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Utopia and the Shadow of Nationalism

The Plays of Sanusi Pane 1928-1940

I

Benedict Anderson's seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, among other things, uses several early works of modern Southeast Asian literature to demonstrate the emergence of a new kind of narrative perspective which could be associated with the general growth of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Anderson 1983:32-7). Subsequently, much work has been done on the links between literature and the construction of a 'national identity'.

Fredric Jameson has gone so far in his thinking about the relationship between nationalism and literature as to claim that all 'third world' texts 'necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory' (Jameson 1986:69). Aijaz Ahmad, responding to Jameson's assertion and the article in which it appeared, countered that Jameson had turned all Asian and African critics and writers into mystified 'civilizational others'. He had done this, Ahmad claimed, by reducing all the issues dealt with by these writers and critics to the singular problem of a nationalist struggle against colonial oppressors and their post-colonial successors. Ahmad argued that it is necessary to avoid such reductionism, no matter how well-intentioned, by overlooking neither 'class formation and class struggle' as motivating forces in history, nor 'the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region and so on ...' (Ahmad 1987: 8-9).

In what follows I hope to add to our knowledge of the ways in which nationalism and literature have associated and continue to associate with one another, by examining the thematic and structural development of the dramatic works of a clearly nationalist Indonesian writer, Sanusi Pane. That is to say, I will analyse Sanusi's plays as literary texts rather than as texts for performance. Written between the years 1928-40, years full of opportunity but also growing frustration for many Indonesian nationalists, Sanusi's five dramas do in fact 'project a political dimension in the form of

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a nationalist allegory'. Yet, though not completely at odds with Jameson, I will argue, more in keeping with Ahmad, that the nationalist vision projected in these plays is of a very specific nature, determined both by personal factors and those of class location. I will show how Sanusi's vision revolves, in contrast to the way most of the commentators on Sanusi's works would have it, not around some conflict of 'East' and 'West' or 'tradition' and 'modernity', but rather around a search for allies who might help realize a distinctly utopian, egalitarian nationalist project. However, this nationalist vision also involves a state that would be led by an aristocratic, intellectual elite. The problems involved in bringing these seemingly antagonistic desires into a working synthesis, even in a series of dramatic fictions, resulted in structural and thematic contradictions within the plays which Sanusi was unable to resolve satisfactorily. These contradictions later required the subordination of one desire – that of utopian egalitarianism – to the other – a unified state led by a legitimate elite – before Sanusi's narrative of nation could be reshaped into his published history of Indonesia – a history used as the standard textbook in Indonesian schools during the early years of the Republic, and widely influential in shaping Indonesians' understanding of their own historical legacy. In pursuing this approach, it will become clear that we need to move beyond cultural fusion paradigms which posit 'East-West' and 'tradition-modernity' as the axes pivotal to our understanding of texts such as Sanusi's. Instead, it is necessary to apprehend such discursive categories as ideological weapons developed and continuously mobilized by specific historical conflicts of a political and economic nature. The tools that I will use to examine Sanusi's texts will be those developed by Fredric Jameson and Pierre Macherey. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues that certain kinds of 'realist' texts, of which I take Sanusi's dramas to be early Indonesian examples, are generated by a personal desire or wish-fulfilment fantasy. Jameson maintains that such texts must first generate a set of necessary ideological preconditions in order to be able to tell the story of the fulfilment of personal desire. This is not a simple operation. The new realistic mode in which Sanusi's dramas are written, inculcated by Dutch-style education, the increasing bureaucratization of the colony, and the effects of the growing market economy, calls forth a kind of text in which all possible obstacles to the fantasy narrative must be presented, if only to be overcome, in order to make the narrative more satisfying. As desire is forced to cope with 'reality', the obstacles concocted by the wish-fulfilling imagination are occasionally too great and 'reality' is revealed in the text as precisely that which resists desire (Jameson 1981:151-84).

Macherey's approach complements that of Jameson. For Macherey, literary texts are an attempt to give ideology a non-ideological form, to give a fictive resolution through theme, style and structure, to a complex historical question which exists in relation to ideology. This complex

question is generated in the text by several conflicting terms or problems. Such conflicting terms and problems correspond to Jameson's notion of the 'reality principle' or 'censorship' which the wish-fulfilment fantasy is forced to elaborate in a realist mode. Thus, like Jameson, Macherey posits such resolutions as being unsatisfactory precisely because they cannot ultimately repress the historical unconscious of the text. This unconscious, he argues, re-emerges in the margins of a work – in its silences, determinate absences, contradictions, and ruptures, all of which serve to point out the structural limitations of the perspective created within the work. Accordingly, my analysis will stress the relationship of these 'uncontainable' textual elements, and the problems they create, to the historically specific social and political dilemma faced by the text's producer and his contemporaries.

In the case of Sanusi, this approach is especially useful. It permits a reading of Sanusi's plays which links the desire embodied in utopian fantasy to particular historical moments in the Indonesian nationalist struggle, moments which Sanusi represents allegorically through his dramas. But before turning to the texts themselves, I will first address the ways in which they have been interpreted.

II

That there is a predominant way of discussing Indonesian literature that borders on an orthodoxy, has already been pointed out before by others and should come as no surprise. Paul Tickell's (Tickell 1987) delineation of five myths that he thinks are the key elements in such an orthodoxy, is one attempt to list the ways in which the prevailing literary/critical framework has circumscribed our critical horizons. Though an extremely helpful initial catalogue of the hegemonic view of contemporary Indonesian literary history and criticism, Tickell's article is by no means exhaustive. One area which is only hinted at by Tickell's category 'The Myth of Nationality and Race' (Tickell 1987:32-4) is that notion of a 'national culture', located somewhere in the middle of a tug of war between vague, schematically defined entities called 'East' and 'West'.

It is not the purpose of this paper to outline the entire history of the specific discourse which has formed itself around these hazy socio-geographical entities, but rather to use it as a starting-point for analysing a series of texts by a specific Indonesian playwright, Sanusi Pane. In so doing, I will show how this discourse has indeed acted to suppress a number of important themes and structural relationships which can be found within Sanusi's texts and which lead us to a radically different reading of both the works and their relationship to the broadly historical and narrowly personal circumstances which mediated the texts' creation in a dialectical way.

Clearly, Sanusi and his contemporaries, such as Sutan Takdir Alisyah-

bana, felt that categories such as 'East' and 'West' and 'tradition' and 'modernity' were important and useful in defining Indonesian nationalist culture. In the *Polemik Kebudayaan*, fought out in the pages of the periodical *Poedjangga Baroe*, as well as in several other publications, between the years 1935 and 1939, Takdir argued that Indonesia should adopt modern western culture as its model. Sanusi countered by asserting that a basis for Indonesian culture already existed in the myriad customs and cultures of Indonesia's various ethnic groups. Sanusi felt that Indonesians should not turn entirely to the 'West', but try instead to blend the calm spirituality of the 'East' with the dynamic egoism, intellectualism, and materialism of the 'West' (Mihardja 1986:13-26). Such arguments may seem reductive to us today, but it is essential to remember that these intellectuals were educated in colonial schools and along colonial lines. The categories 'East' and 'West', or tradition and modernity, were part of a process by which the Dutch educational system undertook to colonize mentally the privileged children of the Indonesian elites (Sutherland 1968:126).¹ Furthermore, since Indonesian nationalists turned such notions back on the colonizers in order to argue the need for independence, these categories dramatically shaped the terrain of much ensuing Indonesian cultural criticism.² Certainly they entailed consequences for subsequent interpretation of Sanusi's plays, plays which were in all likelihood staged frequently in the 1930s at gatherings of nationalist youth groups (Armijn Pane 1953:11, 31).³

Sanusi Pane's important role in the early development of contemporary Indonesian poetry has been clearly documented by the work of Teeuw (1986:20-6) and Foulcher (1977:52-8), among others, but his dramatic works have received scant critical attention. They are mentioned (if at all) by critics almost always in relation to the *Polemik Kebudayaan* (Culture Debates) of the late 1930s, and again almost always as illustrations of the 'eastern' preferences of their author (his first four plays having drawn on

¹ It is important to note in this connection that Sanusi's first two plays, *Airlangga* (1928) and *Eenzame Garoedavlucht* (1930), were both still written in Dutch, the colonial language, even though the nationalist movement in October 1928 declared Bahasa Indonesia to be the national language.

² This specific interpretative discourse still persisted quite strongly in Indonesia as late as the late 1980s, as attested by the special insert in the 20th-anniversary edition of Indonesia's leading cultural magazine, *Horison* (July 1986). The insert featured what amounted to a new round of the 'Polemik Kebudayaan', allowing Takdir to elaborate on his 1930s positions in the face of a number of attempts to reassess the 'Polemik Kebudayaan' in the context of contemporary Indonesia.

³ Sunindyo, a teacher, painter and writer, informed me that Sanusi's plays, and those of Muhammad Yamin, had often been performed at youth congresses and celebrations at the end of the school year during the 1930s. Sunindyo recalled that he had once acted in a performance of Sanusi's *Kertajaya* on such an occasion. He related that the acting style used was like that of *ketoprak*, but with more realistic costumes and natural movements.

the past history of the great Javanese kingdoms for their material, and containing obvious elements of Buddhist philosophy), as opposed to the intensely westward-looking views of Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana (Alisyahbana 1986:81-90; Jassin 1985:106-22; Nasution 1963:89-112; Rosidi 1969:67).⁴

Along similar lines, some critics have accused Sanusi of worshipping the past (Nasution 1963:92; Usman 1964:186), while others have claimed, quite rightly, I believe, that Sanusi's choice of the great kingdoms of the past as a setting for his plays indicates his desire to foster pride in indigenous history and so to begin to imagine a future, independent Indonesia (Nasution 1963:66; Rosidi 1969:66; Oemarjati 1971:98-9). Some have even argued that Sanusi's heroes display distinctly modern, westernized traits (Faruk and Goenawan 1983:258-64).

Yet, if we read Sanusi's plays more closely, we may discover a textual density that threatens to rupture the bounds of the 'East-West', 'tradition-modernity' mould in which the plays' critics have attempted to place them. In fact, these dramas prove to be structurally and thematically diverse. They are full of competing dreams and anxieties given form in nagging questions, structural ruptures, seeming usurpations of plot by late-appearing subplots, and awkward attempts at closure. All of these might be regarded as shortcomings were it not for the fact that Sanusi's works rivet our attention through the considerable emotional force which charges their action and debates. Even more, I believe that it is precisely these ruptures and peculiarities of structure which create the tension that makes these works so interesting. To show why this is so, we now move on to a discussion of Sanusi's five plays.

III

The object of this section is to begin to produce a more detailed understanding of the complex interrelationship between contemporary politics, ideology, personal desire, and literary structures in Sanusi's dramas. These plays easily lend themselves to such a project since Sanusi joined the nationalist party in 1927, a year before his first play, *Airlangga*, was written (Jassin 1985:108). In addition, all five of his plays have among their primary concerns the affairs of state and the need to create a just, even utopian society in which people do not have to suppress any of their individual potentialities in order to make the 'grand' political project succeed. In this regard, it is significant that Sanusi's plays were written between 1928 and 1940, in the wake of the unsuccessful armed uprising of the Musso-Alimin faction of the PKI (1926-27). This was a period of particularly intense repression by the Dutch authorities of the Indonesian

⁴ Foulcher (1980:52) is an important exception here. In his view, the plays explore the conflict between the duty of the individual to the collective and the desire to withdraw from social commitment.

nationalist movement (Kahin 1952:64-100; Friedus 1977:43-4). Consequently, by the mid-1930s most of the leading Nationalist leaders were either in exile or under threat of 'provisional arrest' (Kahin 1952:61), and the discourse of nationalism had shifted to the relatively safer terrain of cultural matters (Sutherland 1968; Foulcher 1980:14-5). Still, even in that sphere, the Governor-General's powers of censorship loomed ominously over all written material, and these powers were reinforced in 1931 by legislation granting him the prerogative of suspending publication of any periodical deemed dangerous to public security (Kahin 1952:62). It is against this background of political repression and difficulty in building a coherent, effective movement, that Sanusi's plays were created.

As Foulcher has noted, Sanusi's education at the Kweekschool Gunung Sari instilled in him a Tagorean-derived notion that 'East' and 'West' were important philosophical categories which could be brought to bear in planning for a modernized Asian society that was yet based on indigenous cultures (Foulcher 1977:52). In 1931, Sanusi, ethnically an Angkola Batak from Sumatra, explained that his fascination with Javanese culture, whose history formed the basis for his first four plays, had to do with the circumstance that 'Dynamic forces, which are in the position to raise the Indonesian nation to spiritual greatness and political power can be released primarily from Javanese culture, in which the oriental spirit finds its purest manifestation in Indonesia'.⁵

As Anthony Reid has pointed out, the publication of the first volume of Fruin-Mees' Javanese history had a great impact on Javanese nationalist thought by making available Majapahit-era texts which listed the 'conquests' of that kingdom, thereby showing the historical greatness and 'unity' of the archipelago. This Java-centric history was later supplemented with the image of the Sumatran kingdom of Sriwijaya, making past history more of a shared legacy among diverse ethnic groups. Yet, in the interests of national unity, nationalists did not delve too deeply into the social structure of these kingdoms, regional differences, or social tensions (Reid 1979:288-90).

However, if we look at Sanusi's first play, *Airlangga*, we immediately realize that Sanusi's dramatic reconstruction of the past Javanese kingdoms does not permit easy acceptance of notions of Indonesian unity. Nor does it provide simple categorizations of the 'East' as a realm of spirituality, or a clear picture of where 'dynamic forces' or 'oriental spirit' might reside.⁶ Set in the 11th century and dealing with the historical king of the play's title, *Airlangga* is essentially a play about a horrible choice which faces both Airlangga and his daughter. Airlangga, the king who would

⁵ Foulcher 1977:56 (footnote 40). The quote is translated by Foulcher from an article in *Timboel* V, 19 (November 1931).

⁶ All citations from *Airlangga* are taken from the Bahasa Indonesia version published by Balai Pustaka in 1985.

rather have been a poet, has put aside personal longings in order to fulfil his obligations to his people and so his historical destiny! He has done this by assuming the kingship and creating a strong, unified Javanese kingdom which is capable of resisting the pressure of the dominant 'foreign' power, the Sumatran-based kingdom of Sriwijaya. As the play opens, we find Airlangga's life work, as well as the meaning of his self-denial, threatened by a dispute between his two sons over the succession. To prevent a civil war, Airlangga attempts to convince his daughter, Sanggrama Wijayattung-gadewi, to become ruler and to agree to be married to a suitable young nobleman who can serve as a strong right arm to bolster her rule. Wijayattung-gadewi would rather live a life of meditative seclusion in the mountains than rule the kingdom, however. Thus, when faced with virtually the same choice between personal desire and social obligation as her father before her, she cannot bring herself to make a similar sacrifice of selfhood. In refusing, she dashes her father's hopes, as well as endangering the future of the kingdom, *Jawadwipa*.

While this play is nominally about Airlangga, the title character is ultimately forced to share centre-stage with Sanggrama Wijayattung-gadewi, his daughter. Though many of the play's dialogues and monologues are devoted to the agony of the king, to his loneliness (his role as liberator/monarch does not even allow love to flourish – pp. 44-5), his alienation from himself and from happiness, and his despair in the face of impending failure, the plot and all of these tragic laments hinge upon, and to a large extent are prompted by, the decision which Wijayattung-gadewi must make. Her vacillation enables all the arguments of Airlangga's councillors to be stated, together with Airlangga's laments over his own choice (made years earlier), its consequences for him, and its final cruel futility.

It should be clear, however, that this decision, this terrible set of choices confronting both Airlangga and his daughter, presents difficulties not only for them but also for the writer, Sanusi Pane. For the play represents a symbolic enactment of a personal fantasy regarding Sanusi's role, as poet and potential activist, in the nationalist movement. Textual evidence clearly indicates that Airlangga's *Jawadwipa* is an allegorical figure for the Indonesian Nationalist movement and a projection of an Indonesian state, which at the time (1928) could not have existed: Airlangga is referred to as the 'pahlawan kemerdekaan' (Independence hero – Pane 1985:27); there are several discussions about the need to resist the encroachments of 'foreign' Sriwijaya (pp. 18-9, 24-6, 52-9); and the spirit of Java, Agastya, gives Airlangga a few final words of consolation in which the image of Java and the surrounding lands as the united, independent entity of the future is evoked (pp. 69-70). Our suspicions about the author's personal investment in the outcome of the decisions made during the play should be aroused by references to Airlangga's early inclination to be a poet (pp. 19-20, 41). This theme is alluded to again by Airlangga's spiritual advisor,

Arya Bharad, who describes Airlangga's reign as the beginning of true history on Java because Airlangga is a king who is also an 'artist' (p. 52). However, a simple equation of Sanusi, the author, with Airlangga, the character, would be misleading. Sanusi has also made Wijayattungadewi, the mirror image of Airlangga, into a spokesperson for the mystical Indian religions, religions in which Sanusi himself had a keen interest (Foulcher 1977:56-7). This suggests a considerable personal investment on Sanusi's part in Wijayattungadewi as well. In this way, Sanusi creates a personal identification with each of the two major characters in order to test a pair of possible roles for himself in relation to the nationalist movement. Still, Sanusi's personal fantasy, situated as it is within a political allegory, is not without its internal contradictions.

The crisis represented by Wijayattungadewi's decision and subsequent refusal is a puzzle that Sanusi cannot solve in a satisfactory manner. The question is put to Wijayattungadewi not once, but three times (pp. 13-4, 19-21, 32-6), and after she has refused for the third time, Airlangga asks Arya Bharad to help find a way out of the impending division of the kingdom between the warring sons. Sanusi has Bharad use this moment to excoriate Wijayattungadewi's behaviour long after she has left the scene. This way, the question, the terrible choice, surfaces yet again. Yet, in this instance, it is put to the princess 'in absentia' as Bharad describes the need for the princess to have acted otherwise (pp. 55-8). The author himself seems divided here; he seems to be structuring the play in a manner that will force the readers into sympathizing with Airlangga, and in so doing, will compel them to see the need for active involvement in the struggle. On the other hand, however, the continual putting of the question to Wijayattungadewi indicates that the author is not at all sure that he has made the point convincingly enough to overcome Wijayattungadewi's arguments.

Still more interesting is the fact that Bharad suddenly breaks off his tirade against the princess in order to deal with the question at hand: how to prevent the partition of Jawadwipa. But he is unable to think of a good solution. At this juncture, the author's desperation becomes all the more evident. In a moment of supreme irony that completely undercuts Arya Bharad's censure of the princess, Sanusi has the spiritual advisor symbolically abdicate all responsibility by declaring in resignation that all of this is probably just a part of some plan wherein everyone has her assigned role to play (p. 58). This statement is immediately clarified and elaborated by the voice of the Java spirit, Agasti, who, summoned by Arya Bharad, assures Airlangga and his advisor that Jawadwipa will eventually rise again, united and even more glorious than before. Sanusi, unable to resolve his own doubts about the dilemma that his political allegory has become, appeals to some inevitable script of history, a history which constantly, like

Hegel's 'absolute spirit'⁷, searches for 'higher' forms of organization in life (p. 61).⁸

I have spent a great deal of time discussing this early play, for I believe that it reveals a crucial contradiction which inhibits it from being played out to a satisfying conclusion as a utopian political allegory. That contradiction can be found in the tension between Sanusi's desire for a new political system and society which could allow human beings to become whole and happy, and his relatively privileged position within Indies society which led him to assume that his fellow-nationalist members of the elite were the natural leaders of such a society. In *Airlangga*, this contradiction appears to be virtually unresolvable without the *deus ex machina*-like intervention of the spirit of Java. The inability to resolve this problem without recourse to a rather contrived historical determinism is perhaps one of the chief reasons why Sanusi's hero weeps, rather than feeling comforted at the very end of the play. And his weeping will continue to be heard in the voices of the major characters of Sanusi's later plays, because this contradiction is constantly in need of resolution.

If the theme of individual desire versus social obligation seems to suggest a dichotomy between the choices of father and daughter, in reality that dichotomy does not exist. For, as I have said, this play is first and foremost a play about a horrible decision which has to be made, a choice between two bad options. And, in this instance, both options are ultimately modalities of the same structure of suffering.

What the two central characters share is an extreme alienation from themselves and from others that is linked through the limited nature of the choice presented to them. This choice is circumscribed by Sanusi's own conception of the terrain of the political allegory in which he has situated his personal fantasy. Wijayatunggadewi's defence of her own individualism stems, she tells us early on, from disappointment with the lies and deceptions of those surrounding her: a court society characterized by a moral and spiritual emptiness, whose members crassly place vanity and self-interest above all else. The princess longs to be as happy as others, to find some truth to hold on to. But her experiences have not brought her closer to these goals and she feels old beyond her years (pp. 11-3). Thus, her

⁷ See Foulcher (1977:53) for a comment on theosophical aesthetic theory, with which Sanusi was certainly familiar, and which bears a resemblance to Hegelian ideas of the development of Pure Spirit.

⁸ This sequence, amazingly enough, is repeated yet another time between pages 66 and 70, when *Airlangga*'s personal anger and frustration explode at the partitioning ceremony, followed by a final reassuring intervention by the spirit Agasti. Here, it is worthwhile to note that Sanusi was not alone in his links with the theosophist tradition. Sukarno, too, as Legge has noted (1984:24-52), was influenced by his father's theosophical inclinations and drew heavily upon the resources of the theosophical library during his stay in Surabaya. As Sukarno formulated his concept of nationalism, he argued that what defined a nation was 'a soul'. This is echoed in the 'spirit of Java' which Sanusi brings to centre-stage in order to 'resolve' the dilemma of *Airlangga*.

assertion of her 'individualism' is fuelled by disappointment and cynicism. In withdrawing to the mountains she surrenders the social side of her life, much as her father has given up his private desires. Her departure in this way is less a victory of personal desire than a clear defeat.

Airlangga's problem is, in origin, closely related to that of his daughter. He has chosen to submit to duty and as a result he is emotionally maimed, no more able to unite private desire and social duty in his life than the princess. He, too, longs to cross the vast gulf which he feels separates him from those who lead happy lives (pp. 41, 45-6). Yet, who would these happy souls be? Airlangga claims that they are the ordinary people (p. 41). Nevertheless, we do not see them in the play. Furthermore, if Wijayattunggadewi's characterization of the nobility is any indication, they certainly do not seem to be those whom the king and princess long to be like. Even more puzzling is the absence of worthy courtiers and knights who could support Airlangga in bearing the burden of rule. Arya Bharad claims that there are indeed such worthy attendants, but, with the exception of Narottama, we do not find them appearing in the play, either. Their absence, despite Sanusi's attempt to 'cover it' with Arya Bharad's assertion, is most clearly felt in Airlangga's loneliness and his feeling that he has no time for personal desires. We are thus led to remember the princess's statements about the self-serving nature of those who inhabit the court, as well as the behaviour of Airlangga's sons, who place personal ambition before the good of the collective. Similarly, Airlangga is proven to be isolated from the people through both structural (their complete absence in the script) and thematic evidence. Airlangga has few allies he can trust, and even fewer when his right-hand man, Narottama, dies. In all of this, remembering that *Airlangga* is not only an authorial fantasy, but also an allegory of nationalism, we can suddenly see the ground slipping out from under Sanusi. This provides a second and related reason for his desperate attempt to find closure in the predetermined 'script of history' that guarantees the future success of nationalism. Sanusi, in attempting to argue for sacrifice and commitment to the nationalist cause, finds himself stuck on the horns of an unresolvable dilemma: the need to be human, to be able to live happily and whole, seems an impossibility when imagined within a movement struggling to transform a society in which there is too much to be done and too few trustworthy hands to do it.

IV

Faruk has convincingly argued that Sanusi shares a romantic vision with his fellow pre-war Indonesian writers, a vision which longs for a new utopian society based upon rationality and democracy, but which is also inclined towards melancholy (Faruk 1992:12-3). However, that Sanusi is not simply a modern version of the melancholy Malay bard, whose stereotypical attitude can be discerned in some of his poetry (Foulcher 1977:55),

is clear when we examine the historical position of the nationalist movement at the time. From as early as 1914, leaders of the Sarekat Islam saw the position of traditional elites in the Dutch bureaucracy as that of enforcers of colonial oppression and injustice. Thus, within the traditional aristocracy, there was considerable opposition to the more aggressively political nationalist groups (Kahin 1952:68-9). The nationalist elite was essentially a very small group of Dutch-educated Indonesians with some backing from merchants and Islamic religious leaders (Kahin 1952:68). This group was severely weakened for a time, just as Airlangga's Jawadwipa kingdom was severely weakened by the feud of his sons in Sanusi's play, by a rift which developed between the Indonesian Communist Party wing of the Sarekat Islam and its more Islamic section, led by Haji Agus Salim and Abdoel Moeis. In the wake of the Communist-led uprisings of 1926-27 (and particularly after 1929), the Dutch administration embarked on a program of severe repression during which nationalist organizational work among workers and peasants became increasingly difficult, if not virtually impossible (Kahin 1952:60-3). Given this context, the depictions of Airlangga and Wijayattungadewi, lonely in the midst of their political and personal struggles and bending under the weight of a burden of responsibility that is too heavy, can be read as plausible perceptions of the individual's position in the nationalist movement of the time. However, this sense of isolation may well have been felt more keenly by Sanusi as an intellectual and writer concerned with propagating a new, western-influenced literature for which the audience was, at the time, still extremely small.⁹ Between 1925 and 1930, Sanusi and the circle of young writers with whom he associated tried unsuccessfully at least three times to found a literary journal that would be devoted to new Indonesian-language writing (Sumardjo 1983:246). Even within the nationalist movement, according to Sutherland, the 'cultural nationalists' who founded *Poedjangga Baroe* and with whom Sanusi was well acquainted found themselves in a position of relative isolation (Sutherland 1968:116). While many of them privately held strong political beliefs, the magazine's attempt to maintain neutrality in regard to political affairs put cultural activists at odds with nationalist political activists (a rift which both Sanusi's works and political career seem designed to address). In addition, the structural absence in *Airlangga* of any lower-class characters reflects a general attitude on the part of the newly emerging nationalist-oriented writers of the late twenties (who would eventually create the magazine *Poedjangga Baroe* in 1933). Their relative isolation was underscored, and in the case of Sanusi heightened, by their own lack of concern for or appreciation of the broad masses of

⁹ Subscriptions to *Poedjangga Baroe* (the pre-eminent literary magazine of the 1930s and the first successful effort of its kind) never exceeded 150, and the total number of copies printed for any issue was never more than about 500 (Sumardjo 1983:245).

Indonesian people (Sutherland 1968:112, 126). Given this background, it is possible to see how Sanusi could superimpose his own lived experience¹⁰ on an allegory of the state of the nationalist movement to produce a work such as *Airlangga*.

Sanusi's perceptions of his own isolation within Indies society engender the feeling that the nationalist struggle must necessarily impose an unbearable burden upon its activists. As described above, these feelings permeate *Airlangga*, turning a would-be nationalist dream into a nightmare, as his chief characters find themselves trapped within the framework of the horrible choice between running away in an attempt to meet personal needs and desires, or sacrificing personal desires to the needs of the collective. What we are led to conclude is that Sanusi's real aim is to be able to imagine a system in which both needs can be accommodated harmoniously, and whole human beings can exist. In *Airlangga*, this utopian desire is tied to yet another: the desire to break free from alienation and to be happy, like others, to be one with others. The realization of these desires can only be accomplished through a radical transformation of society, something the self-serving elites and fractious children of *Airlangga* are incapable of undertaking. It is in this way that Sanusi's next three plays, *Eenzame Garoedavlucht* (The Lonely Flight of the Garuda, 1930), *Kertajaya* (1932), and *Sandhyakala Ning Majapahit* (Twilight Over Majapahit, 1932), represent first and foremost a search for allies who could help in accomplishing Sanusi's utopian nationalist project.

Each of these plays is similarly characterized by a specific set of problems which evolve from one text to the next and are 'played out' in slightly different ways in each case. The heroes, Kertanegara, Kertajaya, and Damar Wulan, generally come, after greater or lesser internal struggles, to accept the responsibilities of service to the group (kingdom). But they accept with the hope that they will be able to effect basic reforms in the system by which they rule or administer. In each case, the major reforms involve a redistribution of the kingdom's wealth and privileges in a more egalitarian manner, thus echoing the notions of the just society being developed by the nationalist party leader, Sukarno, at roughly the same time (Legge 1984:72-3 and 132-3). This reform is coupled, in *Eenzame Garoedavlucht* and *Kertajaya*, with the heroes' dreams of resurrecting Java's former cultural and political glory through the establishment of such a just internal order. This also calls to mind notions of the Ratu Adil (the just king) and the prosperous kingdom of the stories of the Javanese shadow theatre. Such a change of emphasis, however, requires a change in structure as well. The lofty philosophical speeches and lengthy laments of personal suffering such as those found in *Airlangga*, though still promin-

¹⁰ Here I mean lived experience not as some 'objective reality', but rather in the Althusserian sense of 'the spontaneous "lived experience" of ideology in its peculiar relationship to the real' (Althusser 1971:223).

ent, are increasingly shoved to the side in the subsequent plays as more characters make their appearance, more events occur, and more political views are aired. In short, the political landscape, so necessary to plays which deal with the attempt to establish a just kingdom, is sketched in in more and more detail. This is especially clear in *Kertajaya*, the opening acts of which apparently focus the plot on the opposition between Kertajaya's personal desire and the requirements of state (should he marry Dewi Amisani, whom he loves, or a Sriwijayan princess with a view to consolidating the kingdom's political position?). This plot is later virtually hijacked by the political intrigue elements of the play, however, till in the end the resolution of the Dewi Amisani story line merely underscores Kertajaya's total political defeat. Similarly, in *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit*, the Buddhist philosophy of withdrawal from the material world is quickly converted into a philosophical position which favours taking concrete action in this ephemeral sphere, which also needs to be cared for. As the following acts unfold, the political debates and intrigue once more make us forget the opening, philosophical sections.

Sandhyakala ning Majapahit represents a turning-point of a particular kind, however. Despite the heroes' attempts to work for 'the good of the people' (which increasingly becomes Sanusi's yardstick for measuring progress towards a just, more egalitarian society), their efforts always end in failure and ruin in the face of resistance, intrigue and treason on the part of the privileged classes. In both *Eenzame Garoedavlucht* and *Kertajaya*, the people, whom the heroes have counted on for gratitude and support in return for the efforts undertaken on their behalf, never seem to receive the benefits and may even suffer as a result of the civil strife brought about by the heroes' attempts at reform. They fail to understand the intentions of their would-be benefactors, and are even manipulated to turn against them. This puzzles the heroes but should come as little surprise to us, since the efforts of Kertanegara, Kertajaya, and even Damar Wulan, are made at a fatal distance from the 'people'. Except for Damar Wulan, these heroes remain in the palace (at least as far as the texts show us), leaving the field to the entrenched, oppressing classes of officials chosen from among the nobility and religious leaders. These hero/kings of Sanusi are unable to succeed precisely because their campaign is based upon a paternalistic, reform-oriented strategy which emphasizes working within the system and is directed mainly at winning the support of the clergy and nobility through an appeal to idealism. This point is underscored structurally, once more, by the almost complete absence of peasants and lower-caste characters in any significant role in the texts.

In *Sandhyakala ning Majapahit*, however, Sanusi begins to allow his hero to mingle with the people: and though the hero, Damar Wulan, still remains committed paternalistically to reform, he alone, of all Sanusi's early historical heroes, understands the conditions of the people, having worked among them. He alone retains the support of the masses who storm the

palace crying for rebellion as the aristocracy is about to execute him. It is here that the solution to the search of Sanusi's heroes for allies seems to lie. All the elements of the elite are continually found, in these plays, on the opposing side that seeks to prop up the existing system and thereby retain their privileges. Thus, the search for allies in working towards a nationalist 'utopia' increasingly leads Sanusi to the crucial problem of contact with and organization of the masses. Even so, Sanusi was slow to allow his heroes to accomplish this directly. The reason is not simply that he was worried about the implications of so radical a step with respect to Dutch colonial censorship laws, however. For the other reasons, we must turn our attention to Sanusi's final play, *Manusia Baru*.

V

Manusia Baru was published in *Poedjangga Baroe* in 1940, after a period of eight years in which Sanusi was fired from his teaching position at a Dutch government school because of his membership in the Nationalist Party, worked as a teacher in the Bandung and Jakarta branches of the Perguruan Rakyat (People's School) (Mertodipuro 1968:31), became involved in the leadership of the nationalist organization Gerindo (Kahin 1952:96), and served as editor of the newspaper *Kebangunan* (Awakening) (Nasution 1963:106, 120), a position which saw him defending the right of Chinese Indonesians to participate in the nationalist movement, among other things (Suryadinata 1978:70-4).

Manusia Baru (The New Humanity) is a departure from Sanusi's previous plays in its contemporary setting, its more realistic – i.e., everyday – style of language, and in its contemporary plot material, namely the strike of a textile workers' union over low wages and long hours. To soften the impact, and almost certainly to avoid censorship, the action is placed in Madras, India. That the play is another of Sanusi's allegories of the Indonesian situation, however, is clearly signalled in a number of instances. In his brief preface to the play, Sanusi states: 'Let there be no misunderstanding: this play is not a criticism of conditions in Indonesia. Our method of dealing with problems between workers and owners here is already quite good in principle.' (Pane 1940.)¹¹

Given the fact that the paucity of labour disputes in Indonesia in the 1930s was due more to repressive anti-labour laws enforced by the Dutch administration than to harmonious relations (Kahin 1952:62-3), these prefatory remarks have to be read at best as bitterly ironic, and thus suggesting quite the reverse. Similarly, when the textile factory owners in *Manusia Baru* refuse to increase wages and shorten working hours, they invoke the threat of 'international competition' as the chief reason they

¹¹ 'Soepaja salah paham djangan terdjadi: lakon ini tidak berisi keritik atas keadaan di Indonesia. Tjara memperlakoekan soal-soal madjikan dan boeroeh soedah baik sekali di sini azasnja.'

cannot give any concessions to the workers. Interestingly enough, the competition referred to is from places such as Malaya and Java! (Pane 1974:13.) The implication is that the situation in Java is similar to that of India, only perhaps even worse for workers. Finally, the emotional plea for national unity made in the closing moments of the play would make little sense for an Indonesian writing in Indonesian if the India of *Manusia Baru* were not an allegorical figure for Indonesia.

The main characters in the play are Surendranath Das, a union organizer of elite origins, and Saraswati, the daughter of one of Madras' leading textile factory owners, N. Wadia. As the play opens, Das, who arrives in Madras to help organize the union's negotiations, runs headlong up against the owners' solid refusal to meet any of the workers' demands or even recognize their union. In the second act, Das meets Saraswati at the house of the painter Rama Rao, which provides the labour leader with an opportunity to clarify his goals and vision to the beautiful daughter of his chief enemy. This meeting also sets up a second plot strand that runs parallel to and eventually unites with that of the strike, however: the conversion of Saraswati from the pampered daughter of a wealthy industrialist to a woman committed to a life and ideal close to those of Das, with whom she leaves as the final curtain falls. Here the personal and the social seem at last to be able to exist together. The partial victory of the union, Saraswati's change of convictions, and the love which develops between Das and Saraswati provide an optimistic ending, unlike any other which Sanusi has been able to create, and this suggests the direction in which society must move in order to achieve a complete cultural and socio-economic regeneration in this modern age.

Once again, critics have interpreted this play as an attempt to deal with the issue of 'East' and 'West'. Generally, they point to Das' speeches in the second act, which touch upon the need to graft 'western' movement onto a firm basis of 'eastern' calm, as the foundation for their interpretations (Jassin 1985:119-20; Nasution 1963:92-101). The exchange between Das and the painter Rama Rao has also been used to demonstrate that Sanusi had capitulated to Takdir's arguments in the *Polemik Kebudayaan* and *Layar Terkembang*, since Das condemns Rao's continual repetition of ancient themes and scenes in his paintings (Nasution 1963:95; Usman 1964:186). Das says they are dead and without spirit, an attempt to forget the present and flee into the past – accusations with which Rao agrees completely (Pane 1974:28).

It cannot be denied that these issues are important for Sanusi and his contemporaries, and feature prominently in the play. Yet, as I have attempted to demonstrate, there is a far more complex issue unfolding in Sanusi's dramas. In these works, Sanusi's perceptions of his own cultural and political isolation within Indonesian society are projected onto the nationalist movement as a whole. The psychological and emotional burdens resulting from the lived experience of this isolation led Sanusi to

search in his works for a way of transcending the current socio-political impasse *as he saw it*. He attempted through his plays to find the means of creating a utopian society where he could be united with the 'other' of his own society, the Indonesian masses, and where individuals such as himself would be able to fulfil all their human needs, including their need for service to and communion with the group, as well as their personal desires. It should be clear by now that *Manusia Baru* represents the culmination of this complex issue.

I have argued that all of Sanusi's plays represent a search for the possibility of achieving individual happiness and fulfilment in a nationalist utopia, using socio-political allegories as his experimental laboratory. In his works, a set of personal desires is linked and eventually leads to the explicit articulation of a set of nationalist-oriented utopian desires similar to those voiced in a number of Sukarno's speeches. These interconnected sets of desires provide the impulse for the allegorical enactment of the struggle for a just and prosperous society.

In *Manusia Baru* such utopian desires again fuel the plot, becoming more explicit than in any previous play, and they do so within the context of class struggle. The nature of the utopian vision which Sanusi's last play projects is explicitly stated by Surendranath Das for the first time in Act II, in the course of Das' confrontation with the factory owners. After an exchange with Sastri, Saraswati's fiancé (whom Das will eventually supplant), in which they argue about whether the labour of the workers or the brains and money of the owners is the most important component of industry, Das says of the owners: 'But there will come a time when people such as you will be simply the servants of the people' (p. 19).¹²

Later, in discussing the beauty of life and the world, Das remarks: 'I want to help make the world better, so that everyone born beneath these beautiful blue skies, on this radiant, fabulously rich earth, can also enjoy the pleasures of life' (p. 31).¹³

Then again, at a moment of great desperation for the union, when its strike funds are nearly exhausted and workers' families are going hungry, Das, showing Saraswati and her companions the various manifestations of rampant poverty and hopelessness among India's lower classes, declares: 'They suffer here on earth and hope for happiness in heaven. We fight for people like this, too. We're all entitled to happiness even in this world.' (P. 40.)¹⁴

¹² 'Tetapi akan datang masanya orang yang seperti tuan jadi pegawai masyarakat saja.'

¹³ 'Saya mau turut memperbaiki masyarakat, sehingga sekalian orang yang lahir di bawah langit yang indah permai, di dunia yang gilang-gemilang, yang kaya-raya, turut merasai kenikmatan kehidupan.'

¹⁴ 'Sengsara di dunia, mengharapkan bahagia di sorga. Kami berjuang buat orang yang semacam ini juga. Bahagia mesti ada di dunia inipun.'

Thus, Das paints a picture of a classless society where owners are simply managers, employed by society, and where everyone has a chance to enjoy life, to find happiness here on earth. The increasing explicitness of the utopian vision here is not the only difference separating *Manusia Baru* from Sanusi's earlier plays, however. Between the years 1934 and 1940 Sanusi's thinking about the relationship of the intellectual to the masses had undergone an evolution as well. As if in response to his earlier heroes, isolated would-be reformers like Kertanegara and Kertajaya, Sanusi writes a scene into *Manusia Baru* in which Saraswati's rich young companion Laksmi Sarkar accuses the workers of insufficient awareness and commitment because they are hesitant about continuing the strike once their funds have run out. Das quickly responds:

'Excuse me, but Shrimati Laksmi, you have no idea what it means to be hungry, especially if you have a family. When your stomach is full, it's easy to talk about how others should have good manners, good character, a resolute heart, and a strong spirit. I don't blame you, Shrimati, but the conditions surrounding you.' (P. 35.)¹⁵

There is a greater understanding here of the needs of the working and lower classes, as well as a feeling that they can form a basis for social change through strength of numbers (though here again – and this is crucial – under the somewhat paternalistic leadership of the elite hero Das). Sanusi also displays an increasingly penetrating insight into political conflict, especially as it manifests itself in the realm of culture and language. Curiously, it is precisely this new understanding of the cultural terrain of political conflict that undercuts Sanusi's own statements regarding the centrality of the 'East-West' synthesis in this particular work. For in *Manusia Baru* words, concepts and categories like 'East', 'West', 'custom', 'tradition', and even 'national interest' come increasingly to be seen as tactical weapons in economic and political struggles. For example, one of the rumours circulated by the factory owners to turn people away from Das is that he holds nothing sacred and ridicules classical Indian culture (p. 11). Ironically, it is the capitalist industrialists, representing the modern world, who resist changes that threaten their power by insisting on the sanctity of the Indian past and its customs. This becomes evident in the confrontation between Das and Sastri in the final act, when Das comes to take leave of Saraswati. Sastri, as Saraswati's fiancé, tries to forbid Das to say goodbye to her, invoking the authority of '*adat*' (custom) and religion in his support:

¹⁵ 'Ma'af, tetapi shrimati Lakshmi Sarkar tidak tahu apa artinya lapar, apalagi bersama keluarga. Kalau kenyang, mudah membicarakan kesopanan, kemudian, kebaikan budi, ketabahan hati, kekuatan semangat buat orang lain. Saya tidak menyalahkan shrimati, akan tetapi keadaan sekitar shrimati.'

'SASTRI: Established custom must be respected.

DAS : If it's to your advantage. Religion orders us to love one another, to share our wealth, but you haven't shown much interest in that.' (P. 55)¹⁶

When the local newspaper, in return for a contribution from the textile factory owners, brands Das an agitator who will surely bring disaster upon the workers and calls for labour and owners to unite in the national interest, Das' response is similarly revealing: 'In the best interests of our country, the *Madras Daily* proposes that workers and owners, capital and labour unite. Fine, but let's not forget the best interests of the workers.' (P. 34.)¹⁷

VI

Just when Sanusi seems to have found a positive, optimistic enactment for his nationalist allegory in the portrayal of working-class struggles, something very peculiar happens. At the moment the Textile Workers' Union gets its second wind from the financial support provided by other unions throughout India (Act III of *Manusia Baru*), the central government, which has remained in the obscurity of the background of the play, steps forward to bring the antagonistic parties to the negotiating table. The result is that the workers receive a 10% pay rise, but withdraw all their other demands in the country's best interests, since the granting of these demands would allegedly result in the loss of local sales to foreign competition (p. 49). Suddenly the strike is over. There is little hope of harmony, however, and there are signs indicating future bitter discord between workers and owners. The latter are unrepentant, and even resentful that the strength of the trade union movement was able to wring even one concession from them (p. 50).

The entire play seems to be moving towards an unqualified endorsement of Das' cause: the working-class struggle for a decent life free of want and exploitation. This is borne out even after the settlement by Saraswati's decision to leave home in order to work together with Das, the man she has come to admire and love and in whose cause she too now believes. In the last three pages, however, she abruptly begins to explain to her father that she knows that the working class is only looking out for its own interests just like the owners, and therefore she doesn't really side with the workers' movement. Immediately after that, she reverts to a passionate defence of Das, his motives, and his true love. Then she calls for the youth of India to break out of the bonds that hold back progress. Finally she

¹⁶ 'SASTRI: Adat lama mesti dihormati.

DAS: Kalau baik buat tuan. Agama menyuruh belas kasihan, menyuruh membahagi-bagi kekayaan, akan tetapi tidak tuan perdulikan.'

¹⁷ 'Atas nama tanah air "Harian Madras" menganjurkan persatuan majikan dan buruh, modal dan tenaga. Baik, akan tetapi kepentingan buruh mesti dingat juga.'

leaves, calling herself, like Das, a member of a 'new humanity'.

This jolting series of attitudinal changes marks an evident rupture in the flow of the structural and thematic organization and emotional arguments of the text. Saraswati's becoming a 'new human' compels her to leave home. The play has shown us, in its selection of scenes, in the logic of the arguments it presents, and in the lion's share of the dialogue and polemic it apportions to Das, that this change is largely the result of the rightness of Das' cause. With Das, Saraswati has seen poverty and witnessed the struggle against it, and there is no way for her to turn her back on this. Idealism and the dynamism it inspires in Das charges Saraswati's consciousness. Nowhere in the play do we see her questioning the cause Das represents. Suddenly, however, a train of logic that is otherwise entirely absent in her character portrayal (and which has already been shown by Das to be a way of suppressing differences without granting actual change – the appeal to national unity for the sake of 'economic security') springs into being as if by afterthought! By an afterthought that is articulated in an instant and then forgotten just as quickly as Saraswati reverts to a passionate defence of Das and his cause. Even more startling is the closing speech by Rajendra in which he envisages a unified India – a completely unbelievable vision in light of the clear resentment which exists in the hearts and minds of the owners.

Once again, we find a clumsy attempt at closure, just as in *Airlangga* twelve years earlier. However, in *Airlangga* there seemed to be no hope, no way out of the dilemma. The closure of a 'script of history' thus offered a convenient if ultimately unsatisfactory solution. In *Manusia Baru*, a play so full of hope for the future, on the other hand, this sudden attempt to reverse direction leaves us feeling confused and disappointed.

In *Manusia Baru*, Sanusi appears finally to have found the allies he needs to bring together the personal and social obligation, art, love, and politics, to compose a utopian vision of the commonality of a classless society. The difficulty, however, is that the accomplishment of this vision depends upon class struggle, which threatens to destroy the 'national unity' which alone can lift a nationalist project clear of its multitude of factionalisms and allow it to represent a possible model for utopia.

A second crucial dilemma facing Sanusi was that his utopian project could only find fulfilment if he renounced his class-specific ideological position in relation to nationalism. As we have seen from his plays, this position necessitated a kind of nationalist vision based upon the vanguard leadership of an elite (the western-educated intelligentsia) who alone would be able to guide the masses. Yet such was the isolation of this elite from a wide base of support that its members had either to make a deal with the established powers (either the traditional aristocracy and clergy, and/or the Dutch) or else get into contact with the masses. That Sanusi doubted the wisdom of striking a deal with the established powers is revealed in a passage from *Kertajaya* in which the revolution created by 'a man of the

people', Ken Arok, is seen as tainted by the support it has received from the *priyayi* (aristocracy) and the religious leaders.¹⁸ The constant betrayal of Sanusi's utopian-socialist ideals by the established elites (both feudal and capitalist) makes it clear that change in the direction advocated by all of Sanusi's heroes will only come when workers and peasants are organized to effect their own liberation from social and economic oppression. Yet time and time again these heroes appeal to the elite to heed the situation of the masses, as if these elites are the main hope for progressive change. Though in *Manusia Baru* this would seem to be otherwise, even here the methods which Sanusi allows Das are those of the legal industrial dispute, reason, and idealism: once more, working within the system. Furthermore, the appeal to the elite to transform the very system they themselves benefit from is not done away with in *Manusia Baru*, but is instead transferred to the personal conversion of Saraswati's class alliances by Das. This change is effected not simply through an appeal to humanitarian ideals, however, but through such an appeal mixed with the heady presence of romance. And it is through Das's and Saraswati's romance that the play seems, if only momentarily, to transcend class identifications – uniting two members of the upper class in a struggle for the rights of the workers – in order to prefigure in the present (i.e., the inter-class 'unity' of nationalism) the classless utopia of the future.¹⁹

Through the narrative structure of romance, Sanusi attempts to smooth over the potential for discordant class relations, but this gesture does not succeed; Das' ideals and the plight of the workers figure too prominently in Saraswati's conversion, as well as in her emotional bonding with Das. Thus, Sanusi is forced to resort to Saraswati's and Rajendra's awkward final appeals to nationalism in a desperate attempt to step back from the abyss of class struggle to which the logic of his nationalist allegories has brought him.

In the end, then, Sanusi could not bring himself to take that fateful step beyond the principled, yet elite-oriented nationalism expressed both in his plays and in his membership of the progressive nationalist party, Gerindo. And so he attempts to smother the explosive implications of the direction his allegory has taken with the forced closure of 'national unity' which is to be found in the final pages of *Manusia Baru*. However, doing so means abandoning the possibility of achieving utopia as this possibility had

¹⁸ As an indication of Sanusi's continued distrust of the privileged indigenous classes of Indies society, the strike in *Manusia Baru*, it is important to remember, takes place in textile factories. The chief industries owned by Indonesia's few pre-independence '*pribumi*' entrepreneurs were textile-related, for example the batik industry of Central Java (Kahin 1952:27-8 and 66-7).

¹⁹ Jameson argues, in the final chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, that all ideology, including nationalist ideology, contains in some form the utopian desire for community. It is important to remember that Sanusi's notion of individual fulfilment also includes a desire for such commonality with, and service to, others.

developed in the logic of his five plays and settling instead for a nationalism pregnant with social and class tensions.

VII

Such a symbolic retreat to preserve the imagined community represented by nationalism had consequences which reached far beyond Sanusi's own personal life. It would be too easy to dismiss Sanusi's dramatic oeuvre as the flawed work of a talented poet who overreached his abilities by attempting to incorporate the stuff of politics too directly into his creative project. The fact is, however, that the ways in which Sanusi imagined nationalism, and imagined how nationalism could be written about, were not very different from the themes, styles and structures which many of his literary contemporaries helped create in their efforts to inculcate and strengthen nationalist sentiments among their small but growing reading public. Such Indonesian novelists, playwrights and poets of the 1920s and 1930s as Armijn Pane, Muhammad Yamin, M.R. Dajoh, Nur St. Iskandar, Abdoel Moeis, and Matu Mona all made use of 'historical' or mythological material to recount the glory of past kingdoms and heroes of the archipelago. These gestures, this choice of one rallying point for an Indonesian 'nationalism', are certainly indicative of the ideological contradictions operating within the minds of nationalist intellectuals during the period. In order to understand this point one has only to recall that many of these nationalist intellectuals also found some kind of socialist theory appealing in their attempts to imagine the shape of an independent Indonesian society (Sutherland 1968:114).

Similarly, the oppositions of 'East' and 'West', 'tradition' and 'modernity', as I recounted earlier, were not simply to be found in Sanusi's *Manusia Baru*, but in fact occupied a major place in the cultural debates of the times. Large numbers of Indonesian novels throughout the twenties and thirties, including Takdir Alisyahbana's above-cited *Layar Terkembang* (With Sails Unfurled), attempted to tackle this issue. Many of these works have since come to be recognized as canonical works in the history of the modern Indonesian novel, definitive of the growth and development of the genre. Nevertheless, if we read these novels through the Machereyan and Jamesonian kind of analytical glasses whose use I have outlined above, we will notice in each of them determinate absences, silences, ruptures and contradictions which make us aware that there is much more at stake in these texts than what the authors themselves, and the majority of subsequent critics, have been able consciously to acknowledge. *Layar Terkembang*, for example, prominently features a series of conversations about the serious problems faced by Indonesian peasants. Not surprisingly, however, the novel is totally unable to show us those peasants, or make us feel, through structure or formal devices, that their problems are any more than the distant and easily solvable puzzles (if only rationality were brought to

bear on the situation) of an intellectual parlour discussion (Alisyahbana 1986:130-1). The similarity with the problems encountered in a number of Sanusi's plays should be evident.

Nor did these ways of imagining the nation simply disappear with the Japanese occupation, the revolution, and independence. As noted above, the idea of the great past kingdoms of Majapahit and Sriwijaya had taken root in the nationalist movement as early as the 1920s. Among the nationalist leaders, Sukarno himself had long promoted the idea of a glorious Indonesian past as a sign of great future possibilities for the nation. With the onset of the Japanese occupation, Sanusi's fellow-writer of plays about the classical kingdoms of Java, Muhammad Yamin, became senior Indonesian in the Japanese *sendenhan* (propaganda service) and used this position to promote his view of Majapahit as the pre-colonial unifier of Indonesia. During this period, Sanusi's history, later frequently reprinted and commonly used as a school text in the 1950s, was also written (Reid 1979:290-7).

In *Sedjarah Indonesia* (Indonesian History), Sanusi's retreat from the idea of the necessity of a class struggle that is so crucial to his allegories, is readily apparent. The key themes of the work include the unity of 'nusantara' (archipelago) culture, the desire of the various Indonesian peoples for unity, and the potential of local cultures to absorb and modify foreign cultural elements to suit local patterns. Internal struggles between ethnic groups and intra-ethnic factions, as well as tensions between the traditional rulers and peasants are down-played. All rebellions are argued to have been directed chiefly at the Dutch, while exploitative practices of local rulers are rarely mentioned. Even so, remnants of Sanusi's utopian desires, tied to his concern for the circumstances of the ordinary people, persist in *Sedjarah Indonesia*. Early in the first volume, the author takes care to note that not only was Airlangga a great commander, but he was also concerned about his people's prosperity (pp. 65-6). Furthermore, Sanusi argues that the culture of ordinary folk influenced the courts, just as the culture of the courts affected the people (p. 121). Finally, Sanusi's valorization of art and culture as a vital part of a better society, as found in *Airlangga* and *Manusia Baru*, reappears in *Sedjarah Indonesia* in his repeated linking of political greatness with cultural achievement.

In the end, the historical plays of Sanusi and his brother Armijn, as well as those of Muhammad Yamin, helped lay the groundwork for notions of Indonesian history and national identity that are still widely held today. This influence began with the publication of these plays in the journals of the time, as well as their performances at youth congresses and school ceremonies. Developing in concert with nationalist thinking about the Indonesian past and national identity, some of the notions put forward in these plays later were transformed into elements of the standard nationalist histories – the idea of noblesse oblige of leaders, the need for unity, and the greatness of the past kingdoms of the archipelago – as well as later still

coming to permeate much of New Order political discourse and social life. Equally important, however, are the elements expunged in the transition from plays to history for the sake of preserving the idea of national unity. For in the hollow of this absence dwell some of the spectres that have continued to haunt both New Order society and much of contemporary Indonesian art and literature.

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