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Introduction

The Komedi Stamboel, also known as the Malay Opera, occupies a prominent place in Indonesia's cultural history.¹ Its emergence in 1891 has been characterized as a 'landmark' in the development of modern popular theatre (Teeuw 1979:207). The theatre later contributed greatly to the birth of Indonesian contemporary theatre and film² and played a formative role in modern political discourse and representation (see Anderson 1996:36-7). The Komedi Stamboel has been celebrated as one of the most significant 'artistic achievements' of the Eurasian population of colonial Java (see Van der Veur 1968a), but also damned for its deleterious influence on Java's classical and

¹ This article was written while a postdoctoral research fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). It was presented in part as lectures at IIAS and the Fifth International Humanities Symposium, Gadjah Mada University, in 1998. I would like to thank all the participants in the research seminar, 'Popular theatres of Indonesia', Department of Southeast Asian and Oceanic Languages and Cultures, Leiden University, where I developed some of the ideas presented here, as well as Kathryn Hansen, Rakesh Solomon, Catherine Diamond, Surapone Virulrak, Hanne de Bruin, and two anonymous *BKI* reviewers for their comments.

The idiosyncratic and inconsistent orthography of the period concerned presents problems for the textual scholar. I tend to follow the usage of the sources concerned, modernizing some names of persons and places, and complying with general usage when such has been established (for example, 'Komedi Stamboel' and not 'Komedi Stambul'). All the translations from Dutch, Malay, and Indonesian sources are my own; some of the translations of play titles owe something to Richard Burton.

² See Pané 1953; Oemarjati 1971; Sumardjo 1992; and Taufik Abdullah, Misbach, and Ardan 1993.

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folk arts³ and mocked as melodramatic, overly sentimental, and childish (see Sutherland 1967:94-105). Irrespective of this recognition, extremely little is in fact known about the inception of the Komedi Stamboel. Auguste Mahieu (1865-1903), popularly considered to be the Komedi Stamboel's 'creator', remains 'a sort of legendary figure about whom we possess little exact data' (Nieuwenhuys 1972:303). Most secondary accounts are based primarily, if not exclusively, on two sources (Manusama 1922; Knaap 1971) that are unreliable for different reasons.⁴ The present study is an attempt to set the scholarly record straight. Otto Knaap may have luminously characterized Mahieu as 'the pauper *who shaped a unique art form, without sufficient guidance, without schooling or support; the pauper who only had his own strength to thank [...]*' (Knaap 1971:9), but I hope to show here, in contrast, that this theatre should not be seen exclusively as the product of individual genius, but rather as one node in a hybrid popular theatre movement, a network encompassing much of South and Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The focus will be on sociological, as opposed to aesthetic, aspects of the first ten months of the Komedi Stamboel's existence (January-November 1891). This is due to the nature of the sources available – brief newspaper articles and advertisements in Surabaya's three major newspapers.⁵ With one possible exception, no photographs, scripts, recordings, or detailed descriptions of the Komedi Stamboel are available (to the best of my knowledge)

³ See Brandts Buys and Brandts Buys-Van Zijp 1926; Pigeaud 1938; Kunst 1973:4.

⁴ Otto Knaap's portrait of Mahieu (Knaap 1971) will be discussed below. A.Th. Manusama was a librarian perhaps best known for his Dutch version of the Nyai Dasima tale. His account seems largely to be based on knowledge culled from participants in 'Eendracht Maakt Macht', a splinter group formed by several prominent actors from Mahieu's Komedi Stamboel company (Andjar Asmara 1958); including P. Willem F. Crámer, Rudolf Christiaan Hoogeveen, and Hoogeveen's wife, Marie Hoogeveen née Oord. Eendracht Maakt Macht was eventually sold in 1917 to a Chinese woman named Yap Thian Nio for 1,500 guilders, hence at a spectacular loss. Manusama describes Cramer and the Hoogeveens as students of Mahieu who continued his efforts after his death, but they can more aptly be described, according to Andjar Asmara, as employees turned competitors. I do not know whether Cramer or R.C. Hoogeveen were Komedi Stamboel actors in 1891, but I suspect not. Marie Oord joined the company in 1896, at the age of 10, and seems not to have very precise memories of Mahieu (T.R. 1967).

⁵ These three newspapers are *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* and *Soerabaya-Courant* (both Dutch-language papers) and *Bintang Soerabaia* (a Malay-language paper). The months of January-May 1891 of the *Bintang Soerabaia* were not available to me for this article. This is not a major impediment, as the Komedi Stamboel was in fact covered in much greater detail in the Dutch press; many of the *Bintang Soerabaia* articles are translations from the Dutch papers. All information on the Komedi Stamboel's first year, if not appended with a reference, is based on articles and advertisements in these three newspapers. For a history of Dutch journalism in Surabaya from 1835 to 1925, see von Faber n.d.:69-82.

from this early period.⁶ This is offset by the rich reportage of the changing structure, repertoire, and reception of the troupe. The roughly 170 different newspaper items directly concerned with the company allow for a discussion of the week-to-week, almost day-to-day, activities in the company's early development. I will trace the inception of the Komedi Stamboel from its inspiration in the Parsi theatre; tackling the question why Surabaya (and not, for example, Batavia) was its place of origin, documenting the formation and disbanding of the company and its changing audience and management. I will attend, as well, to the Komedi Stamboel's structure of feeling (Williams 1977), the lineaments of social-material affinities and contestations aggregating in art as it is experienced in actuality. Planned follow-up studies will cover the subsequent decade of the Komedi Stamboel, examining further generic developments in the theatre and the varied patterns of reception, consumption, and appropriation in different cities and towns of the Netherlands East Indies. Before going into the details of the Komedi Stamboel's history, however, I would like first to frame the origin of the company in a larger cultural narrative of the Parsi theatre movement.

*Parsi theatre of Bombay*⁷

Much of the theatrical history of South and Southeast Asia is cloaked in mystery. We shall probably never know, for example, precisely when and how the shadow puppet theatre was introduced to the Indonesian archipelago (although that has not prevented generations of scholars from speculating on the topic), nor why 'the' *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* gained the popularity they did as subjects for drama and dance in so many parts of the region. But the history of the popular theatre movement can be traced more or less precisely to a point of origin, the Parsi (or Parsee, as an earlier spelling would have it) minority of Bombay during the 1850s.

The small but influential Parsi community of Bombay, which numbered 44,091 according to the 1872 census of India (the first census figures available), has long been known as the most 'Westernized' of Indian minorities. The group practises the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia. Available historical sources indicate that they migrated from Iran to Gujarat some time between 800 and 1000 CE. Their minority religious status in India, coupled with long-standing prohibitions against certain occupations, made

⁶ I discuss this possible exception, an essay by S. Kalff originally published in the *Java-Bode* in 1893, below.

⁷ The term 'Parsi theatre' is a direct translation of an 'indigenous' South Asian term, *Pārsī Theiyetar*, sometimes used to describe this form (Hansen 1992:322).

them ideal middlemen for the British and other European powers in their economic dealings with the local population (Bosma and Oonk 1998). The Parsis in turn embraced European culture. The Parsis were the first Indian community to found a cricket club (in 1850). They played cards, studied European classical music, enjoyed ballroom dancing, established literary clubs, and ... performed dramatics (Kulke 1974:106-7).

The first Parsi dramatic societies appear to have been amateur clubs, such as the Parsee Elphinstone Dramatic Society (founded around 1850), which produced English-language plays (Kulke 1974:107). The commercial potential for theatre was seen and developed by Parsi entrepreneurs in subsequent decades.⁸ A private theatre had been constructed by Jagannath Shankerseth in Bombay in 1842, which was available for a fixed daily rent to both European and Indian producers. The Parsis thus had access to the latest in European theatrical technology, which they mined to the fullest.

Many of the conventions established by the Parsi dramatists in the 1850s and 1860s have remained constant features of the popular theatre movement through the present. Performances typically began at 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening and continued until late at night (around 2 a.m.) or even dawn, but because of the varied stage effects and setting, fast pace of action, and the interspersed 'interludes' of song, dance, and comedy, the time went by quickly according to most commentators.⁹ Scripts were written in the major literary languages of the Gujarat (Urdu and Hindi), but actors mixed in other regional languages, particularly when performing outside Bombay (Hansen 1992:81). The repertoire was also highly mixed, drawing upon Puranic materials, Sanskrit epics, Shakespeare, Middle Eastern romances and the Arabian Nights, European farce, local legend and history, or the latest adventure novel. Whatever story was performed, however, it inevitably underwent 'transmogrification' (Bengal 1968:70) or was 'localized', to use Brandon's (1967) apt term.

The romantic Romeo becomes the pale-blooded Firoz Laqa, and the passionate Juliet becomes a somewhat crafty and worldly-minded Gulnár, while the disinterested and sympathetic Friar Laurence becomes a somewhat crafty and worldly-minded Qázi. The famous balcony scene is not acted from the balcony [...]. The straightforward moral drawn by the Prince at the end of the play, and addressed

⁸ No comprehensive European-language study of Parsi theatre has to date been published. The following description of Parsi theatre is based upon Ali 1917, Gargi 1962, Das Gupta 1944, Bengal 1968, Yajnik 1970, Saskena 1975, and Hansen 1992, 1999. I am aware of the many shortcomings of this sketch due to the inaccessibility of primary sources. However, my primary concern is not with Parsi theatre per se but rather with its reception in the Malay world.

⁹ Not all spectators were so enraptured, however, as to stay the night. Ali (1917:96) writes that 'When it [a play] ends, only a hardened playgoer can tell'.

to the warring houses of Montague and Capulet – 'See what a scourge is laid upon your hate!' – is transformed into a trite saying [...] 'In this earthly love is a stepping-stone to heavenly love'. (Ali 1917:90.)¹⁰

Mid-Victorian stage conventions, including painted scenery, costumes, and make-up, were followed closely. A strong emphasis was placed on stage effects and producers went to great lengths to obtain the latest in stage technologies. 'Mythical titans raged and thundered on the stage. Devils soared in the air, daggers flew, thrones moved and heroes jumped from high palace walls' (Gargi 1962:156). European designers were engaged to construct and paint scenery and the latest theatrical mechanisms ordered from the theatrical capitals of Europe. Costumes often were modelled on European 'Oriental' productions, while make-up was thick and mask-like.

Music, comedy, and dance were also of critical significance. Musical accompaniment was provided by a *tabla* drum and harmonium, incorporating both classical and popular Indian music and what has been described as 'semi-European tunes' (Yajnik 1970:115) into a type of 'free and easy rag-time music of the stage' (Ali 1917:96). Music included an opening chorus song 'set to a classical melody' and sung by 'chorus girls', romantic and sentimental duets sung by the hero and heroine, and comic duets sung by a male and female clown character 'in a snappy, fast tripping rhythm, with a great deal of clowning and tumbling' (Gargi 1962:188). There were also song intervals interspersed in the course of the night without a connection to the main play. A well-performed song would receive audience demands for 'once more' encores – up to eleven times! While performances were largely based on written scripts, much of the comedy was improvised. Comic turns appear to have drawn on not only local clowning traditions, but also British vaudeville and European farce. Comic sketches known as *swang* would often parody dominant elites, bringing 'the applause of the street crowds' (Ali 1917:89).

The production system developed by the Parsi entrepreneurs likewise provided models for making theatre. Company names tended to be in English, whatever language was used in the plays themselves. Companies were either owned by a sole entrepreneur-manager (who may or may not have been the principal actor), or were under joint proprietorship. Story ideas or themes were usually determined by the manager, who then engaged a *kavi* (playwright-poet) at a fixed rate to write a script. Frequently, more than one *kavi* would work on a play. *Kavi* would also be responsible for re-writes while plays were running. Successful productions yielded bonuses for the writer. Due to inter-company rivalry, scripts were kept under lock and key

¹⁰ For a comparable discussion of Javanese *kethoprak* adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, see Hatley 1981.

and were not as a rule published, at least not until the point when the play was no longer a major repertoire item.

New productions were added regularly to a company's repertoire, requiring a month of rehearsal, including training by a dance master-choreographer, who was typically a troupe actor. Troupes might include up to 50 actors from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds (including Anglo-Indian and Baghdadi Jewish), many of them specialized in particular roles (for example, comic). Some but not all companies were all-male. Companies with actresses, 'recruited [them] from the professional singers and dancers, and as the dance and song form a very important part of the play, the companies as it were get their recruits ready-made' (Ali 1917:97).

The Parsi theatre was a thoroughly commercial affair. Theatre in pre-modern India, as in other parts of South and Southeast Asia, was linked to devotional activities, and typically took place in conjunction with temple festivals. A family might pledge to underwrite one temple shadow puppet theatre performance a year for ten years if a son recovered from malaria (see Blackburn 1996:15). A community might also take up advance subscriptions in order to engage a troupe, with additional donations being given before and during the performance by people attending the temple festival (Richmond, Swann, and Zarilli 1990). In contrast, Parsi theatre depended upon ticket sales for its existence. The new stage effects, scenery, and costumes introduced with new productions made mounting a new play quite expensive, costing up to 4,000 or 5,000 pounds by the 1930s, with weekly running expenses coming to 1,000 pounds. Plays were advertised in advance in newspapers and on billboards (which typically noted not only the titles of plays, but also the most impressive scenic effects), and programmes (or 'opera books') were available for purchase.¹¹

Southeast Asian reception of Parsi theatre

After the founding of the first commercial companies, the Parsi theatre began to travel. Almost everywhere Parsi troupes went, it seems, the theatre exerted a powerful attraction. Imitation companies were formed, translating the conventions of the Parsi theatre into local vernaculars. Long-established tra-

¹¹ According to one estimate no fewer than 25 Parsi companies based in Bombay had existed by 1944 (Das Gupta 1944:225). Theatre based on the Parsi model continued to be performed in Bombay after independence. Brandon (1976:51) describes Bombay's 'Deshi Natak Samaj (National Drama Group) of nineteenth-century melodrama tradition'. 'Attractive actresses; prompting from the wings; electric bell signals stage drops to rise and fall. Magical caves, abductions, missing jewels, battles, ribald interludes, and songs one after the other. An incredible experience, like stepping back 80 years into a vanished era.'

ditional forms of expressive culture, including dance, drama, music, magic, and storytelling, merged with Parsi theatre, resulting in emergent hybrid forms.

The first tours were naturally limited to the Indian sub-continent. It was not long before more ambitious tours were made throughout much of South and Southeast Asia. The Parsee Elphinstone Dramatic Society is said to have travelled to Singapore as early as 1862 (Kulke 1974:107), while the Parsi Curzon Theatrical Company of Calcutta later toured Burma, the Malay Straits, and Penang (Ali 1917:85). Troupes were typically sponsored by local Indian entrepreneurs and communities, but performances were attended as well by children of mixed marriages and locals. In Singapore and the Malay Straits, audiences for Parsi theatre included Malays and Arabs, as well as members of the Indian community (Tan Sooi Beng, 1993:14). Comprehension of the stage dialogue was perhaps limited, but audiences appear to have thoroughly enjoyed the dance, music, rough comedy, and (perhaps above all) the fantastic scenic effects.

The limited nature of the published historical sources available allows only a highly partial view on the immediate effects of Parsi theatre on local cultural production, although long-term effects can be traced. Reactions to these troupes in different areas of Southeast Asia were diverse. Parsi theatre troupes began touring Burma not long after lower Burma's annexation by the British in 1853; the Parsee Victoria Company was apparently so popular at the Mandalay court that it was invited back several times (Singer 1995:32). The degree of influence of these companies on Burmese theatre, in the absence of precise historical sources, is however difficult to determine, but it was possibly a contributing factor to the adoption of the proscenium stage in the early 1880s and the introduction of the practice of charging admission. George Scott (writing as Shway Yoe) suggests in *The Burman: His life and notions* that the concept of commercial theatre did not meet with much acceptance in Burma. 'A large shed has indeed been erected in Rangoon, nightly performances take place, regular troupes are engaged for a definite period, and money is charged for admission; but the idea is an English one, and opposed as it is to ancient custom and the old free attractions elsewhere, meets with barely enough support to keep it going' (Shway Yoe 1927:286-7). Contrary to Scott's expectations, however, the practice spread, contributing to the rise of innovative, technically well-equipped, and highly professional theatrical ensembles, such as Po Sein's celebrated *zat pwe* troupe (Singer 1995:54; Sein and Withey 1965).

The Parsi troupes toured peninsular Southeast Asia and the Malay world to great acclaim. In certain areas these troupes were known as 'Komedi Parsi', *komedi* being a generic Malay term for entertainment (*komedi putar* is a merry-go-round, *komedi ular* a snake show). An 1886 report on the active theatre

scene in West Sumatra states that the Parsi theatre was particularly well received because the Islamic stories that formed a central part of the repertoire were long familiar in this part of the region (Van Kerckhoff 1886:302-3). The Singapore newspapers reporting on these companies in the 1880s and 1890s referred to the form as *wayang Parsi*, *wayang* not only referring to shadow puppet theatre but being a generic term for theatre. Chinese opera is referred to in Singapore to date as *wayang*; silent film came by some to be called *wayang mati* ('dead' wayang), obviously due to the absence of sound (Camoens 1982).

It was not long before a host of forms sprang up in rough imitation of the Parsi theatre, substituting the Hindi language of the original with local tongues, and drawing upon indigenous expressive traditions. Bangsawan companies in Singapore, Penang, and the Malay Straits were formed under the influence of Parsi theatre in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Bangsawan was originally known in fact as *wayang Parsi tiruan* – 'imitation Parsi theatre' – and used the same harmonium-*tabla* accompaniment as its prototype (Camoens 1982).¹² This form in turn fostered numerous other genres, and interacted in complex ways with long-established theatrical and dance traditions. There appears to be a genetic relationship between the *Abdul Muluk* theatre of Palembang (Dumas 2000) and *mamanda* of South Kalimantan, for example. Genealogies are convoluted, and mysterious; like mythological characters in Indic tales, a theatre might have more than one set of parents.¹³

The heritage of Parsi theatre survives in the historical imagination of these theatres of mainland Southeast Asia and the Malay world, often in a highly refracted form. A musical piece known as *lagu Parsi* remains to date in the repertoire of *lenong*, a popular theatre of the greater Jakarta area. In *jikey*, a Malaysian theatre form practised today by about five groups in the provinces of Kedah and Perlis, near the Thai border (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof 1994:102), performances invariably begin with a comic sketch known as *makit keling* (Indian market?). The central character of this sketch, considered to be 'the supremely important character [...] synonymous with *jikey*' as a whole (Kamaruddin 1995:48), is an Indian trader who dances with his hands on his

¹² Bangsawan is the subject of a marvellous theatrical history by Tan Sooi Beng (1993). I draw upon her research and insights into processes and forms here and below.

¹³ The same appears to be true in South Asia, where one would expect the relations to be more direct and less ambiguous. *Nadagam* and 'special drama', two popular theatre forms of Tamil Nadu descended from Parsi theatre, were linked to the latter's ancestral form via itinerant 'Boys' Companies' performing in Tamil (Seizer 1997:66). The precise relation between Parsi theatre and Boys' Companies is as yet 'hazy', however. The name would lead one to surmise that Boys' Companies were junior second-string troupes formed in direct imitation of the Parsi theatre, but available sources do not allow more than guesswork at present.

hips and sings nonsense lyrics vaguely reminiscent of Hindi. 'Warna tena, nana wana, warina sang nana, ahada raya, ahada raja, ala ala semanare' (Soelah 1995:29). Oral versions of the theatre's origin have it that it originated with a group of migrant players who raised money to return to their homeland, with a group of traders from abroad who were forced to perform by a raja of a coastal town as they did not possess valid travel and trading documents, or with an Indian trader and his Malay wife who had to perform in lieu of paying back taxes owed to the raja before they could leave for India. All these stories involve voluntary travel and commercial activity (Soelah 1995:26-7).¹⁴

The reception of Parsi theatre in Java

Available sources indicate that there was not one, but rather various forms of theatre that sprang up in Java during the late nineteenth century under the direct influence of Parsi theatre and in interaction with Malay *Bangsawan*.¹⁵ The first wave of Parsi theatre influence, coinciding with the emergence of *dulmuluk* in Sumatra, resulted in the appearance of short-lived theatre genres in the 1870s, all grounded in the conventions of the Parsi stage, though known locally by different names and inflected in regional ways.

C. Snouck Hurgronje, in an 1893 communication to the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, describes a form known as *komedi Jawa* presenting Arabian Nights tales (a major part of the repertoire of the Parsi theatre) and stories featuring the Malay trickster Abu Nawas (stories also featured in *Bangsawan*), 'interlarding them with popular witticisms' and with 'some care devoted to the costumes and décor' (Snouck Hurgronje in Kunst 1973, 1:289-90). The company was established under the sponsorship of Raden Adipati Sutadiningrat in 1875, during his period as regent of Pandegelang, West Java, and directed by Sutadiningrat's brother, Raden Bagus Jayawinata. Plays were presented in Sundanese, while the musical accompaniment included classical pieces from the *gamelan* repertoire, alternating with European music. Actors were boys from native schools, clerks, and so on. This *komedi Jawa* spawned imitators in other parts of the Banten region of West Java, but the form

¹⁴ Thai *likay* performances likewise begin with an overture known as *ok-kaek* featuring sung 'gibberish', sometimes inspired by songs from Indian films. Performers, in contrast to scholars and intellectuals, maintain an Indian origin for *likay* and describe the *ok-kaek* as 'a means for paying respect to the Indian originators' (Smithies 1975:79).

¹⁵ There is little in the way of documentation available for the visit of Parsi ensembles to Java; it has been suggested that they started playing there following the establishment of the so-called liberal period (1870-1900), when trade barriers that had previously hampered free movement of capital and people across 'international' borders were lowered.

expired after 1878. 'I believe that the fear of certain European civil servants', states Snouck Hurgronje, 'that the quips and witticisms of the Banten dramatists might have a damaging influence upon their notorious "prestige" was the cause of its death' (Snouck Hurgronje quoted in Kunst 1973, 1:289-90).

A second West Javanese form that existed in the 1870s was *wayang cerita*, performed primarily in the area of Bogor by and for Chinese on holidays such as the Chinese New Year (Tio Ie Soei 1960). Stories included Arabian Nights tales and Chinese romances such as Sampek-Engtay. One of the more successful troupes was directed by the renowned Chinese writer and political activist Lie Kim Hok (1853-1912). Lie Kim Hok's play of choice was 'Siti Akbari', enacting the revenge of a princess of Barbary upon the Sultan of Hindustan. C. Hooykaas identified this tale as a reworking of 'Abdul Muluk', the story featured so prominently in the Sumatran genre by this name (Hooykaas cited in Nio Joe Lan 1962:146).¹⁶ Lie Kim Hok's version remained in the repertoire of Malay popular theatre troupes into the 1920s (Shiong Tih Hui n.d.). His play was written in Malay verse and sung to the accompaniment of a mixed Chinese-Javanese orchestra, akin to today's *gambang kromong*. Sets and costumes were simple; only a single backdrop was used, supported by two bamboo battens. Lie Kim Hok's actors were Chinese youths aged 10 to 14. Performances lasted about two hours and took place outdoors in front of the houses of patrons. The troupe toured as far away as Jakarta and received fees as high as 75 to 100 guilders per performance – a considerably higher amount than that paid to Javanese shadow puppet theatre or mask-dance troupes.¹⁷

Troupes such as Lie Kim Hok's (some with all-male casts and accompanied entirely by Chinese musical instruments) were known popularly as *Abdul Muluk* when performing in Batavia and environs. These companies had acquired an extremely negative reputation by 1890. They were perceived as lewd and destructive of public morality and were subject to an official ban.¹⁸

The roots that *komedi Jawa*, *wayang cerita* and related fledgling genres sank into the soil of colonial society were decidedly infirm. Little memory remained of them in the twentieth century. They appear to have all been relatively simple forms, requiring minimal investment in scenic effects, training, or rehearsals. The dramaturgy and story material owed much to the Parsi theatre model, but the performance venues (the backyard of the regent's office, a sponsor's front porch) were traditional to Java. The Komédie Stam-

¹⁶ On Lie Kim Hok's later poetic version of *Siti Akbar* in comparison with *Abdul Muluk*, see Zaini-Lajoubert 1994, Koster 1998.

¹⁷ Taufik, Misbach, and Ardan (1993:29-30) suggest that *wayang cerita* was a precursor of today's *lenong*, which is practised in the greater Jakarta area to this day.

¹⁸ See articles referring to *Abdul Muluk* in *Bintang Barat* of 1890 and 1891.

boel, in contrast, was intensively capitalized and produced, non-traditional in venue, and intimately related to its place and time. Despite a hesitant start, it quickly developed into one of the most wildly popular cultural forms of late colonial society.

Commercial wayang wong

A brief excursus is required at this juncture to discuss an antithetical form of theatre which did not emerge out of the Parsi model. This is commercial *wayang wong*, which could potentially have played a similar role to that eventually fulfilled by the Komedi Stamboel.¹⁹ It might have become a major template for a large range of Indonesian popular and folk genres. *Wayang wong* did not develop in such a fashion. It remained ensconced as an ethnic Javanese art form from its inception, though there were noteworthy attempts in the 1950s and 1960s to translate the form into Indonesian on stage and in film (see, for example; Satyagraha Hoerip 1995). It is important to outline the reasons for the limitations of commercial *wayang wong* to understand why an exotic theatrical model dominated over a homegrown variety.

Scholars have traced the origin of *wayang wong*, in which tales from the shadow puppet repertoire are enacted by a cast of costumed actors, to classical antiquity. The art flourished in the royal courts of nineteenth-century south Central Java following the end of the Java War (1825-1830), the political emasculation of the sultans, and consequent cultural involution. Play texts were inscribed in splendid calligraphy in thick tomes. Elaborate costumes were prepared for new productions. Rehearsals of musicians and dancers, some of whom were the children of sultans, took place over a period of months. Sumptuous public performances, watched by the elite of Javanese and European society, occupied several days. So costly were productions that more than one sultan ran into extensive debt to mount them.²⁰

This royal dance theatre, considered an exclusive heirloom of the royal courts for much of the nineteenth century, by 1890 had been adapted as a commercial art form, enacted in enclosed spaces by paid actors for ticket-purchasing spectators.²¹ Many companies were owned and their plays pro-

¹⁹ Commercial *wayang wong* is commonly referred to as *wayang wong panggung* (*wayang wong* of the stage) in Indonesia today. See Hardjo Susilo 1985, 1987.

²⁰ See Soedarsono 1984. Performances of *wayang wong* at the royal courts of Cirebon featuring members of the elite also appear to have been common in the nineteenth century, but did not interest the city's Europeans. See *Tjerimai* 18-9-1886.

²¹ Pace James Brandon (1967:47), the first commercial *wayang wong* company was not founded in 1895, but some time before that. Brandon does not cite a source for his date. The following description is largely based on articles appearing in *Bintang Barat* in 1890.

duced by Chinese entrepreneurs. Most featured non-noble performers, although at least one, managed by a certain Ong An Hoang, was made up of both male and female members of the minor nobility (*bangsa raden*) of Surakarta. Interest in commercial *wayang wong* mounted fast in Central and West Java in 1890 (the first troupes seem to have played Surabaya only in 1891).

A genuine commercial *wayang wong* craze broke out in Batavia in August 1890. Sell-out performances attended by crowds composed of members of all of Batavia's ethnic groups and races thronged to the stages, attracted particularly by the handsome actors and beautiful actresses. By October, four professional companies were performing in different parts of the city. Competition among troupes was stiff and each strove to outdo the other, increasing the number or improving the quality of its performers or purchasing more splendid costumes. The *gamelan* orchestra of one troupe recently arrived from Bandung was said to be able to play Dutch and Chinese musical pieces, as well as the staples of the Javanese repertoire. Each company had its own strong proponents. Articles in *Bintang Barat*, a Malay daily, described devotees lending their jewellery and household articles to performers to ensure their favourite troupe's success. Respectable ladies ran off with their theatrical idols. Men became 'crazy' with love for the beautiful actresses, above all the curly-headed Ijas. Houses were robbed while their owners were off watching the plays. A storm of protest arose. The theatre was accused of being destructive of public morality, draining the income of the poor, breaking up marriages, and fomenting strife among spectators. The actresses were all said to double as prostitutes. Commercial *wayang wong* was also politically suspect. One article described as seditious a performance in eastern Java that was critical of the court of the colonial *landraad* (district council), with different characters taking on the roles of the court's different officers: *president landraad*, *griffier*, *djaksa*, *lid-lid*, and *penghoeloe*. Court proceedings, including investigations (*pepereksaannja*), and the court's 'troubles' (*pesakitannja*) were parodied precisely (*Bintang Barat* 16:10-1890).

In the same article describing the seditious play, it was announced that the Resident of Batavia would henceforth not give permits for *wayang wong* performances. Other cities in western Java quickly followed suit, despite popular protest. No reason was given for the ban, though readers and reporters had their various theories. The last commercial *wayang wong* performance of the year took place on 30 October 1890. Some of the troupes went to play in other cities, while others disbanded. The beautiful Ijas was soon performing in social dances for Batavia's elite.

The prohibition of commercial *wayang wong* in the trend-setting metropolis, which from August through mid-October 1890 appears to have been the centre of the genre's life, had wide ramifications. It provides one of the major reasons, I would suggest, why an exogenous theatrical model became

predominant over endogenous varieties, and why the development of the Komedi Stamboel genre did not occur in Batavia (the cultural centre in so many other regards) but in Surabaya.

Surabaya: A theatre city

The East Javanese port city of Surabaya – the city of shark and crocodile – was undergoing major changes in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.²² Urban populations were being moved, slums demolished, and avenues paved in the name of progress. Though not the seat of government, nor perceived as a cosmopolitan metropolis as Batavia was, it was the largest city in the Netherlands East Indies, with a combined population of approximately 124,000 'Natives' (including both Javanese and Madurese), 'Foreign Asians' (including Chinese, Arabs, and Indians), and 'Europeans' (including Eurasians) by 1895.²³

Surabaya [...] was discernibly altered to meet the needs and tastes of a small minority of Europeans. Dry docks, machine factories, jails, banks, newspaper offices and presses, import-export firms, elegant Victorian pastry shops and stylish clubhouses were built in rapid succession. Beyond the well-established eye of the city and beyond even the famous Simpang area, which fifty years before had been pleasantly rural, suburban thoroughfares were laid out and lined with large Western-style homes and luxuriant gardens. The old alun-alun [central square] [...] was turned over to commercial and government buildings and replaced with a new square lacking any traditional significance and designed by a Eurasian in what has been described as Greco-Gothic-Moorish style. (Frederick 1978:15.)

Surabaya was also a major theatre city. Surabaya's Schouwburg theatre, located at Komedi plein, hosted touring English music-hall companies, Italian opera, French troupes performing *opéra comique* and *opéra bouffe*, and Dutch ensembles enacting farces and melodramas. Play scripts in Dutch, French, and English were available for sale in Surabaya bookstores. Local amateur 'European' groups such as Ons Tooneel, Vereeniging Apollo, Vereeniging Constantia, Vereeniging Eendracht Zij Ons Doel, and the Onderofficiers-Vereeniging te Soerabaia performed frequently. Many of these amateur groups were all-male, for local women of standing were reluctant to appear on stage

²² On colonial Surabaya, see Arndt 1923; von Faber 1931; Frederick 1978, 1989.

²³ Batavia, in contrast, had a population of 110,669 in 1893. (Frederick 1978:25). Frederick, citing Veth, states that there were 4,293 'European' (including 'Eurasians, Christian indigenes and a variety of others besides Dutch citizens') inhabitants of Surabaya around 1880. 'Indigenous peoples accounted for about ninety percent of the city's population and were attracted there by the availability of employment and higher wages than could be obtained in most rural areas' (Frederick 1978:18).

out of modesty. Ticket prices tended to be high, and attendance was limited to Europeans and the thin upper crust of affluent, Dutch-speaking Asians.

The 'Native' population also had their entertainments, which were free and open to a general public. *Wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre), *tandakan* (social dance), and *wayang krucil* (flat wooden puppet theatre) were sponsored in conjunction with circumcisions, weddings, and annual communal celebrations such as *sedekah bumi* (offering to the earth). These seem to have been rowdy affairs and, at least judging from newspaper accounts, drunken brawls sporadically broke out. The performances seem to have been equally insular racially. The rare appearance of a Eurasian (*Indo Ollanda*) at a shadow puppet play sponsored in conjunction with a ritual celebration was cause for great surprise.²⁴

Surabaya's Chinese community sponsored 'Native' entertainments, such as *wayang kulit*, in addition to fostering their own arts. Chinese opera, sometimes performed in Malay, drew large crowds of ticket-purchasing Chinese spectators.²⁵ The Chinese also produced *topeng* (masked-dance drama). The year 1891 marked the first appearance in the city of commercial *wayang wong*, as noted above. Ong An Hoang's troupe from Solo performed here in June 1891. Another troupe, known as Ban(g)bang Langen Koesoemo, performed in August of the same year. They seem to have been a considerable draw: a *wayang wong* troupe in nearby Bangil performed in a tent with a seating capacity of 1,000. Spectators at *topeng* as well as commercial *wayang wong* performances included both Chinese and 'Natives', though the Javanese-language dialogue restricted audiences to indigenized Asians (*peranakan*) and Javanese.²⁶

Finally, there were mass spectacles which cut across all the racial barriers in their appeal. Surabaya was distinguished by the fact that 'European' festivities, such as the St Nicholas festival, were enjoyed by one and all in different ways as early as 1875 (Helsloot 1998:628). The case was otherwise in other cities of the East Indies. It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century, for example, that 'Natives' appear to have taken an active interest in the Queen's Birthday celebration in the city of Cirebon (see *Tjerimai* 30-8-1905). Foremost among the cross-racial commercial entertainments were the circuses and Wild West shows, both known to locals as *komedie koeda* (horse shows). One of the most famous early companies to appear in Surabaya was Wilson's

²⁴ 'Maka hadjat itoe soenggoe kita bilang pantes krana kendati boekan bangsa soeka tjampoer dengan rahap, kendati poen djoega aer dengan minjak beratnja orang tida bisa bilang' (*Bintang Soerabaia* 7-8-1891).

²⁵ Chinese opera was performed in Malay in Batavia as early as the sixteenth century (Kumar and Proudfoot 1998:38).

²⁶ Newspaper accounts thus contradict Brandon's (1967:47) undocumented assertion that the first commercial *wayang wong* company was founded by Gam Kam in 1895.

Circus in 1879. Thereafter, circus tents became a regular feature of the urban landscape (von Faber 1931:372).²⁷ Many of these companies started off in Australia, Europe, or the United States, but after years of touring 'the Orient' became more and more Asian in their composition. Some of them featured clowns who could speak Malay. Japanese acrobatic troupes were popular in these years as well. There were also magic shows by European and Indian prestidigitators, featuring astounding and often macabre exhibitions of hypnotism and magnetism. One of the most talked-about shows of 1891 was Professor Calabresini's metempsychosis display, in which the head of a person, the head of a statue, a skull, and a birdcage containing two finches, changed places and gradually transformed into one another. Ticket prices for horse shows, acrobatic displays, and magic shows were as low as f 0.25, making them affordable to a large percentage of urban dwellers of all races.

The Komedi Parsi and Yap Goan Thay

The immediate inspiration for the formation of the Komedi Stamboel was the visit of a Parsi theatre troupe from Bombay, the 'Emperal [*sic*] Theatre of Deccan, Hydrabad Company', to Surabaya circa 1888 (see Andjar Asmara 1935).²⁸ This group, referred to variously as 'Komedi Bombay', 'Wayang Parsi', 'Komedi Persie', or 'Opera Perzie', performed for several weeks in a big tent in the central square (*alun-alun*) next to the Pasar Besar. Reactions to this troupe in other parts of Java varied. It got only a lukewarm reception and most probably lost money in Cirebon and Tegal, towns with small Indian communities, and does not seem to have been of much interest to Europeans or Chinese in Surabaya.²⁹ It was much appreciated by Surabaya's Indian community, however, and loved in Batavia.

Late in 1888, this troupe had become something of a sensation in Betawi during a tour there. As the troupe had actresses in the cast it was not long after the com-

²⁷ The circus had reached the Indies by the 1860s. Buitenweg (1965:116-7) reproduces advertisements for McCollum's Groot Amerikaansch Cirque, which appeared in Batavia in May and June 1864.

²⁸ Andjar Asmara, the most important drama critic of the late colonial Netherlands Indies, as well as a celebrated playwright and director in his own right, appears to have based his information on the Komedi Stamboel's origin partly upon conversations with a sibling (*saudara*) of Auguste Mahieu living in Surabaya in 1935 (Andjar Asmara 1935:16). The relation between the Emperal Theatre of Deccan and Surabaya's Komedi Stamboel is also apparent from an article that anachronistically refers to the former company as 'the Komedi Stamboel from Bombay' (*Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 24-10-1891) and other contemporary reports.

²⁹ See *Tjerimai* 22-10-1887, 12-11-1887, 14-12-1887; *Advertentieblad voor Tegal en Omstreken* 25-11-1893.

mencement of performances that many people in Betawi fell madly in love with them. So deep was the 'shameless', emotional entanglement of these infatuated fans that they had gradually begun to neglect their family responsibilities. At various times during the days and the nights groups of these men gathered hopefully at the road junction near the *panggung* [stage] and hoped to get a glimpse of their favourite actress. It was suggested that the moral behaviour of the men had reached such a low point that even religious duties had become subordinate to their infatuation. (Camoens 1982:8.)

Musical pieces performed by the troupe fast became popular among the residents of Batavia and were played as pieces for *gambang* (wooden xylophone), harmonica, and violin.³⁰ A major obstacle to appreciation of the Parsi Theatre was Bombay's 'Hindustani' language.³¹ Andjar Asmara (1939:11) likens his own understanding of this foreign theatre to that of a touring Dutch actor watching Indonesian theatre: 'It was incomprehensible. I couldn't tell when one scene started and another ended. All I knew was that there was more singing than speaking [...].' Some alterations were made during the tour to accommodate Indies tastes, including the addition of an instrumental band from Batavia (Camoens 1982:8). The language barrier aside, the theatre provided a dynamic new model of spectacles. It was, in a word, a start.

It started with Wayang Parsi, which delivered songs and dance from Persia, Arabia, and Hindustan, using harmonium, fiddle, and drum for its musical instruments. Its stories were 'Ghul Bakwali', 'Syamerdan', 'Bujangga Bayu', 'Indra Putra', and 'Langlang Buana'. Lots of kings, with their golden robes, sitting on their thrones of gold, in their audience halls, attended by *wazir*, generals, admirals, heralds, and servants, with unsheathed swords in their hands, heads topped with sparkling crowns. Many princesses, queens, princes, concubines, and slaves singing and dancing in palaces, in royal gardens. Many sunset-red spirits, jinn [spirits], and celestial nymphs, as well, in cloud kingdoms, descending to earth to intervene in the affairs of humans [...] The battlefield where fierce combat is waged; the untamed jungle where kings exile themselves after defeat in battle, where young knights and princesses roam after being banished, the object of the

³⁰ *Bintang Barat* 4-11-1890. Musical pieces derived from the Parsi theatre remain part of the Betawi *gambang kromong* repertoire to this day and fulfil a distinct dramatic function in *lenong*. See Kleden-Probonegoro 1996:54-7.

³¹ News of an impending return visit of 'the Komodie Bombay, the same company that gave a few performances here several years ago' (that is, the Emperial Theatre of Deccan, Hydrabad Company), initially was represented by the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* (6-5-1891) as competition for the fledgling Komodie Stamboel company, formed in imitation of it. A later report stated, however, that 'We do not expect that the troupe will cause much injury to the Komodie Stamboel, as few understand the Bombay language. Moreover, the Komodie Stamboel wants nothing in comparison with the theatrical style of Bombay' (*Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 13-5-1891). In the end, the Parsi company's visit to Surabaya appears to have been cancelled.

wrath of their lord or beloved father. The cave where a sage or priest meditates, who gives his magical aid, resulting in the fateful union and happy marriage of *him* and *her*. (H.A. Salim in Pané 1934:381.)

The inspiration for translating this theatre into Malay, using a cast of Eurasian actors and European songs to enact Arabian Nights stories (a set of plays at the core of the Parsi theatre's repertoire), seems to have been Yap Goan Thay's, or of someone close to him in Surabaya's Chinese community. Yap Goan Thay was the owner of the company, and clearly exerted a significant influence on the company's development until he was bought out by Mahieu in 1894.³² For some members of the Chinese community, at least, the Komedi Stamboel was entirely Yap Goan Thay's creation (see Lauw Giok Lan 1913:ii).

Yap Goan Thay, referred to by the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* as 'the Croesus of Tangu Angin', after his fabulous wealth and residential quarters in Surabaya, in addition to running the Komedi Stamboel, had very diverse business interests. He was a storeowner and restaurateur. His fireworks company, Banyu Urip ('Water of Life'), was well-known, and he attracted national media attention in 1907 when he claimed to have developed a six-day cure for malaria. In 1891, however, he was most famous in Surabaya as a producer of commercial entertainment.³³ Yap Goan Thay had earlier set up commercial Chinese opera companies as well as *topeng* troupes. He was aggressively modern in his advertising, to an extent previously unknown in Java – placing advertisements in the Malay- and Dutch-language newspapers, putting up posters, circulating programmes, sending out circulars, and selling advance tickets at his store, Yap Goan Thay & Co., and other locations. His typical strategy seems to have been to develop an existing troupe over a period while it was in residence in a tent or one of the theatres he managed in Surabaya – adding new actors, altering the musical accompaniment, creating scenic effects, and so on. When Surabaya audience attendance began to drop, the troupes would then leave to tour other parts of the Netherlands Indies or Malaya. An advertisement signed by Yap Goan Thay (placed in both the *Soerabaya-Courant* and the *Bintang Soerabaia*) for a performance by a Chinese opera troupe originally from Pasuruan which began performing in

³² Yap Goan Thay may not initially have been the exclusive owner of the Komedi Stamboel: newspaper accounts published in the first five months of the company's existence refer to a *kongsi*, or commercial association, 'exploiting' the troupe. This may have been a ploy to cover the extent of his involvement. Advertisements appearing in 1892, when the troupe was touring Central Java, clearly indicate him as 'owner' (*eigenaar*).

³³ A story in the *Soerabaya-Courant* (16-7-1891) describes him as 'hier algemeen bekend als iemand die er geld voor over heeft om publieke vermakelijkheden te exploiteeren, m.a.w. daarvan een speculatie maakt'. This story was translated into Malay in *Bintang Soerabaia* 20-7-1891.

his theatre in Kapasan in September 1891, describes eliminating the thin, knobless gong known in Java as *gembreng* or in China as *lo*, which is characteristic of Chinese opera, as it 'deafens the ears', and making the addition of Malay-speaking clowns. He was constantly crossing genres. For instance, he had a Javanese magician, imitating the performance techniques of Professor Calabresini, perform with a Javanese *topeng* troupe. A spectacular stage effect was used for the Pasuruan Chinese Opera troupe's first performance on 12 September, featuring a play about a wife's devotion to her husband. Here a volcano erupted in the middle of an ocean, spewing flames. This same effect was re-used in act three of the 18 September performance of the Komedi Stamboel in the same space, but for a very different play – 'The introduction to the 1001 Nights or The cleverness of a woman'.

The Komedi Stamboel troupe of Surabaya was in fact only one of two such companies initially launched in Java in January of 1891. The founding of the other company, based in Batavia and bankrolled by 'a famous person together with a few wealthy Chinese', was announced in the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* on 17 January 1891, the very same day that the Surabaya troupe gave its first performance in Kampung Doro. It was expected that performances of 'the same Persian tales' performed in Surabaya would be staged in a tent in Tanah Abang. A sum of f 2,000 was committed to purchasing costumes so that 'a caliph named Haroen al Rashid will consequently not enter dressed as the cabman in a royal funeral procession, meaning with a tattered coat, and neither will the loquacious Scheherazade appear in the costume of Cinderella'. A reporter of the Batavia paper *Bintang Barat* was sceptical of the troupe's being granted the necessary permits from the start. The cultural political climate was still hostile to popular theatre, in the wake of the *wayang wong* ban. News that Surabaya's Komedi Stamboel planned to play Batavia prompted the following comment from *Bintang Barat* on 29 January 1891: 'Before arriving, we think that the management of the company should request permission, for as is known, the authorities here do not at all like to give permits for this and many other sorts of entertainment which can lead to the destruction of Muslim families'. The Batavia company seems not to have really materialized, and it was not until 29 September 1892 (following triumphs in most of Java's major cities and towns) that the Surabaya troupe finally played Batavia. There is a possibility, to be discussed below, that some of the aborted Batavia company's actors later joined Surabaya's Komedi Stamboel.³⁴

³⁴ It seems possible that the aborted Batavia company was the re-formed Bangsawan troupe of Mama Pushi, also known as Mamak Pushi and Mohamad Pusi (Edrus 1960:50-4). Mama Pushi was a wealthy Parsi from Penang. It is reported in the literature on Malay theatre that the company he founded was the first Malay Bangsawan to travel abroad. His troupe, known variously

The first Komedi Stamboel company

'All beginnings are difficult' (*Alle begin is moeilijk*), wrote the *Soerabaya-Courant* (22-1-1891). The Komedi Stamboel experienced its share of 'teething troubles', disbanding twice in the first five months of its existence. The first company known as Komedi Stamboel was directed by a certain J.S. Hartens (or possibly Martens), generally known as H.S.³⁵ It consisted of 16 Eurasian actors, 12 men and 4 women, and gave four performances over its two-week existence, before disbanding in a cloud of controversy and incrimination.

Company members were paid a monthly salary of 50 guilders, doled out twice weekly. This income, if unsupplemented, in official terms would 'have placed an individual precisely on the border between 'less well-to-do' and 'pauper' (see Van der Veur 1955:53-4). Many, if not all, of the company members were in fact considered 'paupers' and had been living off their families or public charity before they gained employment as actors. It was a common practice in the first months of the company's operations for its actors to circulate among the audience and solicit tips – a carry-over from Javanese performing tradition. None of the actresses had previous acting experience, and as being an actress was morally suspect, the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* insinuated that they might have ulterior motives for becoming artists.³⁶ The actors' level of education was low, and most spoke Malay as their first language,

as 'Wayang Mama Pushi', 'Empress Victoria', 'Jawi Peranakan Theatrical Company', and 'Pushi Indera Bangsawan of Penang', is said to have appeared in Batavia circa 1890. It seems to have been a commercial failure: Pushi was forced to sell his company to a certain Jafaar Turki – 'Jafaar, the Turk'. Only some of his company members returned to Singapore with him; others, probably including the renowned Bai Kasim, remained in Java. Kasim, originally from Bombay, is known to have joined the Komedi Stamboel (Tzu You 1939:10). He later returned to Malaya and formed the Indra Zanzibar Royal Theatrical Company, which provided major competition for Netherlands Indies ensembles when it toured the country in the first decade of the twentieth century (Edrus 1960:55-7, 66). I have not been able to confirm the presence of Wayang Mama Pushi in Batavia in 1890, though the story strikes me as plausible for reasons relating to the development of the Komedi Stamboel outlined below.

³⁵ *Stamboel* was the Dutch and Malay designation for Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire. The Arabian Nights tales, the core of the Komedi Stamboel's repertoire, were closely linked to the Islamic world, and by extension to its major centre, in the popular imagination.

³⁶ McDonald (1988) presents a pertinent discussion of the financial position and social status of jobbing actresses in Victorian Britain. 'The middle-class novice was at a double disadvantage. Not only was she denied access to a body of traditional stage knowledge to which the scions of the theatrical dynasties fell heir, but for her even to enter the theatrical profession meant social ostracism, not only because of respectable society's view of the theatre as a haunt of criminals and prostitutes, but, more specifically, because the art of the actress was in every way contrary to the notion of ideal Victorian womanhood.' (McDonald 1988:235.) There are clear affinities between this bind and that faced by the Komedi Stamboel's actresses. Most of the latter were likely driven to take up the acting profession by financial need more than love of art.

with only minimal competence in Dutch or any other European language.³⁷

Some of the company members had legal issues to contend with. One actor was arraigned by the Board of Justice in late January 1891 for crimes against tram employees on 1 January. Several of his fellow performers were called as witnesses. A number of the actors (including Mahieu) had jobs as city guards and were frequently imprisoned for short periods due to chronic absenteeism. Many of them were brawlers, and it was common, particularly during the first months of the troupe's existence, for them to get involved in fist fights with members of the audience or even their nominal employer.

The makeshift theatre where the Komedi Stamboel initially performed was located in Kampung Doro, a dirty, smelly part of Surabaya, well outside the centre of the town, and bordered by a road in a state of extreme neglect.³⁸ 'The tent, or better, shed, in Kampong Doro can seat a few hundred', writes the *Soerabaya-Courant*. 'The box and dress circle seats are well-appointed. The building is a bit isolated in its location, but it is easy to find.' (*Soerabaya-Courant* 22-1-1891.) This same space was used for *topeng* and Chinese opera performances. The shed was well-ventilated and spacious, and lit entirely by gaslight, which provided adequate illumination. It appears to have been a bit of a firetrap: only two days before the Komedi Stamboel opened, a leaking reservoir in one of the lights resulted in a fire that almost destroyed the entire structure. A buffet was set up adjacent to the theatre. Initially alcohol was served, but by the Komedi Stamboel's third performance this was prohibited by order of the police, perhaps because of the unruly behaviour associated with drunkenness.

The Komedi Stamboel opened on a Saturday night, 17 January 1891, with a play from the Arabian Nights about the poor fisherman who became king. Thereafter, the troupe performed twice weekly. The same play was reprised 'by popular demand' on January 21. A second play, 'Giafar, who would entertain love for his stepmother', also from the Arabian Nights, had its premiere on January 24 and was reprised the following Wednesday. A third Arabian Nights play, 'Moehassan', was scheduled to open on January 30, but was never performed due to the company's disbanding. Performances began at 9 o'clock at night and went on until around 1 a.m. The actors in the young company were described as always 'doing their best', but were criticized for being 'less than fluent' in their delivery of lines and in need of more energy (*entrain*). This was compensated for somewhat by the actresses, who were

³⁷ Nieuwenhuys (1972:304) in this connection cites statistics collected by the Netherlands Indies Teachers' Society in 1900 according to which 41.5% of 'European' elementary school children spoke no Dutch and 29.3% a little, and only 29.2% spoke Dutch fluently. His conclusion is that 'Malay, not Dutch, was the language of expression for most Eurasians'.

³⁸ The neighbourhood was 'renewed' in August of 1891, when residents received an injunction to vacate their houses and land.

'agreeable in appearance'.

The scenery consisted of painted backdrops (*kelir* in Malay) and painted wings (*coulisses*) and was reportedly 'exquisite, gorgeous in its own right'. Backdrops for 'The Poor Fisherman' included views of the sea, mountains, a lake, and a royal palace. Costumes were 'fresh' and 'dazzling'. These costumes and sets could be, and were, re-used in different plays. This is a general feature of the way that much Asian theatre is put together, in which 'the genre, not the play, is the unit of production' (Brandon 1967:147). It is also characteristic, one should point out, of the production system used by travelling European musical theatre of the period.

'A sort of orchestra, consisting of a few guitars, a violin, and a tambourine', accompanied the first performance. Beginning with the Komédie Stamboel's second performance, the Italian Quintet was engaged regularly to accompany shows. This quintet, a woodwind and string ensemble headed by a harpist, was Surabaya's premier (European) musical ensemble, playing at all the elite balls in Surabaya and the eastern part of East Java. It was considered, indeed, one of the city's cultural jewels.³⁹ Its regular performance with the Komédie Stamboel was a major draw. Performance reviews of the Komédie Stamboel noted that the quintet 'was a delight to hear' and 'provided not a little of the evening's pleasure'. By April 1891, the Komédie Stamboel's management had contracted the Italian Quintet to play at all performances, as long as the quintet was not engaged out of town, at the flat rate of f 50 per show. It played with the company regularly through October, when the Komédie Stamboel finally established its own orchestra in anticipation of an extended tour of Central and East Java.⁴⁰

The audiences attending the performances were large, despite the high ticket prices – f 2.50 for a dress-circle seat (*eerste rang*) – which were approximately the same as the prices one paid at the Schouwburg to see Gilbert and Sullivan or Offenbach. The vast majority of spectators were Chinese. Those sitting in box seats and dress circle received a free programme booklet – a boon for those with less than perfect comprehension of Malay. At the company's premiere there was standing room only, and while a heavy shower in

³⁹ The threatened 'loss' of the Italian Quintet in November 1891, when it received an offer to play in Batavia with a guaranteed income of f 800 a month, was cause for some anxiety to Surabaya's polite society: 'Who will play at our *bals champêtres*?' See *Soerabaya-Courant* 24-11-1891.

⁴⁰ The Italian Quintet accepted other engagements as well in Surabaya during 1891. It played at *bals champêtres* following amateur dramatics by the Vereeniging Constantia on at least five occasions, provided musical accompaniment for a gymnastics display by the Vereeniging Hercules at the Schouwburg (and played at the ball that followed), played at 'a large Chinese party' in Tulung Agung, and provided accompaniment to the magician Calabresini for a special show in the Schouwburg. It also regularly advertised the availability of its services in the *Soerabaya-Courant*.

the early evening before its second performance resulted in a low turnout, attendance at the third performance was said to be 'sufficient to cover expenses, and these are not small'.

Among Surabaya's newspapers, the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* took the greatest interest in the fledgling company, covering the fate and fortune of the Komodie Stamboel with a remarkable degree of intensity during the fateful first ten months of the company's existence. No such attention had previously been devoted by the press (either Malay or Dutch) to any other form of non-European theatre. This was perhaps due in large part to the company's Eurasian actors.

Eurasian actresses had played roles in the Parsi theatre from at least circa 1878, when Anglo-Indian Mary Fenton became the leading lady in the Empress Victoria Theatrical Company (Hansen 1999). These actresses could 'pass' as European or Asian, but were marketed as foreign: 'a large part of their appeal lay in the 'not stark / not dark' play of perspectives they proffered audiences.⁴¹

The Anglo-Indian actress phenomenon added glamor and excitement to a theatre already synonymous with spectacle. In addition to the transformations effected through imported stage devices, sound effects, and painted scenery, here was a transformation in the colonial gender hierarchy. Through the exercise of the gaze, the male Indian spectator could possess the English beauty and enact a reversal of the power relations that prevailed in British-dominated colonial society. These relations, while grounded in economic and political control, were figured as a gendered domination of the masculine West over the feminine East. Instead, the feminine embodiment of the West, the Anglo-Indian actress, was now domesticated and subordinated [...] to the male viewer's gaze. (Hansen 1999:144.)

Yap Goan Thay and the management of the Komodie Stamboel went the Parsi theatre one step better: domesticating and subordinating an entire 'European' company to the gaze of (predominantly) Chinese spectators – economically better situated than the performers, but legally less entitled. The decision to employ Indo actors was largely grounded in financial, not aesthetic, considerations on the part of the management. Many of the actors were completely inexperienced; certainly, more polished Malay-speaking actors could have been recruited among the Chinese and 'Native' populations of Surabaya. But they would not have had the same drawing power as the Komodie Stamboel's Eurasians, whose appearance on stage immediately

⁴¹ 'Not stark / not dark' is, of course, my play upon Homi Bhabha's famous 'not quite / not white' coinage (Bhabha 1986). The terms of Bhabha's analysis of 'the part-objects of presence [...] on the margins of metropolitan desire' are applicable to the Komodie Stamboel. See also Freedman (1991) for a landmark study on staging the gaze, misrecognition, and the play of perspectives in Shakespearean comedy.

became a subject of much discussion in Surabaya.

Part of the reason for the sensation was political. The population of Eurasians (referred to as 'Indos' or 'Indo-Europeans') was considered a major social problem by the colonial authorities in the late nineteenth century. While possessing the same legal status as 'full-blooded' Europeans under an 1854 regulation, the standard of living, and consequentially life-style, of most Eurasians more closely approximated that of the 'Native' population, and the majority did not speak Dutch in their daily lives. This was a source of embarrassment to Europeans in general as 'representatives of the ruling race'. This discomfiture mounted towards the end of the century, as Eurasians began to have a sense of ethnic consciousness, arising out of a new feeling of positionality, and eventually forming mass organizations (Van der Veur 1955, 1968b; Bosma and Oonk 1998).

Opinions about the company were divided from the start. Some said that the group promoted immorality. Both Dutch newspapers, however, praised the company and the courage of its Indo actors in escaping poverty by whatever means possible. New ideas about Eurasians in general began to percolate. 'The company shows that it is willing to labour under the unbearable weight of oppression and prejudice', wrote the *Soerabaya-Courant*. While aware of the Chinese financing, the press promoted the company as a Eurasian initiative and encouraged attendance to support the actors financially. 'It is a very sour loaf of bread that these people have to eat', the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* wrote, quoting a Dutch expression.

The company, then, by all accounts seemed off for a fine start, with strong financial backing, a generous press, and a large public following. There were reports of some financial irregularities, ticket prices seemed a bit high, and the acting was still unpolished, but it seemed likely that the company would enjoy a long life. These aspirations ran aground very quickly as the result of backstage intrigues.

The whole *chronique scandaleuse* was reported by the press. One of the members of Yap Goan Thay's 'clique' financing the company, caricatured in the *Soerabaya-Courant* as 'a pig-tailed dandy beast', attended a company rehearsal without an invitation and attempted to take sexual advantage of one of the actresses. This blew up into a physical confrontation between the actors and their Chinese patrons. Director Hartens subsequently issued a declaration that he would not work with the Chinese *kongsi* again and arranged for the required municipal performance permit to be cancelled. The *kongsi* in turn took action against the resigned director for the return of advances on the first month's wages. The Chinese financiers planned to appoint a new permanent director and put in a request for a new permit, but on 25 February the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* announced that they would not go ahead with their plans. The *Komedie Stamboel* was no more.

The second Komodie Stamboel company

Or so it seemed. The very day after that, it was announced that a performance permit had been obtained and that the second company under the name 'Komodie Stamboel' would begin giving performances in Kampung Doro on Friday, 27 February 1891. This company would feature new actors and actresses (many of the old ones having broken with the Chinese producers along with the resigned director) and be headed by a new director: Auguste Constantijn Pierre Mahieu, according to the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*. Mahieu, one of five children of an impoverished civil servant born in the small town of Bangkalan (Madura), had been an actor in the first company.⁴² Even then, he appeared to the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* to be 'at home on the boards'. His appointment as director was applauded in the press, and indeed his talents proved to be prodigious. Mahieu is remembered above all as a highly accomplished actor, with a fine singing voice, a great sense of theatrical effect, and tremendous energy (see Knaap 1971; Manusama 1922:19; von Faber 1931:371). He and his wife played leading roles in many of the plays he directed and the general level of acting of the troupe improved substantially during his tenure as director, though newcomers were inevitably initially unpolished in their delivery.⁴³

Mahieu was an accomplished musician: in later years, he sometimes conducted the Komodie Stamboel's orchestra when it was hired out for outside jobs, and he is credited with having written the theatre's six musical standards known as 'Stamboel 1', 'Stamboel 2', and so on. Each of these six melodies, which were perhaps based on *kroncong* ballads, could be used in any given play, adjusted to the required metrical texts. The different tunes presented certain moods: the first two were 'fantasies', the third was 'comic-

⁴² In the announcement of his wedding to F.J. van Lingen in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* of 25-6-1894, Mahieu's full name is noted as 'A.O.Th. Mahieu'. The version of the name and dates of birth and death I cite are drawn from Dumas (2000:57), who bases himself on almanacs for his data. Dumas is currently writing an article on the genealogy of the Mahieu family, and it is from a discussion with him that I learned that Mahieu had four siblings and that his father was a low-ranking civil servant.

The *Soerabaya-Courant* reported the name of the new director as 'J.W.W. Seket'. Nothing more is to be found about Seket in any account of the Komodie Stamboel I have seen. It is possible that 'Seket' was an alias for Mahieu, or another company member who failed to get the appointment as director.

⁴³ Mahieu was famous as a 'chéri des dames', or favourite with the ladies. 'Nobody knows how many times he was married', Marie Oord stated in a 1967 interview. Among the female relations known to Oord were Nellie Vos and Lena Koppejans (T.R. 1967:4). Mahieu was married to F.J. van Lingen in 1894 (as noted above), and a later wife whose maiden name was Coppiens was the owner of his company by 1901. His wife in 1891 was a co-member of the company. Oord's account suggests that some of his other wives and mistresses were actresses as well.

dramatic', the fourth 'lyric-philosophic', and the last 'tragi-sensual' (Knaap 1971). This use of musical standards to convey certain moods must have seemed self-evident and obvious to Mahieu. It had resonances in Surabaya's Asian musical drama traditions, including Chinese opera and Javanese *wayang*. In Chinese opera, particular 'stereotyped melodies' are used, subject to variation depending on the text and dramatic situation, to convey particular emotions – an approach known as *ban ch'iang* (Malm 1967:121). Likewise, in the Javanese shadow-puppet theatre, a *suluk* sung by a puppeteer may be transplanted to any play and may have its text altered to suit the nature of the scene. These *suluk* convey different moods – sadness, love, dramatic tension.

The same use of stereotyped melodies was common in the European theatre in the days of melodrama and light operetta, before the rise of copyright restrictions. The most popular item of the repertoire of Harry Stanley's English Comic and Burlesque Opera Company, which enjoyed a long run in Surabaya's Schouwburg in 1891, was Stanley's own play, an Oriental extravaganza entitled 'Blue Beard or Harlequin Ali Barber and Sinbad, the Wig Ked Coarse-Hair' (summarized in *Soerabaya-Courant* 7-4-1891). The play was about 'Fatima, the young lady, destined by fate to be Blue Beard's eighth wife' and was filled with bad puns. When Coraline, the fairy queen, says she will protect the endangered heroines of the play, she announces that 'this *chief miss* of the fairies stops *miss-chief*'. Ali Barber gains entry to the tower where Fatima is shut in, singing to a melody from *The Barber of Seville*:

Do, Re, Mi, Fa!
That's how we practised before her papa.
Sol, La, Si, Do!
Kissing and cuddling whene'er he would go.
Do, Si, La, Sol!
I knew if he caught me, he'd give me the sack,
But we always uncuddled before he came back.
Fa, Mi, Re, Do!

Mahieu and his associates clearly drew on this vital, if rough, theatrical form in his own work.

Mahieu also acted as his company's playwright. Knaap's hagiographic portrait of Mahieu alleges he read French playwrights such as Corneille, Racine, Molière, and Tardieu while in high school (Knaap 1971). This assertion is not supported by a newspaper report published in August 1891, which suggests that Mahieu's education as a dramatist took place on the fly, *after* his appointment as the Komedi Stamboel's director. Mahieu had borrowed books from various acquaintances for use in the Komedi Stamboel. By 3 August 1891, at a period when Mahieu was not functioning as director, the

owners were clamouring for the return of their property.

Most of the plays in the repertoire of the second company were drawn directly from the Arabian Nights: 'Aboelhasan, the chief of thieves', 'Bedredin Hassan, a very honest man, who is always aided by the Lord Allah and marries a young city lady amid great festivities', 'Noereddin', 'Ali Baba', 'Aladdin and the magic lamp', 'Asam and the queen of the spirits', 'The prince of Zanzibar', 'Boekaibik', 'The barber's brother', 'Prince Amgean', 'Prince Assad', 'The woodsman and the spirit', 'The hunchback', and 'Aboehassan, the sleeper awakened'. But Mahieu also began to experiment with adapting popular European literature in the Komedi Stamboel idiom in 'Raelaman bin Rachmat or the Rinaldo Rinaldi of Arabia' (premiere on 26 May 1891), based on a popular novel about the Italian brigand. The novelty of a European novel enacted in Malay attracted a large audience, despite stiff competition from Woodyear's Circus.

There have been some misconceptions about the degree of extemporization in the Komedi Stamboel, and this seems an opportune moment to take up this issue. Playwrights in the Komedi Stamboel were not exact analogues of the Parsi theatre's *kavi*, but they did have an important role to play. A 1500-word summary of an 1894 scenario for a new play by Mahieu suggests that he took some care in the preparation of his scripts, plotting out the stage action for each act and scene, the required effects, music, and much, if not all, of the dialogue (*Advertentieblad voor Tegal en Omstreken* 26-9-1894). Komedi Stamboel actors tended to be typecast, consistently playing the role of young man (*anak muda*), king (*raja*), or genie (*jin*) in play after play. This meant that the stage business in any given performance – standard greetings used on meeting and departure, threats (*mau di bikin manipus sekalian!*), and the like – was much the same as in other plays enacted in the past, and did not need to be written down by the scenarist (see Bouvier 1995).⁴⁴ It was also the typical practice for the director-playwright to convey his scripts orally to the company members, rather than handing out parts or scripts. Comic characters tended to have more freedom in their dialogue, and were able to allude to contemporary events. This does not in any sense mean that plays were

⁴⁴ For this I have referred to an essay by S. Kalff (writing as Aboe Hassan) entitled 'Een avond in de "Komedi Stamboel"', originally published in the *Java-Bode* (15-2-93), and revised as Kalff 1918-1919. Kalff describes an undated performance of 'Het rookende ei' (The smoking egg) or 'Telomja boroong Gorda, atawa radjanja Iblis' (The Gorda bird's egg, or the king of demons) at the Komedi Stamboel's Kapasan theatre. The 'literary' character of Kalff's lively picture of the Komedi Stamboel in its first year of performance (replete with references to the Bayreuth Festival Theatre, the Paris Théâtre du Châtelet, and London's Covent Garden) makes it problematic as a primary source; the changes Kalff made in the revised version suggest he was not averse to a degree of fictionalization. It is a far more detailed account of the first year of the Komedi Stamboel than any other available, however, and one I will refer to again below.

'improvised' by actors, as has sometimes been suggested. Lines had to be memorized, and when a key actor was absent a planned play might be cancelled. The Komodie Stamboel was, if anything, a director's theatre, driven by powerful, highly choreographed images and effects. Clouds of smoke spiral heavenward into ether and condense into giant *ifrit* (spirits). A *wazir* (vizier) is about to kill a princess, when an evil jinni kidnaps her, blinding the eyes of the *wazir* with a blast of cold air. The *mise en scène* was all.⁴⁵

The Chinese management not only hired a new director, they also committed new funds to improving the company. Construction of a new theatre for its use in the Kapasan district began almost simultaneously with the second company's opening night, as Kampung Doro had been slated for urban renewal (its tenants received their eviction notices in August of that year). New costumes were made and sets constructed. New actors were recruited to replace those who had departed with Hartens (though some of the better actors from the first company later rejoined the troupe), and the overall size of the troupe was increased. Two of the new recruits added in February were from Singapore. The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* wondered if the expansion with these 'two sweet heads' was just a publicity stunt, but it seems to have been a genuine effort to draw upon established Bangsawan skills. Possibly one of the new actors was Bai Kasim, the son-in-law of Mama Pushi, who is said to have joined Jafaar the Turk's troupe in Batavia and then, after this company folded, to have acted with Surabaya's Komodie Stamboel. The presence of 'foreign' actors, or, as Tzu You (1939:10) called them, 'overseas Indonesians' (*Indonesiers sebrang*), at this critical early junction in the troupe's history underlines its international orientation, and in particular its links with Malaya.⁴⁶

It was also during the second company's existence that Batavia's Albrecht and Rusche began to publish the first volumes of their seven-volume, lavishly illustrated Malay translation of the Arabian Nights. The volumes were expensive. Priced upwards of f 5.50 each, they were well out of reach for all but the most affluent Javanese. This event was heralded in the *Soerabaya-*

⁴⁵ The special effects and transformations did not impress Kalff (1893), however, accustomed as he was to the dazzling spectacles of flying devils and dragons and beggars-transformed-into-goddesses realized on the metropolitan stages of Europe. He describes, for example, 'the gold paper crown of a St Nicholas suitor on the head' of Radja Eblis, the king of the demons.

⁴⁶ I am extending here an argument put forward by Sumardjò (1992:107): 'A man named Cassim helped out. Tzu You referred to this Cassim as one of the "Indonesiers sebrang". Perhaps this is the same person as the Bai Kassim who founded the Pushi Indera Bangsawan of Penang? This is possible as it seems likely that, after the equipment of the Indera Bangsawan was purchased by Jafaar, Bai Kassim worked as *tooneel-directeur* (stage director) under Jafaar. Then, after Jafaar's group folded, he joined Mahieu's group. This would help explain why so many influences from Bangsawan were present in the Stamboel theatre.'

Courant as an aid to the spectators of the Komedie Stamboel, which under Mahieu's leadership was increasingly attracting European and Native spectators in addition to its Chinese habitués. Though the artists might deliver their lines clearly and well, for a large part of the audience 'much that is spoken is lost, an inconvenience which can only be rectified by [previous] knowledge of the story'. Indeed, though the brawling between actors and spectators decreased with Mahieu's appointment as director, the theatre remained a noisy place. Salvoes of applause and multiple encores would follow at the end of scenes. The noise and turmoil from the adjacent café further decreased people's ability to follow the performance. Fights occasionally broke out among spectators, and some men apparently found it amusing to yell and scream during shows. The plot summaries in the printed Dutch-language 'scripts' or 'programme booklets' which were offered for sale were undoubtedly indispensable to the Europeans in attendance, who would otherwise have had an impossible time following the progression of the plot over the din.

The status of the Komedie Stamboel's actors, much suspect during the first company's run, experienced a rise under Mahieu. An advertisement for four ladies to train as actresses placed in both the *Soerabaya-Courant* and *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* on March 20 and 21 respectively met with positive reactions, including one from the wife of a civil servant.⁴⁷ One reader wrote to the *Soerabaya-Courant* apropos of the announcement that 'there are still Indos who turn up their noses at the Komedie Stamboel. They forbid their children to go to see it, for example, let alone to perform in it: They should come and take a look at a performance of this troupe first. Then they will arrive at a different conclusion.'

Once again, it seemed that the company was destined for great success, with a growing audience base for its twice-weekly (Tuesday and Friday) shows and an enthusiastic press. Again, a conflict between the actors and the management resulted in the company falling apart.

The immediate cause of the company's disbanding this time was a road trip to Pasuruan, East Java, scheduled for early June. Woodyear's Royal Australian Circus, featuring 26 performers, including clowns and Japanese acrobats, had been performing in Surabaya since May 13 and was cutting into the Komedie Stamboel's ticket sales. Two additional horse shows, Harmston and Sons and Abell and Klaer's Excelsior Circus Troupe, were expected to arrive in June. On top of this, the imminent arrival from Singapore of a Parsi theatre troupe from India featuring 36 actors had been announced. The management consequently decided that, instead of continuing to lose money, it

⁴⁷ The *Soerabaya-Courant* (26-3-1891), by entitling its article 'De strijd om het bestaan', implied that aspiring actresses responded to the advertisement from financial need.

would temporarily shut down the theatre and leave on June 7 or 8 for nearby Pasuruan to give a few shows. This would be the first time the company performed outside Surabaya. A benefit performance of a comedy entitled 'Aboehassan, the sleeper awakened' was held for the actors on May 27, with the troupe's best actors in the lead roles and the text in Dutch distributed free. This benefit performance was not a success, partly because the play had been performed several times before and partly as the show took place on a Wednesday night, which was not a usual performance night. Many potential spectators apparently did not know the troupe was performing. Only about f 70 was raised at the door, barely enough to pay expenses, let alone provide extra income for the actors. The actors still needed cash to tide them over during their 'vacation' and demanded a month's wages in advance. The management, which claimed to be temporarily short of cash due to large expenditures on costumes and scenery, said they could provide only half a month's wages. No compromise could be reached, the Pasuruan trip was cancelled, and the actors refused to work, resulting in the disbanding of the *Komedie Stamboel*, for the second time in five months, at the end of May.

The third Komedie Stamboel company

The *Komedie Stamboel* had officially disbanded, but such was its popularity that it was clear it would soon rise from the ashes again. The same article in the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* announcing its demise also reported that a certain 'European had already declared that he had f 4,000 available to invest if the actors and actresses were willing to come together as a theatre company again'. A name change to 'Komedie Perzie' was considered in June, but then decided against. Work on the theatre in the Kapasan district of Surabaya meanwhile continued in June, and it was expected that the third company bearing the name 'Komedie Stamboel' would eventually perform there. The performers and the Chinese management were able in the end to come to an agreement. The majority of members of the old troupe were incorporated into the third Chinese-owned troupe, which was placed in the charge of a new director, J.D. Charles van der Laan, who was 'formerly active as an artist with a British Indian company' (possibly a *Bangsawan* or *Parsi* theatre troupe) and also acted in the company. An effort was also made to recruit actors in Semarang, for employment with the *Komedie Stamboel* was no longer deemed attractive by Surabaya's unemployed due to the well-known conflicts between the actors and management. The management took out a loan of f 3,900 to purchase and make 'picturesque Arabian costumes', construct scenery, and so on. New regulations were introduced by Van der Laan to improve the quality of performance. New backdrops were created by

Lépinat, the painter attached to the company. The actors rehearsed. A new permit was acquired and the furnishing of the new building in Kapasan finished with all due haste.

The Komedie Stamboel finally re-opened to a large audience in the new theatre in Kapasan on Friday night, 14 August 1891. The opening had been twice postponed due to problems finishing the décor and getting the actors to memorize their lines. The new theatre in Kapasan was well ventilated, with good seats and lighting (provided by gas lamps) judged by European standards. Measures were taken to prevent noise from the buffet spoiling the spectators' viewing pleasure. Ticket prices remained the same, except for front box seats, which now cost f 3. The twice-weekly, Tuesday and Friday night, schedule was resumed.

Plays based on the Arabian Nights remained the company's staple. It opened with the play 'The contending Kings Moerat Khan and Haroen al-Rachmat', and the plays mounted under Van der Laan during the first weeks included 'Brahmin, the woodsman prince', 'Sultan Jahja and his children', 'Mahmoed meets a jinni', 'Princes Amgiad and Assad', 'Giafar', 'The fisherman and the jinni', 'Ali Baba', 'The missing queen, Ritodan and Baroldoan', 'The enchanted Prince Aloeur al-Haad', 'The introduction to the 1001 Nights or The cleverness of a woman', 'The prodigal son, Josoop bin Diab', and 'The unhappy King Ali Aljufri'. Van der Laan also adapted the Faust tale to the Komedie Stamboel idiom, namely in 'Tatool-Achmat or the Faust of Arabia' (premiered 22 September 1891). The production was said to be a faithful adaptation of 'the German Faust'. It was well received by its audience, which was primarily European. John Chinaman [a derisive term for Chinese men] appears not to desire a performance portraying the devil's realm', wrote the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*. 'The actors and actresses acquitted themselves well of their difficult task, made even more difficult by most of them never having seen "Faust" enacted.' Van der Laan also introduced farces and comedies to the repertoire, premiering a double bill of one-act plays such as 'The slug-gard' and 'He is not jealous' on 25 September 1891.

Van der Laan's most significant innovation as director, though, was probably the introduction of the practice of concluding plays with choral numbers featuring the entire company and with *tableaux vivants* – fantasies based on themes usually unrelated to the night's main attraction. These living pictures depicted 'Europeans, Chinese, Arabs, Dayaks, and Indians of old times, or the spirit world'. Some were scenes from the Arabian Nights or related tales, such as the story of King Solomon punishing recalcitrant jinn. One of the most noteworthy of Van der Laan's *tableaux vivants* depicted the departure of the steamship *Prins Hendrik* (premiered 29 September 1891). The practice of concluding a dramatic evening with a *tableau vivant* was common with many of Java's European theatrical troupes at the time, but was entirely new to the

Malay theatre. Spectacular scenic effects continued to be emphasized, and six painted backdrops or more might be used in a play. A scene might be set in an Arabian ship at sea, 'with the appearance of real waves', and another scene feature 'a fuming volcano in the middle of an agitated sea'. These scenic effects were described in newspaper advertisements, and clearly were a major audience draw.

Mahieu appears not to have been a member of the third company initially. He rejoined the troupe for its second performance on 18 August. An advertisement that first appeared in the Malay paper *Bintang Soerabaia* on this date (and was reprinted three times the same month) stated that 'Toewan A. Mahieu and his wife are working for the Stamboel again'. This suggests his popularity with the Malay-speaking public. Mahieu in fact is the only actor mentioned by name in an advertisement for the Komedi Stamboel. Other actors also began to win a reputation for themselves. A review of 'Ali Baba' in the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* on 1 September 1891 stated that 'Margiana's acting was outstanding. She is the darling of the public, just as she was in the previous company.'

The company continued to face stiff competition from other entertainments, particularly horse shows like the Fillis Circus. Rambunctious spectators still occasionally disrupted performances with their yelling and whistling. The actors clearly experienced their share of hardships. One almost lost his life when he nearly drank a phial of hydrochloric acid, believing it to be water. Some of the troupe members (including both Mahieu and Van der Laan) worked on the side as city guards and were continually in and out of jail for absenteeism. Most spectacularly, one of the actors, a former cannoneer known as Haholij, was arrested during his first performance with the company, 'The three unhappy princesses', on 23 October 1891. He had been wanted for some 26 months prior to his arrest. The unsuspecting Haholij had just given a fine performance in act six, and was in the orchestra pit when at 11:30 p.m., in the middle of act seven, the intrepid sheriff Calmer arrested him and handed him over to the military police.

The audiences remained primarily Chinese, but there are indications that they became more heterogeneous during the Kapasan period. S. Kalff (writing as Aboe Hassan) evokes the atmosphere as follows: 'In front, in the first-class seats, we note a few rich Mongoloids [*sic*] and a few Europeans; the more crowded second-class seats are occupied by Native children with their nursemaids, soldiers with their families, mariners, Chinese, and Javanese'.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See Kalff 1893. A passage in the revised version of Kalff's essay reads: 'Aside from the throng of natives (Javanese) in their colourful jackets, one saw lower-class Chinese in white *kabaya* blouses and short, wide, polished cotton trousers, native women in their indigo blue jackets and batik sarongs and *slendang* shawls, native soldiers, ships' masters, a few Arabs, and

There are also signs that the theatre's novelty was beginning to wear off during these months, however. A reporter of the *Bintang Soerabaia* suggested that spectators were bored with Arabian Nights plays and that if there were plays based on the tales of Sheikh Abdul Mulia or Abdul Muluk, ticket sales might increase. (The paper's editor facetiously suggested in a footnote that the writer apply for the position of director of the Komodie Stamboel himself, if he was really so concerned about the company's prosperity.) A special benefit performance of 'Asam and the queen of the spirits' on behalf of European and Chinese orphans on Sunday, 18 October, raised f 307.50 and drew appreciative reactions in the letters to the editor sections of the newspapers from representatives of the Protestant and Roman Catholic religious communities. Its publicity value seems to have been minimal, however. The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* reported that 'the Komodie Stamboel last night played to an almost empty house. Two performances a week is a bit too much, and our "brown": [sic] fellow-citizens cannot afford the price of tickets, especially if they want to bring their wives and children. Ticket prices are of course fairly high. If the management must give two shows a week, they should set the prices a bit lower.' (*Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 12-10-1891.)

It was during this period under the artistic direction of Van der Laan, though, that the Komodie Stamboel began to acquire an extra-local reputation. It undertook out-of-town engagements in East Java, performing at the Harmonie Society in Pasuruan on three successive nights, 23-25 August, and made its debut in a furnished shed in Bangkalan at the beginning of September. And there were offers to perform in Semarang (with a guaranteed income of f 250 per night) and at the Mangkunagaran royal court in Surakarta.

The management had decided by early October that it would soon leave Surabaya for an extended tour of East and Central Java. A tent seating 2,000, similar to those used by itinerant circuses, was especially constructed for the tour, so that the company could play in towns and cities lacking permanent theatres. Certain modifications were made to the props and scenery: the wings, for example, could be rolled up for easy storage. A new musical ensemble was formed to replace the Italian Quintet, which would not be accompanying the company on its tour. Permission was requested on 7 October to set up the tent in the *alun-alun* (square) of Surabaya's Pasar Besar, in the same space where the circus customarily performed, to give a series of special performances before departing on the tour. The Surabaya police initially denied this request on the grounds that: 1. 'the Pasar Besar is a European realm and therefore a Native theatre company [...] is out of place', and 2. 'it would disturb the peace of the neighbourhood'. This reasoning was vig-

even fewer "coloured" persons (*kleurlingen*) from the slums, the *kampung* whites (lower-class Eurasians)' (Kalff 1918-19:757).

ously condemned as folly by the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, as the Pasar Besar area had previously been occupied for weeks at a time by a Parsi theatre group from Bombay and as circuses caused at least as much trouble and noise as the Komedi Stamboel. The permit was eventually granted and the Komedi Stamboel arranged to give seven consecutive performances of the best plays in its repertoire, including 'Ali Baba', 'Aladdin', 'The fisherman and the jinni', and 'Siti Seniembur or Innocence protected', in the first week of November. Ticket prices ranged from f 0.25 for second-class bench seats to f 2 for box seats, and the profits for the last three performances benefited the actors and actresses of the company.

During the last nights of the run at the Pasar Besar, Mahieu was appointed acting director, to replace Van der Laan. Mahieu had previously acted as temporary substitute for Van der Laan during the latter's absence at two performances at the beginning of October. The relationship between Van der Laan and Mahieu remained unstable over the next months. In the runs in Mojokerto (13-19 November 1891) and Madiun (23-25 November 1891), they acted jointly as the company's *directie* (directors). By the time of the celebrated Yogyakarta run (4-21 August 1892), advertisements listed Mahieu first as *tooneel directeur* (stage director), Van der Laan second as *directeur* (artistic director), and Yap Goan Thay third as *eigenaar* (owner). A Malay *sair* written about this run characterized the relation as follows:

Toean Mahieu Tooneel Directeur,
Segala lakon dia jang atoe.
Toean van der Laan djoega Directeur,
Toeroet memain pandei bertoetoer.

Tuan Mahieu was the stage director,
He directed all the plays.
Tuan van der Laan was also a director,
He ably delivered his lines as an actor.
(Tan Tjiok San 1892:256.)

Van der Laan's position of authority declined further; by 1893 he was not mentioned at all in the advertisements and may have left the company. Mahieu purchased the Komedi Stamboel from Yap Goan Thay in July 1894 and thereafter consolidated his position as sole owner-director. Even at this early point, the vitality of the Komedi Stamboel genre was recognized wherever it played. Numerous imitator companies sprang into existence. Many of these troupes were composed partly of Komedi Stamboel players lured away with offers of more generous salaries and benefits. It was not long before 'the' Komedi Stamboel – later renamed Komedi Sinar, India – was only one of a host of similar companies. This is another story, however, and one fitter to tell on another occasion.

Reflections on the Surabaya Residency

It seems to have been the management's original intention to tour East Java and the principalities of Surakarta and Yogyakarta for only a few weeks or a month, and then return to Surabaya to resume the customary performance schedule at the Kapasan theatre. This was not to be. The brief road trip turned into a decade of continuous touring of the Netherlands Indies and British Malaya, with only infrequent engagements in Surabaya itself. *Sic transit gloria mundi*, quoted a poetic essay in the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* inspired by the sight of the 'tragic remains' strewn around the *alun-alun* of the Pasar Besar following the Komedi Stamboel's final performance there in November 1891. The Komedi Stamboel was sometimes characterized as a Surabaya company in its subsequent travels, but the connections to its place of origin became attenuated over the years, due to the loss and gain of actors and change of ownership. It was common practice when on the road for all the company members to live together in a single rented house, known as the *rumah kongsi*. Individual and family spaces of exactly specified dimensions were created by curtains and partitions. This living space, new in every city and yet always the same, became the closest thing to a home the Komedi Stamboel and its offspring companies would know (Andjar Asmara 1958; T.R. 1967).

The Komedi Stamboel's ten-month residence in Surabaya was marked by great internal strife, particularly between the Chinese management and the Eurasian actors. Its audience, almost entirely composed of *peranakan* Chinese at its inception in January and racially diverse by November, was likewise inflammable and quarrelsome. Neither the company nor the spectators formed a tightly knit group. This was not simply a European, Eurasian, Chinese, or Native theatre. It had something in common with all of these categories, yet was none of them. It was a new form for the Indies, a popular urban drama⁴⁹, aggregating emergent patterns of association and affiliation and structures of inequality in colonial society.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ On Malay and Indonesian popular urban drama, see Wan Abdul Kadir 1988:31-83; Foley 1993:129-30; Tan Sooi Beng 1993:8-34.

⁵⁰ My view of the relation between the Komedi Stamboel and colonial society thus differs in crucial respects from the one put forward by Armijn Pané: I see the arena of the Komedi Stamboel as articulating and amplifying colonial inequalities, while Pané, drawing on the work of American anthropologist M.J. Herskovits, considered Komedi Stamboel in light of then current anthropological theories of acculturation.

At the end of the last century [...] a type of theatre was born at the initiative of a person of European descent, assisted by an Indonesian and a Chinese capitalist. In short, this theatre can be classified as an acculturation of techniques and structures of the European theatre and opera as they existed around 1900 with the techniques and structures of the extant Malay

Mounting an engaging play by and for novelty-hungry urban dwellers, and projecting a story above the racket of the adjacent buffet and the perpetual stench of the city, meant creating a spectacle of the broadest appeal using all the theatrical means available. The theatre had to be as arresting, and as chimerical in its ethnic orientation, as Surabaya's Greco-Gothic-Moorish central square. Details of characterization and subtlety of plot took backseats to scenic effect. In melodramatic spectacles, as has been argued apropos of early nineteenth-century American theatre, the text and its articulation as dialogue is of minimal significance. 'As long as the various effects came off on schedule, what the actors said or failed to say mattered relatively little' (Grimsted 1987:83). The Arabian Nights, with their enchanting pictures of Oriental splendour, magical flights and disappearances, fantastic vistas, and miraculous and disastrous encounters, provided an excellent basis for lavish spectacle. Plays based on these had the added advantage of prior familiarity, as previously noted. 'You've told me the story', a girl says to her father, 'but I've never seen how it is performed' (Tan Boen Kim 1917:14). One did not have to hear every word to be able to follow the play. One might even spend an entire act at the buffet and return to the theatre without being confused about the plot's development. The 'happily-ever-after' conclusion was always foregone: *sampe pengabisan idoe seneng slamanja* (Kalff 1893).

There are other reasons why a theatrical genre based on the Arabian Nights should become so successful in late colonial Java. Other writers have suggested that the Komedi Stamboel was essentially escapist and that its Oriental plays provided a diverting release from the often grim realities of colonial society. There is some validity in this opium-for-the-masses line of reasoning, though the argument does not apply specifically to Komedi Stamboel but could be applied with equal validity to other expressive forms. I would suggest that at least another important factor was the fit between the world view of the 1001 Nights and the emergent structure of feeling in Surabaya's colonial society. The Arabian Nights were written at a time of expansive possibility in the Islamic trading world, when Muslim traders

theatre, already influenced by India and Persia. The person of European descent arranged the cross between the two streams in such a way as to make it appropriate for the general Indonesian public of the time. At first, the stories were drawn from the Thousand and One Nights compilation, slightly adjusted to an Indonesian taste and understanding, a kind of taste and understanding that sprang from the mixture of many peoples. Already at this time, the society was mixed. One might productively compare it with past conditions in America, before the reification of a particular 'way of life' endorsed by the various American ethnic groups. In accord with this acculturative outlook, the actors were likewise mixed: there were Indonesians and people of mixed Dutch descent. (Pané 1953:8.)

This perspective on the Komedi Stamboel was taken up again, with some modifications, by Heather Sutherland (1967) and Subagio Sastrowardjo (1973), among others.

crossed vast oceans in search of profit, while Islam and its sacred language, Arabic, allowed of a translocal community stretching from the east coast of Africa to Southeast Asia being imagined into existence. The seven voyages of Sinbad, each more remarkable than the other, form a kind of map of possibilities for being in the world. The wisdom and acuity of a well-trained Islamic scholar in the Arabian Nights tales are highly valued on whatever shore he might wash up (excepting the savage lands of cannibals and barbarians).

The cosmopolitan sensibility of an inter-ocean Muslim trading society and the sort of modernity associated with it had attenuated greatly in Java over two centuries of European domination over the translocal trading routes (Reid 1993; Kumar 1997). Hagiographies of the Javanese *wali* ('friends of God') and their disciples conserved some of this translocal spirit, articulated in narratives and sacred sites. The end of the nineteenth century, following the opening of the Suez Canal, the development of new communication and transportation technology, the beginnings of higher education, and the inception of an indigenous popular press, represented in a sense a return to an earlier sensibility, an affinity realized in period reworkings of older narratives, including both indigenous Southeast Asian materials and tales from India, Persia, and beyond.⁵¹ Komedi Stamboel performances, seen in a Bakhtinian light, were double-voiced, simultaneously presenting a wondrous past and equally wondrous present (Bakhtin 1986; Becker 1995). This simultaneity of speaking the past and the present was perhaps most evident in the lines of the clown, who could directly address the audience.⁵² It existed everywhere, however, as an active possibility, and one that the colonial authorities kept a careful watch on because of its subversive capacity.

There remains the historiographical issue of why, given the large number of different people and groups instrumental in the Komedi Stamboel's founding, Mahieu's name should stand out like a beacon in Indonesian theatre history. There are at least three inter-related clusters of reasons. One revolves around historiographical demands of 'the modern'. The Komedi Stamboel is typically represented as Indonesia's first 'modern' theatre, due to its intensive capitalization, its rational production system, and its flexible repertoire, as well as its genealogical position as the forerunner of both commercial theatre and 'art' drama (*opera, tonil, sandiwara, drama, teater*). One of the basic characteristics differentiating 'the modern' from 'tradition' is that its

⁵¹ See, for example, Ranggawarsita's *Paramayoga* (probably written in the 1860s), in which an allegory for imperialism is presented in Sang Hyang Manikmaya encircling the globe and defeating all contenders to his claim to be 'King of the World'. It is significant that Manikmaya receives his only significant setback in his encounter with Nabi Ngisa, an Islamic version of Jesus (Ranggawarsita 1992).

⁵² I plan to discuss the role of the clown in the Komedi Stamboel, with particular reference to the actor Moll, in a forthcoming essay.

emergence and reproduction are predicated on individuals, not anonymous collectivities. The Komedi Stamboel needed a 'creator' in order to qualify as 'modern'.

The second set of reasons is related to Mahieu's presentation of self (Goffman 1959). Mahieu on stage was typecast as the young prince – dashing, dauntless, destiny's darling. His off-stage biography, recorded by the music critic Otto Knaap and Victor Ido, was partly invented and partly distorted to accord with this on-stage personality. His place of birth and parentage were left obscure, his level of education and early cultural sophistication exaggerated, and his ideological motivation and degree of agency greatly magnified. This was not simply due to megalomania, but was rather an articulation of a systematic feature of popular theatre in South and Southeast Asia. 'Facts' were malleable and could be played with for commercial and other advantages.⁵³ Stars were not born, they were invented, and re-invented as need be. The disjunction between the actual personal history and the stage biography of actors became a focus of public interest, apparent from Malay and Indonesian novels about actresses of popular drama (see Tan Boen Kim 1917; K.T.H. 1930; Joesoef Sou'yb 1941).

Finally, there were strong ideological factors responsible for Mahieu's (self-)promotion as the Komedi Stamboel's 'creator'. In the last years of his life, he became active in the Indische Bond (Indies League), a welfare organization established in 1898 to provide 'material and moral support to those European residents of the Netherlands Indies who are in need of such support and anxious to receive it' (Van der Veur 1955:139). He and 28 members of his company became members of the Bond in 1900 and gave frequent benefit performances in aid of it in 1900 and 1901.⁵⁴ This affiliation brought Mahieu into contact with members of the Eurasian intellectual elite and helped define a sense of higher purpose for his popular theatre activities. The Komedi Stamboel was marketed from its inception as an enterprise aimed at improving the lot of impoverished Eurasians. Its cast soon incorporated members of other races and nationalities, including the 'two sweet heads' from Singapore who joined the second company in February. In spite of this, it was frequently touted on its tours in the following decade as a Eurasian ini-

⁵³ For example, when the Komedi Stamboel appeared in Deli in 1897, advertisements read 'founded in 1886' (*opgericht in 1886*), a patent fiction to distinguish the company by suggestions of longevity. See *Deli Courant* 22-5-1897, 26-5-1897, 29-5-1897.

⁵⁴ See particularly articles appearing in the *Bondsblad* between 13-2-1900 and 20-11-1900. Only three other theatre people joined the Bond in 1900: the director of and an actor from De Goede Hoop and the director of Matahane Stamboel. Probably few could afford the membership fee. Mahieu was formally thanked for his efforts on behalf of the Bond at a meeting held in Batavia on 18 November 1900. A 1903-1904 fund-raising campaign among Bond members for the purpose of erecting a memorial at Mahieu's grave failed to produce more than f 152.50, however.

tiative. Mahieu seems to have been keen to play this card in the last years of his life, a lean period professionally due to heavy competition from the many other popular Malay companies touring Java by then.⁵⁵ Two posthumous accounts of Mahieu by prominent spokespeople for Eurasians – the music critic Otto Knaap and the novelist-playwright Hans van der Waal, writing as Victor Ido – were based on personal interaction with Mahieu during the last years of his life and show signs of his heady idealism in his self-mythologizing attempts (Knaap 1971; Ido 1978).

Knaap's account represents Mahieu as a visionary. It initially appeared in the *Amsterdams Handelsblad* and was reprinted in the *Bondsblad* (the official organ of the Indische Bond) following Mahieu's death in 1903, and again in *Tong-Tong* (a periodical aimed at Dutch Indos) in 1971. Knaap here refers to Mahieu by the pseudonym 'Antoine Tardieu', perhaps because of the considerable liberties he takes.⁵⁶ Mahieu, in Knaap's hagiographic portrayal, strove to create a 'harmonic whole' out of Eastern tradition and classical Western theatre. He was an 'innovator, actor, director, impresario and much more' in this enterprise, ready to sacrifice all in the 'temple of art'. Mahieu's theatre is related to his social-democratic political inclinations, and the whole enterprise thus becomes an allegory for class struggle (Knaap 1971).

Victor Ido's novel *De paupers* (The paupers) likewise represents Mahieu in a fictional guise, as Reumer, director of the 'Komodie Hindia'. Reumer is introduced to the novel's protagonist, over a dish of *bami* (noodles), in chapter 14. He delivers a heated address concerning the importance of the league, or brotherhood, uniting Eurasians (or Indos) throughout the Indies. He speaks of systematic discrimination against Eurasians, in favour of Europeans, Chinese, and Natives, over hundreds of years and of his own efforts as an impresario to create a theatre to provide employment for Eurasians. 'I myself am an Indo and feel deeply for the poor siblings of my race', he says (Ido 1978:225).

Mahieu's self-elevation to the status of autonomous creator and the complicity of intellectuals such as Knaap and Van der Wall in this effort marked the Komodie Stamboel as something more than just a commercial entertainment. It was rather figured as a moment in a larger narrative of the self-recognition and communal imagining of the Eurasians of the Netherlands Indies. It was no coincidence that the play the Komodie Hindia enacted in *De paupers*

⁵⁵ In a February 1901 run in the city of Cirebon, tickets cost half of what they had a decade before, while the company's owner was no longer Mahieu himself but his (then) wife, Mrs. Mahieu, née Coppiens. The company was by then known as Komodie Sinar India, as Komodie Stamboel had become a generic name. See *Tjerimai* 13-2-1901, 16-2-1901.

⁵⁶ It was a common practice in journalism at the time to disguise names, often by the use of an initial. The identity of 'Antoine Tardieu' and Auguste Mahieu is asserted in the editor's introduction to the article when it was reprinted in 1903.

was *Romeo and Juliet*. As Reumer explains, 'I have thus adapted a piece by Shakespeare in High Malay. We have had much success with it' (Ido 1978:226-7). As in many colonial countries, rendering the Bard into an emergent poetic medium – considered as 'High Malay' at the time, though later, with the normalization of Malay grammar and the shift from a heteroglossic to a polyglossic linguistic environment, downgraded to 'Bazaar Malay' (Maier 1993) – was part and parcel of a project to realize an ethnic-national identity in the modern world system.⁵⁷ The sustained interest of Indos in the Netherlands in the *Komedie Stamboel* as a Eurasian cultural achievement is a further development of an ideological theme current in the theatre's early history.⁵⁸

We have seen that the appearance of the Parsi theatre in Surabaya was not simply a one-off event, but was a link reinforced even in the first year through the addition of two Singaporean actors and the appointment of Van der Laan as director. Relations with touring Parsi theatres and companies performing related genres (for example, *Bangsawan*) informed the development of the *Komedie Stamboel* throughout, just as the *Komedie Stamboel* cast its stamp on many expressive forms over the decades of its existence as a vital theatre. The Parsi theatre model may have been articulated in the particularities of Surabaya, but this articulation did not mean a severance of connections with generic affines. Comparisons with *Abdul Muluk*, *wayang Parsi*, and the like were common features of newspaper reviews during the first years of the *Komedie Stamboel*'s travels. When Balliwala's Victoria Parsi Theatrical Company played Surabaya in 1898, Mahieu travelled all the way from Semarang to see them perform (*Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* 19-11-1898). We can be sure he was taking notes.

It is high time to write *against* the Orientalist taxonomic model and its classification of expressive cultural forms into rigid compartments for study as 'unique' objects of inquiry, and *towards* a more synthetic, inter-generic, and complex cultural history of South and Southeast Asia. This will require more rigorous cultural historical research than has so far been done, examining the fullest range of sources – oral, visual, manuscript, electronic, journalistic, literary. The present study of the *Komedie Stamboel* and its milieu is intended as a contribution towards conceptualizing South and Southeast Asia's cultural complexity.

⁵⁷ Performing Shakespeare made Mahieu particularly vulnerable to charges of cultural vandalism, though. See Jan Fabricius' (1949:74-82) sarcastic description of a performance of Mahieu's *Merchant of Venice*, which he facetiously characterizes as 'a high point in Shakespearean history'.

⁵⁸ There are many examples of this interest, including articles on *Komedie Stamboel* and related genres in Dutch magazines and journals catering partly or primarily for Indos; naming a 'street' at the annual *Pasar Malam Besar* in The Hague (a major festival of Indo culture, as well as an arts-and-crafts fair, and other things besides) after Auguste Mahieu; and the choice of 'Vincent Mahieu' as a pseudonym by one of the best-known Indo writers of the Netherlands.

APPENDIX

A. The following is a list of titles of plays, in both Dutch and Malay (when available) and with English translations, and of probable dates of premiere and known reprisal dates during the Komedi Stamboel's 1891 residence in Surabaya.

- 'De visscher en de geest' or 'Mahmoed ketemoe satoe djin' (The fisherman and the jinni), premiered 17 January, reprised 21 January, 23 August, and 4 November
- 'Giafar' (Giafar), premiered 25 January, reprised 27 January and 25 August
- 'Aboelhasan, den rooverhoofdman' (Aboelhasan, the chief of thieves), premiered 27 February
- 'Bedreddin Hassan, een zeer braaf man' (Bedreddin Hassan, a very honest man), premiered 3 March, reprised 17 April
- 'Noereddin' (Noereddin), premiered 6 March
- 'Alie Baba' or 'Alie Babah' (Ali Baba), premiered 27 March, reprised 29 August
- 'Alladin en de wonderlamp' or 'Ailoedin' (Aladdin and the magic lamp), premiered 3 April
- 'Asam en de koningin der geesten' or 'Asan sama radjanja djin' (Asam and the queen of the spirits), premiered 14 April, reprised 18 October
- 'De prins van Zanzibar' (The prince of Zanzibar), premiered 28 April
- 'Boekaibik' (Boekaibik) (two-act farce), premiered 28 April, reprised 25 August
- 'Broeder des Barbiers' (The barber's brother), premiered 28 April
- 'Prinsen Amgiad en Assad' or 'Anak Radja Amgiad sama Assad' (Princes Amgiad and Assad), premiered 1 May, reprised 24 August
- 'De houthakker en de geest' (The woodsman and the spirit), premiered 12 May
- 'De gebochelde' (The hunchback), premiered 12 May
- 'Raelaman bin Rachmat of de Rinaldo Rinaldi van Arabië' (Raelaman bin Rachmat or the Rinaldo Rinaldi of Arabia), premiered 26 May
- 'Aboehassan, de ontwaakte slaper' (Aboehassan, the sleeper awakened), premiered 27 May, reprised 7 November
- 'De twistende koningen Moerat-khan en Haroen Al Rachmat' (The contending Kings Moerat Khan and Haroen al-Rachmat), premiered 13 August, reprised 5 November
- 'Brahmin, de houthakker koningszoon' or 'Brahim toekang tebang kajoe' (Brahmin, the woodsman prince), premiered 18 August
- 'Sultan Jahja en zijne kinderen' (Sultan Jahja and his children), premiered 21 August
- 'De verdwaalde koningin, Ritodan en Baroldoan' (The missing queen, Ritodan and Baroldoan), premiered 4 September
- 'De betooverde Prins Aloeur Alhaad' (The enchanted Prince Aloeur al-Haad), premiered 15 September
- 'De inleiding van de 1001 Nacht of De schranderheid eener vrouw' (The introduction to the 1001 Nights or The cleverness of a woman), premiered 18 September
- 'Tatool-Achmat of de Faust van Arabië' (Tatool-Achmat or the Faust of Arabia), premiered 22 September
- 'De luiwammes' (The sluggard) (one-act comedy), premiered 25 September
- 'Hij is niet jaloersch' (He is not jealous) (one-act comedy), premiered 25 September
- 'Den verloren zoon, Josoop bin Diab' (The prodigal son, Josoop bin Diab), premiered 29 September

- 'Den ongelukkigen Koning Ali Aljufri, later wordt hij geholpen door de koningin der geesten genaamd Siti Andjanie' (The unhappy King Ali al-Jufri, later helped by the queen of the spirits, named Siti Andjanie), premiered 2 October
- 'Siti Seniembār of De beschermde onschuld' (Siti Seniembār or Innocence protected), premiered 6 October, reprised 6 November
- 'Boedraim bin Hasap of De vergelding' or 'Boedraim Bin Hasap atawa pembales' (Boedraim bin Hasap or Retribution), premiered 9 October
- 'De haat eens broeders' (The hatred of a brother), premiered 13 October
- 'De wraak van den Sultan van Alvia' (The revenge of the Sultan of Alvia), premiered 16 October
- 'Lotgeval van den Koning Isa bin Asbedi van Hindi' (The adventure of King Isa bin Asbedi of Hindi), premiered 20 October
- 'De drie ongelukkige prinsessen' (The three unhappy princesses), premiered 23 October
- 'De gestrafte Keizer van Perzie Sach Zaman en de Keizerin Siti Ratema' (The chastised Emperor of Persia, Sach Zaman, and Empress Siti Ratema), premiered 27 October

B. The following is a list of descriptions in both Dutch and Malay (when available) of *tableaux vivants* and dates of enactment during the Komēdie Stamboel's 1891 residence in Surabaya.

- 'De sultan Haroen al Rachid, omringd door zijn hof' (Sultan Haroen al-Rachid surrounded by his court), 18 August
- 'Duivels' (Devils), 15 September
- 'De profeet Salomo een paar weerspannige geesten straffende. Salomo ziet men in de wolken' or 'Nabi Seleman hoekoem pada djim doewa ada di awang awang' (The Prophet Solomon punishing a pair of recalcitrant spirits. Solomon can be seen in the clouds), 18 September
- 'Mohamad Achir of de Don Juan van Arabië' (Mohamad Achir or the Don Juan of Arabia), 25 September
- 'Het vergaan van het stoomschip Prins Hendrik' (The wrecking of the steamship *Prins Hendrik*), 29 September
- 'Een strijd tusschen engelen en duivels om een afgestorvene' (A fight between angels and devils for a deceased), 6 October
- 'De arme weldoener en de rijke gierigaard [?] bij hun intrede in het leven hiernamaals' (The poor well-doer and the wealthy miser at their entry into the afterlife), 13 October
- 'De drie perioden uit het leven van een mensch t.w.: de jeugd, de middelbare leeftijd en de ouderdom' (The three stages in the life of man, namely: youth, middle age, and old age), 4 November
- 'Adam en Eva uit het paradijs verdreven' (Adam and Eve driven from paradise), 7 November.

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