

INTRODUCTION

The final decade of President Suharto's New Order in Indonesia witnessed a highly publicized series of confrontations between the Indonesian state and a number of theater groups over performances banned by the government. These clashes began with the banning of N. Riantiarno and Teater Koma's *Sukses* and *Opera Keco* in late 1990, at the same time that President Suharto and key state officials were calling for increased openness in public discourse. The government's attempts to muzzle modern theater continued with prohibitions against performances of other plays by groups from the Yogyakarta-based Komunitas Pak Kanjeng (1994), workers theater groups from the greater Jakarta Region (1995–97), and Ratna Sarumpaet's Satu Merah Panggung company (1997). This series of incidents brought theater into the center of national politics at a time of increasing public dissatisfaction with the Suharto regime. The bannings received extensive media coverage and became the occasion for wide-ranging public debate of a variety of related issues such as the law, good governance, democracy, and economics. They also demonstrated the resolve of the modern national theater's practitioners to resist the state's efforts to limit their freedom of expression. In the process of resisting the state's censorship apparatus, cultural workers gained new solidarity, found common cause with journalists, industrial workers, and other social groups, and grew increasingly bold in the subject matter that their plays broached. Through ever sharper criticism of the government's actions and rationales for banning performances, the theater workers and their allies from other sectors of society

managed to put government spokespeople on the defensive well before the Suharto regime was brought to an end in May of 1998.

This series of incidents highlight the important role that the Indonesian modern national theater was able to play, albeit briefly, on the national political stage. Yet the resistance to government censorship must be seen as emerging together with and, to some extent, building upon the ways in which elite theater workers, from the mid-1980s on, were exploring new modes of theater making: from difficult avant-garde performances to performances undertaken by and for Central Javanese peasants, Jakartan industrial workers, and other groups not normally involved in this form of modern national culture. These modes of theater making raised new critical perspectives on New Order Indonesian society and politics, and presented them to wider and more diverse audiences at a time when typical modern theater patrons were also becoming increasingly interested in such perspectives and issues. Thus, modern national theater in the late New Order era was becoming a site both for fostering germinal alliances between different social classes and groups, and for broaching new and daring themes in the process. These new alliances facilitated an expansion of public discussions about the significance of theater and theater bannings. Such discussions of censorship and of the themes taken up in the banned plays and other theater works helped mobilize public opposition to Suharto's New Order regime.

One of the central aims of this book is to illustrate how and why this happened. I will show how modern theater became a key arena for expressing political dissent under the authoritarian New Order regime, the ways in which modern national theater workers forged new theater practices in concert with a variety of social groups, how these practices were embedded in the social and political contexts of the time, and how they contributed to a sharpening of theatrical resistance to the New Order regime, including the intensifying struggle of theater workers against censorship.

Censorship struggles are an obvious instance of the relations of power between theater and the state, and Indonesia is no exception. In this case, the Indonesian state, claiming to uphold the laws and social

norms of society, assumed the power to represent the nation by policing what could and could not be said and done on stage. On the other hand, theater workers insisted that their right to speak to, and often for, the nation and various groups within it by representing the nation in performance was abrogated by seemingly arrogant state officials using specious arguments or, even worse, state officials who were unable or unwilling to conform to laws which the government itself had promulgated.

Loren Kruger has argued that the attempt to “stage the nation” to represent and reflect the people in the theater arose in the European Enlightenment, but “manifests itself fully only in the course of the 19th century with the rise of mass national politics, ‘universal’ (male) suffrage, and the demand of the people for legitimate representation as protagonist on the political stage” (Kruger 1992, 3). Although there are good reasons for caution when comparing Indonesia to 19th-century Europe, nonetheless, the rise of nationalism in Indonesia during the early 20th century also produced mass movements, mass national politics, universal suffrage, and demands of the people for legitimate representation on the political stage. It also foregrounded the notion of cultivating feelings of “deep horizontal comradeship,” to use Anderson’s term (Anderson 1992 [1983], 7), among those imagined as citizens of the nation. In Indonesia, these feelings were often subsumed into the elite’s sense of *noblesse oblige*, strengthening the idea of its duty to protect the “little people” from the vicissitudes of life and unjust treatment. Under the New Order, this *noblesse oblige* became transformed into a kind of corporatist paternalism in which leaders felt empowered to make decisions and speak on behalf of the “people” under their protection (and most importantly, guidance). Arguments for legitimacy thus have often circled around perceptions of who can speak for and advance the cause and prosperity of the *rakyat* (people). In the modern theater, such attitudes became intertwined with aesthetics and notions of national culture’s responsibility to speak of relevant and pressing social issues, especially when they impinged on the lives of the ordinary people. But splits within the elite created differing visions of who should lead and with what ideological and cultural orientation. One result of this was that modern Indonesian national culture often took an antagonistic stance towards the state and its political leadership.

In such circumstances, we see the nation as a setting in which contests of legitimation are staged in various venues, among them theaters. To assert their legitimacy in the face of an authoritarian and sometimes arbitrary state, Indonesian theater workers continually claimed to want to speak the truth about social conditions and, occasionally, to speak on behalf of the masses, although this was implied more often than actually stated. Eventually, at a time when the New Order government of President Suharto appeared to command its greatest power over the state and society, some theater workers even began to work with peasants, workers, and other mass constituencies, aspiring to speak for, and with, the people and in so doing, to use theater more effectively for social purposes (see especially chapters 2, 3, and 6). At the same time, avant-garde groups within the realm of the national art theater pursued, in their performances and theoretical articulations, a radical critique of both pre-existing theatrical form and dominant social relations, including politics. Seemingly alienated from larger popular audiences, some of these groups nonetheless drew part of their material from the daily lives of Indonesia's lower classes and shared ideas with members of the non-government organization (NGO/LSM) community. Their texts and ideas for staging were not simple by any means, coming, as they did, not only from society's marginalized but from diverse sources, sometimes rooted in the nation's political history, popular traditional theater forms, or local intellectual traditions of experiment and dissent, thereby still staking a claim on national identity and legitimacy within the nation (see chapters 4 and 5).

Thus, one of the things I will demonstrate in this book (specifically in chapter 1) is how national culture, and specifically, theater, often came to be in an antagonistic position towards the state. In so doing, I will demarcate the background assumptions and ideologies—the operative *doxa*—for some of the theater work to be described in subsequent chapters. Yet this antagonism was not total. It was more a dominant theme and mode of operations that became more acute at some times, less pressing, seemingly unnecessary, or of necessity more submerged at others. Accordingly, I will illustrate some of the ways the national art theater resisted, negotiated with, and at times accommodated itself to the state in independent Indonesia.

However, from the mid-1980s on, theatrical relations with the Indonesian state began gradually to shift towards a more consistently critical or even antagonistic mode. This forms the key narrative thread of this study. This theme of growing and more assertive resistance to the state is first taken up in each of the various chapters, but culminates in chapter 7 with a detailed account of the ways in which these varied efforts and practices created linkages among different social groups and ultimately contributed to building momentum towards the struggle against censorship, as well as to helping undermine the legitimacy of the Suharto government. Indonesian national culture has long been the preserve of a small cultural elite whose members generally know one another. In this way, social networks are a constant feature of national cultural life. However, in the late Suharto period, these networks or *jaringan* expanded in the realm of theater work in interesting and strategic ways to include ties with peasants, industrial workers, Muslim students and organizations, and lower- and lower-middle-class urban slum dwellers. This was facilitated both by new kinds of practices (*teater rakyat*/people's theater techniques) that helped elite and middle-class cultural workers reach out to other social groups, but also by the entrance of new constituencies into the world of modern national culture. Lower- and lower-middle-class urban residents, for example, then proceeded to create new kinds of avant-garde performances that spoke powerfully to the cultural elite of the lives of fellow citizens from different social strata. This expansion of *jaringan* enabled theater to speak in different ways and to different social groups about material normally not within the range of modern national theater productions. It thereby joined the modern national theater more closely to the pro-democracy movement of the late New Order.

Thus, the new theatrical *jaringan* acted in at least two ways to offer resistance to President Suharto's New Order regime. On the one hand, they brought together new constituencies in creating theater and protesting censorship, building a more complex social movement around issues of socio-economic justice and freedom of artistic expression. On the other, they brought new themes and material to public attention. Victor Turner argues that theater can create symbols, which in turn can instigate

action and channel its direction by saturating goals and means with affect and desire. Turner asserts that these symbols help us order meaning or question the established order through creative disorder (Turner 1982, 21–23). To illustrate this point, the ways in which reviewers and other observers made sense of avant-garde productions show how form and content helped social critics to formulate new insights about and expressions of social problems confronting New Order society. Similarly, grassroots and workers' theater productions broadened and deepened public awareness of the ways in which the prevailing system put these social groups at a disadvantage. In discussing the examples of Indonesian theater in the following pages, therefore, I would argue that the Islamic theater of Emha Ainun Nadjib and his collaborators, grass roots theater, workers' theater, the satirical plays of N. Riantiarno and Teater Koma, the angry productions of Ratna Sarumpaet's Satu Merah Panggung company, and the critical avant-garde productions of Teater Kubur, Teater Sae, and Teater Payung Hitam all assisted their primary and occasionally overlapping constituencies to solidify particular kinds of critiques of the regime and to imagine a better form of social life. At the same time, the performative and discursive alliances constructed by embattled theater workers, journalists, and workers' theater groups, among others, contributed to wider social articulations of those criticisms of the New Order and increased discursive, social, and legal pressure on the government to change policies and governing assumptions in the lead-up to Suharto's fall from power.

In the chapters that follow, I will present several cases from the late New Order (1985–98), the time during which these processes of expanding jaringan and growing critical interventions became more evident. I will examine several crucial performances and texts created in the course of these collaborations, analyzing their form and content so as to bring out a number of the key meanings they suggested, as well as to indicate tensions in their visions. In particular, I want to show how some of those thematic and formal tensions reflected dilemmas or tensions within the groups, tensions tied to the nature of the relationship between mostly middle-class cultural workers and their modern national arts ideologies on the one hand and the goals, aims, and visions of those groups with whom they worked to construct these performances.

Given that much of the theater I will present here was involved in a project of taking theater to, and making theater with, diverse groups, a second important thrust of this study will be to place the works in their complex social contexts and thereby describe theater's wider connections with society. By looking at the examples of modern theater that I have assembled, we will begin to see how theater was used to respond to problems confronting peasants, Muslims, lower-middle-class and lower-class slum dwellers, industrial workers, and middle-class university instructors and students. We will also see how the theater forms used by these groups to express their views of Indonesian society arose from rich, productive, and, at times, problematic combinations of social perspectives and cultural practices and materials.

One of the ways to illustrate this best is by highlighting the idea of theatrical works—scripts, performances, the ideologies and aesthetics that underpin them, and the institutions that support or hamper them—as always under construction, drawing on a variety of social discourses and cultural forms in the attempt to articulate their creators' often conflicted visions of society and nation and, in so doing, to connect more deeply, more satisfyingly with specific or even more vaguely imagined audiences. This requires at least two lines of investigation. The first is the construction of a genealogy of the theater practices and forms concerned, from which it will be easier to see the many ways theater is connected to and interacts with social and political communities, aesthetic ideologies, and cultural forms. It will also necessitate providing evidence of how the productions, or the groups staging the productions, changed to respond to social circumstances, that were themselves continually undergoing transformation. As Kershaw has noted, it is necessary in judging the efficacy of theater to understand the context in which audiences “read” the meaning of performances. Therefore, critical analysis must move beyond formalism and treat theater in relation to the aesthetic movements of which they are a part, the institutional structures of art, and the cultural formations they inhabit (1992, 5–6).

In all the cases that I will take up (grassroots theater, Islamic theater, avant-garde theater, workers' theater, banning struggles), we will be able to see how the practitioners involved drew upon diverse constituencies,

experiences, theories, and aesthetic backgrounds to construct the particular practices and ideas they produced. We will also be able to discern clearly how specific productions can be seen as snapshots of a process. This is especially true for those instances (grassroots theater, Islamic theater, workers' theater, and banning struggle) in which the collaborations and conflicts between socially differing participants in these projects, involving the search for aesthetic forms that could engage particular audiences and satisfy their expressive desires, and desires for action of creators and audience alike, lead to a more layered understanding of theatrical performances (and scripts, aesthetic ideologies, institutions, etc.) as moments in a complex set of aesthetic and social contestations. That is, such performances are always constructed from ongoing processes of collaboration, conflict, exclusion, and incorporation worked out to satisfy both the relations of power among the creators, audiences, and official institutions, and the aesthetic demands and expressive desires circulating among such groups that are connected to relations of power but never fully explained by them. These processes continue after each performance of a specific work and in the intervals between performances of succeeding works or between those of one group and another. By approaching the work of the groups to be considered in such a frame, we will also be able to grasp something of the dynamics of New Order society and politics from which modern theater arose, to which it responded, and upon which it had an impact.

Methodology and Theory

With the overarching focus of this book on theater's resistance to the New Order, it is necessary to be clear about what "resistance" means. Susan Seymour offers the following useful definition: "In a context of differential power relationships, resistance refers to intentional, and hence conscious, acts of defiance or opposition by a subordinate individual or group of individuals against a superior individual or set of individuals" (2006, 305). The Indonesian theater that I will discuss in the following chapters clearly fits within Seymour's definition. Yet the kind of resistance the book will present are hardly simple instances of resisters versus a superior power. As Seymour and Sherry Ortner have

pointed out, there has been a burgeoning literature on resistance, especially in anthropological and historical studies over the past few decades (Ortner 1995; Seymour 2006). Ortner cautions that many such studies are ethnographically thin for a variety of reasons: they do not look at the internal politics of subordinate or sub-altern groups, they do not give due consideration to the importance of culture, and post-structuralist scholars have often sought to dissolve the subject and have ended with incoherent subjects seemingly incapable of mounting resistance.

I find Ortner's arguments persuasive, and though I have no pretensions to writing a work of ethnography, nonetheless I hope to address some of Ortner's concerns about studying resistance. As should be clear by now, my primary view of the theatrical resistance offered by the groups I will discuss is that it was a resistance formed from diverse and often conflicting constituencies, ideologies, and forms. As theater workers from the mid-1980s on began to explore new kinds of theater practices and engage with new social constituencies, their resistance to the state became more complicated. No longer was it simply a matter of a relatively homogenous cultural elite voicing its criticisms, sometimes uneasily, of society, but theater workers from that elite were constructing socially critical works together with peasants, industrial workers, slum-dwellers, and others. Such collaborations were never simple, and conflicts about themes and aesthetics often showed not only common goals, but also the tensions and differences that separated those offering resistance to the state. Thus, this study offers compelling evidence that resistance cannot be assumed to be homogenous, nor can resisters be essentialized as a "single, unitary subordinate."

Similarly, in a study of theater, it would be absurd to discount the impact of previous cultural patterns and forms on the modes of resistance of the various groups. Accordingly, in chapter 1, I have tried to summarize the complex aesthetics and the social ideologies with which modern Indonesian theater is intertwined in order to present a cultural baseline on which many modern theater workers in Indonesia have operated. This baseline is not a stagnant cultural tradition but is itself a site of contestation in which relations between dominant and subordinate elements are complex and continually being tested and shifted. I have also tried to

highlight important aspects of the cultural backgrounds of particular groups, for example, the mosaic of Islamic traditions which formed the context for Emha Ainun Nadjib and the Yogyakarta Islamic theater groups' work, the lower-middle-class and high arts backgrounds for Teater Sae and Teater Kubur, or the rich high art theater background of Bandung's Payung Hitam. Additionally, I have tried to pay special attention to particular elements of a number of the performances and practices discussed herein that stem from the cultural life and forms of specific communities. In the process, I have indicated how elements drawn from different communities and traditions came into productive tension or dissonance within the newer performances and practices.

Finally, I have sought to place individual groups and participants within these complex backgrounds in order to display the ways in which they grapple creatively with the cultural patterns, ideologies, and aesthetics that condition them and provide templates for their cultural work. One of the clearest examples of this, which will be evident in chapter 1, is the ambivalence many theater workers feel about being too "political" in their productions, while at the same time facing personal and social pressures to contribute to the advancement of the nation by voicing issues of concern to fellow citizens. The chapters that follow will show how different groups attempted to resolve or dispense with that ambivalence.

The body of theory that underpins my work is drawn from a variety of sources, but one of the most prominent is a combination of structuralist Marxism and neo-Marxism. My primary background is in comparative literature and drama/theater studies, and, as a result, I will devote considerable attention to scripts or performance texts. The work of Pierre Macherey, Frederic Jameson, and Terry Eagleton has been particularly helpful in seeing such texts as incomplete, full of tensions and conflicts generated within the texts themselves by the complexity of the issues they raise and the forms they deploy. Yet, in discussing theater, looking at written texts, though highly useful and necessary, is also inadequate in itself. Obviously, written texts are only one point of entry into the world of the Indonesian modern national art theater and some of its related cultural projects like grassroots or workers' theater. I have, whenever possible, tried to watch the performances that I discuss in this book,

either in person or through recordings. I will, accordingly, have more to say about the actual staged performance of some of the case studies than others, although I have tried to supplement my personal knowledge of all the performances discussed with local news media reviews, observations about and descriptions of performances by some of the participants, and occasionally remarks from audience members. Applying the same method for reading performances—seeing them as full of tensions and contradictions—is as productive as in the case of written texts, and at times even more suggestive when the performance versions depart significantly from the text contained in a written script.

At another level, theater work, like other cultural work, is enmeshed in a web of social relations. These relations have an impact on many details of theater production, from the aesthetics deemed proper to producing and staging a script or performance, to the reception of a particular piece of work. In considering such socio-cultural processes, I have been guided by the work of such theorists as Pierre Bourdieu, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall. What my analysis draws from this body of work is a set of tools for seeing cultural tastes, genres, and forms as tied to, though not completely defined by, specific social groups, and representing arenas in which differing groups within society struggle as they attempt to attain dominance over the process of meaning making. As I will detail in chapter 1, their work has allowed me to understand the process of cultural production as one which is never complete and which, though it involves dominant groups as well as subordinates, is nonetheless a continual dance of accommodation and opposition, hegemony, and resistance. It has also allowed me to think of cultural practices and institutions as sites with considerable autonomy within a social system in which, nonetheless, hegemonic forces work to reconcile challenges and incorporate differing ideologies and practices into an acceptable framework of rules and guidelines.

The pursuit of understanding modern national theater in Indonesia at the level of its system as well as understanding individual productions as both conforming to and reacting against that system has also necessitated that I gain an idea of how popular particular plays were and how they were viewed critically in the media and among other

theater workers. In some cases this was made easier because media reviewers are often themselves well-known theater workers or other arts figures. Similarly, I have tried to gauge audience responses by scattered comments in the media and other indicators such as invitations to perform in other locales and the reactions of critics. By comparing audiences' and critics' responses with the dominant aesthetic ideology, through whose lens national art theater is most often viewed and evaluated, I have been able, to a limited extent, to pursue the kind of analysis described by Susan Bennett in her book *Theater Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*. Bennett is concerned with viewing theater audiences as cultural phenomena subject not only to the world created on the stage, but to the institutions of theater and the expectations of theatrical events generated outside the actual performance time and space as well. Yet for Bennett, the public incorporates a diversity of critics and audiences with different horizons of expectations. She argues that the assumptions of middle-class, mainstream audiences should not be seen as an uncontested norm (Bennett 1990, 100–101). In Indonesia this would seem to hold particularly true. Though productions of modern national theater may have been dominated, especially since 1965, by intellectuals who embraced a particular set of artistic values resembling those of middle-class artistic ideologies and values in most developed countries, their productions were not always popular with the bulk of the Indonesian middle-classes. In turn, the assumptions of those middle-classes or intellectuals and art theater practitioners did not always dominate other forms of theatrical activity, most notably the large variety of folk theater productions. In such circumstances, national art theater productions occasionally came under attack for being alienated from popular audiences or from traditional Indonesian values and aesthetics. The situation became even more charged during the 1990s as segments of the middle-class attempted to gain more political power within the New Order state, despite the fact that they still constituted a small percentage of the overall population. This meant these middle-class groups began searching for allies, including peasants, workers, and the broader Muslim constituency. In the sphere of theater, this necessitated undertaking experiments with using theater for *conscientizing* those sectors of the population as well as reaching out to form ongoing

links with social activists in the NGO/LSM (non-government organization/*Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* or Self-Reliant Community Institutions) community. In all cases, this involved to greater or lesser degrees theater workers from the modern national theater sphere, and their involvement posed anew and more deeply the problem of bridging and combining the horizons of expectations and aesthetic ideologies of differing groups. I unravel some of the negotiations and tensions involved in these attempts in chapters 2, 3, and 6.

An additional significant set of ideas vital to my analysis resides in postcolonial theory. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins begin by defining postcolonialism as an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's power structures, discourses, and social hierarchies (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 2–3). However, as we shall see in the Indonesian case, engagement with colonial systems does not necessarily mean a clean binary opposition between the cultural values and forms of the colonizer versus those of the colonized. Furthermore, fetishization of the colonizer-colonized binary as the only axis of struggle can lead analysts to overlook the real divisions and struggles that occur within and among the formerly colonized peoples of a newly independent nation. For example, different groups within the Indonesian nationalist movement continually vied with one another for leadership. Each brought varied systems of values and meanings into the debates and struggles. In the process of give and take, the cultural values and forms of colonizer and colonized were often combined in interesting and unusual ways. And in fact, Gilbert and Tompkins argue that hybridity can be seen as the positive recombination of forms by formerly colonized subjects who are attempting to define themselves (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 11). We see this hybridization process in the formation of modern theater practices and aesthetic ideologies briefly touched upon in chapter 1, but also in the very diverse ways nearly every group discussed combines elements of local tradition with conventions of performance or aesthetics borrowed in part from the West. Similarly, some of the groups discussed, especially those involved in grassroots theater and Islamic theater, consciously sought to set themselves in at least partial opposition to what they perceived to be Western mass culture, while at

the same time adapting specific ideas or practices from such mass cultural phenomenon in an effort to compete. The resultant tensions suggest the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of cultural purity in the creation of cultural works in a postcolonial and globalized world. They also remind us once again of the complexity of the theatrical resistance I will be examining.

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Chapter 1 will summarize the history through which the process of theatrical contestation with the state actually unfolded in Indonesia. Looking at the development of both the modern national theater in Indonesia and the aesthetic ideologies that govern much of its production, I will show the ways in which a struggle between different segments of the indigenous colonial elite led to a discursive and political divide, with those favoring a more conservative cultural vision of the nation eventually gaining more power within the state and government, and those with a relatively more egalitarian and modernizing perspective holding principle sway in several spheres of national culture. This led to a situation in which state and modern theater were often counter-posed in an antagonistic relationship. I will show how this situation was nonetheless always fluid and under contestation, with the state at times asserting more influence in the realm of modern theater, at other times less. I also demonstrate the ways in which leading cultural institutions such as the print media and the Jakarta Arts Center engaged with and exercised some influence on the development of modern national theater. Subsequent chapters will show the continued development of avant-garde and other groups within this matrix of ideology, aesthetics, and theatrical practice. In addition, subsequent chapter will discuss the ways in which some modern national theater workers attempted to expand the reach of the modern art theater and its ideas of social change and critique by creating specific types of theater practices in conjunction with peasants, workers, and Muslim youth.

In chapter 2, I use the example of the Arena Teater based in Yogyakarta (Central Java) to demonstrate the complexities of producing grassroots theater that aims to speak on behalf of peasants and other disenfranchised

groups, often in their own voices. Arena's grassroots theater practice, developed over the 1980s through the incorporation of a variety of sources and direct experiences, shows the way in which one group of modern theater practitioners attempted to transcend the limits of conventional modern stage productions for promoting social change. It illustrates the successes that Arena achieved in *conscientizing* peasants and mobilizing NGO workers to use theater tools in their own work, thus contributing to a growing movement of peasants over land rights and rural development. Yet the chapter also concentrates on the tensions and conflicts that arise when mainly middle-class theater workers attempt to speak for, or even in conjunction with, the Indonesian disenfranchised. I examine the ways in which Arena's practices changed over the years to fit its evolving understanding of grassroots theater as a tool for grassroots empowerment, and point out the difficulties and dilemmas that Arena and a number of other grassroots theater groups encountered in obtaining funding and working with state institutions, factors that limited the reach and continuity of their efforts.

Chapter 3 investigates the work of Emha Ainun Nadjib and a group of collaborators based in Yogyakarta, to create a popular form of Islamic theater between 1989 and 1991. Like Arena Teater, though in a more limited sense, this theater showed its own connections to grassroots concepts. It thereby hints at the appeal expanding modern theater's constituency and its socio-political functions had for diverse cultural workers in Indonesia during the 1980s. Aside from a detailed portrait of the social context and cultural roots of this florescence of Muslim theater, I show how the group surrounding Nadjib continually shaped and transformed its works in order to tailor them to particular audiences and occasions. Evolving to create a Muslim form of stage spectacle that could contend with secular national mass culture associated with the West, this form of theater presents a typical postcolonial dilemma: adapting elements of a foreign (neo-colonial) culture in order to compete with it on something close to its own terms. Nonetheless, Nadjib's and his colleagues' efforts enhanced the image of a cultural Islam as part of the general movement of social protest and reform then underway.

In chapter 4, I discuss the rise to prominence in modern national theater circles of two avant-garde theater groups from Jakarta, Teater Sae

and Teater Kubur. These groups exemplify the rise of modern theater ensembles that combined the lower-middle-class sensibilities of many of their members with high art conventions and aesthetics to shape startling and distinctive new styles of avant-garde theater that questioned both the formerly prevailing practices of modern theater and the social conditions of late New Order Indonesia. I show how these groups forged practices that emphasized disjuncture and fragmentation at the level of form, and that thematized urban alienation, the confusion of rapidly changing contexts and identities, and the crushing weight of national histories and ideologies upon ordinary people. I will also show how Teater Kubur challenged conventional practices of modern national theater by taking its theater to a variety of previously neglected locations and constituencies. Finally, by analyzing the contexts and the performances of these two groups, I will reveal some of the contradictions and tensions in the post-modern visions of society present in Teater Sae's later plays, and show how Teater Kubur's particular rebellion against artifice in theater, related to the work of Teater Sae, was nonetheless characterized by key differences that in large part stemmed from the different bases of support and membership prevailing in each group.

The Bandung-based performing arts academy (STSI) group, Teater Payung Hitam, forms the focus of chapter 5. Though showing distinct similarities with Teater Sae and Teater Kubur, Payung Hitam's origin in an academic milieu and its series of seminal performances between 1994 and 1997 mark it as both hailing from yet another different social constituency and signalling a new, more aggressive phase in modern theater's critique of New Order society. My argument examines the rise to prominence of Payung Hitam, investigating its 1994 national theater festival performance of Peter Handke's *Kaspar*, and its interrogation of the role of the national language in shaping the consciousness of Indonesian citizens. I look at the progressive disappearance of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, from Payung Hitam's original productions in succeeding years as a symptom of a crisis of national identity. Furthermore, I show the way in which the group's three original and highly acclaimed performance pieces of this period foregrounded a growing militant tendency of the modern national theater to tackle current political issues head on, a

tendency that was in part also indicative of the influence of the student protest movement of the 1990s.

Chapter 6 narrates the rise and development of several workers' theater groups (TBI, Teater ABU, Sanggar Pabrik, and TABUR) in the Jakarta area from 1989 to 1998. I pay particular attention to the difficulties encountered in the interactions between worker participants, NGO activists, and modern theater trainers and supporters, including some from the avant-garde groups mentioned in the previous chapter, which point to different understandings of the goals of these theater practices held by the respective social groups involved. I go on to compare the productions of TBI, ABU, and TABUR to the more artistically oriented modern national theater performances of Ratna Sarumpaet, who took up worker themes through her interest in the Marsinah murder case. This comparison demonstrates the differences in treatment and theme between worker groups and modern theater practitioners, but also shows how the two constituencies were slowly drawing closer to an alliance of interests and themes around the struggle for democratization. I also show how the New Order state tried to control and limit this type of theater, a theme that leads into the final chapter.

In the chapter 7, I focus on the series of bans of theatrical performance that began with Teater Koma's *Sukses* in 1990 and reached a climax in the at times covert, and finally, open attempts to ban performances during Ratna Sarumpaet's 1997 tour of her *Marsinah Menggugat* (Marsinah Accuses). By concentrating on several key characteristics of the evolving debates over government bans, I show how the New Order government's legitimacy was eroding long before Suharto's sudden fall from power in 1998. Further, I demonstrate the way in which the media discourse that facilitated the public debates allowed a variety of voices to emerge and find common interests in deploring and protesting such government censorship. Finally, I highlight the fact that modern national theater workers found new solidarity and courage during the course of these struggles, mounting productions that challenged more aggressively than ever before the New Order's unwritten codes for theatrical expression.

These case studies of theater in the last thirteen years of Suharto's New Order present vivid illustrations of the complex political relations,

social conditions, and artistic processes involved in the production of various kinds of modern theater. They show diverse constituencies working together, though not always in agreement, to shape new forms and practices for creating theater that its participants hoped would speak to particular publics about specific issues. They provide glimpses of the manner in which theater workers continually shape and reshape their work in response to audiences, critics, and their own members. And they offer evidence of the diverse and changing paths by which theater contributed to a rising tide of resistance to a regime riddled with corruption and bent on authoritarian control. As a whole, they suggest why theater was able, for a time, to play a modest though significant role on the Indonesian national political stage.

Obviously, in a study of this size, I could not possibly hope to cover all the groups that resisted the New Order and its social, political, and aesthetic ideologies on the stage. There have been many important modern theater groups in a variety of cities and other locations, who contributed to an ongoing theatrical critique of the Suharto regime, using a number of styles and occasionally drawing on the experiences and support of mixed social constituencies. These groups include, but are not limited to, Studiklub Teater Bandung, Bengkel Teater Rendra, Teater Dinasti, and Teater Gandrik in Yogyakarta, Teater Gedag-Gedig and Teater Jagat in Surakarta (Solo), Teater Kecil, Teater Mandiri, Teater Saja and others in Jakarta, Teater Bumi in Padang, West Sumatra, and Sanggar Merah Putih in Makassar (then Ujung Pandang), South Sulawesi. A number of scholars have already written about some of these groups and the figures who led them. Barbara Hatley has been particularly dedicated in following the development of modern theater mainly in the Central Javanese cities of Solo and Yogyakarta, often analyzing the ways in which local modern theater groups attempted to turn local codes of meaning making against the state's oppressive power. Combining theater studies and anthropological-style field work over several decades, Hatley's work has found one important culmination in her recently published *Javanese Performances on an Indonesian Stage*, which documents and analyzes the ways modern national theater and traditional *ketoprak* theater celebrate "the shared identity of particular social groupings" (Hatley 2008, 155), resist or acquiesce in state

power, and adopt to changing conditions. My work owes much to Hatley's earlier studies of the 1980s and early 1990s. Younger scholars like Cobina Gillitt and Evan Winet have also contributed more recently to the study of some of the key groups in the early New Order. Gillitt (2001) has examined the rise of the "New Tradition" of theater in New Order Indonesia, looking at the significance of their pioneering efforts to blend Western dramaturgy with elements of traditional theater, noting in particular the fact that figures such as Rendra, Arifin C Noer, and Putu Wijaya paralleled the ideas of "indonesianness" propagated by the state in combining elements of various ethnic traditions, but arguing that they did so in a manner that refused the state's more static concepts and often criticised the state as well. Winet (2001), whose work I will discuss in the next chapter, has used a performance studies lens to examine the conflict between the theater and the state, using three examples from different historical eras, including Rendra and his Bengkel Teater. Yet many of the groups examined by these scholars achieved their greatest popularity and impact in the first two decades of the New Order (1965–85). I note some of their particular achievements in passing, while laying out the historical background for what happened in modern theater during the last thirteen years of Suharto's long rule.

My examples were chosen based on my own fieldwork in Indonesia beginning in 1986, and indicate a number of the trends in modern theater that I personally found most exciting, but which also seemed to be attracting significant attention in the media or in wide social circles within Indonesia. They were also selected because they drew upon key sectors of society for support and thematic material, and thus, when taken all together, present a complex overview of how Indonesian society was able to contribute to theatrical efforts of the artistic modern stage to analyze, criticize, and resist the regime that for so many years had governed its life. It was precisely this combination of public attention and excitement, the participation of or connections to diverse social constituencies, and the limiting factor of my own arrival in and history of visits to Indonesia that determined the framework for much of my research and eventually this study. Yet there are also clear patterns and connections that emerge from the groups and movements selected for examination here. In all cases of

grassroots, Islamic, or workers' theater included in this study, avant-garde or high art theater participants played roles, while the struggles of peasants, workers, and women often provided themes and inspiration for high art and avant-garde theater performances. Furthermore, not only do the individual chapters show this dynamic and conflicted relationship between the modern national theater and efforts to create more popular types of theater practices, but they also bring into focus connections and developments between the different groups and movements. For instance, the grassroots theater described in chapter 2 had ties, through individuals, common goals or shared history, with the Islamic theater of Yogyakarta in the late 1980s and the worker's theater movement in the greater Jakarta area in the 1990s. Similarly, key members of Jakarta avant-garde companies like Teater Sae and Teater Kubur also participated in the workers' theater movement. Teater Payung Hitam, though not involved in such grassroots or workers' theater efforts, nonetheless also shows connections to the student movement of the 1990s as well as taking up themes that resonated with many of the issues raised by grassroots, workers', and other avant-garde theater groups alike. Finally, there is a certain historical momentum in moving from one chapter to the next; the early chapters lay the groundwork and indicate ways in which some modern national art theater practitioners were engaging with broad social constituencies other than the relatively small middle-class base long supportive of such high art theater. These chapters show the ways theater paralleled and at times assisted the broader movement of young middle-class activists attempting to build greater social equality and democratic relations through work with peasant, worker, and other socially less advantaged groups. These chapters also demonstrate the manner in which theater was articulating various criticisms of the New Order regime and Indonesian society, which contributed to the rise of a sharper kind of resistance to the Suharto government from the mid-1990s on. All of this momentum and work led, both in society and in theater, to the increasingly daring articulations of dissatisfaction and regime criticism illustrated in the realm of theater by the cases presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

When taken altogether, the studies gathered in this volume offer a varied and detailed portrait of the ways in which modern national

theater resisted the power of Suharto's New Order regime and helped contribute to its eventual downfall. However, the role of theater as an important and visible forum for and form of public social criticism in the late New Order did not spring into being overnight or without a lengthy process. It is to the analysis of that longer process that enabled theater to play an important critical role in Indonesian society from 1985 to 1998 that I now turn.