growth of the genre through its routine (weekly) broadcasts of kethoprak. More importantly, it succeeded in stimulating the world of traditional art, enabling it to respond to the challenges of the changing times (Purwadmadi Admadipura 1997:68) and also to the revitalization of local artists (Hartanto 1997:120-121).¹²⁶ In the eyes of Ki Sugati, actor and leader of the kethoprak troupe PS Bayu, television has functioned as a support for traditional performing arts like kethoprak ((Jay/R-4) 2000). Pertinently, television has played an important role in making the genre more popular and giving it a wider reach, as radio had done before it. It boosted the status of certain kethoprak actors and troupes and made them famous, besides being a stimulus to strengthen their creativity (Bondan Nusantara 1990:39-69).

TVRI's sense of responsibility towards the choice of cultural expressions that were recorded and broadcast increased, as the survival of particular genres and artists was said to have become increasingly dependent on their frequent appearance on television and therefore

¹²⁵ On live kethoprak performances in rural areas before Indonesian independence, see Hersri Setiawan's account 'Wayang dan ketoprak: Jagad gedhe vs jagad cilik' (1998).

¹²⁶ 'Kehadiran TV, sebenarnya dapat membangkitkan seniman lokal' (Hartanto 1997).

on more frequent exposure to (larger) audiences than would have been the case in live performances. In 1990, when about 500 troupes were active in Yogyakarta and Central Java, many of whom wanted to perform for television, TVRI Yogyakarta organized selections. These troupes had not only been set up by artists, but also by government and private institutions, and inhabitants of urban and rural areas (Bondan Nusantara 1990:44).

On the other hand, others see television as one of the main causes of the deterioration, even the outright loss of traditional performance genres. In an interview with the newspaper *Republika*, Ki Siswondo HS, Siswo Budoyo's leader, expressed his concern, and in doing so contradicted Ki Sugati's view: since the beginning of the 1990s traditional art genres in Indonesia had begun to teeter on the brink of extinction. Their circumstances often forced small troupes to throw in the sponge (*gulung tikar*). The principal cause of the decline was television, he stated. He was convinced it offered a varied range of entertainment that often ran counter to local cultural values and ethics, and, above all, was easily accessible. The decline was visible not only in urban but also in rural areas, and it would eventually lead to the extinction of traditional art forms. He acknowledged this development was an inescapable outcome of modernization. Nevertheless, he himself, with the help of his kethoprak troupe, tried to keep going, although they had to adapt their performances to the tastes of their audiences who preferred humour rather than an edifying story that inculcated courtesy and etiquette. His conclusion: television destroys traditional shows (Sunarwoto and Fathoni 1996).¹²⁷ Only three years earlier he had been 'the' guest star in the most successful kethoprak sayembara serial on the regional Javanese television stations.

All the while, other factors, agencies and mechanisms that influenced the condition of kethoprak were constantly raised in the discussions: these included factors like urbanization, globalization, a 'modern Indonesia' that is not interested in traditional 'rural' 'old-fashioned' art forms, and a lack of interest of the artists themselves (*Banyak seni tradisional* 1993).

This discourse of loss is closely related to the preservation discourse and to the averred traditional character of kethoprak. The meaning of loss ranges from a betrayal of the traditional features when developing kethoprak (*mengkhianati ciri tradhisional*) (Wahyana Giri MC 1992) to the need to preserve the genre and its values (*Kesenian ketoprak Mataram* 2008) as well as to document it and make recordings before it becomes extinct (Fajrih and Bujono 1992). In the course of time kethoprak was attributed the quality *adiluhung*, refined, a term that in the 1980s was still confined to traditional Javanese court arts and unthought of for commercial urban performance genres like kethoprak. The atmosphere had changed, the most likely link being that artistic genres belonging to traditional spheres, either originally or because of New Order ideas and policies, needed to be preserved because of this quality, lest they be lost. Consequently, even kethoprak sayembara was qualified as invested with 'high values'. Some audiences took the view that in this new television genre kethoprak might lose its identity (*kelangan jatidhiri*), as a journalist wrote in the Javanese magazine *Mekar Sari* (NAR 1991). They wondered whether it was still kethoprak, or whether it should be called film, drama or a show? The author of the piece acknowledged that traditional art was subject to change and that it did not just hold firm to high values. He agreed that the genre needed to

¹²⁷ 'Televisi matikan tontonan tradisional'.

be developed and adapted to new epochs, however without compromising the *adiluhung* values of the art. In its new form, he wrote, kethoprak had become a modern performance genre for modern audiences, not just for the traditional public. Therefore, if it were to retain the fervour of fans of traditional theatre, kethoprak has to continuously re-invent itself.

Conclusions

TVRI Stasiun Yogyakarta took pride in its broadcasts of what it categorized as traditional culture, including kethoprak. The station screened these cultural expressions in order to inform and entertain its audiences and to raise their interest and appreciation, according to the national government's aims and mission, and used them as a vehicle to easily convey government messages.

Preservation was one of TVRI's aims. But, while McDaniel concludes that 'radio and television's contributions to preservation of regional traditional performance arts are questionable' (McDaniel 1994:301), the kethoprak broadcasts by TVRI Yogyakarta prove there was another important motive: awareness of and enthusiasm for local culture. After all, TVRI Yogyakarta had been designed to function as the barometer of this local culture. From its early beginnings, the station had programmed kethoprak and shaped it to the constraints of the medium. The various styles of kethoprak contributed to TVRI's identity, while the television station contributed to the development of the genre as well as designed a new television kethoprak format genre, the kethoprak sayembara, that only exists because of and on television. Because of these innovations, kethoprak continued to exist. Tradition was preserved, albeit in novel forms. Recognition by the audiences was important. But but overall, kethoprak programmes were representations of (Yogyakarta) Javanese-ness.

The ways in which the station produced the local made the programmes appealing to its audiences – at a time when television stations and programme supply were still limited. In the case of the kethoprak broadcasts of TVRI Yogyakarta, the representation of culture has remained local. The productions were made in co-operation with local groups, the themes referred to local history and heroes of the past, local myths and traditional stories, and were tailored to local audiences. The general perception was that the language spoken was Yogyakartaan Javanese, although actually TVRI Yogyakarta also broadcast kethoprak of Central and East Javanese origin. When co-operating with TVRI Surabaya and the East Javanese troupe Siswo Budoyo, for instance, the standard Javanese was permeated with East Javanese. Therefore, kethoprak, TVRI Yogyakarta's primadona, was linked to a local geographical (Yogyakarta) and local ethnic (Yogyakarta Javanese) environment, at least ideologically, as the programmes were also to be seen in Central and East Java and, in a certain period, even co-produced with the East Javanese TVRI Surabaya.

Comparing a broadcast like *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda* with kethoprak sayembara as a phenomenon reveals the following. In the first case the theatrical atmosphere of a staged performance combined with televisual techniques brought this televisual interpretation closer to earlier performance formats of kethoprak. It is reminiscent of Hatley's account of the

audience's attitude towards early kethoprak broadcasts, that the latter did not perceive as real kethoprak. The theatrical approach in *Pangeran Mangkubumi Wisuda* could therefore have contributed to enhanced feelings of *akrab*-ness to the viewers. The choice of the lakon, a well-known and beloved story, and its relation to the locale of broadcasting, Yogyakarta, heightened the working of proximity. Kethoprak sayembara was a different matter. The filmic format and the realistic settings engendered another kind of proximity. But here, too, the stories, the involvement of popular performers and the use of the Javanese vernacular contributed to the proximity.

In his article on script-writing and directing, Soemardjono (1984/1985:3) points out the various attitudes to the character of kethoprak: some call it a traditional art form (*kesenian tradisional*); others call it folk art (*kesenian rakyat*) while, when facing the challenges posed by modern media like radio and television, it is required to synchronize with the expressive features, language and constraints of these media.¹²⁸ In the discussions that take an ideological perspective on tradition, kethoprak is viewed as a precious inheritance from the past that should be preserved. This stance is often normative in character and ties in with the discourse of loss. Kethoprak practitioners, when at work, view kethoprak as part of a tradition that is constantly in a state of flux as it adapts to and appropriates developments from its surroundings. This demonstrates how variegated and complicated discussions on the traditional character of kethoprak are and exposes the presence of a split between pragmatic and ideological approaches to the genre.

¹²⁸ 'mau tidak mau ketoprak harus melaraskan dengan bahasa radio dan televisi'