Randai as a Contemporary Dramaturgy:
Obstacles and insights from an Intercultural Transposition

Indija Noesbar Mahjoeddin

Exegesis as part requirement towards
Master of Creative Arts (Drama)
School of Drama & Music,
Faculty of Arts, University of Newcastle

Submission: April 2011

Supervised by: David Watt
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signature ..................................
# Table of Contents

Index of Images .................................................................................................................. 4
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. 6

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................... 1
   The Gap Between Randai And Western Theatre Assumptions ........................................... 1
      A Distinctive Randai Logic ............................................................................................ 2
   Underpinnings in fieldwork and creative practice ........................................................... 3
   Previous work .................................................................................................................. 4
   An Outline Of This Exegesis ....................................................................................... 5
   Contexts ....................................................................................................................... 7

CHAPTER 1 - Background and Methodology ................................................................. 10
   Introducing Randai And Its Source .............................................................................. 10
      A basic description of the principles of Randai ......................................................... 12
   The Discussion and Practice of Randai in Indonesian and Western Sources ................ 16
   Understanding innovation in tradition ......................................................................... 18
   Tension between academy and kampung Randai ........................................................... 18
   Hybridity and the Australian position .......................................................................... 21
   Using an Emergent Research Methodology ................................................................... 23

CHAPTER 2 - Towards a Systematic Enquiry ................................................................. 26
   Making Randai Beyond The Ethnographic Frame ......................................................... 26
   Maker As Researcher: Investigating Emerging Questions .......................................... 32
   Four Main Issues to Surmount ..................................................................................... 32
   Questions that invite further investigation .................................................................... 34

CHAPTER 3 - Case Studies .............................................................................................. 37
   Moving Towards Australian Neo-Randai ................................................................. 37
   Two Case Studies in Detail ......................................................................................... 39
      Boldenblee: A case study in transposing Randai as a collective expression of community ......................................................... 39
      The Butterfly Seer: A case study in reinterpreting Randai for a contemporary theatre audience ......................................................... 47
   Case Studies as a progression from convention to reinvention .................................... 51

CHAPTER 4 - New Forms in Old Spaces ........................................................................ 54
   Introduction to the Problem of Staging ......................................................................... 54
   Community as Venue ................................................................................................. 59
   Space, Sound and Light: The Impact Of Technical Design On Audience Reception ....... 60
   Finding a Round Peg in a Square Hole ........................................................................ 66

CHAPTER 5 - The Physical Language: Negotiating ‘Silek’ ........................................... 69
   What is Pancak Silek .................................................................................................... 69
   Negotiating Silek in the Rantau ................................................................................... 73
   Repetitivity and Meaning ......................................................................................... 76
   Galombang Dance as Stillness .................................................................................... 77
   Creative Negotiations Issues In Movement (Case Studies) ........................................ 78
Index of Images

CHAPTER 1 & 2
Fig. 1 A recent Randai production, Nan Si Jundai by Indra Utama. Experiment Theater ......................................... p. 13-14
Fig. 2 Tapuak pants slapping in Padang and Brisbane 1996.
Fig. 3 Cimpago Biru’s Firdaus plays Bujang Baganto in a scene from Zulkifli’s Palimo Gaga.

Fig. 4 Diagram - 2 speakers in a circle; the inward staging of Randai
Fig. 5 Diagram - Side elevation of the wok-shaped Medan-nan-bapaneh showing galombang.
Fig. 6 Diagram - Southern’s elevation of a medieval Plen-an-Gwary.
Fig. 7 Diagram - Side elevation showing the dome of sound-space.

Fig. 8 The entrance procession of the Brisbane cast of The Horned Matriarch...................................................... p. 36
Fig. 9 The Horned Matriarch lingkaran chorus.
Fig. 10 The Sydney remount of The Horned Matriarch: Story of Reno Nilam.

CHAPTER 3
Illustration 1. Local and historical landmarks underpinning the narrative.......................................................... p. 46-47
Illustration 2. The Metalmen and the pubic artwork that inspired this episode

Fig. 11 The Ballad of Boldenblee, at The Boilershop, Newcastle 2004
Fig. 12 Using Basl masks to underscore aspects of the collective identity.

Fig. 13 Portraying The Rock as acro-balance with circumnavigation
Fig. 14 Using Poi as galombang and within scenes.
Fig. 15 The use of fire in combat scenes.

Fig. 16 Counterweight ropes at the ready.
Fig. 17 Use of fire combat and physical theatre in scenes.

Illustration 1. The main stage picture of The Butterfly Seer................................................................................. p. 53

Fig. 18 Actors in The Butterfly Seer working the expanded circle................................................................. p. 53-54
Fig. 19 Musicians onstage as singers and silek artists.
Fig. 20 Puppetry and shadows at work in The Butterfly Seer.

CHAPTER 4
Fig. 21 Typical Randai venues - Taman Budaya Padang, and at Kampung Kapal, Branang
Fig. 22 The habit of audience to surround a performance.
Fig. 23 The arrangement of captive school audiences.
Fig. 24 Bondi Beach Pavilion amphitheatre with satay kiosk and rear audience.

Illustration 2. Van Gogh’s painting, The Potato-eaters...................................................................................... p. 64

Fig. 25 The Boiler Room as venue for Boldenblee; Musician’s Dais ................................................................. p. 68
Fig. 26 Plan of the Courthouse Theatre, Carlton with floorplan for The Butterfly Seer.
Fig. 26A Plan of the Princess Theatre Brisbane as set up for The Horned Matriarch.

CHAPTER 5
Fig. 27 Silek practitioners in Padang and Brisbane. .......................................................................................... 71-72
Fig. 28 Australians training in West Sumatra.
Fig. 29 Ulu’ambe in Tarok. *Tari Sado* (from *Randai Nan Si Jundai*) in Malaysia.

Fig. 30 The cast of The Horned Matriarch training with Miko Saeri, Brisbane, 1996
Fig. 31 *Galombang* motifs written up in a variety of notations.
Fig. 32 Rehearsing *silek* and *galombang* with the *lingkaran*.

Illustration 3. Diagram of an awkward hold ................................................................................................................ p. 75

Fig. 33 The gambling scene from Palimo Gaga to Reno Nilam. ................................................................. p. 89-91
Fig. 34 Using silek pasambahan moves to step into the space.
Fig. 35 Clare Apelt and Ron Morelos work from far sides of the circle.

Fig. 36 Drawing on established stagecraft in The Horned Matriarch
Fig. 37 Approaching Randai acting in the Sydney production.
Fig. 38 Using the alienating device of a microphone substitute.

Fig. 39 Stage business in lieu of debate.
Fig. 40 Using real world objects as props.
Fig. 41 Clowns and Doubling.
Fig. 42 Using hip-hop in the gestural vocabulary.
Fig. 43 Working the rectangular end stage as arena.

CHAPTER 6 & 7
Illustration 4. Reading *The Butterfly Seer* at the Playlab Weekend workshop ................................................................................................................ p. 99

Fig. 44 The typical music ensemble of talempong, gandang and traditional reed pipe. .... p. 109-110
Fig. 45 Music facilitator Kari working on the first phase of development.
Fig. 46 A *rapai’i* ensemble and *dendang sampelong* as incidental music.

**Fig. 47** *Biduan*: Singers from 3 shows.
Fig. 48 Consulting with musical director, Megan Collins.
Fig. 49 Erin Jacobi onstage amidst a flurry of *tapuak*.
Fig. 50 Instrumental colours used in *The Ballad of Boldenblee*.

Fig. 51 Sherriff’s instrumentation charts .............................................................................................................. p. 118-119

Fig. 52 Volume and a fat percussive texture achieved using dhol and rabana
Fig. 53 Tuba associating a song with the Bullock.
Fig. 54 Other instruments used in *The Butterfly Seer*.

CHAPTER 8 & 9
Illustration 1: Plen-an-Gwary re-envisioned for Randai ................................................................................................................ p. 147
Illustration 2: Philosophy Nights at Steki Taverna ................................................................................................................ p. 148
Acknowledgements

I would like foremost to thank all performers, collaborators and production personnel on each of the case study productions (too numerous to name here but most of which are credited in the theatre programs appended) whose confrontations with Randai shaped this research.

Also due thanks are my West Sumatran teachers, informants and hosts (and their families) who either initiated me into this body of knowledge or provided formal reference points, outstandingly Zulkifli Dt Sinaro nan Kuniang, Admiral S.Skar.M.Sn., Nasyirwan Pakih Sinaro, (the late) Amiruddin Pakih Suleiman, ethnomusicologist Zahara Kamal, Bpk Mak’Yan of Tarok, Dt Rajo Mudo of Studio Batu Badoro, the dean, directors, staff and students of ASKI (and later STSI) Padang Panjang;

I am indebted to Australian directors and dramaturgs Robin Laurie, Bruce Keller, Steve Gration, Maude Davies and Doug Leonard in particular, for engaging with my thinking processes mostly in the evolution of particular shows presented here as case studies.

For the material means to mount these performed enquiries and in-country investigations I acknowledge: S.A. Dept for the Arts, Asialink, Australia Indonesia Institute, the Music Board, Performing Arts Board and Community Cultural Development Unit of the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Queensland, NSW Ministry for the Arts, Carnivale, La Mama Inc, Centre for Performance Studies University of Sydney, Nexus Arts.

For use of images and audio-visual documentation I thank Luisa Garcia, Elvira Gonzalez, Russell Emmerson, Sam Taylor, Dean Winter, Brook Fraser, Andrew Brown, Simon Bernutt, Brook Fraser, Osman Memisevic, Ren Waters, Indra Utama, Ayeshah Hassan, Haf DzI Sofi and Mira Radmilovic.

And finally acknowledgement is due to all those many valued friends, family and mentors who, alongside my supervisor, Dr David Watt, provided proofreading, feedback and material and moral support towards my completion of the final written work.