
PANCASILA IN THE MINOR KEY: TVRI'S *SI UNYIL* MODELS THE CHILD

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Introduction

The Presidential ban on television advertising in 1981 shifted the state to center screen and changed the way TVRI (Televisi Republik Indonesia) constructed its audience. After 1981, untrammled by market considerations and with a vastly expanded national audience within its reach, TVRI interpellated its audience as a public and a national family. One segment of the family singled out as subjects for specific national address was the audience of young children. This essay presents a case study of how television asserted its role in the Indonesian government's national culture project as an important agency of political and cultural socialization through the development of the children's puppet series *Si Unyil* [(The Boy) Unyil], screened for the first time in April 1981. *Si Unyil* is perhaps the best known television program in Indonesia. The first episode was screened on April 5, 1981, and the series has been broadcast continuously ever since, making it the longest running fictional program on Indonesian television. A total of 603 episodes were screened between 1981 and 1993.

In Indonesia, as in most countries, "the state assumes that its inhabitants are not necessarily born as good citizens; children must be taught and socialized by the state to become good citizens."¹ In the politics of state television, so-called "children's television" becomes part of the machinery of state hegemony. The weekly episodes of *Si Unyil* were crafted by a talented production team to contribute to the managed development of children into good Indonesian citizens who were knowledgeable about

¹ Lynette Parker, "The Creation of Indonesian Citizens in Balinese Primary Schools," *Review of Indonesian and Malay Affairs* 26,1 (1992): 42.

and committed to national development. I begin by situating the series in the discourses of Pancasila citizenship and national development. Official statements of the objectives of the series and the top-down directives which initiated it are noted. The series is also shown to be part of a flow of programming focused on national development and the modeling of preferred center-periphery relations. In the section "Narrative Form and Generic Characteristics" I turn to textual analysis and discuss the ideological work of the series in modeling the desired child social subject. I argue that the adaptation of the conventional structure of the situation comedy in *Si Unyil* models dependent, paternalistic political relations between village communities and the national center.

Following a discussion of character in which the hierarchical relations between children and adults, community and state-center are noted, I move on to consider the role of parody in the series in the characters of Pak Raden and Ogah and Ableh. Here I argue that parody performs the paedocratic² function of turning unacceptable adult behavior into derisory comedy to delineate and reinforce preferred values and behavior. The final sections examine the modeling of cultural differences and the role of the national language in the construction of an idealized national family. I show that the series acknowledges cultural differences but erases their range, specificity, and potential political significance to produce a unitary, homogenous national family.

Si Unyil and Metaphors of Shaping and Guiding

The ideological goals of the *Si Unyil* series were made clear by its first producer, the late Gufron Dwipayana:

[T]he puppet serial was put together [*dikerjakan*] as an entertainment for children. Government messages were incorporated into the narrative. "So it is a kind of lesson [*pelajaran*] in the 'Guide to Realising and Experiencing the Principles of Pancasila' [*Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*] for children" [...] "But, nevertheless, I don't want *Si Unyil* to carry government messages (propaganda) in an obviously crude manner."³

The state re-affirmed these goals three years later in a national Five Year Plan (*Repelita IV*) document:

The mass media will be utilised to distribute information which promotes the political education of the people and the development [*pengembangan*] of Indonesian identity based on Pancasila. This recognizes the geography of Indonesia which makes mass media essential for education and [the need to deliver] Pancasila education [P4]⁴ broadcasts using role play and other means which are appealing [*menarik*] but effective [*efektif*] primarily for school aged children and young people. Children's films such as *Si Unyil* and *Huma* will be continued and used to greater advantage to plant P4 values [*nilai nilai P4*] in the

² John Hartley, "Invisible Fictions: Television Audiences, Paedocracy, Pleasure," *Textual Practice* 1,2 (1987): 121-38.

³ *Tempo*, October 31, 1981.

⁴ P4 is an abbreviation for *Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*.

young generation. In planting these values as early as possible, it is hoped that the young generation will grow into citizens with high levels of national tenacity.⁵

The metaphoric contours of these two statements reveal the state's instrumentalist communication model and politico-cultural strategy for television. The teleological organic metaphor in the second passage imagines the *managed* development of children into competent adulthood and citizenship. The organic metaphor is interestingly linked to television technology. The generality implicit in the concept of broadcasting acknowledges the inherent crudity of the technique. The risk of failure in social nurturing through broadcasting is implicit in the suggestion by Indonesian planners that P4 values should be implanted "as early as possible." For subjects left without the benefit of P4 values for even a short time, left alone until later in their lives, may grow in ways that reflect individual preferences and choices rather than state priorities. Development outside regimes of state guidance may produce a subject different from the desired ideal citizen. But if the state catches its subjects in time it can reap the harvest of a generation of adults who are model national citizens.

The policy position outlined for Indonesia is not fundamentally different from children's television policy in Western countries such as the United States and Australia. Dwipayana's statement represents a difference of degree rather than fundamentals. The internationally famous *Sesame Street* and the renowned Australian *Play School* are both concerned with the socialization of children in socially approved ways. In recent years, for example, *Sesame Street* has presented a "race relations" curriculum that emphasizes that "diversity is good".⁶ The Indonesian series differs from the American and Australian programs only in the rather closed subject position inscribed for the child and the relative lack of explicit instruction in pre-school skills such as numeracy, literacy, and classification. To an Australian viewer at least, *Si Unyil* is much more about the ideal-typical place and role for children in the Indonesian family, community, and nation, than Australian children's programming. The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal places great importance on the entertainment values of children's programs, which it rates far higher than the "worthiness" of programs. That said, the Australian standard does require children's programs to "show Australia to Australians," enshrining an idea of *national* cultural content that Indonesian regulators would find completely acceptable and understandable.⁷

Dwipayana's statement describes the series as a mixed pedagogic and entertainment practice. It goes beyond the second passage in suggesting that the practice should efface its mode and *telos*. State objectives should desirably be achieved without the subject being consciously aware that s/he is being guided towards a specified subject position. The reason for effacing the directive motivation of the series is suggested by the distinction struck between the series as "entertainment" and the series as a "lesson." The distinction signifies a difference between a series which accepts the pleasure of the text as an end in itself, and a series which uses pleasure as

⁵ REPELITA Republik Indonesia 1984, p. 519.

⁶ Sherryl Browne Graves, "Diversity on Television," in *Tuning in To Young Viewers: Social Science Perspectives on Television*, ed. Tannis M. MacBeth (Thousand Oaks Ca.: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 71.

⁷ Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, *Kidz TV: An Enquiry into Children's and Preschool Children's Television Standards*, 2 vols. (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 1991), p. 71 (vol. 1).

a means to a pre-determined end. One is audience-centered in its recognition and value placed on children's enjoyment of play; the other subordinates children's pleasure in entertainment and uses it as a means in the construction of desired social subjects. The intersection of two discourses, one which seeks to entertain the subject and the other to direct and shape the subject, produced contested readings and inscribed fractured and sometimes contradictory representations of the desired social subject. These tensions between subject positions are traced in a discussion of selected episodes and by reference to critical discourse in the Indonesian press.

Development of the Series

The *Si Unyil* series is a production of the State Film Production Center of Indonesia (Pusat Produksi Perfilman Negara, PPFN).⁸ An outline for the series was prepared in 1979 by screenwriter and well-known children's author Kurnain Suhardiman in response to a request from the foundation director of the Center, Gufron Dwipayana.⁹ Kurnain's brief was to write a scenario for a children's television series which was "authentically Indonesian." For Artistic Director Suyadi, Dwipayana's invitation reflected the perception that Indonesian culture needed to figure more assertively on television.¹⁰ Kurnain Suhardiman and Suyadi were a good choice for the new series. In 1970 they had published a brief instructional text for elementary and junior high school teachers titled *Sandiwara Boneka* [Puppet Plays] which included three practice scripts including "Si Unyil kerimba" (sic) [Unyil Goes to the Forest].¹¹

The decision to set the series in a rural village reflected an intersection of ideological and aesthetic factors. For Suyadi, an urban environment presented a more difficult design problem because of the complexities of including traffic and crowds. The village setting was preferred because of the belief that a rural way of life reflected the circumstances of the majority of Indonesians, 78 percent of whom were rural people. It was also a better vehicle for the representation of a modest way of life.¹²

The idealization of village life as an harmonious idyll was overdone in the first few episodes.¹³ Suyadi reported that in those episodes all the characters were uniformly "good." The episodes were saccharine (*terlalu manis*), unconvincing, and lacking in dramatic intensity. Accordingly, in subsequent episodes, Kurnain and Suyadi

⁸ Now "Perum Produksi Film Negara" PPFN. "Perum" [Perusahaan Umum] signifies PPFN is a state-owned company.

⁹ Gufron Dwipayana was a journalist and former member of President Soeharto's personal staff. Suyadi described him as "a great favorite of the President" (Personal interview, May 5, 1993). "Pak Dipo" as he was known, was appointed Head of PPFN by State Secretary (later Vice-President) Sudharmono when he was Acting Minister for Information in 1981. Under Pak Dipo, whom Krishna Sen describes as "the chief presidential image-builder," "PPFN was committed to big budget feature films about the head of state." Krishna Sen, *Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order* (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 66.

¹⁰ Suyadi, personal interview, May 3, 1993.

¹¹ Kurnain Suhardiman and Sujadi, *Sandiwara Boneka* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1970).

¹² Suyadi, personal interview, May 5, 1993. See Christine Drake, *National Integration in Indonesia: Patterns and Policies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 13 and 293 n. 48.

¹³ I was unable to gain access to the early episodes of the series. With PPFN's help a selection of episodes produced in 1981 were made available from the National Archive. Episodes produced from 1979/80 to 1984/85 were shot on 35mm film. Costs of transferring these episodes onto video tape were beyond my research budget. PPFN was reluctant to project the original 35mm print because of its archival significance.

introduced antagonistic characters into the village community. "Pak Raden," for example, was "someone you could hate, someone who was lazy, who was stingy, who had no community spirit [*gotong royong*] at all. He was someone who annoyed and irritated people." A second character "Engkong" (Chinese: Grandfather) was also introduced. Suyadi described Kong as

someone who was not evil, but someone who had a one-track mind, focused on money. Kong was always dreaming about his glorious homeland [*tanah luhur*] which showed that he was not fully assimilated into Indonesian society.¹⁴

Two other Chinese characters, the children Mei Lan (Melani) and Bunbun, are, like all the children, positive characters. However the stereotyped representation of ethnic Chinese as flush with money is maintained with Bunbun who occasionally helps the indigent Ogah and Ableh by lending them money so they can join in village activities.¹⁵

Unyil and his puppet friends in the village Suka Maju captured the imagination of children throughout Indonesia from the earliest episodes. The immediate popularity of the series prompted PPFN to produce a dramatized feature film, *Unyil Becomes Human*,¹⁶ using live actors in all roles. The film was well received by children's audiences around the nation.¹⁷

Funding for the series drew from three sources: PPFN, TVRI, and funds raised by PPFN from government departments such as the Department of Health, the Department of Population and Environment, and the Armed Forces (Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia, ABRI). Departmental funds were advanced on the understanding that particular episodes would focus on issues nominated by the sponsoring department. Consequently the Department of Health underwrote episodes promoting village cleanliness, the role of community health centers, the need for care in taking drugs, and the like. The Department of the Environment supported episodes encouraging children to care for the natural environment. The Armed Forces underwrote episodes such as: "ABRI Comes to the Village" (1982/83), "Long Live ABRI" (1988/89), "Victory ABRI" (1989/90), and "Our ABRI" (1991/92). Some

¹⁴ Kong was taken out of the series in the late 1980s. He was deleted from the program as Indonesia's official relations with the People's Republic of China began to improve after many years of stand-off following Indonesian allegations that Communist China was implicated in the coup of 1965. It was believed that Kong was prejudicial to harmonious relations with Chinese. Kong's appearance was anachronistic, his slit eyes, long mustache, pigtail, and dark blue clothing more in keeping with Indonesian Chinese of the nineteenth century than contemporary Indonesia. His sing-song accent, poor Indonesian, and the non-verbal expressive gestures he characteristically used were also heavy-handed, making Kong an altogether unsympathetic representation of a Chinese. Kong was not replaced with a more sympathetic character. ("Petinju Cilik" and Suyadi, personal interview, May 5, 1993).

¹⁵ Suyadi, personal interview, May 5, 1993.

¹⁶ The ninety-minute film was titled *Si Unyil Jadi Manusia* and produced by PPFN in 1981. Scenario by Kurnain Suhardiman. Bambang Utoyo, the voice for Unyil in the television series, played Unyil in the film. Artistic director, Suyadi, played "Pak Raden." "Pak Ogah," perhaps best described in Australian idiom as "the bludger" character in the series, developed fortuitously out of the film. The voice actor Hamid, who contributed to the post-production of the film, had a face that Suyadi found irresistible, and he made a puppet in his likeness. Kurnain Suhardiman loved the puppet face and decided to develop a character around Hamid's voice and the new puppet. It was in this way that Ogah, one of the most interesting and controversial characters in the series was born.

¹⁷ *Berita Buana*, October 21, 1981.

funds were raised from approved community groups who used the series to broadcast information about their activities.

Si Unyil—Part of a Bigger Picture

Raymond Williams's observation that television is characteristically organized as an associative sequence or "flow" of programming¹⁸ suggests that part of any examination of *Si Unyil* episodes should locate them in the larger context of TVRI programming. A weekly regimen of programs with a rural emphasis framed the appearance of the *Si Unyil* series on Sundays, enriching the inscription of the fictional village and community in Suka Maju. The flow of programs structures a mutual transfer of content and generic characteristics and is intended to reinforce development values and the (adult) roles modeled for children.

Si Unyil was first broadcast in a Sunday morning time slot, and has retained this slot ever since. Between 1984 and 1987 it was also broadcast on Wednesday afternoons. Over many years, a range of non-fictional programs about rural and village life have been broadcast in the late afternoon. In five episodes of *Siaran Pedesaan* [Village Broadcast] screened in December 1991, and six episodes screened in April 1993, I discovered significant intertextual associations between *Si Unyil* and *Siaran Pedesaan*. The tone of these episodes, the idealization of villages as cooperative, friendly places, and the incorporation of children and adolescents engaged in social welfare activities into the narratives provide strong parallels with the portrait of life in the fictional village of Suka Maju. In *Siaran Pedesaan* the audience is frequently informed about institutions such as village health centers and programs such as family planning, immunization, and clean village campaigns. These topics, and others like them, regularly feature in the fictional world of Suka Maju. Although *Siaran Pedesaan* is a non-fictional program, it included fictional segments in some episodes. In 1991 for example, an episode concerned with accident insurance explored the consequences of a traffic accident in a short drama set in a village. Another episode used role-play methods with villagers to explore the implications of a change in land tenure rules.

Si Unyil also shares a complex intertextual association with *Ria Jenaka* (Great Comedy).¹⁹ Scheduled on Fridays and Mondays when it was first introduced in 1981, the series was screened on Sunday mornings from 1984 until 1993. The program is performed by four male actors who take the roles of the clowns from the shadow puppet (*wayang kulit*) repertoire. The program was devised by TVRI as a way of promoting national development, and it addresses an audience of children and adults.²⁰ The extempore antics of the clowns have been popular with children. Adults, particularly those familiar with *wayang*, enjoy the verbal texts which blend Indonesian

¹⁸ In Williams's original formulation the concept of "flow" was restricted to the sequence of programming during one evening's viewing. There is no real justification for restricting the time frame of the concept in this way. Channels invariably orient viewers to programs scheduled for later in the week, just as they lead viewers to anticipate programs scheduled later on the same day. In linking flow with intertextual relations of content across time and genre I am following John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987).

¹⁹ *Ria Jenaka* is hard to translate as the two words of the title have similar meanings in English. Translated literally, the title would be something like *Cheerful [and] Funny*. Compounded, the two terms intensify the sense of fun.

²⁰ *Tempo*, June 20, 1981.

and Javanese expressions in amusing ways. *Ria Jenaka* has dealt with many of the same issues covered in both *Si Unyil* and *Siaran Pedesaan*.

Across these three different series, each produced to build consent for the national development program, there is a blurring of generic characteristics and a sameness of content. The predominantly informational/educational *Siaran Pedesaan* incorporates fictional strategies in addressing its audience. *Ria Jenaka* turns humans into puppets so it can communicate about development issues in a humorous way. In *Si Unyil*, puppets are human, caught up in a mundane world of school and homework, national celebrations, village clean ups, literacy drives, and energy conservation.

Suka Maju—a Model Village

The events of the series are set in the fictional village Suka Maju, “somewhere in Indonesia.” The village functions metonymically as the space of governance, where proper relations between the center and the periphery are modeled. Quite deliberately, producers have created an ideal-typical space which cannot easily be identified with a specific province or even island. Suka Maju reflects the modest ideal of the *cukupan* (just enough, subsistence) lifestyle.²¹ There appears to be enough food for everyone, most people enjoy good health, most adults appear to be self-employed as farmers, and many women maintain minor trading enterprises such as food selling and hawking.

The name of the village is an emblem of its support for the dominant development ethos of the New Order state. “*Suka* [be willing/ready/enjoy] *Maju* [to improve/progress/go forward]” is a phrase that can be translated as “ready or willing to advance.”²² However, these dictionary references fail to capture the ideological force of the phrase which opposes *maju* (progressive) to *kuno* (old fashioned, conservative).

James Peacock explored the connotations of the *maju/kuno* distinction in a study of Javanese folk drama which is particularly relevant to my discussion. Peacock understands the basic distinction as being between “objects or actions that symbolize a progressive stance towards modernization and objects or actions that symbolize a conservative attitude.” He expands our understanding of the paradigm in the following set of signifiers which prefigures a number of important themes in the *Si Unyil* episodes analyzed below:

Madju is opposed to kuna to contrast: . . . use of Indonesian language with the use of Javanese or other provincial language; playing volley ball with gambling on pigeon races; wearing tight slacks, skirts, and lipstick with wearing sarong and jacket; employing medically trained midwives with employing animistic midwives; feminists with gentle wives of yore; movies with puppet plays; choosing one’s own spouse with status-based, parent arranged marriage; neighbourhood cleanups and communal feasts on national holidays with

²¹ Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 97.

²² “Suka Maju” is a trope which has a life beyond the *Si Unyil* series. Lynette Parker notes that elementary school textbooks in Bali in 1981 and 1989 referred to a model student and citizen, Budi, and his family and friends. They lived in a model village “Suka Maju” which Parker translates as the “Village of Like-to-Progress.” Parker, “The Creation of Indonesian Citizens,” pp. 52-53.

neighbourhood purification rites and communal feasts on non-national holidays; being educated with being illiterate; youths with elders.²³

Suka Maju is a small, self-contained community where “everyone knows everyone else,” where people are tolerant of each other and ready to help each other. It is a rural idyll. Suka Maju is everywhere and nowhere, a setting which permits a majority of viewers throughout the archipelago to find themselves fictionally in Suka Maju. In its very formlessness the village contributes to the representation of a homogenous national culture-space, where differences between places and life-styles are not as important as the similarities. The economic linkages that Suka Maju shares with other spaces are not articulated. Many details of the social life of the village community are also unknown. It is a place without history. Together these silences contribute to the self-sufficiency of the village. It is a place, as the name of the village suggests, fixed on the future, and it almost effortlessly manages its own affairs.

But Suka Maju is not completely self-contained. Its progressive disposition waits upon and is directed toward goals determined by the national capital. The rural rhythms of Suka Maju are intersected by larger rhythms which fictionally link Suka Maju and villages like it throughout Indonesia in a unity of space, time, and culture. A progression of national days such as Education Day, Environment Day, and Independence Day punctuate Suka Maju’s calendar. These events are observed in the village, but are not of the village. They are aspects of official culture imposed from outside the village. Suka Maju reacts to these events; it does not initiate them, and it is dependent on the national capital for their timing and content.²⁴ This relation of dependency is, however, constructed as a positive, beneficial one. National days and village clean-up days create opportunities for Unyil and his friends to get together and show how responsible they are. Their contributions to the celebrations demonstrate the skills and competencies their Presidentially sponsored (*Inpres*)²⁵ school has provided them with. The events provide opportunities for them to enjoy themselves in entertaining the village community. In this way producers merge national priorities with local pleasures and forge a shared set of interests.

The model citizen inscribed is the subject who is communally minded—one who accepts the regime of improvement determined by the state and energetically and enthusiastically contributes to its implementation. Unyil himself is frequently inscribed in this way. Often Unyil takes it on himself to suggest how he and his group can celebrate a particular event or carry out a nationally directed program. In performing these socially beneficial roles, the children seek approval and are usually guided and directed by village authorities such as parents, their teacher, or the village headman. These intra-village relations can be read another way. The dependent relation between

²³ James Peacock, *Rites of Modernization: Symbolic and Social Aspects of Indonesian Proletarian Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 8. *Rites of Modernisation* was written and published before the Indonesian spelling system was changed in 1972.

²⁴ Teruo Sekimoto, “State Ritual and the Village: An Indonesian Case Study,” in *Reading Southeast Asia: Translation of Contemporary Japanese Scholarship on Southeast Asia*, ed. Takashi Shiraishi (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1990).

²⁵ *Inpres: Instruksi President* [Presidential Instruction]. Schools in Indonesia may benefit from funds allocated by a particular Presidential directive.

children and adults may be read as an analog of the paedocratic relationship between center and periphery.

Relying on a mimetic logic, *Suka Maju* is inscribed as an Indonesian microcosm. But the microcosm crucially lacks a center, the center of governance. The village as self-directing, where subjects take part in village activities ostensibly on their own initiative, masks the reality of a highly directive center and the representation of the model citizen as a compliant supporter of state priorities.

Narrative Form and Generic Characteristics

Si Unyil is structured as an episodic series in which narrative closure or resolution is achieved by the end of each episode.²⁶ The narrative form and comic elements of the series resemble the situation comedies (sitcoms) of 1970's American television, which dealt with families confronted from the outside by a variety of socially derived problems and issues.²⁷ In the *Si Unyil* series it is not the nuclear family which is the boundary situation, but rather the village community as family.²⁸ The village is idealized as a stable, harmonious community motivated by a spirit of mutual cooperation and self-help.

David Reeve has traced the collectivist family construct as a model for social relations in Indonesia to early nationalist philosophy and the idealization of primordial relations:

There was an enthusiasm for the idea of society as a totality, an interdependent whole, an "organic" collectivity, an idea that seemed at once modern and socialist and yet in accordance with "the family principle," the "unity of *kawula* and *gusti* [servant and master]," the "law of nature," *adat* [customary] law and original village practice.²⁹

²⁶ There are some episodes that extend over two or more weeks, but these are exceptional. The episodes which form the basis of the analysis in this discussion derive from three sources. First, there are recordings of three episodes made off air in Jakarta in 1991 and 1993; second, eight episodes produced between 1981 and 1990 supplied to me by Suyadi from his private collection; third, eleven episodes produced between 1982 and 1993 selected at random in consultation with PPFN. Written scenarios for an additional fifteen episodes were also made available by Suyadi. These scenarios have not been utilized in this analysis.

It is not claimed that this selection of episodes is representative of the twelve years of the *Si Unyil* series. The notion of representativeness, drawn from statistical discourse, asserts a putative relationship of likeness or typicality between part(s)(episode(s) and a whole (all episodes) which is problematic in the study of television texts. Representativeness assumes a determinate position of meaning outside of the text(s) which can act as a standard or criterion for typicality. To claim that this episode is, or is not, like all (or the majority) of other episodes assumes agreement on what those episodes have in common. But each and every episode is textually unique firstly because of its distinctive pattern of signification, and secondly because any assessment of its significance or meaning will be a product of interaction between the text and individual viewer(s).

²⁷ Sitcoms screened by TVRI before the advent of *Si Unyil* included *Hogan's Heroes* in 1980, *Swiss Family Robinson* in 1979, *Mr. Ed* in 1978, and *I Dream of Jeannie* from 1974 to 1976.

²⁸ S. Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 239, 241.

²⁹ David Reeve, *GOLKAR of Indonesia: An Alternative to the Party System* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 43.

It is striking that in the *Si Unyil* series the outside disruptions are not threats or “problems”³⁰ but are perceived to be beneficial. This represents a major departure from the generic characteristics of sitcom as described by Eaton and Fuer, and deserves further comment. Mick Eaton³¹ has argued that the plot of the typical British sitcom is structured as an intersection of discourses of the “inside/outside” which disrupt the harmony of the opening situation (family, workplace) which has then to be restored by the end of the episode. In British and American sitcoms, agency is ascribed to the members of the inside to expel the threats from the outside. Whatever the conflict, whatever the threat, the dynamics of the sitcom require that the resources of the family are capable of resolving the disruption so that next week a new upset can be introduced.³²

In the *Si Unyil* series discourses of the outside are disruptive, but rather than being rejected or challenged, they are accepted. Village programs such as adult literacy, the “clean village” campaign (*Operasi Bersih*), courtesy and friendliness campaign, environmental protection, and celebration of national days are all discourses of the national government addressed (respectively) to a range of incompetencies and inadequacies: illiteracy, lack of hygiene, poor cross-cultural skills (in interacting with foreign tourists), lack of environmental awareness and knowledge, and parochialism (a tendency to put local concerns ahead of national priorities).

In contrast to the British and American sitcoms, where the family resists destabilizing outside discourse, in the *Si Unyil* series the outside compensates the village community for what it lacks. The community absorbs and acts on external interventions, and in doing so remakes and enhances its communal life. The outside (the state) plays a pedagogic—even therapeutic and pastoral—role, addressing perceived lacks in its citizens as individuals and as a community. This shift in generic conventions in *Si Unyil* displays the fundamental political assumptions and objectives of the series. To maintain its role as guide and mentor in life, the state, through the agency of the *Si Unyil* series, empties out the agency of the village and its children, positioning them as dependent subjects.

The narrative structure of equilibrium-disruption-restoration is also typical of non-televisual oral forms such as legends and folk tales (*dongeng*).³³ The *Si Unyil* series appropriated elements of indigenous oral culture by re-telling traditional folk tales and legends, by producing episodes written in folk style, and by making references to folk beliefs in the course of general episodes.³⁴ This has a twofold effect. First, it

³⁰ Jane Feuer, “Narrative Form in American Network Television,” in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin MacCabe (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), p. 107.

³¹ M. Eaton, “Television Situation Comedy,” *Screen* 19,4 (1978/9): 70.

³² Jane Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 125.

³³ James Danandjaja, *Folklor Indonesia: Ilmu Gosip, Dongeng, Dan lain Lain* (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1984).

³⁴ Examples of folk tales and legends presented include “Timun Mas” and “Ayu Berubah Rupa” (Java); “Atu Belah” (Sumatra) and “Raksasa Mengejar Apen” (unknown provenance). “Uti Di Belantara” and “Uti Di Sarang Raksasa” by Agust Suprpto are written in the style of traditional “monster stories.” “Girah, Anak Juru Kunci” concerns children’s fears of the *sundel bolong*, a mysterious spirit creature in the form of an attractive young woman. The *sundel bolong* has a large hole in her back which she covers with her long hair (Danandjaja 1984). Episodes which celebrate folk culture include “Panjat Pinang” which

familiarizes (in multiple senses of the term) the television series and increases its appeal through a process of indigenization. Second, it displaces and disempowers traditional story tellers such as parents, village elders, and puppet masters (*dalang*). By absorbing elements of folk culture the series performed the hegemonic role of re-producer, processor, packager, and circulator of folk culture. In appropriating the discourse of the private, domestic sphere of the home and neighborhood, the *Si Unyil* series performed a political function in the way it merged the private sphere with the sphere of official, public culture. The articulation of the private sphere with the public sphere here created the nation as family, and the family as nation, in line with government policy. A series such as *Si Unyil* reaches deep into the social lives of viewers to attempt a thorough transformation of the lived experience of Indonesian citizens from childhood through adulthood.

The cloying familyism (*kekeluargaan*) and the dominant and dominating roles of *Ibu* and *Bapak* that Saya Shiraishi describes in her insightful studies of Indonesian children's literature are not, however, as obvious in the *Si Unyil* series. This deserves a brief comment, for it may account for the popularity of the series and the sense by the audience that *Si Unyil*, while familiar, represented something new.³⁵ In the *Unyil* series, it is the children who are center screen most of the time, who initiate most action, and who at times get the better of adult characters, even if it is only Ogah, Ableh, and Pak Raden. The children are not represented as tied to their own homes. Episodes generally open with *Unyil* and his friends out and about, already engaged in making something or going somewhere. The children's activities are not constrained by parental or their teacher's say so. *Unyil* and his friends are not, then, "helplessly dependent" in the way Shiraishi describes.³⁶ For much of the time, they are represented as independent and capable. At times, too, *Unyil* and his friends are found engaged in generally innocent but clearly unsanctioned escapades such as playing in the forest when they had been told not to, or challenging each other to walk by the scary cemetery. And while it is true, as discussed below, that often the children fail in their endeavors and need the guidance of their parents and teachers, this is not inevitable. The series gives the children space to be adventurous, to be successful, and to enjoy themselves. Perhaps this is why *Si Unyil* was so popular with Indonesian children in its early years, and became less popular as adult messages began to overtake the children's initiatives.

The Characters

The pivotal character in the series is *Unyil*,³⁷ but he is never presented alone. In the title sequence, *Unyil* is shown with his friends *Usroh* and *Ucrit*. The inseparability of

shows children climbing a greasy palm for prizes tied at the top and "Arak Arakan Sisinarang" which features a young boy's circumcision procession.

³⁵ It deserves more than a brief comment, of course, but a more comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this essay. Saya Shiraishi, "Young Heroes: The Family and School in New Order Indonesia," PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 1992; "Children's Stories and the State in New Order Indonesia," in *Children and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Sharon Stephens (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 169-183.

³⁶ Shiraishi, "Young Heroes," p. 115.

³⁷ "Unyil" is not a common Indonesian name. Suyadi informed me that it was a generic name (Everyboy?), invented to sound like an Indonesian name but impossible to associate with any particular ethnic group or

these three, signified not only by their constant interaction but also by the symmetry of their names, inscribes Unyil not as an individual, but as a member of a group. The village community is represented as a stratified set of age groups divided into two major divisions—adults and children. The protocols of age structure a number of different subject positions within the village. Relative age and expectations of different age groups are the focus of numerous episodes. I will argue below that age and expectations as to what is “proper behavior” by individuals in specific age groups are salient in understanding the subject position structured for the marginalized characters Ogah and Ableh.

Unyil’s group includes the boys and girls who attend elementary school (*Sekolah Dasar*, SD) together. Another group, formed around Endut, Cuplis, and Pesek, provides opportunities for the writers to introduce variety into the children’s activities.³⁸ Children of kindergarten (*Taman kanak-kanak*, TK) age form another stratum of characters. The adults in the community are in turn divided into two groups. First, there is a group of adults of indeterminate age who are the bearers of most of the key adult roles. This group includes characters such as parents, the village school teacher, the food seller Ibu Bariah, Ogah and Ableh, and Pak Raden and his wife. Second, elderly adults (*manusia usia lanjut*), fewer in number, complete the village population pyramid.

Parodic Subjects

If Unyil, along with his friends, is the very model of a modern (minor) citizen, Pak Raden and Ogah and Ableh are not, and this is what makes them funny. While Bu Bariah and Engkong are comic in their “funny voice” routines, the other three are comic because they systematically transgress the role and expected behavior of model adult citizens. It is significant that the prime source of humor in *Si Unyil* comes not from jokes or events initiated by the children, but from adults. The role of the parodic adult characters can be linked to the paedocratic objectives of the series. Stallybrass and White have argued that transgressive characters can be understood as a *licensed* inversion of established order, which serves the interests of official culture.³⁹ Recall that the authors of the Repelita IV statement had their eyes fixed firmly on the desired *adult* citizen. Parody is funny because it is founded on the transgression of decorum and verisimilitude, “on deviations from any social or aesthetic rule, norm, model, convention or law. Such deviations are the basis of comic surprise.”⁴⁰ Transgression of

region. *Pos Kota* (September 13, 1981) quoting Kurnain Suhardiman, traces Unyil to a character in a comic strip published in the magazine *Sudut Remaja* in the 1950s. It is not clear whether Kurnain was responsible for creating Unyil in that publication. His name is simply mentioned as a contributor along with “Ayip Rosidi and others.” *Hai* (#28, 1981) again quoting Kurnain, claims he named the comic strip character after a favorite nephew.

³⁸ Suyadi (personal interview, May 5, 1993) used the English word “gang” when describing the relations between the village children. In my description, I have chosen to use the more neutral “group” as it more accurately represents the relations between the characters. The groups are not rigidly structured and are not inscribed as rivals. Unyil frequently interacts with members of the other group. The word “gang,” with its more rigid adversarial connotations, seems inappropriate under these conditions.

³⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, p. 86.

what is expected and familiar simultaneously draws attention to and reinforces social conventions. This process functions through the creation of an “inside” “we who share the joke” and an “outside” which creates a relationship of power, of inclusion and exclusion.⁴¹ Children in Suka Maju are empowered by this process. In laughing at deviant adult behavior, they signal acceptance of the idealized norms and expectations of conventional adult behavior in the village. In this way, parody performs a paedocratic function. Its teleological fix is on the desired adult subject. It creates a regime of complicity in providing the audience with opportunities to join in laughing at those who do not subscribe to the normative discourse and roles of official culture.

Pak Raden is a cultural anachronism. His aristocratic title⁴² and sense of superiority mark him as a relic of Java’s feudal past. His Dutch language and the pride he takes in his role as a former Dutch civil servant mark him as out of touch with the social changes introduced through the Indonesian revolution. His title, costume, tastes, and hobbies are all signifiers of the idealized refined (*alus*) Javanese character.

When Unyil suggests a painting competition, and the judges from Jakarta declare all participants’ paintings to be equally good, the episode closes on an apoplectic Pak Raden, loudly complaining that his work is much better than anyone else’s. When Pak Raden arrives late for the celebrations in “Hardiknas” and finds no time left for his speech, he jumps to his feet and complains furiously. Late again in “Anak Masa Depan,” Pak Raden protests loudly that he has not been given any time to deliver the two hour speech he had prepared.

The trope of an angry, loudly complaining Pak Raden is frequently used to close episodes. These images emphatically signify Pak Raden’s inability to adhere to his own values. More generally, his tantrums mark him as a selfish person, whose frustration comes from his egotistical and elitist desire to be recognized as a superior individual, deserving of special consideration. Pak Raden’s customary behavior and values transgress those of the ideal subject who is modest, self-disciplined, egalitarian, and motivated by a spirit of communalism (*gotong royong*).

Pak Raden is a contradictory character. He is funny not because he is Javanese, but because he is not Javanese *enough*. As Clifford Geertz writes: “emotional equanimity . . . is the mark of the truly *alus* [Javanese] character.”⁴³ Conversely, “spontaneity or naturalness of gesture or speech is fitting only for those ‘not yet Javanese’—that is, the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 242.

⁴² Pak Raden usually introduces himself to visitors with barely managed modesty as “Raden Mas Singomenggolo Jalmowono.” The name, drawn out in a low purring tone of self-congratulation, signifies Javanese aristocratic status through “Raden Mas.” “Singomenggolo” carries equally illustrious associations, signifying a man who is a leader, a lion among men, and a famous East Javanese legendary character. But Jalmo (Javanese, person) *wono* (Javanese, jungle/forest) pricks the bubble, as it signifies a man who lives in the forest, an orangutan in other words! Having said his name, Pak Raden usually goes on to say: “But if that’s too much of a mouthful, call me Pak Raden for short.” Once again Pak Raden’s pretended modesty carries a sting in its tail. The combination of “Pak” (Indonesian) with “Raden” (Javanese) is ludicrous, as inappropriate as saying something like “Call me Mr. Your Majesty.” Thanks to Benedict Anderson for clarification of some of the nuances of Pak Raden’s name.

⁴³ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 240.

mad, the simple-minded and children."⁴⁴ If Pak Raden managed to maintain the refined politeness that is the Javanese cultural ideal (as his long-suffering wife indeed does), his parodic value would be significantly reduced. Recalling Neale and Krutnik's point that "comic pleasure is . . . inextricably linked to a replacement of transgression in relation to ideology, a re-setting of the boundaries,"⁴⁵ Pak Raden's parody of Javanese norms suggests that Javanese cultural values (the ideal Javanese subject) remain valid in modern Indonesia. Clifford Geertz asserts that there is indeed "an attempt to revitalize traditional Javanese beliefs and expressive forms, to return them to public favor by demonstrating their continued relevance to the modern world."⁴⁶ Keith Foulcher holds a similar view, and notes that: "[t]here is . . . an increasing tendency to align 'Indonesia' with a redefined *priyayi* [upper class] Java," which he understands as "the most visible and tangible way in which the state seeks to balance the 'modern' attitudes of a national culture with the awareness of an indigenous basis to cultural identity."⁴⁷ One unexpected outcome of "Javanization" has been a renewed pride in regional culture, a counter-hegemonic tendency which contests the unitary cultural construct of the New Order cultural project.⁴⁸

Ogah [reluctant, unwilling] and Ableh/Enyeng⁴⁹ are two adult male characters who perform a complex parodic function in the *Si Unyil* series. Ogah and Ableh are unmarried and unemployed. They have no home of their own, but sleep in the village security post (*Pos Siskamling*⁵⁰) which Ogah sometimes describes as "his office." As comic characters, they function as a classic double act—Ableh as straight man, setting up Ogah as fall guy. In the terms of the organic metaphor, they are socially stunted, child-adults whose inadequacies go to the heart of the model adult subject.

Unemployed and owning no land, Ogah and Ableh are chronically short of money and food. They spend a lot of time (though not much energy) in trying to scrounge from passers-by. Like children, they are dependent on others for their subsistence. Their insistent "gimme gimme" as the village children pass by reinforces their inscription as dependents. But the children rarely give money or food to Ogah and Ableh, mainly because the two men usually try to trick them out of their money and are unwilling to do anything to earn the money. It is their unwillingness to take part in productive work which makes Ogah and Ableh sinister as well as comic characters. The security post, at the center of the village, might be read as the center of a web, where Ogah and Ableh

⁴⁴ Clifford Geertz, "'Popular Art' and the Javanese Tradition," *Indonesia* 50 (October 1990): 80.

⁴⁵ Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, p. 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴⁷ Keith Foulcher, "The Construction of an Indonesian National Culture: Patterns of Hegemony and Resistance," in *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman (Clayton: Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), p. 303.

⁴⁸ Timothy C. Lindsey, "Concrete Ideology: Taste, Tradition, and the Javanese Past in New Order Public Space," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 166-182.

⁴⁹ Ableh and Enyeng ('Nyeng) are different characters but both play straight man to Ogah. Ableh was written out of the series in 1990 because the character was believed to be "counterproductive" (*kurang mendidik*) (*Pos Film*, December 30, 1990). 'Nyeng is not as gormless as Ableh, but is otherwise much the same as his predecessor. 'Nyeng parodies Ogah's lack of status by invariably referring to him as "Boss"(sic).

⁵⁰ *Sistem K[e]amanan Lingkungan*—local environment security system. Usually staffed on a rotational basis by adult males.

wait, ready to prey on passers-by. Read this way, Ogah and Ableh are feral, potentially destructive forces.⁵¹ Their comic parody of the self-sufficient, productive villager has a sharp edge. The inverse logic of their parody suggests that citizens who do not grow up to play a productive role are destructive and incompatible with the well-being of the community.

In most episodes Ogah and Ableh/Enyeng are presented as incompetent, irresponsible, immature, dependent, and selfish. This list substitutes valued adult attributes with qualities usually associated with children rather than adults. The comic pleasure Ogah and Ableh/Enyeng provide derives from the way their behavior and attitudes parodically invert our expectations of acceptable adult behavior in Suka Maju. Ogah and Ableh are models of all that children growing up should strive *not* to be. They are the negative case, and help to delineate more clearly the positive attributes of the model Indonesian villager.

Si Unyil Models Cultural Differences

The religious faith of families in Suka Maju is varied and draws attention to three “world religions” which the state has “officially recognized” and promoted as part of the national culture project. Unyil and his family are Muslims, Ucrit is a Catholic, and Meilani is a Protestant. Although Muslims are obliged by their faith to pray five times a day, the *Si Unyil* series rarely makes reference to the practices of prayer, and Unyil is not shown at prayer. Very occasionally Ucrit’s family is shown saying grace before eating. The major religious festival of Christmas, the Islamic fasting month (*Ramadan*), and end-of-fast festival *Idul Fitri* are acknowledged in *Si Unyil* episodes around about the time of their actual occurrence. Producers link the fictional representation of religious events in the series with religious practice in real life by scheduling screenings in this way.⁵²

In Indonesia the media are not permitted to publish or broadcast any material which is likely to incite ill-will or conflict between people and communities on the basis of race, religion, or ethnicity. “TVRI avoids anything in its programming that may cause the slightest uneasiness for any ethnic or religious groups.”⁵³ The MISS SARA code⁵⁴ has contributed to the structure of complex televisual texts in episodes which touch on religious themes in the fictional lives of Unyil and friends.

⁵¹ Siegel notes that in Java it is only when a child has acquired the ability to speak High Javanese that s/he finds a place in Javanese adult society. Until they are integrated into Javanese society, children are described as “not yet Javanese.” As such, they are not imagined to be part of any other ethnic group, but rather as “animalish.” See James T. Siegel, *Solo in the New Order: Language and Hierarchy in an Indonesian City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 18. Ogah and Ableh, unnaturally fixed at the child stage, have a disturbing otherness which I have expressed in the spider metaphor. See also the previous quotation from Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, p. 247, cited in footnote 44 above.

⁵² Suyadi, personal interview, May 5, 1993.

⁵³ Godwin C. Chu and Alfian, “Programming for Development in Indonesia,” *Journal of Communication Research* 30,4 (1980): 53.

⁵⁴ The letters stand for *Menghasut, Insinuasasi, Sensasi, Spekulasi* and *Suku, Agama, Ras, Aliran*. David Hill writes that the code forbids broadcast of anything considered “seditious, insinuating, sensational, speculative, or likely to antagonise ethnic group, religious, racial or ‘group’ (class) tensions.” David Hill, *The Press in New Order Indonesia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1994), p. 45.

The *Si Unyil* program has regularly presented episodes which focus on aspects of religious belief and practice. In the episodes available to me, a structure of what may be called embedded narrative is used when dealing with the highly sensitive topics of religion and moral guidance. I read this strategy and the subject positions it constructs as a practice that distances discussion of religion as faith, and foregrounds religion as a discourse of teaching and learning.

The first few minutes of “Perjalanan Kakek Abror” [Grandfather Abror’s Journey] illustrate the practice of embedding one narrative within another. The episode opens in Ucrit’s home where “O Come All Ye Faithful” is playing on the radio. Ucrit’s mother reminds her husband that he had promised to read the children a Christmas story (*dongeng*—legend) from the book he had just bought. Mr. Ucrit yields to his children’s eager pleas and begins to read. As viewers, we share the children’s point of view. We see the black and white illustrations in the book which show a town in the ancient Middle East in the time of Roman occupation. As Mr. Ucrit reads, the story book comes to life. The illustrations become puppets, and we and the fictional readers in Suka Maju are transported to a set representing a town near Bethlehem. For the remainder of the episode we remain in the story-book setting.

This story within a story performs two functions. First, it unites us as viewers with the Ucrit family and offers us the opportunity to enjoy the Christmas story along with Christians. Second, the storytelling positions us as observers, not participants or believers. Listening to the story involves no devotional practice or commitment from the implied audience in the way that a scene which showed the family praying together might. Third, the story distances the audience from Christian faith and practice; it takes Christianity out of Indonesia and sets it in a far away place, in the distant past. These devices enhance the “legendary” characteristics of the story. It is not a Biblical story. It is a story about children and their parents risking their freedom to help an old man achieve his life’s ambition to travel to Bethlehem after misfortune has made him a pauper. It is the story, as the title of the episode signifies, of a journey or pilgrimage, a metaphor which has resonances beyond Christianity in Muslim Indonesia. It is a story told more to reveal what religious traditions *share* than what makes them distinctively, doctrinally different. It is another instance of the practice of acknowledging cultural differences while erasing their specificity, an important process in the national culture project.

A similar distancing strategy is evident in the episode “Hijrah” [The Flight] which is concerned with key events in the life of the prophet Muhammad. As in the “Perjalanan Kakek Abror” episode, the re-telling of events in Muhammad’s life is distanced from an overtly religious context. First of all, the exclusively religious connotation of the signifier “*hijrah*” is broken down by linking Muhammad’s flight to Medina with events during the Indonesian revolution in 1945. Black and white archival footage at the beginning of the episode shows Surabaya citizens fleeing from military action in Surabaya in November 1945. Pak Raden describes this event to Unyil and his friends as a *hijrah*. Secondly, Muhammad’s flight to Medina is framed as a school history lesson introduced by the village school teacher (presumably in response to a question from Unyil about the meaning of *hijrah*). Once introduced, the story is continued by puppets who dramatize the story. The episode ends in the schoolroom

with a question from Unyil that provides the motivation for the teacher to round off the account of events.

The use of black and white archival footage and the framing of Muhammad's flight to Medina within a school history lesson together function to suppress the exclusively religious connotations of *hijrah* and foreground the political and historical narrative. This device positions Unyil and friends as students of religion. They are not inscribed as protagonists of any particular faith. Framing religion as "history," signifies that it is something to be studied and learned in the same way that many other topics are in the village. Viewers, together with Unyil and friends, are drawn into learning, studying, and enjoying each others' beliefs.

In the episode described above, the mixing of codes and artifacts of official culture (the history of the Indonesian Revolution and archival footage) with codes of legendary and religious tales produces a complex intersection between religion, fiction, and history. The *hijrah* story may be read as a somewhat bookish exegesis of events in the history of Islam; this secular approach to religion resembles the approach Lynette Parker found and described in her study of Balinese primary school instruction.⁵⁵ It may, however, be read as ascribing an almost sacred character to the events in Surabaya. Read this way, the episode ascribes an epochal significance and aura to the events of 1945-49, and reinforces the official valorization of the unifying power of the struggle against the colonial Dutch government which features prominently in primary school texts on "The History of the National Struggle."⁵⁶

Language, Consent and Hegemony

The constraints on the expression of emotion and on other dynamics of interaction imposed by using puppet characters in the series are considerable, and they raise the verbal text to an importance it would not usually hold in a televisual or filmic medium, where gesture, facial expression, spatial relations, and other subtleties of non-verbal communication "speak volumes." In *Si Unyil*, language is the prime channel of expressive communication. Language performs a hegemonic function in the series, functioning as a prime strategy of building and strengthening audience acceptance for the national language and the "national subject."

The language used by all of the *Si Unyil* characters for most of the time is Indonesian, the official, national language of Indonesia and the prime language for education and television broadcasting.⁵⁷ Indonesian has made the series intelligible to children throughout the archipelago. Even though for many children Indonesian may not be the language of primary, familial orientation, it is the language of primary socialization beyond the home, at school, and in most "public" situations.⁵⁸

The Indonesian which Unyil and his friends speak is instantly recognizable in its expressiveness, its abbreviated forms and elisions, and its syntax and vocabulary as

⁵⁵ Parker, "The Creation of Indonesian Citizens," p. 111.

⁵⁶ Barbara Leigh, "Making the Indonesian State: The Role of School Texts," *Review of Indonesian and Malay Affairs* 25,1 (1991): 17-43.

⁵⁷ Decree, Minister for Information #111, 1990.

⁵⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), p. 134.

the language of an in-group, a group of friends whose close social relations make it unnecessary to “spell everything out.” The appreciation and acceptance of children’s language is signaled in the first few moments of the title sequence when Unyil, Usroh, and Ucrit play a game, chanting out the nonsense syllables “Om Pim Pah, Unyil Kucing!”⁵⁹ The language of Unyil and his friends, and of many of the adults in *Suka Maju* (with notable exceptions which will be discussed later), is an example of a “restricted linguistic code” which reinforces “the *form* of the social relationship (a warm and inclusive relationship) by restricting the verbal signaling of individuated responses.”⁶⁰ The representation in *Si Unyil* of the restricted code so common among peer groups of children makes the language of the series accessible and familiar, and encourages the audience to identify and empathize with the characters, drawing them imaginatively into the unfolding of the narrative.

Language is also a source of humor. An episode concerned with national education day foregrounds literacy. It opens on Ogah laboriously sounding out letters in a newspaper. Ableh gently points out that the paper is upside down. Ogah airily dismisses his friend’s remark, saying that his action is quite deliberate, for if one is a clever reader, one can read upside down just as easily as right side up! Later in the same episode, Ogah is again a figure of fun as he tries to cover up his inability to read by memorizing the words on a banner. Caught out, Ogah protests that his substitution of “stir up” (*galakkan*) for “raise” (*tingkatkan*) in the text means the same, sending the children into peals of laughter, as they insist that that is not what reading is all about. In “Tua Muda Belajar Baca,” Unyil takes over from a flustered and frustrated Pak Raden in tutoring an adult literacy class. Before doing so, he obtains his father’s agreement that he will be excused from a punishment his father had earlier imposed on him. This kind of humor, involving inversions of child-adult relations mediated through language, attributes power and prestige to the children because of their language competence, and accounts for children’s pleasure in the series.

Making fun of characters who have only a restricted code at their command, who have “deviant” accents, or who speak a regional dialect is another strategy that legitimates the dominance of Indonesian and makes competence in Indonesian an attribute of the model citizen. The Bu Bariah and Engkong characters are striking in this regard. Their speech habits constitute their whole dramatic (and ideological) impact; this is particularly true of Bu Bariah, who often appears on screen without any motivation from the plot. Ibu Bariah is little more than a source of linguistic pleasure for the viewer. Her entry is usually heralded off-screen by her hawker’s cry “*Rujak, Rujak petis!*”⁶¹ readying the audience for the rushing tumult of her idiosyncratic Indonesian mixed with Madurese and Surabaya-inflected Javanese words and

⁵⁹ The game is a device for choosing who is to be “in,” rather like the “eenie meenie minee mo” Australian children use for the same purpose. The full text of the Indonesian rhyme is “*Om Pim Pah, Alaya Om Gambreng; Pok Minah Pake Baju Rombeng*” (Ratna Sulastin Chalmers, personal communication, September 1993).

⁶⁰ Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 78 (emphasis in original).

⁶¹ *Rujak petis* is a kind of fresh fruit salad spiced with chili and fermented shrimp paste. *Rujak petis* is a specialty of Surabaya and Madura. The character Ibu Bariah is a woman from the island of Madura.

phrases.⁶² Once on screen, 'Bu Bariah's statements are delivered with what we might think of as Cockney verve, and they are greatly enjoyed by the audience. But 'Bu Bariah's speeches frequently end by simply trailing off. She rarely gives any closure to her comments and is not used to provide narrative development. She is a side-show in which her dialect is the freak. Similarly, Engkong's stereotypical sing-song Chinese accent is a major part of his comic impact.⁶³

This play with accents and dialect makes "non-standard" Indonesian laughable. Non-standard speakers are constructed as deficient subjects, lacking competency in the national language. The validation of a geographically and ethnically unmarked Indonesian signifies a preference for a national, homogenous culture over an ethnically and regionally differentiated culture. The play with language illustrates Jackson Lears's argument that

the essence of the concept of hegemony is not manipulation but legitimation. The ideas, values and experiences of the dominant groups are validated in public discourse.⁶⁴

Yet the ideal subject created by this discourse is a fractured subject. The national motto of Indonesia (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika: They are Many, They are One, or Unity in Diversity*) legitimates diversity, but as we have seen, the subject position provided for regionally and ethnically inflected Indonesian accords "standard" Indonesian high prestige and denigrates other languages and ways of speaking.

Much of the dialogue between children, and between children and adults, is conducted in a restricted linguistic code, signifying the close, shared relationships enjoyed by the Suka Maju village community. There are, however, some adults and, on occasions, children who use an elaborated linguistic code. The elaborated code is associated with "standard"⁶⁵ Indonesian (*Bahasa baku*), and is typified by the use of complete sentences, inflected verb forms, an expanded vocabulary of unabbreviated words, and less expressive and more deliberate delivery compared with restricted code utterances. An elaborated code is usually associated with valued roles and statuses in the society.⁶⁶ In Suka Maju the Village Head, school teacher, and visitors habitually use an elaborated code. When a Jakarta-based journalist visits Suka Maju, his conversation with the village Headman focuses on the journalist's experience in writing about life in widely scattered parts of the nation. Their conversation makes it

⁶² 'Bu Bariah's speech is Indonesian, spoken with a Madurese accent, with (Surabaya) Javanese words and phrases inserted in place of Indonesian elements: "*Gah, aduh awake saya peno tulungi opo-o. Ini lho, saya dapat surat, tapi saya nggak bisa baca. Tolong ya Gah, dibacakan" (Surabaya Javanese words are underlined). In line with Madurese morphology, 'Bu Bariah creates her own compound words by taking the second syllable of a word and making it the first syllable of the original word: *ca-baca, yu-ayu, kep-cakep* (sic). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this article for help in understanding 'Bu Bariah's speech.*

⁶³ Suyadi, personal interview, May 3, 1993.

⁶⁴ Jackson T. J. Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 574.

⁶⁵ TVRI announcers are encouraged to speak in a "standard" accent which neutralizes any association with place such as Java, Madura, or Jakarta. J. B. Wahyudi, *Jurnalistik Televisi: Tentang dan Sekitar Siaran Berita TVRI* (Bandung: Alumni, 1985).

⁶⁶ Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, p. 78.

clear that it is the journalist's Indonesian language (and the institution of the press) which are crucial in representing the nation to itself. The key role of Indonesian is reinforced when Unyil and his friends crowd around the journalist, asking how they too might become journalists. The visitor impresses upon them that an ability to use "good Indonesian" is essential.

Children are represented using an elaborated code on those occasions when they perform individualized, public roles, such as acting as announcer, narrator, or chairperson for a village-wide event. The code shifting involved in performing these roles is highlighted in two ways. As viewers we are sometimes given access to the children "behind scenes" as they prepare nervously for a performance. The children's language is in restricted code and highly expressive, with a lot of teasing about who should do the announcements, protestations about being shy, and the like. But when the young Master or Mistress of Ceremonies takes the stage to welcome guests and announce the program, they usually speak in fluent, well-formed Indonesian. Sometimes, however, the difficulty in using an elaborated code is foregrounded. In "Saya Anak Indonesia" the normally fluent Unyil, acting as Master of Ceremonies, stumbles over the word "*hadirin*" (guests or people attending), mispronouncing it as "*haridin*," drawing attention to the rather more formal vocabulary and constructions required on such occasions. But this is an exception, and on most occasions children are shown to be competent in using an elaborated linguistic code in public.

Standard Indonesian is therefore systematically associated with socially and culturally prestigious roles in the case of adults, and with those occasions when a child performs a representative or beneficial public role such as providing others with information. The elaborated code of Indonesian is thus associated with cultural and social success. But producers have faced the problem that the elaborated Indonesian is usually spoken by the least funny and entertaining characters and sounds bookish, bureaucratic, and removed from everyday life. As a result the producer's desire to build consent for Indonesian, and "good" Indonesian at that, may be undermined. Indeed letters from viewers urged producers to represent a wider range of provinces in the series. One viewer noted that while the present range of dialects in the series did reflect the diversity of Indonesia, more regional dialects should be represented.⁶⁷ Gramsci has reflected on this issue in the Italian context, noting that dialect may become a source of pride and self-defense or resistance used by subordinate classes against the hegemonic power of a ruling elite and a caste language.⁶⁸

A wider vocabulary and more complex syntactical structures provide users of an elaborated code with the linguistic means for distancing themselves from the dynamics of a context-dependent, particularistic restricted code. Such a capability is important for individuals who perform social roles requiring the exercise of individual judgment and leadership. Professional roles will almost invariably require such competencies. But in many *Si Unyil* episodes, it appears that communalism, or collectivism, characterized by a high degree of mutuality, is highly valued and individual initiative

⁶⁷ These comments are summarized from Department of Information Regional Offices unpublished reports written in response to a 1989 PPFN survey on *Si Unyil*. Comments cited summarized from respondents in Maluku, Irian Jaya, and Sulawesi Utara.

⁶⁸ Stuart Hall, Bob Lumley, and Gregor McLennan, "Politics and Ideology: Gramsci," in *On Ideology* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), p. 50.

relatively devalued. An elaborated code introduces a degree of social distance and individuation which in some measure is antithetical to communalism and the maintenance of superordinate-subordinate power relations characteristic of the village world inscribed in Suka Maju.

In "Anak Masa Depan," a story about how Unyil and friends commemorate National Children's Day, Unyil suggests to his friends that they ask Pak Raden to be their adviser in preparing for the show they have decided to present to the village. Endut objects, saying that he is sure they can do everything themselves, and lists what they have already accomplished. Unyil isolates Endut, asking for a show of hands from those who think Pak Raden should not be their adviser. Endut raises his hand and tries to get Cuplis to join him. Cuplis declines, saying he would rather go along with the majority. On another occasion in the same episode, while resolving a quarrel with another group of children, Pak Raden urges them to seek mutual agreement through discussion, which he expresses as *musyawarah dan mufakat*, a reference to the Pancasila principle "Popular sovereignty governed by wise policies arrived at through deliberation and representation" (*Kerakyatan yang dipimpin oleh hikmat kebijaksanaan dalam permusyawaratan/perwakilan*). The theme of consensual decision making is explored in a number of other incidents in the narrative which need not detain us here. The main point for our purposes is that the narrative legitimates decision making processes that are consensual, and that apparently do not accommodate individual points of view very well.

Another illustration of this tension appears in the episode "Saya Anak Indonesia." The village children decide to present a performance of songs and a play for the adult community. Throughout the narrative, there are many affirmations of the children's sense of independence, responsibility, and commitment. One woman sitting in the audience and waiting for the show to begin, for example, says to a friend "It's marvelous isn't it, children putting on a show like this without adult help." There are also many instances which remind us that these are "children" after all: some players arrive late, others have a scuffle going across stage, and one nervous boy threatens to go home. Eventually, the children begin their play. Set in a schoolroom, it concerns the visit of an official from the Department of Education. The fictional teacher drills the class in how to greet the official from "Dep Dik Bud" (**D**epartemen **P**endidikan dan **K**ebudayaan) which provides a lot of scope for jokes about the Indonesian custom of developing acronyms. The children get confused, and thinking that the official's name is DepDikBud, chant that out, sending the audience into fits of laughter. Then the official arrives, and one student makes a formal speech of welcome and thanks. Half-way through, he forgets his lines, and despite Unyil hissing the final phrases for him, loses his nerve and begins to cry. At that, his friends seated on stage all begin to jeer and tease him about being a cry-baby, and the episode ends with the (fictional) teacher and the visiting official saying over and over that everything is "Chaos, chaos!" (*Kacau! kacau!*).

Two aspects of this entertaining, multi-layered televisual text are of interest for my argument. In the schoolroom scene, the children of Suka Maju, for a few delicious moments, send up officials and teachers, turning the officialese of the national bureaucracy into a set of nonsense syllables, something to play with, like the "Om Pim Pah" that introduces each episode. It is a ritual of reversal (of roles and social

categories), a licensed period of rebellion and mockery which draws attention to the normal state of affairs and affirms accepted power relations.⁶⁹ But the narrative steals the children's fun. They are not able to bring off their send-up of the education system. Their parents' pride in them as capable, independent organizers is dashed as the play falls apart because one of the players fails to carry off the joke. The hints we were given of the cracks in the performance are gathered up in the final scene where it becomes obvious that these were, after all, only children playing at being adults. Thus the narrative restores normal relations of deference and power, of organization and control between adults and children. It is as if even the *fiction* of such a change in village dynamics was beyond imagining. It is clear from these extracts that it is adult supervision, knowledge, and judgment which ultimately bring order out of chaos. The subordinate role of children (even educated children) is re-affirmed along with the suggestion that innovation and individual initiative have the potential to be disruptive, and may lead to chaos.

The idea that the usurpation of adult roles leads to chaos is taken up by Saya Shiraishi in her discussion of children's literature.⁷⁰ Shiraishi contrasts stories in which mothers neglect their duties and children demand their rights with the "family basis" educational models proposed by influential nationalist intellectuals such as Soetatmo Soeriokoesomo, first president of the Taman Siswa movement. Shiraishi's description of the way Soetatmo described democracy in language and imagery recalls the "Saya Anak Indonesia" episode discussed above; in both, democracy leads to a chaotic state in which proper roles are reversed:

if the mother persistently neglects her duties, collision is unavoidable. And when it—this collision—comes, the children will triumph. The roles will be turned upside down and the father and mother will have to obey. And we will here see the picture of the democratic state.⁷¹

In the television narratives, then, it is possible to identify a tension which produces a fractured subject. The discourse of education encourages initiative, independent action, and judgment in children, mediated through an elaborated linguistic code. The discourse of communalism, deeply rooted in Javanist, nationalist educational ideas of familyism (*kekeluargaan*) and conventional expectations of proper relations between children and adults, however, offers a subject position which does not acknowledge children's independence and valorizes the group over the individual. If the development of an elaborated linguistic code is intimately related to the development of individual judgment and the expression of ideas, narrative closures which offer negative rewards to individual achievement will produce a subject split by a disposition to articulate his/her individuality and a desire to conform to conventional (paternalistic) power relations and norms of communalism.

⁶⁹ Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1965); Peacock, *Rites of Modernisation*; Allon White, "Pigs and Pierrots: The Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction," *Raritan* 2,2 (1982): 51-70.

⁷⁰ Saya Shiraishi, "Young Heroes," chapter 3.

⁷¹ Soetatmo Soeriokoesomo, cited in *ibid.*, p. 168.

Conclusion

When Kurnain Suhardiman died on February 26, 1991, Artistic Director Suyadi and Agust Suprpto, long-term director of the series, took over Kurnain's role as script writers, but given their dual roles they have been unable to maintain the momentum of the series. In 1990/91, fifty-two episodes were screened. In 1991/2 and 1992/3, the series was screened once a fortnight. When I interviewed Suyadi at PPFN in May 1993, the series was not in production. Unyil and his friends rested on dusty shelves in the workroom at PPFN, and the adjacent studio was locked. Suyadi himself seemed uncertain of Unyil's future.

The loss of Kurnain is not the only factor, however, nor even the main factor, which has put Unyil on the shelf. Apart from a natural waning of audience interest after such a long run, critics such as Hannoeng Sumanthadiredja and Eduard Depari have argued that the program "lost its way"⁷² as the balance tipped too much towards modeling the ideal child subject as part of national development and away from the entertainment of children.⁷³ For *Post Film's* critic EV, the episode in which *Si Unyil* moved outside the studio to visit the largest steel factory in Indonesia was definitive:

since *Si Unyil* has been mixed up with instructional films like this one, it is no longer a puppet film, but is headed towards being a documentary.⁷⁴

Post Film reported in November of the same year that from its observations, the Sunday film on RCTI was more popular than *Si Unyil*, which had lost touch with its folk content and lively characters.⁷⁵

The insertion of *Si Unyil* in a flow which aligned it with non-fictional and heavily didactic comedy added to problems of reception. Rather than unifying the sequence as Raymond Williams' theory might seem to predict, the intersection of development discourse across *Ria Jenaka*, *Siaran Pedesaan*, and *Si Unyil* became a focus for audience dissatisfaction, and even confusion in the case of *Si Unyil*. Critical comment in the press and letters to the editor suggest that the unsubtle and inappropriate use of the program for instructional purposes insulted and confused its audience. The dramatist Ikranegara, for example, comparing *Sesame Street* with *Si Unyil*, argued that the American program was "one hundred per cent" better than *Si Unyil* because it did not make fools of the audience. He noted further that the program was enjoyed by adults as well as children for that reason.⁷⁶ Eight years later, critic Hannoeng Sumanthadiredja made a similar point: "[I]t is no longer clear to whom this puppet film is targeted. To children who are forced to think like adults, or to adults who have the minds of children."⁷⁷ Kurnain Suhardiman himself complained that government departments restricted his freedom to write in a way that appealed to children.⁷⁸ Suyadi said this became especially trying after TVRI learned that *Si Unyil* was

⁷² *Suara Karya*, January 24, 1988. See also *Pos Film*, January 15, 1989; *Suara Pembaruan*, August 13, 1989.

⁷³ *Kompas*, March 31, 1985; *Angkatan Bersenjata*, January 12, 1988; *Suara Pembaruan*, August 13, 1989.

⁷⁴ *Pos Film*, February 4, 1990.

⁷⁵ *Pos Film*, November 11, 1990.

⁷⁶ *Zaman*, August 23, 1981.

⁷⁷ *Pos Film*, January 15, 1989.

⁷⁸ *Kompas*, March 31, 1985; February 18, 1990.

watched by families, not just by children. He reported that it prompted government departments and other interest groups to seek access to the program as a way of extending information about their role and programs to adults as well as children.⁷⁹

For a decade, *Si Unyil* was TVRI's most popular children's (and possibly adult) series. The familiarity and charm of the scaled-down Indonesian world communicated to audiences across Indonesia in the same kind of way that the highly successful series *Skippy* did for Australian audiences. But the desire to create an "authentic" or "identifiably Indonesian" series by drawing on indigenous aesthetic content and the decision to use a children's series to popularize and build consent for national development priorities have been problematic for producers. Overly didactic episodes foregrounded the production conditions of the series and contributed to a perception that the series sought to manipulate its audience. The central problem of balancing the intersection of entertainment and instructional voices in *Si Unyil* opened the text to criticisms that threatened the consensus position the state intended to create. The co-option of Unyil, and the inappropriate adult voice with which he often spoke, made the text vulnerable to readings which interpreted development as a heavy-handed, coercive process. The insistent lecturing of village friends that Unyil was pushed into, far from constructing a world of mutuality and self-help, drew attention to the one-way, dependent relationship between the state and village communities it positioned as subjects needing "development."

⁷⁹ Personal interview, May 3, 1993.