

CHAPTER ONE

NEGOTIATING HERITAGE: WAYANG PUPPET THEATRE AND THE DYNAMICS OF HERITAGE FORMATION

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Introduction

Generally, wayang refers to many kinds of traditional theatre in Java, Bali, Lombok, and some other parts of Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The word wayang can either mean a (wayang) performance, (wayang) puppet, or (wayang) character. *Wayang kulit* is played against a screen with flat shadow puppets, usually cut out of water buffalo hide and painted. This is the most widespread form of wayang.

Wayang golek is performed with wooden doll-like rod puppets without a screen (Mràzek 2002, 1). Wayang puppets in museum collections around the world together with the exotic sound of the gamelan have become icons of “authentic” Javanese culture with roots in a pre-Islamic past since colonial times. This connotation of authenticity was confirmed and reinforced by the Indonesian state within the context of the nation with the application of the wayang puppet theatre for the UNESCO List of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. In 2003 wayang puppet theatre was officially proclaimed as a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, and five years later inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. An elaboration on the justification for the UNESCO Proclamation can be found on the UNESCO website: “The Wayang Puppet Theatre still enjoys great popularity. However, to compete successfully with modern forms of pastimes such as video, television or

karaoke, performers tend to accentuate comic scenes at the expense of the story line and to replace musical accompaniment with pop tunes, leading to the loss of some characteristic features.”¹



Fig. 1-1: Enthus Susmono performing in Teater Lingkar, Semarang, 30 July 2009. Photo: Sadiyah Boonstra

In January 2009, the dalang (puppeteer) Ki (The Honourable) Enthus Susmono visited the Netherlands to be present at the opening of the exhibition “Wayang Superstar - the theatre world of Ki Enthus Susmono” in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam.

The exhibition focused on Enthus Susmono himself and his puppets. Later that year he performed in the Tropentheater which, like the Tropenmuseum, is a department of the Royal Tropical Institute. Various papers picked up the museum’s press release and wrote: “Ki Enthus Susmono breathed new life into the authentic Indonesian wayang puppet.”² “The controversial Javanese puppeteer and puppet maker Ki Enthus Susmono enjoys in his own country the status of “superstar”. He is the most trendy, the most cheeky, and the most creative.”³ “His performances are innovative and keep the wayang theatre alive.”⁴ “Rough language, sexual allusions, a puppet that drinks beer. Until recently such brutalities were unthinkable of in Indonesian puppet play, the wayang. The work and performances of Ki Enthus Susmono changed that. [...] In his home country Ki Enthus Susmono had to endure quite some abuse. He was called the Crazy Dalang, the Cowboy Dalang, and the Kasar Dalang, the ‘rude’ dalang.”⁵



Fig. 1-2: Enthus Susmono at a press conference in his house, 22 July 2009. Photo: Sadiah Boonstra

These quotes suggest that key elements in the work of Enthus Susmono concern innovation and the enlivening of a tradition which had almost died out. The kind of wayang he creates is implicitly distinguished from another, contrasting sort of wayang which is authentic, not modern, not creative, but nearing extinction. Also, he is opposed to older dalang colleagues. However this “other” kind of wayang is not defined or elaborated on; it is looming in the background, assumed to be known by the readers of the (newspaper) articles. Various questions arise from the distinction that is being made in the way Enthus Susmono is described. If he is considered to be modern and innovative he is being measured against some kind of wayang standard that is referred to as “authentic” and “traditional”. What then is the wayang that is being defined as the standard? How has this become the standard? How does Enthus Susmono differ from this other, “authentic” or “traditional” wayang? Who and what decides what this standard is and what does the use of it imply? How do local and global elements influence the process of standardisation and interaction? What does this tell us about the dynamics of heritage formation? Rather than giving answers this paper aims to open up a first exploration into this subject.⁶

“Traditional” wayang puppet theatre

A widely shared idea of wayang has already existed for a long time. Consequently, the specific sound of the gamelan together with the

delicately carved and painted wayang puppets have become icons of a culture that has become considered as “authentic” Javanese culture. Even though Indonesia nowadays contains the largest Islamic population of any nation in the world, this image of “authentic” Javanese culture is rooted in a pre-Islamic past. The American historian L.J. Sears observes in her influential study *Shadows of empire: colonial discourse and Javanese tales* (1996) that wayang and the gamelan sounds are appealing and nonthreatening signs of postcolonial Indonesia, particularly when viewed in the light of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the representation of the perceived threat of Islam in European and American media. Sears also points out that wayang is usually conflated with Java and Java with Indonesia; and that this coalescence is still used by orientalist scholars, Indonesian businesses, tourist promotion schemes and the political running elite in Jakarta (Sears 1996, 215). The conventional idea of wayang thus mirrors a static and ahistorical tradition. However, the contemporary wayang tradition is far from an ahistorical phenomenon. It is the result of a centuries long vital relationship between a performance practice and wayang scholarship by Western and Indonesian wayang enthusiasts, the influence of the Javanese courts on the tradition, as well as modernist and contemporary politics.

Although the earliest historical evidence of wayang dates back to the 9th century (Herbert 2002, 16), our knowledge of its history, performance practice and role in society starts with Dutch documentation in the late 18th and early 19th century (Sears 1996). The earliest scholars were mainly interested in wayang kulit in order to become acquainted with Javanese culture, but tended to discount wayang golek. Simultaneously with the documentation of the wayang tradition, guidelines were established for what was worth and what was not worth recording. This is illustrated by the accounts of the Dutch philologists J.A. Wilkens and C. Poensen. Wilkens is the first to document a wayang performance in Javanese with a Dutch translation in 1846 and wrote in his introduction: “The one who wants to judge [the] wayang play in comparison to our dramatic performance will not find anything that is worth viewing, but if one would want to become acquainted with the Javanese more closely, then we believe, that a wayang performance provides a suitable event, in which the people are characterised most excellently [...] The following *tjarang* [fiction of the dalang] Pregiwo, we wrote down from the mouth of the court dalang, Ki Redhi Soeto, with omission of the platitudes, which would not have been left out in the same performance.”⁷ (Wilkens 1846, 6-7).

Almost three decades later Poensen wrote: “But what is it? There is no development, no progress, in the art! Once one has got the hang of it, once

one has got the grasp of it, got the knack of it, one is done for the rest of his life. Henceforth, one knows neither of new parts nor repetitions. It is or does not become science, but rather a knack, a skill, and if one once hits a wrong tone, oh! It does not matter that much!"⁸ (Poensen 1872, 220). And: "Let us learn what the dalang will recite [...]. We chose the Lampahan Palasara. We will report this story initially literally and further in short features, omitting all, that seems to us somewhat hurting or less proper."⁹ (Poensen 1872, 246).

At the turn of the century the wayang tradition was elevated with the work of the Dutch historian G.A.J. Hazeu. He was convinced that wayang was originally Javanese with roots in primitive, religious ancestral ritual. "It can be said: the wayang performance was part of the ancestral ritual. [...] If the shadow performance – as we tried to show above – was one of the constituent parts of the ancestral ritual, the performer, the dalang, was the priest of the cult..."¹⁰ (Hazeu 1897, 54). His study was without criticism adopted by Western scholars and laymen, but also by educated as well as untrained Javanese. For almost one century Hazeu's analysis was influential, until the 1970s, when the Dutch philologist J.J. Ras concluded that the wayang theatre did not develop from an ancestral ritual, but that it evolved from a merging of two parallel traditions, the one rural and native Indonesian with roots in magic-religious events that also had an entertaining character; the other tradition aristocratic and imported from India (Ras 1976, 86-87).

A.B. Cohen Stuart, a Dutchman who specialised in Malay and Javanese language, was the first to pay attention to the differences between Indian Mahabharata and wayang stories in 1860. The interest for religious and philosophical elements of wayang was reinforced by the discovery of its Hindu-Buddhist roots in the 19th century and with this wayang's status was raised. According to Sears, the Dutch Theosophist Mrs. C. Van Hinloopen Labberton was one of the first, influenced by Theosophy, to no longer regarded wayang as a degenerated tradition, like the 19th century scholars. Van Hinloopen Labberton first wrote down her ideas in English in 1912 and published in Dutch in 1921 that she considered wayang as a vehicle of ancient Javanese contact with higher knowledge. To her wayang was a reflection of an old wisdom long gone that could be traced back to the great Shaivite and Buddhist kingdoms of the pre-Islamic period; a period in which Indian religious, cultural, legal, and textual traditions were imported to Java (Sears 1996, 129).

In 1922, the anthropologist H.W. Rassers, also a Dutchman, wrote *De Panji-roman*, a study of the tales of the legendary East-Javanese prince Panji. Like Hazeu, Rassers was convinced of wayang's roots in ancestral

ritual. He argued that wayang was a symbol of the ancestral marriage. It was the initiation ritual of a bride and groom into society performed in a dramatised form: “[...] the oldest core of the Panji-story is a myth, which [...], tells the origin of the Javanese world with its exogamic arrangement of marriage and its initiation rite as an introduction to it.”¹¹ (Rassers 1922, 369). A few years later, under influence of theosophical thoughts, Mangkunagara VII, ruler of the minor court in Surakarta (1916-1944), wrote *Over de wajang koelit (poerwa¹²) in het algemeen en over de daarin voorkomende symbolische en mystieke elementen* in which he emphasised the mystical element of wayang. It was written in Dutch in the 1930s, and at the time of its publication regarded as the key representation of wayang (Sears 1996, 15). Mangkunagara states that wayang is the essence of Javanese culture and every wayang story is a quest for mystical knowledge. “...the wayang is not just play and entertainment, but the reflex of a spiritual and inner life of a whole people. [...] That is why the wayang stories [...] are the testimonies of a very special and very high civilisation. [...] But there is still something else. Many wayang lakons contain a lesson, which is based on a secret, derived from supernatural influence, knowledge concerning God, the world and nature.”¹³ (Mangkunagaran VII 1933, 88).

Every performance is a representation of an effort to establish a mystical relation with the higher powers within oneself; a spiritual search of mystical knowledge. The wayang puppet theatre is the essence of the Javanese people: “It is hoped that I have contributed with this lecture to the unravelling of the peculiar mystery, why the wayang already for centuries roots in the soul of the Javanese people and why it, even now, in modern times, is still loved, admired and honoured where the real Javanese national spirit in the positive meaning of the word, still rules.”¹⁴ (Mangkunagaran VII 1933, 89-95).

The studies briefly discussed above were all key publications in the construction of the understanding of “authentic” or “traditional” wayang. These publications focused on ritual, religious, and mystical elements of wayang and wayang’s essence to Javanese culture is emphasised. These elements came to constitute the “authentic” wayang tradition which was taught and further developed at Javanese courts by the establishment of the dalang court schools in the beginning of the 20th century. The Pasinaon Dhalang ing Surakarta, or Padasuka in short, was the first dalang school to be opened in 1923 in Surakarta upon the instigation of Susuhunan (ruler of the main court of Surakarta) Paku Buwana X (1893-1939). In 1925 Habiranda was the second dalang course to be opened in Yogyakarta on the authority of Sultan Hamengku Buwana VIII (1912-1939) with the

support of the Java Institute. A few years later, in 1931 another dalang course was established at the princely court of Mangkunagara VII in Surakarta, the Pasinaon Dhalang ing Mangku-Nagaran, now known as PDMN (Pamulangan Dalang Mangkunagaran). At the court schools wayang practice was used as a standard and codified in rules that were widely recognised as ideal patterns (Arps 1985, 33-37). The dalang court schools emphasised the “correct” presentation: the practice of the norms and rules for the art of dalang were established at the Javanese courts. New developments in wayang performance were condemned as they deviated from the rules. The rationale behind the establishment of these schools was the education of people who could preserve and pass on the court tradition in its purest form (Van Groenendael 1985, 37). The education provided at these dalang court schools could be regarded as an attempt to record and standardise the wayang tradition (Ras 1976, 103-104).

After Indonesia’s independence (1949) the Dutch lost their pre-eminent position in the academic study of wayang. Mainly Indonesian scholars and American anthropologists continued to work in this academic field. However, colonial works on wayang continued to influence postcolonial wayang studies. The conventional view on wayang was prolonged by a few more decades with *The Religion of Java* (1960) by the American anthropologist C. Geertz. His work repeated the colonial view of wayang by describing it as an elite art and as the essence of the Javanese people: “...the “Alus [refined] Art” complex – is at once the most widely spread throughout the culture, the most deeply ingrained, and the most philosophically and religiously elaborated, this last largely by the priajjis [elite]. The center of the complex is the wayang, the world-famous Javanese shadow-play.” (Geertz 1960, 262). He portrayed wayang as a classical, elite art form, distinct from rural and folk traditions with a religious connotation: “A wajang performance is at once a kind of elaborated abangan selamatan [traditional Javanese religious meal] and a refined art form subtly symbolic of the priajaji outlook and ethic.” (Geertz 1960, 267).

But even after Geertz, the conventional view of wayang continued to exist. In it wayang is perceived as a high art containing teachings: “Wayang purwa is a form of theatre. It is ancient, for it originated in the days of primitive man; it is very beautiful, both to ear and eye, and it has a spell-binding effect upon millions of Indonesians. Wayang Purwa is a mine of ethical teaching inherent in Indonesian culture, and it is a medium of communication capable of acting as an agent of change in the fast-changing world of modern Indonesia.” (Bondan 1984, 7). And it is a never changing tradition that for centuries has been passed over: “The stories

presented in these plays are imbued with moral and ethical education. Over and beyond everything else, Wayang Purwa is concerned essentially with ethics and education. Whatever the changes made in wayang over the centuries since its remote origins, its ethical heart remained unaltered.” (Bondan 1984, 8).

In his discussion of Bondan’s publication the anthropologist R. Curtis observes that “authentic” wayang is described in an ahistorical way, in which the emphasis focuses on both a Javanese/Indonesian essence and its Indian roots. Also philosophical, supernatural, religious, mystical and psychological elements in wayang are highlighted, elements that were already highlighted in publications written in colonial times. The function of wayang is described as educational, communicative, reinforcing morality and acceptable modes of behaviour for the individual and society (Curtis 1997, 173). The purity and authenticity of wayang as indigenous (rather than of Indian origin) and having undergone no fundamental change over thousands of years also implies a concern that it, as with other national cultural treasures, needs to be preserved. Conservative wayang lovers often fear that the quality of wayang is under continual threat from what is regarded as negative consequences of rapid social change and wayang’s popularisation (Curtis 1997, 186-187). The conventional view on wayang still exists and still functions as a benchmark for many Indonesian and Western wayang scholars and enthusiasts, and as a basis of analysis (Curtis 1997, 182), even though work has been carried out to break through the barriers of this traditional approach and view of wayang by the anthropologist J. Mrázek by approaching the wayang puppet theatre purely as a performance practice (Mrázek 2005).

Concerns that wayang is threatened by the negative consequences of social change can also be found in contemporary heritage discourse in Indonesia. As noted earlier wayang puppet theatre was proclaimed a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on 7 November 2003. In honour of this proclamation an exhibition was organised in Paris, and performances were given in France (in Paris, Angers, Niort, Rouen), Belgium (Strasbourg and Bruxelles), as well as in Austria and Hungary in 2004. A programme book and an exhibition catalogue entitled *The Development of Wayang Indonesia as a Humanistic Cultural Heritage* were published by the Indonesian national wayang organisations Sena Wangi and Pepadi in honour of the UNESCO Proclamation, the exhibition and the performances. Sulebar M. Soekarman, Chairman of Research and Development of Sena Wangi, wrote the introduction of the catalogue. In this introduction a traditional perspective of the wayang puppet theatre resonates.¹⁵ “Wayang is a creative work of

the intelligence of the people of Indonesia and is an intangible heritage which contains extraordinary life values. Based on research, Indonesian experts have estimated that the culture of wayang has developed in Indonesia since prehistoric times, as long ago as 1500 BC.” (Sri Mulyono 1975, 3, as quoted in Soekarman 2004, 4). “[...] this artistic presentation which is *adilung* and *edipeni* (noble and beautiful) indeed has a deep significance because of its conveying moral and philosophical messages of life in the direction of the formation of noble character. This noble character is for personal life as well as for the life of community, nation and state. Wayang is clearly not simply an interesting entertainment, but also contains guidance for life, those who love wayang even say: ‘wewayangane ngaurip’, wayang is a symbol or reflection of human life.” (Soekarman 2004, 9).

Soekarman also mentions the religious elements, and its educational and communicating function: “From the 10th till the 15th Centuries, wayang developed as a part of religious rituals and education for the people [...]. Wayang was able to develop as an instrument for religious preaching, education, information and mass communication. This role and function of wayang has continued till the present day.” (Soekarman 2004, 5-7). And finally he points to an unchanging essence of wayang: “Whatever changes may take place, the identity of wayang will never be shaken, because of its strong foundation. The main foundation of wayang are the qualities of *hamot*, *hamong* and *hamemangkat* (Solichin 1999, 14 as quoted in Soekarman 2004, 7). *Hamot* is the quality of openness in accepting external influences. *Hamong* is the ability to filter new elements in accordance with existing values of wayang, to subsequently make values, which are in accord with wayang as its own capital to develop along with the development of society. *Hamemangkat* is a power to adapt an old value to become a new value in accordance with the challenges of the age.” (Soekarman 2004, 7).

Innovative wayang puppet theatre

If the conventional view on wayang still resonates in contemporary heritage policy, what should be made of dalangs (puppeteers) who do not fit the conventional description? The kind of wayang Enthus Susmono creates contrasts with the aforementioned image of “authentic” or “traditional” wayang. Enthus Susmono (1966) was born and raised in a dalang family in Tegal on the north coast of Central Java. Since he was five years old he accompanied his father Ki Sumaryodihardjo (†1984) to wayang performances to watch and learn about both wayang kulit and

wayang golek. He loved to draw, cut, and colour wayang puppets. Most of his skills he learned from his father, but he often went to watch other dalangs perform such as Ki Bambang Suwarno and Ki Manteb Soedharsono (1948). He also often listened to the commercial cassettes of the late Ki Nartosabdho (1925-1985), famous for his innovations in wayang puppet theatre.

Nevertheless, Enthus Susmono's father did not want him to become a dalang as he was of opinion that being a dalang was a tough profession. He wanted Enthus Susmono to become a teacher in order to earn a good living. Despite his father's objections Enthus Susmono grabbed every chance to practice:¹⁶ "I played wayang when my father was asleep, after a performance. When he would wake up, I would already have put back everything neatly." (Enthus Susmono 2009).¹⁷ In 1983 Enthus Susmono performed for the first time at his school with his father's puppets. His friends played the gamelan. When his father passed away the next year, Enthus Susmono was forced to replace his father in wayang performances that were already booked. But this was not enough to provide a living for the whole family, therefore additional means had to be found. To this end, Enthus Susmono also worked as a radio dj at the local radio station Anita as well as in theatre, but he also continued to play wayang. When he won a wayang competition in 1988 his name became widely known in Central Java especially on the North coast. In the 1990s his fame increased as he regularly played in performances with two screens that were live broadcasted by TVRI Stasiun Semarang. (Exhibition Guide 2006). Nowadays Enthus Susmono still lives in Tegal where he runs the wayang studio Satria Laras and is one of Indonesia's superstar dalangs having acquired celebrity-like qualities.

Known as one of the dalangs changing and modernizing wayang, Enthus Susmono is widely regarded as a radical innovator. He is, therefore, as popular as he is controversial. His work is inspired by literature and his experience in modern theatre; his work as a radio dj brought him knowledge of experimental techniques and mass media. Enthus Susmono employs language influenced by modern theatre and media rehearsals. He talks about his performances as *konser* (concerts), tells his musicians to *demo* (demonstrate) when he wants to hear them play, to *cut* (cut) when he wants to stop them and refers to stage clothes (including his own puppeteer outfit) as *kostum* (costumes). Enthus Susmono is on intimate terms with puppeteers around Indonesia. Like other superstar dalangs, he works with a manager, scriptwriters, puppet makers, and musicians and vocalists from all over Java. What is considered non-traditional in his performances is the reduction of formal

interchanges and the maximisation of humour. In addition, Enthus Susmono uses flash backs, frame breaking, and autobiographical discourse, when he speaks unreservedly about his own experiences and views (Cohen 2007, 361; author's fieldwork 2009).

As innovative elements in his work, Enthus Susmono mentions his puppet creations, the musical compositions, his performance style, his language, and himself: "Yes, first, there are the wayang puppets, then the language, then the accompaniment of the music, then the dramaturgy, or storyline, then there is the appearance of a funky dalang. Say hello to the audience... Yes, funky, that's how Westerners call it."¹⁸

Dedek Wahyudi, stage name of Antonius Wahyudi Sutrisno a well-known composer of modern gamelan music, composes the gamelan compositions used by Enthus Susmono. Drums are added to his gamelan orchestra, violins, guitars, and synthesisers are also regularly included. Another notable aspect of Enthus Susmono's work is the integration of Islam in his work. *Qasidah*, religious chants in Arabic sung to the rhythm of a stringed, plucked instrument of Arabic origin, are regularly heard, and Islamic singers from time to time contribute to his performances. This implies that, contrary to most dalangs, Enthus Susmono does not restrict himself to high Javanese, but also employs languages that conventional dalangs might consider coarse. Besides occasional Arabic, he draws on colloquial Javanese, Tegal or Semarang dialect, Indonesian, or even slang (Author's fieldwork 2009).

Although he has a large puppet collection, Enthus Susmono also designs his own puppets. He created a set of futuristic looking shadow puppets in 1999 that he called *wayang planet*, and shadow puppets with human faces, instead of the traditional, highly stylised ones that he named *wayang rai wong*, Javanese for wayang with the human face. He has also created puppets that do not play a role in the wayang stories, like his shadow puppets of the Wali Sanga, the nine holy men who brought Islam to Java. Inspired by cartoon, film and television characters, as well as by political figures, Enthus Susmono made shadow puppets of Superman (1996), Batman (1996), the Teletubbies, George W. Bush (2001), Saddam Hussein (2001), Osama bin Laden (2001), and Hogwarts (Harry Potter's school of wizardry). He uses these internationally known characters in his performances to compare and contrast them to *wayang* superheroes such as Gatot Kaca, who has supernatural powers and can fly (Exhibition guide 2006). Other creations include a wayang golek caricature of himself and a life-size puppet of the demon Batara Kala.

Enthus Susmono made his debut on the international stage with the exhibition "Wayang Superstar. The theatre world of Ki Enthus Susmono"

in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This exhibition was on display from 3 January 2009 until 8 August 2009 in the Parkzaal in the Tropenmuseum. The focus of the exhibition was on Enthus Susmono himself and his innovative puppet creations. Fifty-seven of his film and television characters, cartoon characters and political world leaders were on display of which forty-five were incorporated in the Tropenmuseum's collection afterwards. Although Enthus Susmono designs the puppets himself, they are carved and painted by his team of wayang puppet makers. To highlight his innovations and the modernising elements in Enthus Susmono's work his work was displayed alongside information on the more "traditional" or conventional wayang puppet theatre to demonstrate the contrast in styles. His innovative puppet creations were displayed next to and in contrast with "traditional" examples from the museum's collection. By means of texts on banners, the audience was guided through the "traditional" structure of a wayang performance, the "traditional" wayang stories and "traditional" wayang characters. The texts gave information about Enthus Susmono's performances and puppets in the context of the conventional wayang theatre.

Five interviews with Enthus Susmono were on display in which he voiced his views on his own work. Each interview covered a different topic: the person Enthus Susmono and his relation to wayang; innovation in his performances and gamelan compositions; new puppet creations; and Islam in Enthus Susmono's work. Since the exhibition focused on the innovative and modernising elements of Enthus Susmono's wayang, the questions asked in the interviews were all aimed at highlighting these elements in both his work and person. This means that other, less innovative or modern influences were left out of the interviews and exhibition. To get an impression of Enthus Susmono's performances video fragments of performances were also on show. The exhibition demonstrated that Enthus Susmono's work could only be fully understood and appreciated in relation to the conventional or "traditional" wayang theatre. The museum had to present a standardised form of wayang by giving textual information about the structure of a "traditional" performance, and by putting "traditional" puppets on display from the museum collection. What the exhibition thus implicitly and most certainly undesirably presented to the audience was a conventional and static image of wayang that could only be set in motion by the addition of contemporary and international elements. What also became apparent was that something considered "innovative" or "modernizing" can only be regarded "innovative" and "modernizing" in relation to something that is perceived "traditional" or "conventional".

As a spin-off of the “Wayang Superstar” exhibition Enthus Susmono performed for the first time ever in the global heritage theatre with two performances on 19 and 20 June 2009 in the Tropentheater. The wayang story “Dewa Ruci”, relating the quest for perfect knowledge, was performed twice with an entourage that was adapted for a performance in The Netherlands. After the performances in the Tropentheater the group travelled to Dordrecht (The Netherlands) for one performance and to France for two more shows. In September 2009 Enthus Susmono travelled to Korea for another performance of the same story. For these international shows, the group of musicians was cut down from over twenty to eight for economic reasons, among them the composer Dedek Wahyudi, who also wrote new arrangements for the occasion. Both performances were a mix of wayang kulit and wayang golek.

In the Tropenmuseum, a questionnaire on wayang was spread among the audience by the author on both nights, to examine the existing general ideas of wayang among the audience.¹⁹ The performances were attended well,²⁰ and can be considered a great success if measured against the satisfaction of the audience. Forty-nine from fifty-eight respondents on the first night indicated that they were satisfied. On June 20, sixty-four out of seventy-two respondents were pleased; eight others confessed that they were positively surprised since they had come without expectations. The questionnaire also revealed that most people regarded wayang in a conventional way. It became clear that wayang is mainly regarded as traditional, as art and as cultural heritage. Respondents were less convinced about classifying wayang as modern, popular, and contemporary, and were also hesitant about the entertainment aspect. Enthus Susmono’s performances were appealing enough to be appreciated and fully captivated the audience’s attention even though the majority did not understand the Indonesian language. Many respondents left spontaneous positive reactions and two even called the performance spectacular.

Enthus Susmono is known for spectacular elements in his performances. As mentioned earlier his performances minimise the use of formal interchanges and maximise humour, frame breaking, and personal accounts (Cohen 2007, 361). These characteristics were maintained in his performances in the Tropentheater. Respondents to the questionnaire mentioned the “spectacular” and the “light show”. In the first night the humorous elements were stretched to the limit and Enthus Susmono used everything he had at his disposal. He even tried to speak some English and Dutch words and sentences, instead of the Indonesian that he used during the whole performance, to really draw the audience into his performance. In the second performance Enthus Susmono got up to fight a demon, after

two wayang golek puppets that are his mirror images, did not succeed in conquering it. He is known to sometimes stand up to fight a life-size Batara Kala demon puppet²¹, and has earlier cut open and burned a puppet screen in performances (Kicuk 2003).



Fig.1-3: Enthus Susmono fighting Batara Kala. Kebumen, 3 July 2009. Photo: Sadiah Boonstra

He is also known to have slaughtered a puppet with a large knife after the audience shouted for the puppet's death. Enthus Susmono justifies these spectacular attractions (*atraksi*) as ways to reach new audiences but his critics speak of a "virus Enthus" (Enthus virus) that degrades Java's noble wayang heritage (Kicuk 2003).

Enthus Susmono is not the first or only radical innovator in the tradition of wayang performance. In the 1950s and 1960s the dalang Abyor was criticised like Enthus for his outspoken social critique, Islamic themes, and theatrical attractions, notably including the cutting open of screens (Weintraub 2004, 197). The same is true for Ki Nartosabdho, who was both the most famous and the most controversial dalang in Java in the 1970s. He introduced more humour, musical experimentation, and a new approach to narrative. He was known as the "destroyer" and was sharply condemned by conservative dalangs for his audacity to rework stories. Although Nartosabdho's innovations were radical at the time, they are nowadays commonplace and are even used by conservative dalangs (Petersen 2001, 106-107). The difference today is that innovative dalangs such as Enthus operate in a globalised world of ideas, techniques, and technologies. An innovator such as the wayang golek dalang Asep

Sunandar Sunarya has, like Susmono, incorporated influences from American cartoons into his puppet designs and used Chinese martial art films as inspiration for his puppet choreographies (Weintraub 2004, 197).

The globalizing world opens up great possibilities for dalangs. For example, before Enthus Susmono the above-mentioned Asep Sunandar toured Europe despite a net loss of income because of the prestige it brings at home (Weintraub 2004, 197). Ledjar Subroto, known for his Wayang Kancil, has a long term performance contract with the Tong Tong Fair (formerly Pasar Malam Besar) in The Hague in The Netherlands. Purbo Asmoro often performs in the United States. The international appreciation of dalangs opens up new markets, raises their prices and is used for their prestige and marketing strategies at home. According to Enthus Susmono, for example, the wayang documentation centre Pusat Wayang Data Indonesia that is part of the Wayang Museum in Jakarta was not interested in collecting his work until his trip to Europe. Thereafter he was asked to donate some of his puppets to their collection. This shows that international appreciation might have “heritagisation” as a consequence. Not only do Enthus Susmono’s puppets end up in the canon of a museum collection in Europe (Tropenmuseum) but also in a national collection in Indonesia. International appreciation is very positive for domestic marketing strategies. In every performance by Enthus Susmono in July and August 2009 and still in 2010, he mentioned his trip to Europe, as well as the name that he was given there: Wayang Superstar and his performances were announced with the same title (Author’s fieldwork 2009-2010).

Besides dalangs, contemporary wayang artists such as Heri Dono and Slamet Gundhono, also link themselves to a network of international patronage, benefit from professional development outside Indonesia and readily collaborate with artists from around the world. They create new work inspired by the wayang tradition that appeals to international audiences (Cohen 2007, 362). Work by Heri Dono was in 2010 exhibited in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam in the exhibition entitled “The Dono Code”, and Slamet Gundhono received the prestigious Dutch Prince Claus Award in 2005. In that same year Enthus Susmono was given an honorary doctorate by the Institute of Business Management and Arts, affiliated with the International University Missouri, United States, and very recently, in May 2010 Manteb Soedharsono was awarded the Nikkei Asia Prize for Culture 2010, an award created and sponsored by Nikkei Inc. from Japan.

Dalangs and other wayang artists are inspired by international elements, but the globalizing world is also bringing international appreciation for

Indonesian artists such as the UNESCO Proclamation of the Wayang Puppet Theater as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Thus, on the one hand, the UNESCO proclamation can be regarded as an international sign of recognition of the cultural value of wayang and of its vulnerability to extinction or change beyond recognition. But wayang is not quite the endangered art form that the UNESCO proclamation would indicate. One of the claims made in the application was that wayang was degraded by an overemphasis on humour and clowning, but as we have seen puppeteers have always been conducting performances in this manner (Cohen 2007). On the other hand, since it was the Indonesian nation-state which applied, the proclamation can also be considered instrumental to mark Indonesian identity on the global stage and as a token of prestige, in the same way that the World Heritage List functions (Van der Aa 2005). Consequently, international appreciation could lead to international standardisation as well, since the wayang puppet theatre had to meet certain criteria developed by UNESCO in order to be proclaimed a UNESCO Masterpiece. This brings us back to the questions posed in the introduction.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the wayang puppet theatre developed under mutual influence of external elements such as colonial and elitist ideas of the Dutch colonisers about wayang. Consequently, an inordinate attention on the mystical, philosophical and religious elements dominated for a long period the international view on wayang and it continues to do so as evident from the questionnaires handed out in the Tropentheater. However, it seems that the boundaries between the local and the global have always been blurred in the wayang puppet theatre. Contemporary, innovative dalangs incorporate international characters into their wayang to appeal to local audiences and to familiarise Indonesia's youngsters with wayang. They use international languages and develop their work in response to international networks and audiences. Cultural institutions and stages around the world play a role in this process. But international appreciation, such as the UNESCO Proclamation has the implication of framing the heritage into predefined structures. This means that some forms of the wayang puppet theatre and some dalangs smoothly fit this frame and others do not. Who does fit and who do not is the result of a constant negotiation about what this frame is, or should be. The outcome of this negotiation is decisive in defining what heritage is and whom it is for. Various groups, organisations and individuals compete in this negotiation

and all have different interests depending on differing cultural, personal, commercial, political, and economic grounds. How this negotiation evolves in the field of the wayang puppet theatre as a form of intangible heritage must be examined in further research.



Fig. 1-4: Announcement of wayang performance by “Wayang Superstar” Enthus Susmono. Semarang, 19 July 2009. Photo: Sadiah Boonstra

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Notes

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php#TOC1>, 8 March 2010.

² "Ki Enthus Susmono blies de authentieke Indonesische wajangpop nieuw leven in", *Nouveau* February 2009.

³ "De controversiële Javaanse poppenspeler en poppenmaker Ki Enthus Susmono heeft in eigen land de status van 'superstar'. Hij is de hipste, de brutaalste en meest creatieve", *De Echo* 10 June 2009.

⁴ "Zijn voorstellingen zijn vernieuwend en houden het wajangtheater springlevend", *Friesch Dagblad* 10 January 2009.

⁵ "Ruige taal, seksuele toespelingen, een pop die bier drinkt. Tot voor kort waren zulke brutaliteiten ondenkbaar in het Indonesische poppenspel, de wajang. Met het werk en het optreden van Ki Enthus Susmono is dat veranderd. [...] In zijn thuisland heeft Ki Enthus Susmono heel wat scheldwoorden te verduren gehad. Hij werd de Crazy Dalang genoemd, de Cowboy dalang, de Kasar Dalang, de "grove" dalang", *NRC Handelsblad*, 19 June 2009.

⁶ This subject is being further explored in the research programme "Sites, Bodies, Stories. The dynamics of heritage formation in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia and the Netherlands" of which the PhD research "Performing identity, shaping heritage. Wayang puppet theatre and the dynamics in contemporary Indonesia" forms the Stories part.

⁷ “Die de waarde van het wajangspel naar onze dramatische voorstellingen wil beoordelen, zal er niets in vinden, dat de moeite der toeschouwing beloont, maar wil men den Javaan van naderbij leeren kennen, dan gelooven wij, dat eene wajangvertooning daartoe eene geschikte gelegenheid aanbiedt, waarin het volk op het uitstekendst wordt gekarakteriseerd [...] De hierop volgende *tjarang* Pregiwo, hebben wij uit den mond van den hof-dalang Ki Redhi Soeto opgeschreven, met weglating echter van de platitudes die bij derzelver vertooning niet achterwege zouden zijn gebleven.” Wilkens 1846, 6-7.

⁸ “Maar wat is ‘t? Er is geen ontwikkeling, geen vooruitgang, in de kunst! Eenmaal er achter, eenmaal het gevat, de slag beet hebbende, is men dan ook klaar voor zijn geheele leven. Men weet voortaan van nieuwe partijen noch repetities. ‘t Is of wordt geen wetenschap, maar veelmeer een slag, eene vaardigheid, en een enkele maal een’ verkeerden toon aan te slaan, och! ‘t Hindert zoo heel veel niet!”, Poensen 1872, 220.

⁹ “Laat ons nu vernemen, wat de dalang zal voordragen....Wij kozen de Lampahan Palasara. Wij zullen dit verhaal aanvankelijk woordelijk en verder in korte trekken mededeelen, al datgene achterwege latende, wat ons eenigszins kwetsend of minder oorbaar voorkomt.”, Poensen 1872, 246.

¹⁰ “Men kan zeggen: de wayangvertooning maakte deel uit van den voorouderlijken eeredienst,” Hazeu 1897: 45. “Was de schimmenvertooning – zoals we boven trachtten aan te toonen – een der bestanddelen van den voorvaderlijken eeredienst, de vertooner, de dalang, was de priester van dien eeredienst...”, Hazeu 1897, 54.

¹¹ “Dit kader zelf, de indeling van den stam, bleek dan ook in eigenlijken zin de achtergrond van den roman, en in ons laatste hoofdstuk hebben wij aannemelijk pogen te maken, dat de oudste kern van het Pandji-verhaal een mythe is, die, op een alleen in een totemistische gedachtegang passende wijze, het ontstaan verhaalt der Javaansche wereld met haar exogame regeling van het huwelijk en haar initiatie-ritus als inleiding daartoe,” Rassers 1922, 369.

¹² Wayang purwa consists of plays based on material from the Javanese version of the Indian epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata.

¹³ “...de wajang niet louter spel en vermaak is, doch de reflex van het geestelijk en ziele-leven van heel een volk. [...] Daarom zijn de wajang-verhalen, [...] de getuigenissen van een zeer bijzondere en een zeer hooge beschaving.”, Mangkunagara 1933:80. “Maar er is nog iets anders. Vele wajanglakons bevatten een leering, die op een geheime, aan bovennatuurlijken invloed ontleende kennis omtrent God, de wereld en de natuur berust.” Mangkunagara 1933, 88.

¹⁴ “Naar ik hoop heb ik met mijn lezing het mijne bijgedragen tot de oplossing van het wonderlijke raadsel, waarom de wajang reeds eeuwen wortelt in de ziel van het Javaansche volk en waarom zij ook nu, in den modernen tijd, nog overal wordt bemind, bewonderd en geëerd waar de echt-Javaansche nationale geest in den goeden zin des woords nog heerschende is.”, Mangkunagara 1933, 89-95.

¹⁵ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>

¹⁶ “Ki Enthus Susmono, Kreativitas Tiada Henti” *Kompas* 27 February 2009.

¹⁷ "Saya memainkan wayang kalau ayah saya sedang tidur, sesuai pentas. Kalau beliau bangun, semua perlengkapan sudah saya rapikan lagi." *Kompas* 27 February 2009.

¹⁸ In one of the interviews in the exhibition "Wayang Superstar. The theatre world of Ki Enthus Susmono" in Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. On the question: "Pertunjukan Ki Enthus juga sudah dianggap lain daripada konvensional. Dalam arti yang mana pertunjukan Ki Enthus lain?" Enthus Susmono answers: "Ya, pertama dalam boneka wayang, kemudian bahasa, kemudian iringan musik, kemudian dramaturgi, atau alur ceritera, dramaturgi dan penampilan seorang dalang yang funky say halo dengan penonontonnya cah cah cah lebih canggi, funky kata orang Barat."

¹⁹ On both evenings 100 questionnaires were distributed among the audience. The response rate on June 19 was 58% and on June 20 it was 72%.

²⁰ The capacity of the Tropentheater was 512 seats of which 321 tickets were sold on June 19, and 354 on June 20 (information obtained from Tropentheater).

²¹ For a demonstration of this phenomenon: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAqWnt2U5-Y>, 18 May, 2010.