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## **Producing the local: Javanese performance on Indonesian television**

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## **Part II**

### **Localizing persuasion**



## Introduction

The end of the 1980s saw significant economic growth and the first expansion of the Indonesian televisionscape. Both government television and the new private broadcasters turned to Javanese performance for informative, persuasive and propaganda ends. TVRI continued its rural broadcastings, disseminating government messages in support of development goals, to inform and educate local villagers. TVRI Stasiun Yogyakarta's *Mbangun Desa* (Developing the Village) provides a case study in Chapter 8. Private broadcasting institutions with purely commercial objectives also focused on 'Java', first by producing programmes with a tinge of Javaneseness, and later by broadcasting specific regional performing arts. The case of the then newly established Indosiar described in Chapters 6 and 7 shows the efforts made by this station to seduce both the advertisers and the audiences, not to mention the Indonesian government, by facilitating the presence of multiple discourses in these programmes.

Three premises, all deduced from the character of the medium television, form the starting point for my exploration of localized persuasion. Firstly, contrary to what might have been expected, both case studies balance in between various, often apparently paradoxical narratives and ideologies. The most prominent feature in the Indosiar broadcasts of Javanese performances were the messages from the commercial world. Indosiar's self-(re)presentation and its New Order-based discourse about the need to preserve the nation's tradition were interspersed with these commercial messages. In *Mbangun Desa*, from the perspective of the sponsors and the producers, the most important component was the development discourse. However, the series gained fame and popularity because of its comic and entertaining narrative that grew steadily more prominent in the course of time. Also in this, discourse on traditional culture was part of the show.

As White argues, 'television is the locus of intersection and coexistence of varying narratives, genres, appeals, and modes of address' (White 1992:191). To unravel these apparent paradoxes, I analyse localized persuasion with respect to this 'variety of issues, voices, positions, and messages' as '[n]one of these on its own accounts for the ideology of the medium' (White 1992:190). White's idea of the multiple messages approaches what Becker refers to as epistemologies. In his analysis of wayang kulit Becker discerns the various conceptual worlds that 'coexist in a single wayang' (Becker 1995:40). Each epistemology exists in a different concept of time, and each epistemology retains its distinctiveness, even in language (Becker 1995:40). To reveal how Indosiar's Javanese performance programmes and TVRI Yogyakarta's *Mbangun Desa* simultaneously managed to accommodate a variety of patrons and ideologies by presenting multiple narratives, voices and messages, I shall analyse the agents involved in the mediation processes and examine the programme flow.

Secondly, Javanese performance was part of the medium's strategy to persuade Javanese people in front of a television set 'to play the role of viewer' (Allen 1992:119). Television's key predicament is its quest for audiences who must constantly 'be seduced, attracted, lured'

(Ang 1991:18). Only if an audience has been recruited can more persuasion be successful. Furthermore, the traditional aura Javanese performance in the 1990s had contributed to the persuasive techniques of the medium. As Kemper demonstrates, when used in advertisements, tradition serves ‘to catch the eye, not to represent a known way of life’ (Kemper 2001:137); this is equally true of the programme in its entirety, that is after all commercial television’s main instrument in its search for audiences (Ang 1991:27). A similar conclusion can be reached about government television when it resorted to traditional Javanese performance genres for non-commercial informative and ideological persuasive purposes. Thus, traditional culture was used to frame and address audiences as citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed and entertained – as public (Ang 1991:29) – , and as potential consumers of TV programmes and the products advertised on these programmes – as a market (Ang 1991:28).

My third premise concerns the fact that not only TVRI but also the private television industry in Indonesia sustained the New Order government ideology. This conforms to the character of television that ‘works to sustain the dominant social-cultural ideology’ (White 1992:190). My findings in Chapters 6 and 7 support Kitley’s conclusion that in the 1990s the commercial television industry in Indonesia was largely controlled by the state, making it ‘a compliant adjunct to the political and cultural objectives of the government’ (1994:12).

### *Performance and persuasion*

Information, persuasion and propaganda are all forms of communicative practices. Jowett and O’Donnell define persuasion as ‘a communicative process to influence others’ (1999:27). They view the persuasion process as interactive, resulting in ‘the fulfillment of a personal or societal need or desire’. This fulfillment regards both the persuader and the persuadee, ‘if the persuadee accepts the persuasive purpose’ (Jowett & O’Donnell 1999:27-28). Propaganda shares techniques with information and persuasion, but goes a step further (Jowett & O’Donnell 1999:26). It deliberately and systematically attempts ‘to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist’ (Jowett and O’Donnell 1999:6). Popular performance genres, both live and mediated, have proved to be an excellent propaganda channel (*Folk media* 1982), taking their place alongside photography, music and film. These performance genres facilitate the creation of a favourable climate in which to present information, persuasion and propaganda, a process that Pratkanis and Aronson (2001:51) call pre-persuasion. Pre-persuasion is the first of four stratagems of influence they list in their study. The second one is the source credibility, required if the persuader is to appear authoritative or trustworthy. Source credibility as a special technique to maximize effect is also mentioned by Jowett and O’Donnell (1999:291). The goal of the message, the third stratagem, is to control the attention and thoughts of the audiences. As fourth stratagem, Pratkanis and Aronson mention the arousal of emotions. Jowett and O’Donnell (1999:295) explain, for instance, how by means of specific language use and lyrics, melody and sound, music can arouse emotions and hence is employed as an effective persuasive medium.

Javanese performance has been used in Indonesia to disseminate government information, persuasion and propaganda under various circumstances and in different periods, by various parties concerned and by means of various media. The instances of persuasion discussed in this second part have had a host of predecessors. To put them in a historical perspective, and to trace changes and/or continuities in the persuasive techniques applied, here are some examples.

In the colonial period, kethoprak mobilized support for nationalism; as I have shown in Chapter 4, although the Dutch banned these performances, they themselves employed Javanese drama to propagate their messages. Interesting examples of Dutch colonial propaganda are the films *Tanah Sabrang*, *Land aan de overkant* (The Land Overseas) from 1939, and *Mas Soemo Bojong* (Soemo's Evacuation) from 31 December 1941.<sup>129</sup> *Tanah Sabrang*, a film by Mannus Franken, commissioned by the Centrale Commissie voor Emigratie en Kolonisatie van Inheemsens (Central Committee for the Emigration and Colonization of Indigenous People) (Mannus Franken 1979:44), urged poor farmers in densely populated Java to transmigrate to Sumatra. *Tanah Sabrang* is constructed around two types of wayang, the wayang kulit and the wayang wong, and employs the Javanese clowns as messengers and persuaders, relying on their prominent position in the traditional wayang plays – and source credibility –, and on their humorous presence. These clowns address the people, inform them and accompany them to their new homeland, just as they accompanied the wayang heroes (Franken 1988:28).<sup>130</sup> *Mas Soemo Bojong*, a production of Java Industrial Film (Batavia), based on a script by Andjar Asmara, was commissioned by the Netherlands Indies Regeerings Publiciteits Dienst (R.P.D., the Government Information Service).<sup>131</sup> The film provided local people with information about evacuation strategies in the event of a Japanese invasion. It begins with a discussion at a *warung*, a foodstall, after rumours had been spread about the possible arrival of the Japanese within days. The village head gathers the people and reassures them that the government has prepared for their evacuation. A simulation of the evacuation is shown, voiced-over in Javanese.

Although they apply different approaches to information, persuasion and propaganda, the two films share many similarities. Both of high artistic quality, they frame the themes within a Javanese cultural setting, use Javanese as the language of communication and feature Javanese culture. In both films the village head (*lurah*), representing local authority and enhancing the credibility of the source, plays an influential role, 'guiding' the people to make the 'right' decisions and reassuring them of the support of the (colonial) government (Figures II.1 and II.2). Both films consciously apply the idea of cultural proximity to attract the attention of their audiences, and to enable an easy identification with content and form of the mediated drama and especially with the people who receive the information in the film, creating resonance (Jowett and O'Donnell 1999:290-291), thereby making them susceptible

<sup>129</sup> The Indonesian Film Center gives 1942 as the year of production (<http://www.indonesianfilmcenter.com/pages/archive/watch.arcv.php?v=5217>) [Last accessed 7 February 2017].

<sup>130</sup> See also Arps 1988; Grasveld 1988.

<sup>131</sup> <http://in.beeldengeluid.nl/kanaal/2532-de-kolonie-nederlands-indi/2541-mas-soemo-bojong> [Last accessed 7 February 2017]. Kurosawa (1987:105) mentions the title of the film, without any further data, in her list 'Films made in Java'.

to the message. Comparable persuasive techniques were applied by Indosiar and in *Mbangun Desa* in the 1990s.



II.1 Village head in *Tanah Sabrang*



II.2 Village head in *Mas Soemo Bojong*

Several new types of wayang were developed with persuasive aims in mind during the Japanese occupation (Brandon 1967:285; Kurosawa 1987:83-84), the Revolution years and early independence (Brandon 1967:286-294). In the 1960s, the LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute of the People's Culture) propagated its ideology by means of traditional drama (Yuliantri and Dahlan 2008:337-384), using the satirical humour of ludruk to win the hearts of the people (Yuliantri and Dahlan 2008:373-379) (see Chapter 4).

Under the New Order, various parties including the Indonesian government and the military as well as commercial and other sponsors made extensive use of live performances and mediated shows on cassette tapes, radio and television to disseminate their messages. The Department of Information (Departemen Penerangan, Deppen) investigated the potential of local performance genres. In special programmes but also on a regular basis, it trained and instructed the messengers (Surjodiningrat 1982; *Pesan-pesan* 1995): the performers of wayang kulit (Yampolsky 1995:711; Clara van Groenendael 1985) and wayang golek, kethoprak (Wijaya and F.A. Sutjipto 1977:45; Hatley 1985:202), horse dance (*jaran kepang*) (Clara van Groenendael 2008) and other art forms belonging to the traditional sphere, like ludruk, Srimulat and dhagelan. The more relaxed comic scenes proved to be the best suited to this purpose, with servants or nursemaids (*emban*) voicing the messages. Special compositions (*gendhing*), like the Family Planning song (*Gendhing Keluarga Berencana*) and the song propagating reforestation (*Gendhing Penghijauan*), or messages inserted in the lyrics (*tembang*) or the vocal interjections (*senggakan*) championing family planning or mutual co-operation (Gotong Royong) became well-known.

The building of the nation and the development of the country (*pembangunan*) were the main themes of government campaigns. Development information was tailored to the goals of the Five-Year Development Plans (Repelita), as designed by the New Order government (Soemardjan and Breazeale 1993; Yampolsky 1995; Hellman 2003). Alongside India and Malaysia, Indonesia was seen as 'a front-runner in instrumentalizing her rich potential of folk



culture for government sponsored messages' (Oepen 1988:59); television was the central agent for the promotion of this 'paradigm of development' in these countries (Nain 2000:146).

One of the largest persuasive media spectacles ever in the country was the Indonesia-wide broadcast of *Genta Indonesia* on the evening of 16 February 1998, at the height of the monetary and economic crisis. The result of a co-operation between all official Indonesian mass media institutions, the show was one continuous request for contributions (in the form of US currency or gold) to support the Indonesian Foreign Currency Reserves, couched in the form of an emotional appeal to the feelings of unity of the people and the nation. In an array of media genres, artists and officials voiced the persuasive slogans and messages. Srimulat celebrities were given a prominent role in propagating love for the rupiah, the Indonesian currency (Bogaerts in Arps et al. *Being with media* Forthcoming).

Looking ahead to the following chapters and with this concise historical flash-back in mind, we are justified in calling the informative and persuasive techniques used by and in Javanese media a tradition. Just as in the past, the embedding of informative and persuasive messages in a Javanese cultural setting, the use of Javanese as the language of communication and the featuring of Javanese cultural expressions continued to be approved practices and therefore they were implemented by TVRI Yogyakarta and Indosiar as the analyses in Part II will demonstrate.

Messages from commercial sponsors, in particular producers of traditional herbal medicine and the clove cigarette industry (for example, Gudang Garam), had already appeared on live shows and in radio broadcasts of traditional performance genres. Consequently, the commercialization of these genres on television was not a new phenomenon but their scale did increase dramatically. In the following chapter, I shall elaborate on the localizing of persuasion as it was communicated by private television stations targeting Javanese audiences.

