
THE “CRISIS OF THE *SINDEN*”: GENDER, POLITICS, AND MEMORY IN THE PERFORMING ARTS OF WEST JAVA, 1959-1964

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During the 1950s, there was a *wayang* [puppet theater performance] in Cimahi [West Java], at Pa Idin’s house if I’m not mistaken, where the *sinden* [female singer] was Upit Sarimanah. The first time Upit sang, three people died, seven were seriously wounded, ten suffered minor ailments, scores lost their children, many lost their dates, and several lost their spouses. Who knows how many lost their wallets! This report may be an exaggeration. But someone did die on that occasion, they say. We can understand—at the time Upit was extremely popular. No doubt the audience was huge. Until the [last] *gong* sounded, people moved about constantly, that’s for sure. Mothers lost track of their children, girlfriends went unattended, men forgot their wives, and children were pressed together tightly in the crowd. It was this kind of crowd that thieves throve upon.¹

Published in 1966, less than a year after the Indonesian government had carried out one of the bloodiest massacres in modern history, the preceding account memorializes the sound of a woman’s voice and the violence that it allegedly engendered. The writer makes a curious move to produce a causal link between loss or calamity and the

¹ Emaj Dien Machmud, “Hiburan Wayang Golek,” *Tjampaka* 32 (1966): 18.

performance by a female singer (*sinden*)² at a *wayang golek* (puppet theater event).³ He slides abruptly from flatly reporting the staging of a performance at a certain location and the identity of the singer in that performance into a secondhand account of strange and mysterious occurrences, tragedies, ailments, and loss. The report portrays a popular female singer as both the object of mass audience attention and the cause of social chaos, theft, and even murder.

Social and political contestations of authority and power during this politically tumultuous period of Indonesian history were performed on stage and recorded in various discursive spheres, including spoken and written discourse. *Sinden* drew large crowds, and newspaper and personal accounts characterize scenes inspired by the singers as carnivalesque, chaotic, and sometimes even violent. *Wayang* aficionado and writer, K. S. Kostaman, has termed the period 1959-64, tellingly, the *krisis sinden*, or the "*sinden* crisis."⁴ Not coincidentally, the *sinden* crisis coincides with Sukarno's Guided Democracy (1959-65), a period in Indonesian history characterized by the weakening of the state, economic hardship, and rampant political factionalism.

In Sundanese *wayang golek* puppet theater troupes of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the popularity of *sinden* among audiences eclipsed even that of the traditionally dominant male puppeteer (*dalang*). As the saying went, "the *sinden* is accompanied by the *dalang*, rather than the *dalang* accompanied by the *sinden*."⁵ As *sinden* gained popularity within *wayang golek* troupes, they were raised up on tables so that men in the audience could see their bodies and facial expressions, diverting attention away from the *dalang* and the puppets (Figure 1 and Figure 2). *Sinden* not only sang the latest popular songs of the day, but they moved their bodies and danced onstage in ways that men found sexually provocative. The remarkable shift in audience attention led Sundanese author and cultural critic, Ajip Rosidi, to comment that "people came [to *wayang* performances] *only* to watch the *pasinden* and not to watch *wayang* or listen to the *dalang*'s story" (emphasis mine).⁶

The *sinden* crisis became so severe that *dalang* formed a government-sponsored organization, backed by the army and police, to halt what Dalang Barnas Somantri called "a parasitic plant overtaking an old tree."⁷ A conference was held in 1964, in

² Sundanese singers and musicians that I interviewed for this article tend to use the term "*sinden*" in spoken communication, rather than more formal terms, including the Sundanese "*pasinden*" or the Indonesian "*pesinden*," which are often used in written communication.

³ *Wayang golek purwa* is the rod-puppet theater tradition most frequently performed for Sundanese-speaking audiences in West Java. The repertoire consists of tales derived from the Ramayana and Mahabharata story cycles. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to Sundanese *wayang golek purwa* throughout this article as *wayang golek*.

⁴ K. S. Kostaman, "Kapasinden di Tatar Sunda Rek Dikumahakeun Deui?" *Manglé* 976 (1984): 49.

⁵ "... da istilahna oge, Dalang disindenan . . . sanes Sinden didalangan." Elan Surawisastra, "Prasaran: Elan Surawisastra," in *Buku Pangeling-ngeling Seminar Padalangan* (Bandung: Jajasan Padalangan Djawa Barat, 1964), p. 81. I will refer to this publication as *BPSP* hereafter.

⁶ "Orang pun datang untuk menonton pasinden dan bukan untuk menonton wayang atau mendengarkan cerita dalang." Ajip Rosidi, "Ciri-Ciri Manusia dan Kebudayaan Sunda," in *Masyarakat Sunda dan Kebudayaanya*, ed. E. Ekadjati (Jakarta: Girmukti Pasaka, 1984), p. 120.

⁷ In his speech at the 1969 Indonesian Wayang Week (*Pekan Wayang Indonesia*), Somantri used the Sundanese proverb "Jati kasilih ku junti" which means literally "an old kind of tree overtaken by a parasitic plant." Barnas Somantri, "Masalah Padalangan Dewasa Ini" [The Contemporary Art of the *Dalang*] in *Pekan Wajang Indonesia, 1969* (Jakarta: Panitia Pekan Wajang Indonesia, 1969).

which the association proposed a code of ethics to "ban" the dancing, interactive songs, and other practices that had made performances so exciting and energizing to its audiences.⁸ The conference led to the shaping of public policy to contain female performers' behavior, movements, songs, and dress onstage. Female singers were reprimanded, and efforts were made to subdue their status, both in terms of their physical position onstage and their performance practice.⁹



Figure 1. A performance of Sundanese *wayang golek* featuring *sinden*, Upit Sarimanah, elevated on a table above the *dalang* and male instrumentalists (c. 1960). Credit: the author.

In this article, I address the following questions: how did *sinden*, the only female members of the *wayang golek* troupe, gain such a privileged position in a performance genre dominated by men? Why did the Indonesian state become involved in local Sundanese performing arts at this particular historical juncture and in this particular way? What were the underlying material and cultural conditions that made it possible to imagine a crisis concerning female singers coupled with a national political crisis?

I describe major changes in musical repertoire, style, aesthetics, and technology, leading up to the period 1959-64, often called the "era of the *sinden*" (*jaman sinden*). I show that the changing performance practices of the *sinden* in *wayang golek* troupes and the unruly scenes that resulted were grounded in the political ferment of the period. The changing role of *sinden*, characterized as a crisis, brought together a discourse of

⁸ Borrowing from a Soviet model in which the performing arts were considered the symbolic weapons of Western imperialism, Sukarno fulminated against "Western music, Western dancing, and the hula hoop" during Guided Democracy. Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951-1963* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 186.

⁹ Williams notes examples of the performance stage as a feminized space in other performing arts. Sean Williams, "Constructing Gender in Sundanese Music," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 30 (1998): 74-84.

national (dis)integration and local performing arts. Their dominance in performance and increased economic power challenged the authority of the *dalang*, and posed a threat to conventional gender relations, in response to which the authority of the state was invoked to contain *sinden*. I contend that the *sinden* crisis was a struggle over cultural authority, and that these struggles had, and continue to have, important ideological stakes. The narrative of crisis in the performing arts serves as the focal point from which to analyze these competing ideological positions.¹⁰

Sinden in Historical Perspective

The first appearance of the female singer as part of a *wayang golek* performance occurred in the late nineteenth century, when Nyi Arwat sang in a performance led by Dalang Bradjanata.¹¹ According to *wayang* scholar Kathy Foley, female singer/dancers called *ronggeng* were “co-opted” by *dalang* as a way of drawing their audiences to *wayang golek*:

Formerly, it is said, female performers, called *ronggeng*, working with small orchestras, would collect viewers by the roadside. Men would request songs, and the *ronggeng* would sing and dance with viewers in return for a gift of money. Private parties could be arranged, and the *ronggeng* would entertain a male audience. Drinking might accompany such a gathering, and money might be passed to the *ronggeng* in unusual ways—from lip to lip or tucked between her breasts. *Ronggeng* were esteemed for their easy virtue. One of the places that *ronggeng* [sic] was sure to find a gathered crowd was at a *wayang*. Presumably the *ronggeng* began as competition for the *dalang*, drawing his audience away, but soon she was co-opted.¹²

Drawing the *ronggeng*'s audience to the *wayang* would have certainly eliminated competition between the two separate performance events.¹³ Foley suggests that this process of “co-optation” established the basis for future economic relations between the *sinden* and the *dalang*, in which the *sinden* became dependent on the troupe for her livelihood.¹⁴ By co-opting female singers, the *dalang* solidified his authority and control over them. However, the relative status of *sinden* and *dalang* did not remain the same, and it varied according to the status of individual performers. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, certain *sinden* enjoyed such a heightened level of popularity that *dalang* became economically dependent on them.

¹⁰ I would like to thank Suzanne Brenner, Yoseph Iskandar, Henry Spiller, Ricardo D. Trimillos, Sarah Weiss, Sean Williams, Philip Yampolsky, Ben Zimmer, and one anonymous reader for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts.

¹¹ M. A. Salmun, *Padalangan*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Dinas Penerbitan Balai Pustaka, 1961), p. 205.

¹² Kathy Foley, “The Sundanese Wayang Golek: The Rod Puppet Theatre of West Java” (PhD dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1979), 89-90.

¹³ Elan Surawisastra presented a somewhat different view. He told me that the first *ronggeng wayang* were patronized by the *Bupati* of Bandung, around the turn of the century. The *Bupati* also hired his own *dalang*, and at some point the *Bupati* asked the *dalang* and the *ronggeng* to perform together. Elan Surawisastra, personal communication, June 16, 1994.

¹⁴ Similar economic arrangements are common in central Javanese *wayang kulit*. See Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 181.

Ronggeng—the singer/dancer/entertainer/prostitute—were firmly established in several famous *wayang* troupes by the 1930s.¹⁵ The two top *dalang* of the day, Dalang Uyut Suwanda (in Bandung) and Dalang Ende Kayat (in Garut), employed "*ronggeng wayang*" as part of their respective troupes.¹⁶ During the late 1930s, most were "free agents" and not tied to a particular *dalang*.¹⁷ Many of them did eventually become husband-and-wife teams, a family structure that further solidified the power of the *dalang*/husband over his *sinden*/wife. The marriage bond has been described by Sundanese scholar, Atik Soepandi, as another example of co-optation by *dalang* to ensure that certain popular singers would sing exclusively with their troupes and no one else's.¹⁸ Marriage would also allow the *dalang* to control the *sinden*'s sexuality, restricting her availability to hosts or guests.

Previous to the 1930s, Sundanese female singer/dancers accompanied by gamelan were defined as *ronggeng*, but their status began to change as they participated more actively in the *wayang* troupe. During 1933–36, *sinden* were broadcast over VORO and VORL, the Dutch colonial radio stations based in Jakarta (Batavia) and Bandung, respectively.¹⁹ During the 1940s, about forty well-known *sinden* could be heard on the radio in towns and villages throughout West Java.²⁰ Particular songs were associated with individual singers, known as their *kostim* or signature tunes.²¹ Names of singers were mentioned along with the names of *dalang* in radio advertisements as early as 1942.²² Recordings of *wayang golek* featured the names of the female singer on individual discs and in recording company advertisements and catalogues.²³ The

¹⁵ For European characterizations of Sundanese *ronggeng* as disruptive influences on respectable society, see Henry Spiller, "Erotic Triangles: Sundanese Men's Improvisational Dance in West Java, Indonesia" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2001), pp. 52–102. For information on *ronggeng* in other parts of Indonesia, see David Goldsworthy, "Melayu Music of North Sumatra" (PhD dissertation, Monash University, 1979) (Sumatra); R. Anderson Sutton, "'Who is the *Pesindhen*?' Notes on the Female Singing Tradition in Java," *Indonesia* 37 (1984): 119–33 (central Java); Paul Wolbers, "Gandrung and Angklung from Banyuwangi: Remnants of a Past Shared with Bali," *Asian Music* 18,1 (1986): 71–90 (east Java); Robert Hefner, "The Politics of Popular Art: Tayuban Dance and Culture Change in East Java," *Indonesia* 43 (1987): 75–94 (east Java); and R. T. A. Lysloff, "Srikandhi Dances Lengger: A Performance of Music and Shadow Theater in Banyumas (West Central Java)" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991) (western central Java).

¹⁶ Taryat, personal communication, July 16, 1994. Taryat first performed *wayang golek* with a *sinden* in 1934. See also Salmun, *Padalangan*, p. 205, and Kostaman, "Kapasindenan," p. 23.

¹⁷ Nyi Arnesah was an exception because she was married to the *dalang* Partasuwanda.

¹⁸ Atik Soepandi, *Tetekon Padalangan Pasundan* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1988), p. 46.

¹⁹ Salmun states that radio broadcasts began in 1935 (Salmun, *Padalangan*, p. 211). Nji Warnasari, among others, is said to have been a star of VORO. See Roesjan, "Lalaguan di Pasundan," *Budaya* 13 (n.d. [1956?]): 25. These radio associations were later merged into one main Jakarta-based organization, "The Association of Oriental Radio Broadcasting" (Perikatan Perkoempoelan Radio Ketimoeran, or PPRK), which continued its operation until the Japanese occupation of Indonesia in 1942. See Judith B. Agassi, *Mass Media in Indonesia* (Boston: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1969), p. 54.

²⁰ Roesjan, "Lalaguan," p. 25.

²¹ *Kostim* may also refer to specific ornaments or *senggol* associated with a particular singer.

²² "Programma radio," *Sinar Pasoendan* 29, February 6, 1942, p. 6, advertises a radio program for February 7, 1942 that lists Partasowanda as *dalang*, performing the *lakon* (plot) "Kombajana's Secret" ("Rasiah Kombajana") and Nji Arnesah as *penjanji* (singer). At 8:45 pm, the *wayang* begins, but lasts for only forty-five minutes, ostensibly to draw people to listen to the news at 9:30. At 9:45 pm, the *wayang* resumes and continues until 5:45 am, the next morning. The program was also broadcast (*direlay*) on VORL and Noesantara.

²³ Female singer, Iti, appears on a recording of the *lakon* "Pergiwa Pergiwati" with *dalang* Emon (Odeon A278259 ab/cd/ef); female singer, Si Heulang, appears on a recording of *lakon* "Indramana" with *dalang*

popularity of certain singers was enhanced by these radio broadcasts and recordings, which favored the audio component of *wayang golek*. Subsequently, touring *wayang golek* troupes based in the cities of Jakarta and Bandung brought *sinden* to outlying areas, where audiences came to performances to see the singers they had heard on radio and recordings.

Wayang golek troupes based in Sundanese cities traveled from the city to rural areas in west Java. These touring troupes helped to spread modern notions about female professional artisans. Although women had become active in education and political organizations beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century, these efforts affected primarily urban middle- and upper-class women. Audiences for *wayang golek*, however, were often rural and subaltern. The image of a woman as an individualized star performer disrupted two dominant meanings attached to women during the period: 1) the idealized role of women, or *kodrat*—an “Islam-inspired code of conduct based on women’s intrinsic ‘nature,’” in which they should be “meek, passive, obedient to the male members of the family, sexually shy and modest, self-sacrificing and nurturing, and that they should find their main vocation in marriage and motherhood”;²⁴ and 2) the sexualized role of the singer/dancer/entertainer/prostitute (*ronggeng*).²⁵

During the early 1940s, Arnesah, a singer in a popular *wayang golek* troupe, initiated several reforms that changed the *sinden*’s image, repertoire, and behavior. Arnesah was considered modern (*majengan*) and not old fashioned (*buhun*). Previously, *sinden* had sung only *sisindiran* lyrics, four-line couplets fitted to formulaic melodies. Arnesah’s repertoire reflected the new style of composition (*wanda anyar*), through-composed songs involving set melodies, set male and female parts, and instrumental arrangements.²⁶ In 1943, Arnesah attempted to “clean up” the image of the female singer for *wayang golek* by systematically differentiating them from the village-based *ronggeng*. Arnesah, and her husband Partasuwanda, began promoting singers as “*jurusinden*” (“expert [at] singing”) rather than the less respectable “*ronggeng wayang*,” and insisted that their singers no longer participate in other kinds of village-based performance. As Arnesah (using the penname “Nyi A.”) wrote in a magazine article in 1964: “*jurukawih* [expert (at) *kawih*] and *jurusekar* [expert (at) *sekar*] are not *ronggeng*; they are female artists who promote [*ngagungkeun*, literally, ‘elevate’] the culture of

Parta Soewanda (Odeon A278345 ab/cd/ef); and female singer, Oeneh, appears on a recording of *lakon* “Bradja Moesti” with *dalang* Emon (Odeon A278392 ab/cd/ef). According to Philip Yampolsky, who has conducted extensive research on the history of the Indonesian recording industry, these recordings were probably released during the late 1930s.

²⁴ Saskia Wieringa, “Sexual Metaphors in the Change From Soekarno’s Old Order to Soeharto’s New Order in Indonesia,” *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 32,2 (1998).

²⁵ The emergent image of a woman as a valorized and elevated performer (*sinden*) conflicted with the dominant image of the sexualized singer/dancer/entertainer/prostitute (*ronggeng*). *Sinden* were members of specific *wayang golek* troupes, whereas *ronggeng* were hired for individual events. Recordings helped to produce this distinction between *sinden* and *ronggeng* by separating the *sinden*’s voice from her sexualized and performative body. I am not suggesting that *ronggeng* were less respectable than *sinden*, but I do claim that the representations of and meanings attached to women changed around this time, because of this shift from *ronggeng* to *sinden*.

²⁶ Imik Suwarsih, personal communication, November 22, 1994.

Indonesia."²⁷ The name change, from "*ronggeng*" to "*juru sinden*," as well as "*jurukawih*" and "*jurusekar*," was an effort to create an image of female artists whose well-mannered, controlled, and respectable behavior would contribute to the discourse of Indonesian nation-building.

These newly fashioned artisans differentiated themselves further from *ronggeng* by becoming musical innovators. *Sinden* introduced new compositions—newly composed melodies and texts accompanied by traditional gamelan structures (for example, *Kulu-kulu*, as indicated in the chart below). The following chart lists just a few examples of new compositions and the *sinden* who introduced them during the period 1945-48:²⁸

Composition	<i>Sinden</i>
"Kulu-kulu Syanghay"	Nji Warnasari
"Katjang Asin"; "Nasi Goreng"; "Djambal Roti"	Nji Rohanah
"Dodol Garut"	Nji Mene
"Hajam ngupuk"; "Kangkung Bandung"; "Badingdong";	Nji Arnesah
"Kelom geulis"; "Pangungsi"; "Suria medal"; "Kulu-kulu	
Langlajangan"; "Sinar Gumilang"; "Djangger";	
"Gandawesi"; "Tepang sono"; "Balon ngapung";	
"Sukarela"; "Ontjom Bandung"; "Badjigur Bandung";	
"Berdjuang"; Sumur Bandung"; "Betja"; "Oraj Welang";	
"Ronda Malem"; and "Ti Djogdja ka Garut"	
"Kulu-kulu Nirom"	Nji Epon
"Entog"; "Singkajo"	Nji Idas
"Kulu-kulu Batin"	Nji Dasima

It is not clear to what extent the *sinden* "composed" the music or lyrics they sung.²⁹ Much. A Affandie notes that the compositions introduced to the public by Arnesah, for example, were composed by her husband Partasuwanda.³⁰ Sundanese *sinden* active both before and after this era were credited as composers (of melodies and lyrics accompanied by pre-existing gamelan structures); for example, Ibu Mursih composed "Es Lilin" during the 1930s, and Iyar Wiarsih composed "Mojang Priangan" in 1960.³¹ Despite the fact that many songs were composed by men, the contribution of the *sinden* as "performer/composer" must be taken into account here. Songs were learned orally, lyrics were often interchangeable in performance, and each singer had her own

²⁷ "djurukawih sareng djurusekar teh sanes ronggeng, nanging seniwati anu ngagungkeun budaja Indonesia." Nyi A [Arnesah], "Bedana Ronggeng djeung Djurukawih," *Sari* 19 (1964): 12.

²⁸ Data for this chart are based on an article by Much. A Affandie, "Sadjarahna lagu-lagu nu alanjar," in *Kandaga, Djilid III*, ed. M. A. Salmun (Bandung: Ganaco, 1957), pp. 81-84.

²⁹ The phenomenon of Sundanese female singers as composers contrasts sharply with Central Javanese practice. Susan Pratt Walton, who has done extensive research on female singers in Central Java, knows of only one Javanese woman composer for gamelan-related genres. See Susan Pratt Walton, "Recasting a Traditional Javanese Gamelan Gendhing: The Dynamics of Personal Agency, Musical Innovation and Trauma" (unpublished paper, 1995).

³⁰ Affandie, "Sadjarahna lagu-lagu nu alanjar," p. 82.

³¹ K. S. Kostaman, "Es Lilin Ibu Mursih jeung Mojang Priangan Iyar Wiarsih," *Kawit* 35, V-III (1983): 8.

distinctive style of ornamentation (*senggol*).³² *Sinden*, particularly those who introduced new songs to the public, helped to create the song's lyrical and musical content, as well as the song's mood or feeling, through her improvised performance of the tune. They not only placed their own individual stamp on the song, but the songs were identified with particular singers and not with the composer, whose names were rarely known by the public.



Figure 2. *Sinden* Upit Sarimanah singing at a *wayang golek* performance (c. 1960). Credit: the author.

Another way that female performers began to change their image was by using a different approach to stage names. During the 1930s, the *ronggeng wayang* went by bird names, including "Si Gagak," "Si Kelong," "Si Koreak," "Si Walet," "Si Puyuh," and others.³³ By the 1950s, *sinden* had become regular members of the troupe, and, as their role increased, they began using their own names.³⁴ They also began using the more

³² *Sinden* usually learn melodies in collaborative group sessions led by a *rebab* player. (A *rebab* is a two-string spike fiddle.)

³³ Kostaman, "Kapasinden," pp. 22-23.

³⁴ Kostaman notes that there were non-bird names as well, including "Si Manis" (sweet), "Si Kalong" (fruit-eating bat), "Si Manyar" (weaverbird flower), "Si Piit" (type of small flower), "Si Pecut" (whip), "Si Layung" (evening glow), "Si Leunyay" (defined in a Sundanese dictionary as a kind of luminous

respectable and distant form of address "*Nyi*" rather than the intimate title "*Si*." For example, *Si Gagak* (Miss "Crow") became *Nyi Kasiah*, and *Si Koreak* (Miss "Koreak" [a type of bird]) became *Nyi Idah*. Singers began using their full names: *Nyi Imik* re-emerged as *Imik Suwarsih*; *Nyi Upit* returned to *Upit Sarimanah*; *Nyi Omah* resurfaced as *Omah Komasih*; *Nyi Engkay* was revitalized as *Engkay Sukarsih*; and *Nyi Empat* reappeared as *Titim Fatimah*. By using their own names, they began to assert their own identities as real human beings, rather than as animals ("song birds"). The increase in the number of syllables also signaled a higher status.

Furthermore, *sinden* began to play an increasingly significant musical role in the narrative component of the *wayang* story. Previously, they sang only occasionally to give the *dalang* a rest, but during the early 1950s, specifically in Bogor and Sukabumi, their repertoire had to include not only *lagu kawih* (metered songs performed as interludes and dramatic pieces), but *kakawen* (unmetered "mood songs") and *pangkat lagu* (melodic introductions to instrumental pieces).³⁵ In those regions, the *sinden* were more integrated as part of the total theatrical performance.

Electronic amplification also contributed to the increasing prominence of the female singers. Amplification, which was first used during the 1950s, could reinforce the prominence of the new breed of *sinden*.³⁶ With regard to being heard above the musical ensemble, amplification proved to be a greater advantage to *sinden* than it was to *dalang*. A *dalang*'s narration was not accompanied by gamelan, and *kakawen* ("mood songs") sung by the *dalang* were accompanied by only a small subset of the ensemble. In contrast, the *sinden* always sang with the full ensemble. Therefore, the differences perceived by spectators after amplification was introduced would be more salient in relation to the *sinden*.³⁷

Spectators began to discern fine aesthetic distinctions between singers. These distinctions had significant implications for spectators' class identifications. *Imik Suwarsih* relates a story in which the elite composer, R. T. A. Sunarya, characterized *Upit*'s voice as "*suara emas*" (golden voice) because it was "*lemes*" and "*ampuh*" ("refined" and "magical"); *Imik*'s voice had the multifaceted quality of a diamond (*berlian*) because of her extensive use of ornaments (*seueur senggol*).³⁸ *Tati Saleh*, a successful female singer of the 1970s and 1980s, noted the differences in vocal production between *Upit Sarimanah* and *Titim Fatimah*.³⁹ To be a fan of *Upit* and her "golden voice" was to signify sophistication, urbanity, and respectability, whereas fans of *Titim*'s tended to be raucous, rough, and unrefined. These distinctions were reflected in the two singers' respective singing styles and repertoires. According to *Tati Saleh*, *Upit*'s vocal production was "buried in her chest," similar to a *juru penembang* (a

millipede, "which is said to enter people's ears when they're sleeping"), and "*Si Mata Roda*" (round eyes). *Kostaman*, "Dari Ronggeng Sampai Jurukawih," *Kawit* 16, IV-II (n.d.): 11.

³⁵ *Imik Suwarsih*, personal communication, November 22, 1994.

³⁶ *Dalang Sapa'at Suwanda* cites the first usage of public address systems in *wayang golek* performance as taking place in 1955 in Jakarta. By 1956, top *dalang* in Bandung were already using them. *Dalang Sapa'at Suwanda*, personal communication, May 3, 1994.

³⁷ Sutton makes this point in relation to cassette recordings of Javanese gamelan music. Sutton, "Who is the *Pesindhen?*," p. 119.

³⁸ *Imik Suwarsih*, personal communication, November 22, 1994.

³⁹ *Tati Saleh*, personal communication, July 15, 1994.

tembang Sunda singer).⁴⁰ Titim produced tones “in her head,” and the vocal quality was open, loud, transparent, and more like a *sinden*. Upit appealed to the upper classes (including *pejabat*, or the official class), whereas Titim’s audience was the *rakyat* (the people).

By the 1950s, the *dalang* and the *sinden* of *wayang golek* troupes were inseparable and played complementary roles. She “[was] the left arm, and he the right arm.”⁴¹ As Soepandi writes:

[the relationship] between the *dalang* and *juru kawih* was like sweet and sour, a flower and its scent, a lamp and its light.⁴²

However, it seems that the fans’ interest was increasingly drawn to the singers, who satisfied audience demands for *wayang golek* to become a more interactive space than it ever had been. These shifts in audience attention coincided with the demise of the *ronggeng* after Independence.⁴³

The audience itself created a process that effectively placed *sinden* performance in the foreground in front of the *dalang*. Writing in 1983, Pandi Upandi, a faculty member of the government music college in Bandung, recounts that:

there was a *kapal-kapalan* attached [leading] to the *juru sinden* at the far back of the audience area.⁴⁴ So the *kapal-kapalan* was always running back and forth sending notes from the audience to the *juru sinden*. It seems as if they were still not satisfied with that method, because in addition to the *kapal-kapalan*, the *juru sinden* was equipped with a bench in the middle of the stage so that the *juru sinden* was higher than the *dalang* and the musicians. But the audience was still not pleased. They eliminated the *kapal-kapalan*. To send notes, they arranged to deliver them individually to the *juru sinden*, because her position had changed. The *sinden* was no longer sitting on a bench, but she was equipped with a special place at the right-hand edge of the stage located prominently in front.⁴⁵

Upandi posits that, through song requests, the audience was actually able to control the pacing, flow, and duration of the performance, as well as the configuration of the entire *wayang golek* performance stage area. Although men in the audience were no longer placing money between the *sinden*’s breasts, these changes in performance staging allowed men to interact with the *sinden* by passing her personal notes (with money enclosed).

The *sinden*’s rise in musical, social, and economic status posed a threat to *dalang* and officials associated with *wayang golek* because *dalang* were no longer the main

⁴⁰ *Tembang Sunda* is a vocal genre accompanied by *kacapi* (zither) and *suling* (flute).

⁴¹ “djurusinden teh leungeun kentja, ari dalang leungeun katuhu.” Salmun, *Padalangan*, p. 201.

⁴² Soepandi, *Tetekon Padalangan*, p. 45.

⁴³ Kathy Foley, “Of Gender and Dance in Southeast Asia: From Goddess to Go-Go Girl,” in *Proceedings of the 20th Anniversary CORD Conference* (New York: Congress on Research in Dance, 1989), p. 57.

⁴⁴ The *kapal-kapalan* was a rope-and-pulley system which allowed spectators to transport notes to the *sinden* by attaching notes to a rope or string. Burhan Sukarma, personal communication, December 28, 1995.

⁴⁵ Pandi Upandi, *Pengetahuan Karawitan: Latar Belakang dan Perkembangan Karawitan Sunda* (Bandung: Proyek Pengembangan Institut Kesenian Indonesia/ Sub Proyek Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia Bandung, 1983/84), pp. 26-28.

attraction. For Sundanese, the *sinden* Upit Sarimanah's popularity was greater than any performer of her era. As one musician told me, "America had Elvis, Indonesia had Upit. Men showered her with money, land, and even cars."⁴⁶ *Dalang* who had either lost their popularity or never achieved it could become well known by playing with famous *sinden*, as was the case with *Dalang* Gandaatmadja who often "accompanied" Titim Fatimah.⁴⁷ Although not all *dalang* were relegated to a position subordinate to the *sinden* in the troupe, the possibility of such a fall in status caused great anxiety for even the most popular *dalang*.

Dalang and *sinden* were hired separately, and it was often the *sinden* who was commissioned by hosts before the *dalang*. Imik Suwarsih, a famous *sinden* during the period, explains:

In the past, the *dalang* called the shots, but after Independence, the *sinden* had more control. So, before hiring the *dalang*, the *sinden* [was hired] first, to avoid any conflicts. Then the *dalang*. So, "who is the *sinden*?" [the *dalang* would ask]...."Miss so-and-so" [would be the answer]...."Oh, I'll do it" [the *dalang* would reply].⁴⁸

The *sinden's* increased prominence was to produce, not only social status, but concrete economic returns for her. She began to wield more economic power than *dalang*. Based on research conducted in 1964, James Brandon reports that, in some cases, the *sinden* made five to six times what the *dalang* made.⁴⁹ During the early 1960s, *sinden* began advocating the establishment of a copyright office to control ownership rights for their compositions.⁵⁰ Iyar Wiarsih, who had composed many songs by that time, was concerned about collecting royalties on her compositions, which included the wildly popular hit song "Mojang Priangan" ("Girl of Priangan").⁵¹

Clearly, the song component of *wayang golek* performances acquired heightened significance during this era. The two most famous *sinden* during the period, Titim Fatimah and Upit Sarimanah, sang newly composed pieces, presented in new and exciting ways. Singers had become skilled musicians, innovators, and interpreters of songs. According to the composer, Nano S., who was a teenage fan of these singers during the early 1960s, people had become bored with *wayang golek*, and *dalang* were too slow to adapt to spectators' changing desires and aspirations.⁵²

But the desire for change in the realm of musical performance must be articulated with corresponding shifts in politics and economics. As the following quote indicates, it was the *voice* of singer Upit Sarimanah, one of the most popular singers of the era,

⁴⁶ Tan De Seng, personal communication, August, 2001.

⁴⁷ Musicians whom I interviewed for this article spoke critically of Gandaatmadja. Entjar Tjarmedi, personal communication, November 22, 1994; Entis Sutisna, personal communication, December 31, 1994.

⁴⁸ Imik Suwarsih, personal communication, November 22, 1994.

⁴⁹ James Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967; 1974), p. 270. Citations are to the 1974 edition.

⁵⁰ *BPSP*, p. 100.

⁵¹ In gamelan practice, a hit song can be popular for decades. For example, "Mojang Priangan" was frequently played in the context of *wayang golek* and other genres during the initial research for this article (1994). Therefore, royalties would have been considerable.

⁵² Nano S., personal communication, April 26, 1994.

which was so intoxicating that it could transport listeners from the “noisy turmoil of reality”:

Listening to her [singer Upit Sarimanah] was like being intoxicated and transported to a perfect world, free from the noisy turmoil of reality.⁵³

By examining briefly the unstable political and economic conditions of the period, we can begin to understand why *wayang* audiences craved, at least symbolically, a semblance of change. The performing arts, and the practices of the *sinden*, became the channel through which spectators could exert their agency and desire for change.

Guided Democracy

What were the political conditions and ideological components of Sukarno’s Guided Democracy?⁵⁴ The system of liberal democracy, which was in place after the Federal Republic of Indonesia was born in 1949, resulted in ideological standoffs among the sixteen parties represented in the Parliament. Coalitions among the parties were difficult to sustain, and during the period 1950-57, no fewer than seven different cabinets existed. Although elections took place in 1955, the vote was dominated by four major parties: PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia)/Indonesian Nationalist Party (22.3 percent); Masjumi/modernist Islam (20.9 percent); NU (Nahdatul Ulama)/traditional Islam (18.4 percent); and PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia)/ Indonesian Communist Party (16.4 percent). Complicating these ideological divisions was the fact that the PNI, NU, and PKI were Java-based, whereas the Masjumi was based on Sumatra and Sulawesi.

Sukarno believed that Indonesians should move away from the parliamentary system, not only because of its colonial roots, but its tendency to cause divisiveness as well. During 1957-65, Sukarno emphasized his own leadership and his corporatist vision of a National Front, consisting of political parties, mass organizations, and “functional groups” of workers, peasants, officials, intellectuals, students, and women. On August 17, 1959, he publicly established the state ideology of Guided Democracy, based on *Panca Sila* (the five principles of the state) and MANIPOL-USDEK (Sukarno’s Political Manifesto [*Manifesto Politik*] combined with a return to the 1945 constitution, Indonesian socialism, guided democracy, guided economy, and Indonesian identity).⁵⁵ A year later, he began promoting the concept of NASAKOM, based on nationalism (*nasionalisme*), religion (*agama*), and communism (*komunisme*). Sukarno rallied the parties (PNI, Masjumi, NU, and PKI) for organized political support against the army, with whom he shared power (neither Sukarno nor the army had his/its own party).

⁵³ Panitia Mieling Jasa-Yasa Ibu Hajjah Upit Sarimanah, “Mieling Jasa-Yasa Upit Sarimanah, Bandung 29-30 Oktober 1992” (program booklet, 1992), p. 13.

⁵⁴ The following information is based on four sources: Herbert Feith, “The Dynamics of Guided Democracy,” in *Indonesia*, ed. Ruth McVey (New Haven: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1963; 1967); Hindley, *The Communist Party*; M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1300* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); and R. B. Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History since 1945* (London and New York: Longman, 1993).

⁵⁵ The five principles are belief in God, nationalism, humanitarianism, social justice, and democracy. The initials composing “USDEK” derive from “Undang-undang dasar 1945,” “Socialisme a la Indonesia,” “Demokrasi terpimpin,” “Ekonomi terpimpin,” and “Kepribadian Indonesia.”

Sukarno did move closer to Communism, but partly to play the Communists off against the army and Muslim groups, both of which were threatened by the ability of the PKI to organize at the village level. Despite his political vision, charismatic leadership, and penchant for creating revolutionary national symbols, Sukarno was ineffective at running a modern state. Between 1961 and 1964, inflation skyrocketed, infrastructure collapsed, and agricultural production suffered. The killing of six generals and one lieutenant by non-commissioned officers and privates on October 1, 1965 led to the army taking control of the country under Suharto, who ruled until 1998.

The 1964 Wayang Golek Conference

During the early 1960s, the female singing tradition in *wayang golek* became identified with the national political crisis of Sukarno's Guided Democracy.⁵⁶ Cultural organizations and the popular press created a "climate of disorder... exploiting the deep anxieties of a population that was already badly shaken by the political and socioeconomic tensions of the period."⁵⁷ The practices of *dalang* and *sinden* became a matter of government intervention and national policy.⁵⁸ The "crisis of the *sinden*" led to the formation of a regional state-sponsored organization to address the crisis, the staging of a conference to discuss the crisis, and the creation of public policy to resolve it.

One of the major reasons for the establishment of the Wayang Foundation of West Java (Yayasan Pedalangan Jawa Barat) in 1961 was to enforce the preeminence of the *dalang* over the *sinden*.⁵⁹ Members of the Wayang Foundation called a meeting on February 28, 1964 that was attended by more than nine hundred people.⁶⁰ Moral and material support was provided by the Governor's office of West Java, two military posts, Police Headquarters of West Java, and the Ministry of Education and Culture.⁶¹ Based on research conducted in 1964, Brandon describes the political nature of the meeting (*italics mine*):

Female singers (*pesinden*) of *wayang golek* were vigorously condemned, and the major stated aim for instituting a strict licensing system was to shore up the *dalang's* position vis-à-vis the singer. It is extremely unusual for a voluntary

⁵⁶ For example, a Sundanese cultural magazine featured the following quote ("Upit Sarimanah Bumetah di Hegarmanah," *Panghegar* 1, December 1966, p. 29):

If you are asked the meaning of USDEK, reply that USDEK can be characterized as U-S-D-E-K: U-pit S-arimanah D-iuk E-mok K-akawihan! [Upit Sarimanah sings with her knees bent and folded to one side!]

⁵⁷ Wieringa, "Sexual Metaphors," p. 13.

⁵⁸ Hindley writes that "In January 1962 all political parties and most mass organizations were enrolled [in the National Front]. By August 1962 over 200 political parties, mass organizations, and functional groups were reported to have joined, with a total membership of 33 millions [sic]." Hindley, *The Communist Party*, p. 279. An April 1964 issue of the Sundanese newspaper, *Sipatahoenan*, reports that the Wayang Foundation will not be responsible for those who perform *wayang golek* without being properly "indoctrinated" by the National Front.

⁵⁹ R. A. Darya, quoted in Foley, "The Sundanese Wayang Golek," p. 91.

⁶⁰ *BPSP*, p. 125; Kostaman, "Kapasindenan," p. 24.

⁶¹ *BPSP*, p. 6.

artistic group to attempt to *police itself* in this way.⁶² Enforcement of the new licensing system will rest, not with the Foundation, but with the National Front, a semiofficial government agency which sees to it that private organizations support government policy.⁶³

The following discussion is based on the published transcript of conference presentations (*Buku Pangeling-ngeling Seminar Padalangan*), as well as interviews with musicians who were active during the period. There were opening remarks by the chair and vice chair of the organization, as well as cultural officials, army personnel, government officials, police officers, regional administrative heads, and Javanese *wayang* experts.⁶⁴ Following the introductory remarks, there were two main speeches by Sundanese *dalang* and responses by nineteen individuals, including seven *sinden*; the main speeches, however, were not presented by women.

In his opening speech, R. A. Darya, the head of the organization and director of the national radio station in Bandung, articulated the role of local Sundanese performing artists within the discourse of "nation-building," a term that appears in English on page nine. He noted that the revolution for Independence was still incomplete (p. 8), and characterized President Sukarno as the "great *dalang*" (p. 10). To combat what he referred to as the "problem affecting the existence [literally "body"] of our art," Darya was hoping to find "the best route for channeling the people's needs, in an orderly and civilized manner, without giving rise to anything that will harm our culture" (p. 9). For Darya, it was a matter of *sinden* not being properly "behaved" (*tata-tertib*), resulting in the degradation of *Indonesian* culture (italics mine). The demand for a disciplining of women's bodies was unambiguously being articulated with the cultural order of the Indonesian nation-state.

As director of the radio station, R. A. Darya wielded a considerable degree of power in setting the terms for performance practice. He voiced official anxiety over the chaos and excitement inspired by the female singers in no uncertain terms:

...*wayang* performance practice, at the request of the audience, has become a place for the *pasinden* to dance and the audience to go crazy, which clearly we must eliminate. (p. 9)

The main reason for calling the meeting was to reassert control over the staging of performances (*pemanggungan*), which referred to the staging of male and female performers. The reorganization of performance practice was based on eradicating the very scenes that audiences found desirable.

Dalang Elan Surawisastra flatly blamed the decline of *Padalangan* (the art of the *dalang*) on the modern *sinden*. Six or seven years before (1957-58), the art still had some "integrity," he said. However, during the period 1959-64, *wayang golek* performances were frequently interrupted just after they had begun. Elan Surawisastra related a

⁶² Within the framework of gender relations that I have outlined thus far, however, the organization was not policing itself, but it was policing women performers.

⁶³ Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, p. 214.

⁶⁴ It is not unusual at national *wayang* conferences to have a contingent of Javanese *wayang* experts present. Their authority derives from the fact that the Javanese, as an ethnic group, made up a powerful constituency in the national government. Further, it is generally believed that Javanese *wayang kulit* carries greater authenticity because it predates Sundanese *wayang golek* in Indonesia.

story in which someone from the audience requested a song and then moved the *kayon* (the buffalo-hide puppet that opens and closes every performance and serves many important dramatic functions throughout the play) because it was obstructing his view of the *sinden*.⁶⁵

The conference report focused on the details of gendered roles in performance. Surawisastra took great pains to explain the proper seating position for women, based on Javanese modes of etiquette. However, this prescription was not being followed in practice:

When they sang, they sat up straight with their heads bowed, at most, with their elbows up or with their hands on their sides. When their legs got tired from sitting with their legs to the side, they might sit *sila*, not like a man (legs crossed), but the way most Javanese women would sit. It looked polite and good to look at as they sang in *wayang*. But it so happened that the situation changed radically. The *dalang* sat below, and Miss *Sinden* was placed on a chair or table, higher than the *dalang*.⁶⁶

A number of suggestions were made to deal with these issues. Some advocated the creation of new stages so that the *sinden* could be on the same level as the *dalang*.⁶⁷ Cultural critic and author, M. A. Salmun, suggested that the *dalang* be empowered to stop the show at his discretion; he would be paid the full honorarium, putting the onus on the hosts and attending officials to keep order. The flow of performance, as well as performance fees, would be placed more firmly in the hands of *dalang*, hosts, and officials. He urged *dalang* to impede the progress (*diblokir*) of headstrong *sinden*.⁶⁸ He also encouraged *sinden* to develop an organization along the lines of the Wayang Foundation that would have the authority to deny membership to those singers who insisted on perpetuating such unacceptable behavior.⁶⁹ *Sinden* performance practice would therefore become linked to the national cultural formation, or *nationalized* through this organization, which, like the Wayang Foundation, would be affiliated with Sukarno's National Front.

However, not everyone at the conference was as alarmed as the above-mentioned speakers. A. Sunarya, the second representative *dalang*, did not agree that the *sinden* were to blame. The problem of disruptions was complex and was more likely "because the leaders of the troupe didn't understand the function and importance of *wayang* to the people."⁷⁰ In other words, it was the *dalang's* responsibility to keep order:

We are not able to refuse the wishes of the masses at this time, but have to use our heads and find a way to channel those wishes in a way that does not threaten the nature of the troupe. If we do refuse [an invitation to perform], it is certain we

⁶⁵ *BPSP*, p. 85.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81. Sundanese are quick to instruct foreigners on sitting properly, with a clear gender differentiation. My first Sundanese language lesson focused on the different words for sitting. Gender-specific humor is often used to reinforce these lessons.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ "Sinden djalingkak teu rea djumlahna, bisa diblokir ku para dalang," *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁹ "tidak menerima anggota Sinden djalingkak," *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

will not be asked back, and we will not be popular and no one will ever want to watch us again.⁷¹

Elan Surawisastra urged the *dalang* and *sinden* to present the following conditions to the host before a performance, stating that “these are the rules which have been agreed upon at the Seminar Padalangan”; if they were not agreed upon, they were urged to refuse to perform at the site:

- 1) The *pasinden* and *dalang* must sit at the same level as the musicians.
- 2) Repetitive songs (*sindir-sampir*) will be shortened and all risqué lyrics will be changed to lyrics dealing with development (*pembangunan*) and Indonesian national identity (*kepribadian*).
- 3) There will be no dancing during the *wayang*.
- 4) All songs that have *longser* scenes are to be eliminated.⁷²

Sinden were clearly disturbed by Surawisastra’s comments. Ibu Suhajaatmadja agreed with A. Sunarya that it was the *dalang*, as the leader of the troupe, who must maintain control of the overall performance flow.⁷³ The *sinden*, Iyar Wiarsih, insisted that those *sinden* raised up above the *dalang* were “an infiltration from outside the area” of Bandung, referring to the Jakarta-based *sinden* who competed with Bandung-based *sinden*.⁷⁴ She, along with Euis Banowati Komaraningsih and Ibu Suhajaatmadja, focused on another issue during the conference, arguing for the establishment of a copyright office to control ownership rights for compositions composed by *sinden*.

These objections, however, were not strong enough to keep the committee from issuing the following resolutions as part of a document titled “Rules for Mutual Respect Among Male and Female Artists” (*Sila Kahormatan Seniman-Seniwati*).⁷⁵ This document was created according to a) mandates by Coordinator of Defense and Security/Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces General A. H. Nasution and Minister of Education and Culture Prijono; b) the advice of regional military and civil authorities; c) deliberations by the top *dalang* of the day (Elan Surawisastra, R. U. Partasuwanda, R. Gunawan Djajakusumah, Engkin Sukatmamuda, A. Sunarya, and Somasondjaja Sukatmaputra); and d) rebuttals by conference participants at a special session. Specific resolutions were as follows:⁷⁶

A. Internal (for performers):

3. In principle, male and female *wayang* performing artists are to be considered equal in value and rank. Given that, efforts have to be made to put them onstage at the same level.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁷² *Longser* is a Sundanese theatrical genre that involves dialogue between the performers and the audience.

⁷³ *BPSP*, p. 102.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

⁷⁵ The word “*sila*” has two separate meanings: “moral principle” and “cross-legged (i.e., male) sitting posture.”

⁷⁶ *BPSP*, pp. 125-26.

4. There must be discipline written into the formation of an ethical code (principles of respect) among male and female *wayang* performing artists.
5. There must be good manners with respect to staging.

3. *Dalam principenja seniman/seniwati pedalangan sedjadjar harkat dan deradjatnja. Oleh karena itu pemanggungan harus diichtiarkan tempatnja jang sedjadjar pula.*
4. *Harus ada disiplin jang tertulis jang merupakan code ethiek (sila kehormatan) seniman/seniwati pedalangan. Oleh karena itu ditetapkan sila kehormatan terlampir.*
5. *Harus ada kesponanan dalam pemanggungan.*

B. External (for the government):

2. To ban all manners of staging that create artistic chaos (those that transform *wayang golek* performances into dance parties or threaten moral behavior).
3. The Cultural Inspectorate, National Front, and other affiliated government offices should demonstrate tangible guidance to *wayang golek* performers.

2. *Melarang segala tjara pemanggungan jang dapat menimbulkan keonaran kesenian (merobah pertundjukkan wayang golek djadi djoged atau tjara² pertundjukkan jang melanggar susila).*
3. *Inspeksi Kebudayaan, Front Nasional dan badan² Pemerintah lainnja jang ada hubungannja supaja memberi bimbingan jang njata kepada seniman/seniwati Pedalangan.*

C. For the people:

2. People are asked to care for and protect the art of *wayang* by preventing *wayang golek* performances from becoming dance parties or performances that threaten moral behavior.
3. Those that sponsor performances of *wayang golek* are asked to fulfill the promises which have already been agreed upon before the show between those who request the performance and those presenting the performance.

2. *Masyarakat diminta agar ikut mengawasi dan melindungi seni pedalangan dengan djalan mentjegah adanja pertundjukkan wajang golek jang dirobah mendjadi perdjogedan dan tjara² pertundjukkan jang melanggar susila.*
3. *Masyarakat jang mengadakan pertundjukkan wajang golek diminta agar memenuhi perdjandjian² jang telah disetudjuinja sebelum pemanggungan antara jang meminta pemanggungan dan jang memberi pertundjukkan.*

The committee decided that these resolutions should be made known to all performers and people who patronize *wayang golek* throughout West Java and sent to all government institutions involved. Such a widespread campaign was never carried out, but it certainly had a chilling effect on *sinden*. While the efforts of the Wayang Foundation may appear to have been unsuccessful, an analysis of the 1964 conference transcript helps to illuminate the politics of gender and performance in the Guided Democracy period.

The *sinden* as an object of state cultural policy has interesting implications for the public representation of women and state power. Daniel S. Lev states that:

In neither the parliamentary nor Guided Democracy (1959-65) periods was there a public effort to distinguish ideologically between men and women. There was lack of interest and the usual condescension. The monument to the revolution at Pejambon, whose kneeling woman offers rice to a heroically alert guerrilla, states a common position, but no government until the present one [the New Order] tried to transform that concrete into doctrine.⁷⁷

The state-sponsored resolutions cited in the "Rules for Mutual Respect Among Male and Female Artists" did not officially stipulate that *sinden* be subordinate to *dalang*, as the kneeling woman was subordinate to an alert guerrilla, but that the *sinden* and *dalang* should be "in principle...equal in value and rank." However, these attempts to regulate her movements, behavior, repertoire, and involvement in the pacing and flow of performance were clearly designed to prevent her from occupying a dominant position in relation to the *dalang*.⁷⁸ The discourse of crisis surrounding the *sinden* and written prescriptions to regulate her conduct were state-sponsored attempts to construct a certain kind of gendered social relation, specifically, one in which women could not be symbolically more prominent than men. They were important and valued only insofar as they could be placed within the framework of a social order.

There were, however, concrete ideological struggles that directly involved the performance of *sinden*. *Sinden* were recruited by contending political parties to attract crowds, thus opening up public spaces for the circulation of political messages.⁷⁹ *Sinden* were accused of supporting the PKI, the Indonesian Communist Party, by singing at PKI-supported performances of *wayang golek*. *Sinden* performed at events sponsored by LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, the People's Cultural Association), the artistic wing of the Communist Party, which used village performing arts to promote its political platform.⁸⁰ For example, certain songs of the early 1960s were allegedly connected to the Communist Party, including "Kembang Beureum" ("Red Flower") and were allegedly banned.⁸¹ The Wayang Foundation, backed by the military, police, and the government of West Java, was strongly opposed to the PKI, which enjoyed strong support among rural audiences. The battle between the army and the PKI was fought on several fronts, in local and national forums, and within the gendered politics of local performing arts as well.

⁷⁷ Daniel S. Lev, "On the Other Hand?" in *Fantasizing the Feminine*, ed. Laurie J. Sears (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 197.

⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that calls for equality between *dalang* and *sinden* do not emerge during periods when the *dalang* is dominant.

⁷⁹ Foley, *The Sundanese Wayang Golek*, p. 250.

⁸⁰ See articles in *Zaman Baru*, 1960-64.

⁸¹ Iyar Wiarsih, personal communication, August 21, 1999. Sean Williams has suggested that the song was banned because its lyrics refer too directly to the female body. Personal communication, September 15, 2003. I have collected numerous song books that contain lyrics gathered and written by the singers themselves, and none of these contain songs that were banned. It is likely, however, that lyrics to these songs were never written down because of their politically sensitive nature, or, if they were written down, they were removed and prevented from circulating.

Sinden and Cultural Memory

New Order and post-New Order representations of *sinden* in government publications and the popular press shed light on how these media were used to shape people's cultural memory of the period. As the epigraph to this article indicates, accounts written during the New Order about the "era of the *sinden*" (*jaman sinden*) portray performances of *wayang golek* as wild, uncontrolled dance parties, where theft and even murder could occur. The practices of *sinden* were constructed as dangerous and even as oppositional to state ideology. Social upheaval and violence at performances, reportedly provoked by women, threatened to destabilize the nation even further. I suggest that audiences exerted control over the performance practices of the *sinden* as a way to assert their authority over the unstable circumstances of their social lives. In this way, the figure of the *sinden* symbolized struggles over authority, between a populace demanding social change and a state losing its control over the nation. Therefore, control over the nation hinged on control over the representation of *sinden*.⁸² Female singers, the repository of these feelings of loss and instability, had to be contained in order for the nation to be recovered. In this climate of disorder, male control over the bodies of performing females signified the creation of order out of chaos.

The "krisis *sinden*" has become part of the anti-Communist discourse of the New Order and post-New Order periods as well. During the Suharto era, newspaper reports, music school publications, and seminars sponsored by cultural organizations continued to link the social mayhem of 1959-64 with the *sinden*. In a 1996 *KOMPAS* article, the *dalang*, Tjetjep Supriadi, talked about the rise of the female singer as a "sign of 1965" (*gelagat tahun 1965-an*), a code word for the Communist Party. The prominence of *sinden* was a "symptom" embedded within the chaos of the period that had to be contained.⁸³ The narrative persists in the post-Suharto era: in a 1999 *KOMPAS* article, the author links *sinden* with a rogue group connected to the PKI who would take the rice credits (*kredit Bimas*) and give them to their favorite *sinden*!⁸⁴ The writer implies that *sinden* drove these men to corruption and somehow caused the collapse of the credit system.

Forty years later, it is the figure of the *sinden* that continues to be produced as a symbol of the political chaos and crisis of Sukarno's Guided Democracy. The crisis of the *sinden* and the political crisis of Guided Democracy are discursively assembled in such a way as to suggest a deterministic relationship between the *sinden* and the state:

⁸² Suzanne Brenner has pointed out the relationship between control over the national future and control over images of women in the New Order. Suzanne Brenner, "On the Public Intimacy of the New Order: Images of Women in the Popular Indonesian Print Media," *Indonesia* 67 (1999): 13-37. Brenner's comments apply equally well to representations of women in the popular performing arts of the period preceding the New Order.

⁸³ Her Suganda, "Tjetjep Supriadi, Kerisauan Wayang Golek," *Kompas Cyber Media*, June 14, 1996, <http://www.kompas.com/9606/14/naper/tjet.htm> (accessed November 9, 2001).

⁸⁴ Anon., "Nasib Wayang Golek Sunda: Cepot Kehabisan Stamina," *Kompas Cyber Media*, June 29, 1999, <http://www.kompas.com/95/03/19/1803hera.klp> (accessed 1999). The author uses the term "*bujidor*" to describe this rogue group. The term "*bujidor*" (also a Sundanese genre of performing arts) is constructed by taking the first syllable of each word in the phrase "*barisan jiwa doraka*" ("rows of sinners"), which refers to the PKI.

if *sinden* become dominant players again, then corruption, chaos, and the weakening of the state will surely follow.

From Co-optation to Individual Attractions

Changes in the performance staging and musical practices of *sinden* did occur after 1965, but these were connected to the social upheaval of Suharto's New Order regime, which came to full power approximately nineteen months after the conference took place. After the bloody tragedy of September 30, 1965 that ushered in the New Order, the *dalang's* dominant position in the troupe was secured once again through the agency of cultural institutions connected to the New Order. *Dalang* were cultivated by the state as "information officers" for government propaganda, whereas *sinden* were cast as entertainers.⁸⁵ The singers, Upit Sarimanah and Titim Fatimah, as well as other singers, never again reached the level of popularity that they had during the Guided Democracy period.⁸⁶ *Dalang* and *sinden* still competed for audience attention, but a sense of (new) order prevailed.

However, *sinden* continued to dance onstage, albeit no longer on tables. During the 1970s, Ernst Heins reports that "to watch a *wayang* [*golek*] performance (*nonton wayang*)...[was] often jokingly referred to as 'to watch the female singers' (*nonton pasinden*)."⁸⁷ *Sinden* danced as a way of "warming up the stage" for a *wayang golek* performance. In an interview printed in *Tempo*, singer Dudeh Diwangsih is described as follows:

To warm up the stage, she is not hesitant about singing while standing.... Not only that. Dudeh also sings with her back to the audience as she swings her hips. "Most of them go crazy when I swing my hips on stage," she says honestly.⁸⁸

As audiences demanded to hear their favorite popular songs in the context of *wayang golek* performance, *sinden* again began to challenge the authority of the *dalang*.⁸⁹ But conditions had changed. In 1983, Danasasmita characterized the way in which *dalang* and *sinden* maintain competing focuses of attention for spectators as follows:

In contemporary performance, it often seems as if the *dalang* and the female singer become individual attractions on one stage with the same accompanying musicians.⁹⁰

The *dalang* and *sinden* acting as "individual attractions" characterized the performance practice of most popular troupes during the 1980s and 1990s. In these troupes, top singers were allocated individual sections (interludes) throughout the

⁸⁵ Andrew N. Weintraub, *Power Plays: The Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, forthcoming).

⁸⁶ Ajip Rosidi, personal communication, December 6, 2002.

⁸⁷ Ernst Heins, "Goong Renteng: Aspects of Orchestral Music in a Sundanese Village" (PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 1977), p. 45.

⁸⁸ "Pesinden, di dalam & di luar pentas," *Tempo*, December 22, 1979, p. 30.

⁸⁹ *Jaipongan*, the social dance/music craze of the late 1970s, ushered in a new era for the *sinden*, but that is outside the purview of this article.

⁹⁰ Saleh Danasasmita, "Pagelaran Wayang Sebagai Teater," *Kawit* 37 (1983): 9.

evening. The length of these interludes lasted thirty to forty-five minutes, and during an entire evening, sections devoted solely to *sinden* could last as much as three to four hours of a six- to eight-hour performance. Rather than competing directly with the *dalang* for audience attention, the *sinden's* interludes were built into the structure of the performance, consequently limiting the possibility for subverting the *dalang's* authority.

Conclusion—A Crisis for Whom?

A critical approach to the discourse and meaning of the "*sinden* crisis" makes it possible to understand the relationship between gender, politics, and performance during this important, but relatively understudied, period in Indonesian performing arts history. I have traced the history of the *sinden* in the *wayang golek* troupe in order to show how the *sinden's* role changed from a singer/dancer/prostitute to a star with a privileged position in the troupe. My research on *sinden* suggests an alternative interpretation to the dominant, male-biased, and state-supported meaning of *sinden* as disruptive, disorderly, and dangerous.

Wayang golek audiences, consisting primarily of non-elite classes who were badly shaken by years of worsening political and economic conditions, exerted their limited agency for change by demanding changes in the realm of culture. The *sinden*, whose position in the troupe had been getting steadily more prominent, became the channel for change. *Wayang golek* performance became a space for dancing, for interaction between audiences and performers, and as a means of escape from everyday social problems through the "intoxicating" sound of women's voices.

It is hardly surprising that *dalang*, whose art had been traditionally a locus of male social authority, were troubled by their loss of control in the *wayang golek* troupe. Their status relative to *sinden* had even begun to have corresponding shifts in the loss of economic returns. The "*sinden* crisis" was ultimately a crisis about the *dalangs'* anxiety about their loss of control.

The performance practices of the *sinden* became a complex symbol of the state's own political crisis during a period characterized by rampant political factionalism and fierce competition among political parties. In this highly volatile and dynamic period, *dalang* forged alliances with state cultural apparatuses as a way to reassert their own authority. As *sinden* became less dependent on *dalang*, they simultaneously became more crucial to the state's cultural policy.

The combination of visual and sonic signifiers that I have discussed in this paper produced a relationship of difference between *sinden* and *dalang*. This relationship of difference, in which *sinden* were positioned as artistically superordinate, economically more powerful, and the focal point of audience attention, represented a challenge to *dalang*, who had enjoyed a position of dominance previous to the Guided Democracy period. Shifts in performance practice signified to spectators the possibility that women's position in relation to men could be elevated, whether in *wayang golek* performance or everyday social life. During the tumultuous period of disorder that accompanied Guided Democracy and the enforced order of the Suharto regime, local

and national discursive practices about the voices and bodies of *sinden* engendered social struggles over gender, politics, and memory.