Article

Casting Shadows over Malay: Palliating Voice, Palliating the Wayang

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Abstract

Wayang Kulit shadow puppetry has, for over one millennium, enacted both political and secular voice, for the maintenance of cultural heritage and social critical opinion. Throughout Malaysia, Wayang has mediated shifts in language ideologies and socialization. Yet, shifts in the Wayang have correlated positively with shifts in the Malay language, in light of Malaysian government efforts to palliate social voice through its control of Wayang and the Malay language and its poetics.

This paper addresses the Wayang Kulit and its relevant to the Malay language, as well as its semiotic complexities during performance and in larger society, as a tool for the expansion or suppression of critical social voice. The study exposes these shifts in the Wayang, its stylizations, symbolisms, and its performativities, in the latter 20th century. These changes have aligned with cultural and language shifts, against government attempts to legitimize both pro Islamic and neoliberal ideologies. The data set includes a multi-year ethnography of the Wayang in Malaysia, and a corpus of discussions, documentations, and scripts of Wayang performances and narratives, grounded in an abduction theory methical framework.

Keywords: *Wayang Kulit, Malaysia, linguistic anthropology, abduction theory, poetics and performativity*

40

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

Introduction

Wayang Kulit, as a form of shadow puppetry that has predominated throughout South Asia, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in other forms (e.g., in Greece with the name *Karagkiozi* puppetry), has had a turbulent history in Malaysia, throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Throughout this period, and before, the Wayang has gone to great lengths to preserve its own performance heritage, as well as local and wider cultural and linguistic heritage. In addition to its entertainability, the Wayang once embodied democratic voice, where the *dalang* (puppeteer) sought to contextualize yet to intervene in government and other social goings on.

Yet, for centuries, the Wayang had been a repository of spiritual, cultural, linguistic, and political narratives, throughout Malaysia and beyond, as an educational and political voice. Language and society sought representation through Wayang performance, a process which the dalang channeled in collaboration with the community (cf. Duranti 2015 for work on communities), as satirist, performer, teacher, and at times, shaman. As such, the Wayang language register was stylistic and performative, sitting in a tension between local *kampung* (the village) and larger Malay identities.

Following the efforts by the Malaysian government to eliminate the Wayang, its politically subversive polyphony, and its broader set of cultural performances and cultural voice, Malaysia saw a drastic decline in the Wayang, yet which has of late begun to reemerge, owing to the government's search for opportunities in an era of (post)late capitalism, that is, to develop commodities that 'represent nationhood.' Through this disappearance, and as the Wayang was central to the socialization of a young Malaysian generation, a cultural and linguistic void occurred, damaging the traditional poetics of the Malay language and the ritualized spiritual and philosophical performances of the Wayang, a performance ideologically entangled with Malay social identity (Caton 1987).

In this paper, I address the Malaysian government's depoeticization of the Malay language and its society, and its attempts to drastically alter the symbolisms of the Wayang performance and its language to align with government agendas to palliate elements of subversion that once prevailed in the Wayang. Throughout, I discuss the de-poeticization of both language and performance in the Wayang and its possible correlation with the depoeticization of language throughout larger society, considering that the two have mutually and symbiotically mediated, that is, *synmediated*, one another. I discuss these changes as having occurred since the mid 20th century (Sweeney 1969, 1972, 1994), consequent to which, linguistically ulterior processes have emerged to resocialize several generations throughout Malaysia.

As such, I structure the paper as follows: In the second and third sections, I discuss Malaysia's political climate from the 1970s to the early part of the 21st century, and the ways in which this

41

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

overlaps with its cultural climate. Here, the Malaysian government sought to alter its culturo-political models in order to accommodate a seeming foreign encroachment powered by the mechanisms of transnationalism and neoliberalism. I then depart from a discussion of nation, to discuss how cultural performance in Malaysia, and specifically the Wayang, have emerged from the political climate of the region, through a politicization of Malaysia's shifting ideological climate. Here, I include some talk of the symbolisms in the Wayang, and I do this through a light reversion to structuralism, and at times to post structuralism, of Wayang performance and language. In the fourth section, the Methodical Framework, I briefly discuss the data and ethnography. I have opted for an abduction theory framework, which considers the repeated reiteration of data, ideology, and interpretation of data, thus becoming optimum for the rebuilding of ideologies of the mid to late 20th century. Following this, in the fifth section, I summarize the shift in the Wayang genre and language in parts of Malaysia. In the sixth section, I conclude the paper.

This paper contributes to the fields of Asian linguistic anthropology in that it discusses the correlation among political apparatuses, performance, and language shift in the Malaysian context, as a possible model for larger or other contexts.

The Cultural Past of Malaysia

Philosophies and political and ideological systems, such as Hinduism and Confucianism, first began integrating with practices local to Malaysia in the first millennium C.E. (Yousof 1985), where travelers brought across literary ideas and scripts. The practices local to the region at the time included shamanism and animism. Well into the second millennium C.E., itinerant Muslim and Christian preachers and traders reached the region now bounded as Malaysia with their own religious and other literary scripts, further compounding the region's social, cosmological, and literary complexities. The earlier introduced scripts included the Sanskrit Ramayana and the Hikayat Seri Rama narratives (Zieseniss 1928), yet which later adopted Islamic ideologies.

As a popular social and political apparatus, the Wayang would ultimately draw on newly introduced texts; the earliest Malay version of the Ramayana being of 1633 (Osnes 2010), to establish an eclectic yet localized version of the Ramayana and the Hikayat Seri Rama narratives in shadow puppetry (Barrett 1963). Sweeney (1972) notes, however, that Wayang, as a Malaysian state craft, may have preceded Indian migration, where, an inscription in 907 A.D. evidences the earliest Wayang records in Malaysia (see Holt 1967 for a discussion).

In the battle for political agency and economic control, the government targeted Malaysia's cultural commodities in the late 1970s and early 1980s, while inter-faith tensions were intensified. At this time, in order to mitigate public unrest and conceptions of neoliberal and

42

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

transnational encroachment, a Malay-Islamic fundamentalism appeared, and through which, political actors developed an *adat* cluster (Malay, religious law), to further intensify nationalism through Malay-Islamic junctures (Lieber and Weisberg 2002). To their advantage, the political parties PAS and UMNO drew on these fears of foreign encroachment, to intensify these political apparatuses, not least of which were those in the state of Kelantan; here, fundamentalist Islamic ideologies made themselves apparent in rules on attire, on relations between men and women, on media and performance, and on worship, fully shifting the lifeworlds of that society en large. The institutionalization of Islamic law throughout Malaysia, and predominantly Kelantan, in the late 20th century, was most notably observed in *kebudayaan*, *seni*, *hiburan* (Malay, culture, arts, entertainment), enforcing a new *dakwah* (Malay-Arabic, Islamic morality) in social consciousness. This religious and social politicizing was also motivated by neoliberal intentions. An Islamomorphic Malaysia emerged to further segregate religious groups and cultural heritage (Eickelman and Piscatori 2004).

Grounding his new and contestably progressive social ideologies in discourses of foreign encroachment, to-be Prime Minister Mahathir (1970) divided those he labelled as 'unsophisticated traditional backward' Malays from the 'sophisticated orthodox-Muslim' Malays, to institutionalize and exacerbate segregation both within the Malay populace and between the Malays and other ethnic groups. Mahathir accomplished this by positioning the Malays as agents of selection between elements perceived as an 'indulgent, primitive, slothful ethnicity, engaged in fantasy,' which hindered their overhaul, and progressive Malays, who would renounce all superfluous poetic and artistic practices. Mahathir inculcated that the progress of the Malays would require a renouncement of lethargic, self-effacing practices, and social and historical illusions, grounded in go nowhere poetics, metaphor, and circular life practices. Here, Mahathir announced that a new politics of efficiency would remove challenges to the continuation of Malay society and its progress in a neoliberal world.

As per Mahathir's intention, this aggressive-progressive approach mediated a depoeticization and hence linearization of language and society of the Malays, and Malaysia thus sought departure from its unsophisticated rural mindsets, to "urbanize the Malays" (Mahathir 1970, p. 105). To further enforce this change, Mahathir opened his Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding in 1992, which sought to 'Islamically refine backward Malays' (c.f. Malhi 2003). Pursuing these ideologies, Mahathir (1970) adhered to his notion that the rehabilitation of the Malays required a departure from custom or old adat, to acquire new values and ways of thinking through urbanization, and modernist ideas and values.

Mahathir sought to further reinforce and expand on these ideologies of immediacy and directness, and to discard Malay traditional long-winded, unnecessarily cyclic, 'go-nowhere' rhetoric, ideology, and performance through a development of industry and increasingly efficient

43

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

communication and rationalism in all sectors, not least of which was the cultural industry. Here, the government framed cultural performance at the time as inefficient and circular, a discourse which set up genres such as the Wayang to become fully politicized.

The Wayang

History and Significance in Malaysia

Traditionally secularized, the Wayang sought to democratically connect with Malay spiritual and cultural heritages, its deities and spirits, and its *semangat* (Malay, socio-spiritual continuities), thus iconizing the past by retaining traditional ideologies in the present. The Wayang lama register was embedded in ideologies of social hierarchy; to disperse social and linguistic capital accordingly, the *dalang* (Malay, puppeteer), a secular Wayang, and community, all found junctures. Within this process, Wayang communities sustained the poetics of old Malay worlds, which constituted a democratic vortex for the critical voice, as highly enregistered texts (Agha 2007). Yet, Islamic fundamentalism in the region (see Geertz 1960) targeted traditionally secularized performance, such as that of the Wayang *lama* (Malay, old), previously structured on ritual sequences. The emerging political theistic ideologies of the mid-20th century increasingly outlawed these rituals (Cohen 2006), through a Malay culturo-political dialogue on heritage and social voice.

   In 1990, PAS moved to ban all performance in several regions throughout Malaysia, the most intense of which was Kelantan (Yousof 2011) on official levels, by attacking and prohibiting Wayang's democratic structure and voice, and its origins as non-Malay. Through these efforts, the Wayang almost disappeared in the 1960s and 1970s (Hashim 2006). The government also targeted Wayang's heresy, its use of puppets for *sekmoh* (Malay, worship), its *Syirik* (Malay, representation and personification of false deities) (Hourani 2001), its involvement with the occult, such as possession by the puppet *jembalang* (Uthman 2004), and other processes such as hypnotic trance work. The dalang's portrayal of spirits as both social human-like and animist beings, once highly influential to Malaysian communities, succumbed to the government's pressure to mitigate such ideologies, during the modernization of Malaysia. Similarly, the government, particularly in Kelantan, attacked Wayang's 30-day performances which impeded efforts to engage in *solat* (Arabic, Islamic prayer), stipulating that performance should be restricted to only between *maghrib* prayer (sunset) and midnight.

   In line with the above, the government in Malaysia began to develop policy to restrict Wayang performance, explicitly announcing its intentions to rebuild ethnic identity, yet implicitly intending to suppress Wayang's critical democratic voice that opposed the government. I discussed this issue at lengths with practitioners and communities over years. One such

44

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

discussant was Eddin Khoo, who spoke on the critical voice of the Wayang. Khoo spoke of one dalang who had a sanctimonious puppet, always speaking on morality and marriage: Yet, the puppet showcased an erection. This puppet performance portrayed the satirical attitudes and general consensus in the community.

> In *kampungs* (Malay, villages), there's an old joke about sending kids to religious class. Make sure they wear underwear; you never know where the teacher's hands are going. These jokes disappeared, due to Islamization, but dalangs would get behind these, lampooning the hell out of people.
>
> (Personal interaction 2016)

Khoo describes that policy, and particularly Kelantenese policy, was the apogee of a multi-decade frenzy that triggered an antithetical stance towards the Wayang. This stance culminated in a National Cultural Policy (1970), which fully standardized and institutionalized Wayang, in such a way so as to incorporate Wayang learning into education systems, as a symbol of tradition, nation, and ethnic heritage. Following this, in 1971 and 1976, the government developed two new policies, the National Cultural Congress Policy and the National Language Policy (respectively), which both denigrated Wayang's political voice. Here, the government placed dalangs in educational institutions, to teach Wayang *moden* (Malay, modern), to culturally and linguistically conditioning society, and in the process, to politically bully the Malays. Khoo labels the students of the time 'policy babies.'

Wayang's politically motivated decline grounded new ideological biases and tensions between authentic and inauthentic authorship of and participation in the Wayang (Hadzantonis 2021; c.f. Johnstone 2013). These political processes, as ideological biases, sought to erase truths inconsistent with the popular perceptions of Wayang communities (c.f. Irvine and Gal 2000 for a discussion on ideological biases), yet which larger society contested through resistance to the government. The fluctuating pressure thus significantly influenced the Wayang, politically and culturally, a force which ultimately convinced PAS that public unrest was imminent. As such, PAS then opted for a softer approach in order to gradually and unbeknown to the general public, erase the Wayang through simply ignoring it, or rather, by developing strategies for the public to render the Wayang insignificant, or to forget it completely over time. To effect this deliberate erasure of the past, PAS was for a time lax on religious (non-Islamic) rituals (Skeat 1967; Sweeney, 1972) and in this way, gradually curtailed Wayang performance, to the point where it declined to a non-entity (Yousof 2004). At the same time, its dalangs were growing old or were realizing that their work was not sustainable, and hence opted to change occupation. In addition to this, audiences disappeared, and Wayang's existence was now threatened. This draining of cultural heritage through the disappearance of the Wayang robbed Malaysia of a tradition central

45

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

to everything that was Malayness at the time.

However, dalangs and audiences contested, ignored, or subverted the policies by PAS. In this way, through its bans, the government generated widespread curiosity in the Wayang, and thus ironically damaged its efforts to remove the Wayang, a damage to which media and (mobile) technology subversively contributed. A post-1990s revivalism assisted to resuscitate a new Wayang, and in 2001, the PAS government realized that it had shot itself in the foot (Khoo), and thus finally lifted the ban. The government convened on the disenfranchising of its own popularity, the popularity of the Wayang, and the popularity of Malay language arts through the official ban in 1990, and in discovering the neoliberal benefits of commodifying Wayang as a cultural artefact, altered its cultural policy. Reshaped Islamically by the government, Wayang began to symbolize the desired lifestyles (c.f. Agha, 2007) of a Malaysia that was increasingly becoming Islamically-orthodox.

At the onset of the 21ˢᵗ century, governments at various levels throughout Malaysia convened to invite experts on the Wayang to develop a Wayang *baru* (Malay, new). This Wayang contained a highly stringent code of ethics, and illegalized all characters with Hindu origins, while mandating attention to Islamic-Malay content (Yousof 1997). One Kelantanese dalang, Pak Yusof, discussed this Islamization (personal interaction 2012), noting the following:

> I always recited the Quran during performance. 'Subhana 'llahi, walhamdu lillahi, wa la ilaha illallah' 30 times, and the verse, 'Bismillah, Al-Fatihah.

Yusof emphasizes that to avoid issues from the government or even prohibition, puppeteers were required to commercialize and Islamize the Wayang, "[b]ut I don't, I hold on. Performing for 35 years. I'll never conform." Subsequently, technology, urbanization, and neoliberalism, facilitated both the decline and then the resurgence of Wayang.

Nationalism and the Politization of the Wayang

Aligning with the time scales in a modernized society, in the early 1980s, audiences increasingly rejected antiquated Wayang *lama* structures, replacing these with more dynamic forms of the Wayang and other entertainment. Yet, the dalangs who did persist in working on Wayang were adamant to compete with this new media dynamic. Despite the policy and guideline restrictions, as well as a declining televization, these dalangs sought to develop new innovative designs and visuals, while also accelerating and truncating their performances (Osnes 1992), which further contributed to the formation of Wayang *baru*. By the 1970s, dalangs were replacing classical, ritualistic, and *ilmu dalam* (Malay, esoteric) circular styles of knowledge with direct 'linear' performances, to compete with accelerated media and technology (Ramlan and Quayum 2010).

46

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

According to one dalang in Kedah, today, dalangs now only know linear performance, and not traditional circular and connotative poetic styles. As such, new dalangs cannot, for example, do complex fight narratives, which require poetics, connotation, and lengthy improvisation. They are very *kasar tak halus* (rough and unrefined) (Personal interaction 2013). The two dalangs Pak Yusof and Yeo Hyeok Seng describe that every Wayang *lama* word required musical rhythm, yet at present, the rhythm has disappeared. These two dalangs argue that current Wayang performances are little more than disgorge (personal interaction 2015).

The bright translucent colors of Wayang *moden* and *baru*, absent in the monochromatic Wayang lama, where the black of Wayang lama is seen as *haram*, compensated for the relinquishing of complex poetics and semiotics within Wayang and across society as the community's central medium for entertainment and socialization (Mellema 1954). Wayang *baru* well aligned with the Entertainment Act (1998), requiring dalangs to integrate the didactic and moralist intentions of Islam, discourses of nationalism, and reference to public health, into their acts. Khoo suggests that the Wayang now misaligned with its original intentions, where it once addressed a communal, emotional, and psychological yearn for stories, music, and expression, not moral or didactic components. In Khoo's opinion, the Wayang *moden / baru* forms, constituted a complete failure (personal interaction 2016).

Yet, the shift to the *baru* form of Wayang evidenced the entextualized properties of the genre, and the Malay language. Dalangs overcame restrictions at this point, and adapted, intent to ensure that the Wayang would again flourish and hence survive. Within this movement, a new resurgence occurred, that of the Hikayat Sri Rama narratives, but now included local folklore, local history, comedy, current affairs, and new puppets and characters. The various dialects were combined with the national standard, Bahasa Melayu, with the English language, and with other modes such as popular and pop music and song. This revised Wayang *baru* would find junctures between Islam, Hinduism, popular culture, and animism, yet the emphasis would clearly become the Malay world.

The policies developed by the Malaysian government over several decades had well facilitated the politicizing of the Wayang. These policies accomplished this by first attacking the Wayang's democratic inclusion of folklore and vernacularity, and subsequently, by correlating the Wayang with a new Malayness and Malaysia's Islamic fundamentalism. By foregrounding its religious fundamentalism, and by seeking to eliminate popular discourse that contested the government agenda, this politicizing of the Wayang facilitated the attack on the language and selected heritage. In short, the evolving government policy molded Wayang *baru* into a monotonous standardized language and performance that catered to a neoliberal and highly capitalist society.

The progressive Wayang and vernacular increasingly catered to their communicative intentions, framing the traditional repetitive *mantras*, *pantuns*, *Kata ganda berirama*, and other

47

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

literary genres, as antiquated. Wayang *moden* and *baru* required standardized scripts, rather than the traditional improvised, poetic, localized improvisations, which many dalangs reinforced through their separation and identification of a standard-non standard binary (Sweeney 1972), and hence a pure-impure binary. Many of my ethnographic communities, in agreement with Mahathir's views, acknowledged the fact that the new and emerging dominant linguistic and sociopolitical values of the 1970s-1990s contributed to the betterment of Malay society, as opposed to the detrimental effects of old indulgent poetic Malay. New language-(national)identity linkages emerged through these new ideologies and the reappropriation of cultural commodities, to legitimize the socializations of a new, modern, neoliberal Malayness, yet to sever interethnic channels. One discussant, an Indian Malaysian woman in her late 40s, commented as follows:

> In the 1980s, the early 1980s, we had Muslim neighbors. After dinner each day, we'd knock on the fence and share dinner. Our food had pork, sometimes wine based. They loved it. Now, we don't talk.

> (personal interaction 2017)

One Malay woman, in a high-level admin role at the university commented that,

> up until the 1980s, during the Mahathirian era, UM (the University of Malaya) was selling beer and other alcohol on campus, to maintain great relations between groups, and to give the university a global feel.

> (personal interaction 2014)

Yet, in 2016, in one of the campus colleges, two Chinese mainland students had placed several slices of pork in the college kitchen refrigerator, which were found by other students and reported. Hundreds of students were immediately evacuated, the whole college was disinfected and an exorcism was conducted, while police tape around the college prevented entry for several weeks.

Methodical Framework

Immediately following the turn of the 21st century, I began my work on Malay cultural forms and its language, partly owing to the complex and formidable goings on in the regions, partly owing to its involvement in the growth of ASEAN, and partly owing to the fact that the Malay cultural heritage is a complex one, linguistically, culturally, religiously, and so forth. For this ethnography,

48

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

I have for approximately two decades interacted with Wayang performers, Wayang communities, and Wayang scholars. As with any fruitful ethnography, my involvement with Wayang communities has been nothing short of highly active, attending performances held for entertainment and spiritual purposes (healing, exorcisms, and so forth) in Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, and elsewhere. This has thus become a multi-site and multi-modal ethnography, the data collection for which has included performances, texts, ideologies, and media, to build a holistic investigation of the Malaysian Wayang and its shift in language and society over the past half century.

To analyze the government's efforts throughout the 1960s-2010s to alter social structure and ideology, and to effect change in the Malay language, and to document the government's efforts to remove critical voice from the Wayang and larger society, I draw on an abductive approach (Blaikie 2007). Through such an approach, I categorize and locate the semiotic typologies of social and cultural contexts, by combining participants' accounts with interpretations of these contexts, to reconstruct social phenomena. Novak (2001) describes abduction as a reasoning process, beginning in observation, then moving to description, through a recursive recalibration of findings and cross examining these with participant accounts, literature, and the interpretation of the researcher. Here, I identify typologies that 'fit' with social processes (Schutz 1963), to describe the shifting of language and society through government efforts to curtail what Mahathir (1970) has labelled as superfluous culture and communication.

Discussion

Wayang Structure and Symbolism

Owing to a crossover of symbolisms between the Wayang lama and society, society did at the time of high popularity of the Wayang *lama* also employ such symbolisms, to accomplish its communicative and ideological intentions. The appropriation of these symbolisms mediated the centrality of the Wayang *lama* and its ideologies, not least of which were its cosmological underpinnings, language parallelisms and poetics, political satire, spiritualism, social structure, and rituals, which also concomitantly appeared throughout larger society, creating socio-spiritual linkages between Wayang performance and society.

49

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

The Ramayana ideologies and cosmologies in the Hikayat Sri Rama and Cerita Maharaja Rahwana narratives, formed the following (c.f. Osnes 2010; Sweeney 1969):

Ramayana ideologies and cosmologies	
The cerita	Trunk and branch stories
The cerita ranting or cerita pokok	Twig narrations
The cerita bunga	Flower narrations
The cerita daun	Leaf narrations

With the dalang as historian, scholar, medium, healer, and prophet, the Wayang *lama* long forged symbolic linkages between village cultural lineages and spiritual forces. Here, the dalang would create back and forth circular ethical discourses between the performance and audiences, thus constructing its circular symbolic tensions, such as the tension between good and evil (Blackham 1960; Osnes 1992), and the tension between perception and imagination.

At the Wayang *lama*, audiences would experience a tensioned perceptual givenness of presence and their imaginary givenness of absence, a conflict that would shift their perceptions of reality to generate new conceptual possibilities (Sokolowski 1992), and to intensify the circularity between Wayang symbols. Here, performance assumes an asymptotic yet metonymic 'almost reality,' as the shadow juxtaposes its role as signifier and as signified / representamen. These ephemeral cyclic actions, from and to nothingness, elicit an epiphany, as the shadow symbolizes a cyclic departure from and return to primordial simplicity, to effect a deep subconscious atavistic rituals. More significantly, this 'cyclophoric' (producing a cyclic force of excitement, my term) process heightens the audience's attention (Steinman 1986).

Yeo Hyeok Seng (personal interaction 2014) discusses that one symbolic tension is the Wayang's situatedness within the heaven-earth binary, in *playana* celestial realms comprising physical, cultural, and ideological spaces. A parallelism forms between the binary nodes at the edges of these tensions, where these two nodes perpetually reference each other in cyclophoric motion. Wayang lama and its spirituality had a secular purpose, drawing parallels between the altered states of the body and societal ideology. A socio-emotional moderation of the *semangat* (spirit) structured and motivated Wayang spirituality, reflexively shaping socio-sensibility and ideologies, to thus forge Wayang-social linkages. Wayang lama had aesthetic intentions, that is, to manipulate the psycho-social animist binary *angin* (literally wind, metaphorically emotion/mood), drawing on processes external to the human condition. If you were to present yourself as a legitimate dalang, you would need access to your *angin*. Add to this, the *gerak hanim*, the shifting of the aesthetic, a *lepas angin* (move wind/emotion), and *nafsu* (an insuppressible,

50

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

permanent lust which people must control and correctly express) of all Wayang participants, required a highly democratic cyclophoric interaction between performance and social ideology. As such, the Wayang *lama* was replete with circular back-and-forth parallelisms, such as the movements between larger cosmic symbolisms external to the Wayang, and its repeated re-enactment of the circle of creation;

Wayang hierarchy of creation	
The panggun microcosmos	Symbolizes the larger macrocosmos
The axis mundi	Connects the sky (top), earth, nether world (below) (Buck 1975)
The kelir	Separates those conjuring and the blessed

In Wayang *lama*, the slicing the *kelir* by the dalang removes all separation to connect audiences with Wayang worlds, and to hence shift the parallelisms and cyclic tensions, though still intensifying semiotic differentials between the binary nodes. As Ulbricht (1972) notes, the *kelir* represents visible material and invisible non-material worlds, intensifying these Wayang semiotic binaries and their separation which are in tension, creating a circularity between real and imaginary signifiers, yet is reinforced by music, and the *tarik selampit* (poetry). Together with this, the Wayang lama narrative contains folkloric-type movements, where ultimately, the salvation-bearing figure renounces comfort, defeats evil, and returns home more righteous than at first, as an ongoing circular pattern at many levels. Central to the placement of spiritual symbolisms is the following scheme, all parts of which would remain in tension, yet as a metaphor for the human body:

The Wayang world metaphor for the human body	
Deities (top)	The intellect
Carnal beings (middle)	The emotion
Demons (bottom)	The instinct/movement

To effect the spiritual ascetic intentions of the Wayang *lama*, one must repeatedly move hierarchically through these functions, from which Wayang's spiritualism draws the *nafsu* (Dibia 2004). To represent this hierarchy, the symmetrical *pohon beringin* (tree-of-life) puppet creates a circular tension between left and right parallels. The *pohon beringin* frames the Wayang microcosm phenomena and objects, to symbolize the Wayang in all of its entirety (Matusky 1997); temporarily, spatially, symbolically, spiritually, and ideologically (Yousof 2004).

51

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

The cyclophoric tensions and linkages also appear between the plot structure and its theme, while transitioning across which, the symbolisms (shadows, deixis of deities, puppet ephemerality, ethics of the narrative) undergo code conversion (Solomonik 2006). A weakening of either would rupture the circular *panggung* semiotic differentials. While Wayang music, narratives, and visuals take on a temporally repeating cyclical form, the Gamelan musical ensemble interacts with the performance and audience, through a synmediation (symbiotic mediation) process. Matusky (1997) notes that, in hearing the Wayang orchestra, people uncontrollably sit mesmerized and entranced, which the government saw as sacrilegious. Similarly, Wayang *lama* advocated temporal circularity within its cosmological architecture, as dalangs connected sequences of micronarratives, each with its independent micro-finality. The rigid non-expressiveness of puppets, as a spatiotemporal freezing, would signify a two-dimensional chronotopical entrapment in planar space, yet the temporally repetitive and circular back-and-forth movement of these puppets, perpendicular to the *kelir*, would signify an ephemeral 'growth-ungrowth.'

With the shift to Wayang baru/moden, through a politics of despiritualization, the semiotic differentials within these binaries and circular tensions disappeared, thus denigrating Wayang symbolisms and its potency as a critical voice. As Eddin Khoo comments, "Traditional Wayang was very back-and-forth, now all gone. Modern styles are slapstick, linear" (personal interaction 2015). This politicization of the Wayang *lama* altered the semiotic repertoire of not only the Wayang, but also of its society, becoming a linearization of Wayang and societal poetics and symbolisms.

Language Ideologies and the Wayang Genre

The performances of dalangs were violating government policy during the transition, requiring that they perform in secrecy. During the decline of old Wayang (*lama*), a new language variety was emerging, *bahasa baku* (standard language), whose intention was to standardize the Malay language throughout Malaysia on many levels, including the phonetic. Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim introduced *bahasa baku* in the late 1980s, with the assistance of scholars from the University of Malaya (Asmah Haji Omar) and others. President Mahathir opposed baku, and in 1998, halted its use, thus reverting to older standardized varieties. In that ten-year period, the variety expanded to schools and larger society, as a medium for STEM oriented subjects.

Between the 1970s and the 2000s, poetic Malay largely disappeared from officialdom, and barely survived as a vernacular. This politically powerful officialdom, combined with religious guidelines and policy, forced this vernacular into a linguistic cleansing, to remove poetics and superfluous aesthetics. At the time, an Arabization and Islamization of the Malay language was also in progress, to simplified, shorten, and accelerate standard Malay. As Khoo (2015) explains,

52

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

in the 1980s, *bahasa baku* began. All beautiful traditional nuances and their circularity disappeared … Old Malay is a dead language. The entire poetic structure of Wayang has been lost.

Yet the government's ulterior or greater motive in removing old Malay from textbooks was to align with and resolve Chinese opposition to the use of old Malay and the Jawi script in school systems (Asmah Haji Omar, Personal interaction 2020). Concurrent to this, the same process was transpiring in Wayang, aiming for the same outcome in both language and symbolic processes. The PAS government certainly forced this shift in the state of Kelantan, where standardized 'scripts' (re)written in *bahasa baku* mirrored national neoliberal interests, ethnic standardization, priority to Malay society, and the strengthening of relations with Chinese communities. The new Wayang was strictly communicative, and not circular, poetic, nor did it intend to reference anything non-Islamic.

Language Ideologies and the Wayang Genre

A reversion to traditional Malay began, as original or alternative genres entered the vernacular, and satire and subversion again were positioned to substitute the disappearing poetics. These poetics previously pervaded vernacular and Wayang *lama*, which contained a proliferation of synonym and metaphor. Yet, in modern registers,

> words are less interesting, syntax is shorter, less rhythmic and poetic. Less lyrical. Now it's communicative. Traditionally, Malay wasn't communicative. It's by nature very lyrical, very poetic, not didactic. But young politicians are again beginning to deploy charisma and sindiran (satire).
>
> (Khoo, Personal interaction 2014)

In the Excerpts 1 – 4 (below), I indicate the shortening of rhetoric over the several decades following the new government policies on Wayang, at the cost of this 'cleverness.' A proliferation of examples appeared that evidence language shift in both Wayang and large society vernacular. I have lifted Excerpts 1 – 4 from Sweeney (1994), but have discussed these with several dalangs, one of whom, dalang Pak Yuso, has somewhat altered these.

53

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

Wayang *lama*	Aaaaaaahh, tuan hamba duduk la, sebab kami ni nak 'tidur- beradu' di atas 'katil-tilam-permaidani'
	Aaaaaaahh, sir, make yourself comfortable by sitting, because we're wanting to 'sleep-slumber' on this 'bedbase-mattress-floormat'.
Wayang *moden*	Aku ak tidur, jange caro ko aku.
	I want sleep, don't bother me.

Excerpt 1

Wayang *lama*	Hah...Patik sembah awak ayam kampung, khalifah kampung, keluar-jauh, tanam-dalam, gantung-tinggi ... haaa
	Hah...I your subordinate serve/present you with a village chicken, the 'king of the village' (chicken-as-village-superior metaphor), far- exited (wandered), embedded-deeply, highly hanging...haaa
Wayang *moden*	Ini ayam bagus
	Here's a good chicken.

Excerpt 2

Wayang *lama*	Aaah...Adinda tuan Puteri Sita Dewi, takdop la ore yang comel, kesayangan, seelok rupa, tingkah laku, anak desa yang kena .... Aaaa
	Aaah...my younger sibling dear-respectable Princess Sita Dewi, there's no other person as adorable, as loved by everybody, as good in facial features, and in behavior, as you, you're indeed a true country child...Aaaa
Wayang *moden*	Puteri Sita Dewi, cantik nya mu, napok indah.
	Princess Sita Dewi, you're pretty, look wonderful.

Excerpt 3

Wayang *lama*	Caaamm ooohhh, bertenang, kun kun, caaamm ooohhh
	Like ohhhh, begging for calmness, calm calm, like oooooh
Wayang *moden*	Eeeeeeeeeeeeee
	Aaaaaaah

Excerpt 4

54

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

The satirically subversive formulaic pantun once pervaded political speeches and film monologues. Comparing this traditional pantun (Hill 1955) with the current pantun, evident becomes the disappearance of connotation and poetics, and references to body, sex, sensuality, and beauty, all of which have been replaced by a subservience to political apparatuses, and an ornamentalism of leadership and materialism, praise for royalty, politicians and their families, and marketable commodities. Similarly, in Wayang *lama*, the language went 'beyond the text,' while pervading Wayang-community boundaries, seeping into larger society (Sather 2005). Pak Yusof and Yeo Hyeok Seng both confirm that Wayang *lama* often crossed these boundaries to enter vernacular and other practices, such as exorcisms (Matusky 1993; c.f. Hanks 1996). Here, dalangs must experience and even live the characters and narratives on and off the *panggung* (Sweeney 1994).

Wayang *lama* mirrored bahasa *lama* (Sweeney 1972), in that rhetoric would begin with a structured narrative, would move to an unstructured narrative, followed by satire, and then would return to a structured narrative, as a cyclophoric process. Clown and peasant characters in comical Wayang *lama* would engage in scatological bawdy innuendo to provide insults (Blackham 1960; Wright 1980), as well as a lampooning of the law, through subversive language. These stylized satirical poetics became cues for social commentary (Sweeney 1972), which the larger community would popularize.

The following more complex passages exemplify the circumlocution in Wayang *lama*, where the character would extensively describe another person, not permitted in the Islamically oriented Wayang *moden* register:

Sauk 'ngan gelang kaki, gelang tangan, dukuh isi leher, siapan seorang perempuan yang cantik, sebaik rupa.
Wear anklets, bracelets, pendants covering the neck, preparations for a beautiful woman so fair in appearance. (Sweeney 1994)
Excerpt 5

Formulaic parallelisms, that is, set phrases repeated in similar form (Sweeney 1994), now absent in Malay baku, prevailed in the Malay lama, and its permainan register. Traditional vernacular contained Wayang formulaisms (Hashim 2006; Malay concordance project 2016), at multiple levels of complexity (rhyme, synonymicity, assonance, alliteration). The underlying feature of parallelism in Malay and Wayang *lama* was the pair, as phonological, semantic, morphological, syntactic, or discursive. These reduplicate dyadic sets stylized social language (exorcisms, incantations, celebrations, performance) through recurrent reduplication. Malay *lama* promoted parallelism to a canon (c.f. Jakobson 1968 for a discussion on poetics), where

55

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

dyads grounded social ideologies, thus encouraging circular language and cultural models (c.f., Fox 2014), and grounding society's aesthetic intentions, as in Excerpt 6 below.

Makan tak lalu, mandi tak basah, tidur tak lenah.
Eating (yet) un-full, showering (yet) unclean, sleeping (yet) unrested (Sweeney 1994)
Excerpt 6

Kata ganda berirama (bounded rhyming pairs), as simple parallelisms, contain paired words in the form of phonetic complements (Table 1 below). The individual words alone do not have a semantic value. In *peribahasa* (unbounded pairs), both parts of the phrase can function independently, but can also act to couple semantically and phonetically, thus strengthening the circularity of the phrase. This complexity and circularity increase when combining each of the pairs with other objects, such as in pair juxtaposition.

Bounded pair	Semantic	Literal	Modern
baik-baik-belaka	very good	baik(good)-belaka(all)	baik/mari
basa-basi	politeness/courtesy	basa(polite)-basi(stale)	sopan
bukit-bukau	hilly	bukit(hill)-bukau(hit)	bukit-bukit
cola-cala	idle speech	cola(talk)-cala(talk)	bual-ual

Table 1. Kata ganda berirama (bounded rhyming pairs)

Unbounded pair	Semantic	Literal	Modern
Daki-dunia	world treasures	daki(stain)-dunia(world)	harta dunia
Jadi-umang-umang	person who sponges	jadi(become)-umang-umang(hermit crab)	menyamar
Jejak-jejak-bara	almost falling	jejak(trail)-bara(ember)	hampir jatuh
Angit- berjangkit	sense traversing generations	angit(bug)-berjangkit(infectious)	keturunan

Table 2. Peribahasa (unbounded pairs)

In complex parallelisms (quatriants) phrases can 'double-up' pairs with other words, pairs, or phrases, to produce the complex formations, as in Examples 1-3 below.

56

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

The unbounded pair *diri-cancan*

   integrates with *sama*(same) into the formula

Sama-diri, sama-cancan

   Standing/remaining upright, remaining erect

Example 1

Berkasih-sayang

   Love and cherish

      Juxtaposes with 'stylized' formulas to produce thefollowing two possibilities:

Berkasih-sayang, reman-laman

   Loving cherishing, friends intimends),

      Integrates to become

Berkasih ke aku sebanyak mana, *sayang* ke aku sebanyak mana

   How much (s/he) loves me, how much (s/he) cherishes me

Example 2

Siang-malam

   Day and night, all day all night

      would form

Siang-jadi-malam, malam-jadi-siang

   Day becomes night, night becomes day

Tak-tahu-siang, tak-tahu-malam

   Doesn't know day, doesn't know night

      Combining these heightens parallelism:

Tak-tahu siang-jadi-malam, tak-tahu malam-jadi-siang

   Doesn't know that day becomes night, doesn't know that night becomes day

Example 3 (Sweeney, 1994)

57

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

Triplets (three-word phrases) would also couple in parallelism. As in the following example:

Tengok-fatop-kelih
Looks, studies, sees
Example 4 (Sweeney, 1994)

Concluding Notes

Parallelism and reduplication were societally framed as an elevated register in both Wayang *lama* and in vernacular until the mid-20th century, as they were in other regions, such as Indonesia (Fox 2014). Similarly, an increase in the circularity of the language would correlate positively with its symbolic strength, whereas a lesser deployment of parallelism would reduce the speaker's social or political agency in their efforts to contest political apparatus. The use of this reduplication constituted a sociosemiotic strategy through which to deconstruct political apparatus, the use of which was becoming increasingly arduous, owing to the government's soft approach, and the failure of this reflexively compounded a reduction of social agency.

The reduction of use of *permainan* and *tarik selampit* minimized the poetic significance of utterances, and hence their cyclophoric effectiveness. More precisely, the eliminating of this parallelism and associated circularity may well have curtailed the agencies of Malay society and its speakers. A direct, denotative, and linear interaction and performance facilitated compliance with new policy and government's intentions to shape society. Many dalangs objected to this removal of circularity, but had little option but to comply, following government force and their need to sustain their livelihood, and freedom, and to feed their families.

Yet, Malay society has long attempted to palliate political discourse in interesting ways, and more so at present with new technologies, and through language and performance poetics, which Jaffe (2009) pinpoints as a meta-sociolinguistics. By the mid- to late-1990s, Malaysian society had well begun to re-interpret governmentality, and to rebel against the government suppression of the arts, following the renewed interest in traditional Malaysian film and performance. This trend aligns with Blaikie's (2010) notion of the fact that society seeks to interpret social phenomena during ruptures in social progress. This resurgence is apparent in the efforts of younger generations rediscovering Malay cultural performance and heritage, to explore language and its transformative ability to subvert social oppression, as well as a polysemiosis which can critically afford speakers ways through which to palliate these government efforts, therefore summoning dialectic processes that acquire multiple indexical meanings (Agha 2003, 2007; Johnstone 2011).

58

Casting Shadows over Malay:
Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

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59

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JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

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60

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Palliating Society's Critical Voice by Desemiotizing Wayang Performance and Register
JALA, The Journal of Asian Linguistic Anthropology

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61

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