

# ***Panakawan's Discourse of Power in Javanese Shadow Puppet during the New Order Regime: From Traditional Perspective to New Historicism***

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***Abstract:** Wayang kulit (shadow puppet) has not only been an entertainment; it is a medium to disseminate Javanese values to the public. Therefore, wayang kulit has been a site of power game. Those who could control it have their best opportunity to pass their values to the public. Throughout its history, those in power since the colonial time until the New Order regime had successfully 'used' this medium to 'educate' the public. The New Order regime, for one thing, had used this medium well. Wayang kulit promoted Suharto as an equal of Semar, a wise, god-like character. It also promoted Golkar as the most powerful political party in the New Order Era. Feudalism in wayang kulit was also used to reinforce a feudalistic regime of New Order.*

***Key words:** shadow puppet/wayang kulit, panakawan, clown, power, new order, values, biases*

Puppetry has been a part of the Asian theatre for centuries. One of the homes of puppetry in Asia is Indonesia, where it is usually called *wayang*. The Indonesian *wayang* "has been acclaimed the world over for its unique character of preserving the old traditions and techniques as primitive a form as is conceivable while being a medium of drama capable of satisfying a wide variety of tastes, both rustic and urban" (Tilakasiri, 1968, p. 49). There are at least 28 kinds of *wayang* in Indonesia, 17 of which are made of leather, 5 are made of wood, 1 is made of paper, and the rest are either in the form of masks or human beings as puppet actors (Guritno, 1988, p.14). Unfortunately, some of these puppets are already extinct and some others are in the process of extinction. Some, however, especially *wayang kulit/wayang purwa* (shadow puppet) in the island of Java, remain extant and maintain their popularity.

The Javanese *wayang kulit/wayang purwa* (*kulit* means leather and *purwa* means origin/beginning) performs the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* tales. These tales have often been compared with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece (Sears, 1996, p. 1). According to Sears the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* stories are much more alive in India and Indonesia today than the stories of Homer are in Europe and America (p. 1). She further notes that the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* stories are not only performed in human and puppet theatres to celebrate national and regional holidays, but they are read avidly in novels, romances, and comic books; and the characters appear in creative commercial guises in radio and television programming (p. 1). It is believed that the tales were originally written in India between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> BC and compiled by a Brahman called Wyasa<sup>1</sup> (Bandem & Murgiyanto, 1996, pp. 38-39). In Indonesia, these ancient tales dated back to the kingdom of King Airlangga (1019-1043 AD) (Guritno, 1988, p. 29). Sears even argues that the Indonesian version might date back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and possibly much earlier, when they traveled from India to the Indonesian islands. By the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, the stories were sung in Old Javanese meters and performed as shadow plays (pp. 1-2).

The origin of the shadow puppet itself, however, has always been debated by traditional historians. The Ceylonese theatre historian J. Tilakasiri (1968), although he admits that it is so much veiled in obscurity, seems to believe that it originated from India, as the tales did (p. 8). It means that *wayang kulit* is a certain variant of the Indian shadow puppet. The Dutch historian G.A.J. Hazeu, on the other hand, contends that even though the tales are from India, *wayang kulit* is originally Javanese. He maintains that it is not from India since none of the main terminology that refers to the performance techniques is in Sanskrit (Guritno, 1988, p. 30). Whichever is right is now up to traditional historians to prove, if they could at all.

That the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* tales are from India is no question. They traveled to Indonesia together with the spread of Hinduism. The main characters in *wayang kulit*, therefore, are similar to those in the Indian shadow puppet. New characters, however, have been developed since no tales that have become the blood of a culture for centuries avoid acculturation. Some of the original Javanese characters in

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<sup>1</sup> In Hindi it is spelled Vyasa.

*wayang kulit* are *panakawan*, the Javanese clowns. As uniquely Javanese characters and dressed as common people, unlike other characters who are kings, queens, or knights, *panakawan* gives liberty to the *dalang* (puppeteer) to address the audience directly without having to use the formal court language.

For the description of *panakawan*, without doubt we owe traditional historians for their meticulous efforts to “uncover the truth” about *wayang kulit*. J. Tilakasiri (1968) in his sweeping book about the puppet theatre of Asia says:

The element of humor and comic relief, which must necessarily find its place in a long performance of this kind, is a very marked feature of the Javanese shadow theatre. Three stock characters, the pot-bellied Semar, the impish Gareng, and the awkward Petruk, are most lovable clowns of the *wayang*. There is also a fourth added to the group, Bagong, who is similar to Semar in appearance. They are also known as *Panakawan* (scholars), the faithful servants of Arjuna or his son Abhimanyu, accompanying their master on his adventures. (pp. 58-59)<sup>2</sup>

The word “scholars” as the English equivalent of *panakawan* I find misleading since as common people they cannot be more educated than their masters. Pandam Guritno gives a better definition of *panakawan* by his semantic analysis. He suggests that *panakawan* derives from the words *pana* and *kawan* which mean, respectively, “understand thoroughly/wisely” and “friend.” *Panakawan*, therefore, means wise friends (p. 80). With this definition, although they have the “wisdom,” they can also be simple people as servants usually are.

They are wise servants because the father, Semar, is actually a god—Sang Hyang Ismaya—who chooses to become a servant of the upright knights (Bustomi, 1995, p. 191). In Tilakasiri’s language, Semar, whom he relates to Vidusaka of Sanskrit literature, is “identified with supreme divine power” (p. 59). Pandam Guritno even goes further to the symbolism of Semar and his sons. Semar, he says, symbolizes *karsa* (will), Gareng symbolizes *cipta/akal* (mind), Petruk symbolizes *rasa*

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<sup>2</sup> The show usually starts at 9 or 10 p.m. and ends at about 5 or 6 a.m. (before sunrise). Tilakasiri makes a lot of spelling mistakes such as in the word *Panakawan*. Unlike Hindi, Javanese uses ‘w’ instead of ‘v’.

(feeling), and Bagong symbolizes *karya* (work) (pp. 81-87). The "artist," therefore, is Petruk, who usually leads his brothers to entertain their master when he is sad.

Within the plot of the shadow play, the *panakawan* usually appear after midnight, which Groenendael (1985) calls the "second act"<sup>3</sup> (p. 175). Their appearance is usually called *gara-gara*. In some ways *gara-gara* functions as an interlude before the plot reaches climax and resolution.<sup>4</sup> *Gara-gara* can happen for more or less than an hour, depending on the *dalang*'s need and ability to improvise, in which the *dalang* can perform comic bits and "contextualize" the performance. The comic bits usually consist of jokes which are sometimes just a play of words.

PERMADI.<sup>5</sup> Nala<sup>6</sup> Gareng, which forest is this, Nala Gareng.

GARENG. Master, if you ask me, it is the forest in which we get lost.

PETRUK. O, Reng, don't embarrass us. If you don't know, say it frankly. I don't think it will be a problem.

GARENG. I am telling the truth. The truth is this is the forest where we get lost.

PETRUK. Your master asked you the name of the forest, not the place.

GARENG. If the question is about its name, I don't know. Who cares to name a forest? I don't think all who are here<sup>7</sup> know when the forest was born, they don't know who the father was, either.

SEMAR. Hush, stop. Stop! You don't act like a decent human being's son. [You]

Can't control yourself...! (Anonymous, p. 21)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There is actually no word that equals act in *wayang kulit* terminology. She seems to use it to help English readers understand.

<sup>4</sup> There are also some other interludes before it, which are shorter. Usually it is for the women servants of a princess, Cangik and Limbuk. We can never take it as a rule, however, since in some stories the women clowns do not appear and in others, one of the *panakawan* might appear since the beginning of the shadow play. In either case, the *gara-gara* interlude is always there.

<sup>5</sup> Arjuna's name when he was young.

<sup>6</sup> Gareng is sometimes called Nala Gareng.

<sup>7</sup> He refers to the audience.

<sup>8</sup> I translated it from an anonymous text in my personal collection of a complete script of *Parta Krama* (Arjuna/Permadi's Marriage). This kind of text is usually used by beginners to learn the art of playing *wayang kulit*.

An inexperienced *dalang* usually uses these kinds of bits—out of their own stock or of their training—since usually he is not yet skillful enough to improvise and manipulate the audience. A very experienced *dalang*, who is usually well-known, can improvise by satirically commenting on what happens in the society. Tilakasiri observes that “the *dalang* . . . entertain(s) the audience with jokes of a topical nature. If he finds the audience receptive, he digresses and alludes to social and political problems with pungent wit” (p. 59). Of course, it needs an experienced, skillful, and knowledgeable *dalang* to do it.

A good *dalang* can also contextualize the shadow play in such a way that the ancient story can fit the contemporary situation. Van Groenendael (1985)—thanks to her hard work in transcribing and translating a shadow performance for a Ph.D. thesis she wrote in Free University, Amsterdam—gives a good example of Petruk’s dialog with a disciple of the hermit guru Abiyasa. The disciple (Cantrik) abandons his wife and children because he finds that life is meaningless, and he wants to be a hermit. In this dialog about poverty, says Van Groenendael, Petruk replies to the disciple:

PETRUK. After letting your remarks sink in, I feel ashamed on the one hand but not ashamed on the other. The way in life is, in fact, for people to end up being disillusioned. But it does not matter. A person tries to win and then turns out to have lost. If that isn’t disillusionment . . . he will look again, but end up being disillusioned again. Searching and being disillusioned, that is what life is all about. Believe me! Come to think of it, what you have said is true, Cantrik,<sup>9</sup> true! But well, even if it is true, if everyone were to live their lives like you, a fine mess we’d be in then . . . (p. 194)<sup>10</sup>

According to Van Groenendael, who must have attended the performance and taped it, the *dalang* used Petruk “to give most apt expression to the general feeling of impotence to do anything to improve their situation prevailing among the population of this area<sup>11</sup> (who are) threatened with

<sup>9</sup> *Cantrik* means disciple. Since he is a common man, his name is not mentioned. Cantrik therefore becomes his name.

<sup>10</sup> I cut considerably owing to the space limit. See the complete transcript in Van Groenendael’s book.

<sup>11</sup> In the village of Tugu, Central Java.

transmigration” (p. 194). Van Groenendael also notes that the audience was also reacting to him. One of the audience said, “He is right, Petruk is right,” another said, “*Pak*<sup>12</sup> *dalang* is like one of us. He is very clever and has intuited our situation exceptionally well!” (p. 194). Van Groenendael finally concludes, “. . . the audience’s enthusiasm and attention for the *dalang*’s presentation are greatest when he remains ‘close to home’ . . .” (p. 195).

Discussions as such work under the domain of traditional theatre history. Although values are discussed, they are not dealt with critically. Traditional historians often fail to notice that there are issues of power in any text. Therefore, *panakawan*’s discourse, especially which is related to values assigned to it, invites critical research. This paper aims at showing how discourse of power is not addressed in traditional theatre history and at dealing with the issues of power in the discourse of *panakawan* using new historicism/cultural poetics lens.

### The Absence of Discourse of Power in Traditional Theatre History

One of the problems in traditional theatre history, because of the basic belief that there is an objective truth, is that it does not usually deal with the issues of values and biases. For example, J. Tilakasiri (1968), the Ceylonese historian, seems to try to create an objective narrative (“the narrative”) of the Asian puppet theatre in his book *The Puppet Theatre of Asia*. Objective as it might seem, he does not realize that his narrative has engaged in certain values and biases. In his narrative about Indonesian puppet theatre, for example, he generally uses the Indonesian government’s “formal” interpretation of the complex puppet theatre world. For instance, without any critical comments he quotes a source from the Ministry of Education and Culture that says: “In short the *wayang* has embraced so many aspects of the life of the people that it was conceived as a means of education covering (i) the mystical, (ii) the ethical, (iii) the aesthetical,<sup>13</sup> (iv) the social and (v) the political education of man” (61). What kind of education is it? What does he mean by “the political education”? In the 1960s the New Order, an order that was challenged by the students and collapsed in 1998, was trying to develop its power. The

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<sup>12</sup> *Pak* is an address that more or less means Mr.

<sup>13</sup> It should probably be “aesthetic.”

Ministry of Education had been more an institution to control the students so that the political elite could develop and maintain their power. The “education” Tilakasiri quotes may simply mean “controlling the students (and the public)” so that they agreed with the government’s policies without any reserve. Therefore, although Tilakasiri may try his best to avoid his own biases (which is impossible), he attaches other’s biases in his narrative.

Van Groenendael, who has done a good job in investigating *wayang kulit* from the *dalang*’s perspective, is a good example of a careful traditional historian. She tries to “describe” and “discuss” the aspects of *wayang kulit* scientifically, by developing a scientific research method to maintain her objectivity. Nevertheless, she has also taken sides by her being objective. In the previous discussion of the dialog between Petruk and Cantrik, if she cares to be critical to the *dalang*, she should sense that even though Petruk’s monologue is enveloped with a philosophically sounding speech, the *dalang* actually spoke more on behalf of the establishment. *Wayang kulit*, which was once a court theatre, had been co-opted by the New Order establishment to deliver its propaganda. Transmigration had been one of the New Order’s biggest agendas to solve the overpopulation in Java by sending the poor to empty, sometimes unproductive, lands in under-populated islands.

If we extend the discussion, does not Van Groenendael work under the spirit of the ethnographic orientalism in which the Javanese are viewed as “the other”? Van Groenendael does see that the *dalangs* have become the disseminators of the messages of the “Development”—a New Order’s buzz-word. However, it seems that she doesn’t want to be engaged in political interpretations. She situates herself as a disinterested researcher, an intelligent Ms. Know All, who puts the Javanese as the object of her curiosity within a revolving world with Europe as its center. Without being aware, therefore, she has actually assigned two values: one is the Euro-centric lens through which she sees the *dalangs* as just the objects of her curiosity, the other is that she tacitly agrees (by being objective) with the prevailing values that operate in “the other’s” world she is observing.

In the traditional history of *wayang kulit* written by the native researchers, values actually are one of the objects of inquiry. However, the researchers see values as something objective to dig and uncover, not realizing that they themselves assign values in their inquiries, and without admitting that the inquiries involve their biases. The attempt usually takes

two forms. First, since *wayang kulit* is an oral literature, they try to write/or rewrite the stories. Second, they write about it.

Suwaji Bustomi (1995), for instance, has rewritten 57 stories from the *Mahabharata* in his book *Nanggap Wayang (Engaging Wayang)*. He was, however, too obsessed in preserving the values in *wayang kulit* so that his stories were burdened with messages. Even worse, Bustomi used too much "Development" jargon created by the New Order regime. One of the stories, entitled "*Peranan Panakawan terhadap Ketahanan Negara*" (*The Panakawan's Roles in the National Defense*), is about the *panakawan's* success in defending Amarta<sup>14</sup> from an invasion by Prabu (King) Manik Mahendra. Bustomi probably tried to contextualize the stories, but his contextualization was for the establishment by using jargon such as "*Ketahanan Negara*" (National Defense) which was often used to curb any underground political movements by condemning them as communists. Another example is seen in "*Sikap Semar terhadap Kurawa*" (*Semar's Attitude towards Kurawas*<sup>15</sup>):

Rice fields' as well as home industries' works are done with "*gotong royong*"<sup>16</sup> system, based on the general needs. That is why Klampis Ireng<sup>17</sup> village becomes *desa swa-sembada* (self-sufficient village) and *desa teladan* (model village) for other villages in Amarta. (p. 191)<sup>18</sup>

The underlined words are "Development" terminology created by the government to enhance the "success" of their programs, since only with economic success could the elite maintain their power.<sup>19</sup> It was also a reward given to a community if they were considered successful by the government. Local officials who could make their communities get the title of *desa teladan* could have the chance to climb the ladder. Therefore, oftentimes it was more important for the official than for the community to get such a title.

<sup>14</sup> Amarta is the *panakawan's* master's (Pandawa's) kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> Kurawas are Pandawas' cousins and enemy. Their kingdom is called Hastina/Ngastina.

<sup>16</sup> *Gorong royong* means helping one another.

<sup>17</sup> The name of the *panakawan's* village when Semar is the head.

<sup>18</sup> My translation from the Indonesian text.

<sup>19</sup> It has now turned out to be a back lash. Their effort to maintain the power has brought the economy to an incomprehensive free-fall.

The example of the second kind of research is done by Pandam Guritno (1988) entitled *Wayang, Kebudayaan Indonesia dan Pancasila (Puppet, Indonesian Culture and Pancasila)*<sup>20</sup>. He has done a good job in describing the aspects of *wayang kulit*, from its cultural background to its production details. Again, however, like Suwaji Bustomi he also worked under the spell of the grand design project of the modern Indonesian society engineered by the New Order. He even tried to find a connection between *wayang kulit* stories and the national basic principles, *Pancasila*. Although at that time most Indonesians accepted—and were even proud of—these principles, which were first introduced by the first President Soekarno, some found the excessive indoctrination irritating. There had been a deep resentment toward the government about this problem since they allowed only a single interpretation.

Another example, which is surprisingly curious, is a research done by St. Darmawijaya (1989) in his book *Pengabdian: Panakawan atau Hamba Yahwe? (Service: Panakawan or Yahwe's Servant?)* Here he tries to find the similarities between *wayang kulit* and the Bible tradition. It seems that it is his effort to introduce Christianity to the Javanese society. He must be quite aware that the values in a religion can easily be disseminated into a culture through the similarities between them. In his book, St. Darmawijaya tries to discuss *panakawan* as simple servants with authoritative moral force and Jesus Christ as the “Servant of man,” especially in the idea of a god being a man in Semar and God being a man in Jesus Christ.

Researches like those of Darmawijaya have also been done by the Moslems. In fact, Islam has used *wayang* as a means for its *syiar* (evangelism) for centuries. Islam, for instance, has even introduced *Serat Kalimasada* as Puntadewa's<sup>21</sup> lethal spell. *Kalimasada* is actually derived from *kalimah sahadat*, the Islamic profession of faith (see in Sears, pp. 48-50). The highest god in *wayang*, Sang Hyang Tunggal, I suppose, is also the Moslems' invention to change Hindu's polytheism<sup>22</sup> to Islam's monotheism. By doing so, the Hindu gods—which cannot simply be

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<sup>20</sup> *Pancasila* means “Five Basic Principles.”

<sup>21</sup> Puntadewa is the eldest of the Pandawas, King of Amarta.

<sup>22</sup> Of course, the Balinese, who are predominantly Hindus, still believe in polytheism and presumably have no such god.

eliminated—are given the angelic position. Semar, therefore, is an angel that becomes a man in the Islamic interpretation.

It is therefore very evident that *wayang* has never been free from values and biases. Traditional historians have long been taking it for granted. They tend to ignore the fact that they themselves assign values to the texts. They do discuss the values in *wayang*, but they see them as something they can dig and discover like paleontologists do to the dinosaurs' fossils. They even try to reconstruct *wayang* by putting a new flesh on the fossils, without realizing that by doing so they bury them again under the plastic flesh and create new fancy creatures out of their own imagination.

*Wayang kulit*, however, unlike some other *wayang* theatres, is by no means dead. It is still roaming the jungle of Javanese culture like the surviving rhinos. It might look awkward in the modern theatre world, but it invites enormous attention. Some try to capture it in a "cultural zoo" to save it from extinction, some try to preserve it in the "cultural habitat" either as a scientific object or simply as entertainment, some others even try to "tame" and "cage" it for their own agenda, hidden or overt. In either case, values and biases have taken place, and traditional historians have overlooked them.

Values and biases in the history of *wayang kulit* are best examined by cultural theoretical lens, which Charles E. Bressler (1999) calls "Cultural Poetics" or "New Historicism" (p. 236). In cultural poetics, "all texts are really social documents that not only reflect but also, and more importantly, respond to their historical situation" (p. 244). History is not seen as an object that is free from values, biases, ideologies, or even political agenda. Therefore, *wayang kulit* as a body of texts is the reflection of Javanese society and how the Javanese society responds to historical changes. The study of the history of *wayang kulit* using this perspective may start from the antiquity until the present time, but in this paper I shall limit the discussion in the New Order era. In this era, while other forms of traditional theatres were dying, *wayang kulit* survived very well. Some of the central issues that can be seen in *wayang kulit* in the New Order era were the issues of power since the New Order was run by a regime with an extremely strong power. *Wayang kulit*, as a form of art, was surely influenced by the game of power in the New Order. Therefore, it is quite interesting to see how *wayang kulit* artists (*dalangs*) responded to it.

This paper is the result of preliminary research of *wayang kulit* I plan to conduct. While in the 'real' research I will use more extensive materials, primary as well as secondary, in this paper I will focus my analysis on audio-recorded performances of *wayang kulit*. During the New Order (1965-1998), *wayang kulit* performances were recorded in tapes and broadcasted in radio stations all over East and Central Java. Whatever was said by the *dalangs*, consequently, was widely transmitted to *wayang kulit* audience. Therefore, an audio-recorded performance is one of the major materials to study. I selected three *dalangs* whose performances were tape-recorded: the late Ki Nartosabdo from Semarang, Ki Anom Suroto from Surakarta, and Ki Hadi Sugito from Yogyakarta. They all have been the most famous *dalangs* in their regions and even beyond. I got two works from each of them, from Ki Nartosabdo I got *Dasamuka Lena/Death of Dasamuka* (1985)<sup>23</sup> and *Bima Suci/Holy Bima* (1985), from Ki Anom Suroto I got *Semar Boyong/Semar Moved* (1989) and *Antasena Rabi/Antasena's Marriage* (1989), and from Ki Hadi Sugito I got *Petruk Dadi Ratu/Petruk Becomes a King* (1984) and *Semar Bangun Kayangan/Semar Builds Heaven* (1984). There are some other *dalangs* whose works are worth discussing such as Ki Manteb Sudarsono or Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno, but I found difficulties in finding their recorded works.

#### ***Panakawan's Discourse of Power in New Historicism's Perspective***

The descriptions of *panakawan* by the three *dalangs* are basically like the descriptions given by the experts I quoted in the introduction. As usual Semar is given many other names such as in Ki Nartosabdo's description in the *gara-gara* of *Dasamuka Lena*. Those names are Badranaya, Nayantaka, Dhudha Manang Munung, Wong Boga Sampir, and Drudyah Kunta Prasanta which respectively mean, a man with a moonlight smile, a man who can see death, neither a man nor a woman, a man who is a god or a god who becomes a man, and the servant of upright knights (Nartosabdo, 1985, cassette 5). More clearly about his being godly, Ki Hadi Sugito (1984) in *Petruk Dadi Ratu* says: "... kang sak nyatane Bathara Ismaya ngejowantah" which means "... who in reality is god Ismaya who becomes a man" (Cass. 5). Such descriptions clarify that

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<sup>23</sup> Year of performance.

Semar is a special *panakawan*. He is a god, he actually has more supernatural power than his masters, and he 'takes care' of his masters (Pandawa).

Semar's sons are also usually described, but the descriptions often end up in jokes about them. For example, in *Semar Bangun Kayangan*, Petruk is described as having a pointed chin which means having a lot of (clever) talks, being vast breasted which means being a gentleman, and having a big belly which means being fond of eating (Sugito, 1984, cass 5). Semar's sons, although less powerful supernaturally than their father, are also exceptional in that at times they can be more able than the masters. In *Petruk Dadi Ratu*, for instance, he can even beat Werkudara, the strongest among Pandawa, in a battle (Sugito, 1984, Cass. 8).

### Feudalism in *Wayang Kulit*

In the world of *wayang kulit* with *Mahabarata* and *Ramayana* tales as the main sources, power is regulated under feudalistic frame of thought. It is the world of gods, kings, and knights. In general, human beings are classified into two big categories: "*kawula*" (servants/common people), and "*gusti*" (masters). While the masters are represented by Pandawa and their relatives, the servants are represented by *panakawan*. The masters are usually pictured as having more (physical) power and skills (Suroto, 1989, *Semar Boyong* cass. 6), they also have better attitudes (Surata, 1989, *Antasena Rabi*, cass. 6) and, of course, they have more refined language. Even further, the masters own the *panakawan*. In *Semar Boyong*, when King of Astina, Duryudana, tells Queen Banowati that Astina can only be free from the plague that grips the kingdom by the presence of Semar, Banowati replies: "I will ask the owner, Janaka. I think he will give him (Semar) away" (Cass. 2).

The *panakawan* are pictured as dependent, both politically and economically, upon their masters. Politically, being servants, their fate is determined by the masters. *Panakawan* should show up in weekly "*pasewakan*" (meetings), and when they do not show up, the masters would look for them (Sugito, 1984, *Petruk Dadi Ratu*, Cass. 6). If they do not show up when they are needed, one of the masters may be angry. In *Semar Boyong*, when Semar does not show up, Werkudara (the second of the Pandawa) says, "... Pandawa without Semar will be fine. Even from now on Semar and his sons should not live in Amarta" (Suroto, 1989,

Cass 5). The sons, who happen to be there, can only talk to themselves jokingly that they would get “PHK.”<sup>24</sup>

As servants, they are also ready to die before their masters. For example, when Gareng fights King Welgeduwelbeh he says, “This is his *gedibal*.”<sup>25</sup> You can fight my king when I’m dead” (Sugito, 1984, *Petruk Dadi Ratu*, Cass. 8). In fact this is the common statement of anybody going to war protecting the king. The stock expression is “Step over my dead body before you fight my king/master.” This expression is usually used in battle scenes by novice as well as experienced *dalangs*. Even more, such an expression is used by children who play *wayang kulit* at home.

Economically, *panakawan* are poor people and most of the time are pictured as dependent to their masters. This can be seen in what is said by Sangkuni, who is ordered by King Duryudana to invite Semar to Astina: “Semar and his sons are servants and economically live below standard; if they are given prosperity, they will heed” (Suroto, 1989, *Semar Boyong*, Cass. 2). In the same story, when commenting on Janaka’s illness, Baladewa says, “Those cockroaches. If their master is healthy they eat from him. If the master is sick, they can only gaze blankly” (Cass 5). In fact, in almost all of the six records, there are always jokes and dialogs by the sons of Semar on how they expect ‘pocket money’ from the masters, how they need food from them, etc. Semar does say that they should live modestly (Sugito, 1984, *Petruk Dadi Ratu*, Cass 5), but it only shows that they are economically weak.

In the feudalistic world of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, everybody should be aware of the social hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy is, after the gods, the king. There are still many layers below the king before it finally comes to *panakawan*. Being at the bottom of the hierarchy, *panakawan* have layers above them to respect. Although in some cases the fact that Semar is a god makes the hierarchy circular, in general *panakawan* are the ones who finally give the services. When a god becomes a man, it seems he should give services to the rulers of the world.

Being *panakawan* is actually a fate as well as a choice. There is no ladder climbing since the top of the ladder only belongs to those who are blue blooded. In Hadi Sugito’s *Petruk Dadi Ratu*, Petruk does become a

<sup>24</sup> PHK stands for *Pemutusan Hubungan Kerja* which means being fired.

<sup>25</sup> Gareng uses the word “*gedibal*,” a very rough word used to call a servant.

king, but it is temporary because at that time the gods grant him. However, his becoming a king is a joke. He does not speak, behave, and think like a king; instead he does behave like a clown. When swearing, he would use an expression like “dengkulmu mlecet kuwi!” This expression is not likely used by the aristocracy since its translation might be equivalent to “You stupid fool!” Bagong himself, when facing King Welgeduwelbeh who is actually Petruk, says: “How come a king has no manner” (Cass. 8). This story, in turn, only becomes a reference when people make jokes about somebody who does not deserve a top position in an organization. They would say that s/he is like “*Petruk dadi ratu.*”

As stated by Suwaji Bustomi (1995), Semar chooses to be a *panakawan* (191). This is also said by Petruk in *Semar Bangun Kayangan* when he quarrels with Kresna that it is his choice. When Kresna calls him “*gedibal pituliku*” (which approximately means the lowest of the servants) he says that although he is “*gedibal pituliku*” that is his business, his own choice. Then he tells Kresna that he should not differentiate between “*kawula*” and “*gusti.*” Kresna needs to pay attention to people like him because they are the ones who help make him a king (Sugito, 1984, Cass 2). To *wayang kulit* feudalistic perspective, therefore, one may choose to be a servant, to be poor, because his job of helping the master is also noble. *Wayang kulit* lulls the servants/poor by telling them that being poor can be noble, and therefore they should not hurt the masters/rich. This can be seen in the dialog between Petruk and Antasena (the son of Werkudara who finally helps Petruk) below:

ANTASENA. You did not punch back, did you?

PETRUK. No.

ANTASENA. That's good. It means that you are real *Panakawan*. Although you can fist him back, that is your master [so that you are not allowed to].

PETRUK. That's what I mean. If other people know, that would be a shame. (Sugito, 1984, *Semar Bangun Kayangan*, Cass. 3).

Since becoming a servant is a choice, Petruk should not hurt the master, although the master is ready to kill him. This is one effective ‘philosophy of life’ to feed the poor so that they do not rebel. Feudalism, therefore, still flows in the blood of most Javanese and *wayang kulit* helps keep the blood flowing by its mythical stories as well as feudalistic ideology reenacted by the *dalangs*’ performances.

### Feudalism Reinterpreted

If it is observed more critically, feudalism in *wayang kulit* has actually been utilized by the New Order regime to control the country. For the Javanese, modernism is still mixed with traditional beliefs and in the mixed cultural values (modern and pre-modern) meanings can be ‘manipulated’—consciously or otherwise—to the benefits of those who are in power. Laurie J. Sears once discussed the relationship between *wayang kulit* and the Indonesian elite’s struggle of power both in the colonial and post-colonial times. She discussed, among others, how the Dutch in the colonial time dealt with *wayang kulit*, how revolutionary rhetoric developed in *wayang kulit* during Sukarno’s<sup>26</sup> time, how *wayang kulit* was manipulated during the struggle between the anti-communists and the communists (which ended up with the banishment of communism in Indonesia), and how Suharto<sup>27</sup> with his New Order used *wayang kulit* as a means of political control (see *Shadow of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* by Laurie J. Sears, 1996, Durham and London: Duke UP). Sears’ observation could be justifiable when we see some dialogs in the six records of the three *dalangs* we are discussing.

The masters in *wayang kulit* performances were often associated with the New Order rulers and officials. This was often very subtle so that less critical audience would not realize it. One clear example is what is said by Bagong in Ki Anom Suroto’s *Semar Boyong*. While discussing about being a good “*pamong*” (besides being the *pamong* /servant of Pandawa, Semar is also a “*pamong*”/head of a village), Bagong says that it is better to work in private sector than to work as officials since to work as officials means being watched by the people. If they have four cars, for example, people will think that they are the results of corruption (Suroto, 1989, Cass. 3). This dialog is of course a shift from Astina’s context to that of Indonesia. Anom Suroto was clearly discussing the Indonesian officials at that time instead of the officials in Amarta because in the original context of *Mahabharata* there were no cars yet. This is what is meant by Tilakasiri (1968) that a skillful *dalang* can ‘digress and allude to social and political problems’ (p. 59). In such a discourse, unconsciously the

<sup>26</sup> Indonesia’s first president. He was in power for 20 years and historians call his era “*Order Lama*.”

<sup>27</sup> Indonesian’s second president. He was toppled from the presidency in 1997 after ruling for 32 years.

audience was brought to believe that the kings and knights they were watching were the pictures of the New Order rulers and officials. Thus, the feudalistic ideas of the mythical past were brought to the present (the New Order era).

The topics of the discourse can also be changed to the New Order's topics. In *Antasena Rabi*, Ki Anom Suroto talks about 'gotong-royong (togetherness in helping individuals and the society), culture, and women's affair' (Cass. 5). In the New Order, *gotong-royong* was one of social customs that was utilized by the government to enhance the development programs. Culture, to the New Order government was often reduced to art which was used to show the "national identity." In the New Order, it seems that the national identity was like *wayang kulit* with its feudalistic ideology. Women affairs were often about women's trainings on how to take care of the family.<sup>28</sup> In *Semar Boyong*, Anom Suroto makes Limbuk, a woman *panakawan*, say that women should have five "M's": "Mengurus rumah tangga," "Meneruskan keturunan," "Mendidik anak," "Mengabdikan ke masyarakat," and "Mendampingi suami" which respectively mean taking care of the family, giving birth, educating the children, serving the society, and standing beside the husband (Cass. 2). This lesson under patriarchal ideology was one of the many lessons that the government wanted the women to learn.

Even further, *panakawan's* discourse also serves as a means of "public speech" to the government officials about how to be good officials. When discussing Semar in *Semar Boyong*, Petruk, representing the public, says that as a *pamong* Semar does have four principles: *wibawa* (charisma), *wicaksana* (wisdom), *sentosa* (strength), and *prasaaja* (modesty). He says that to get 'wibawa' a *pamong* should be honest, be fair in helping everybody without expecting anything, be strong mentally as well as physically, not be abusive of power, and finally live modestly (Suroto, 1989, Cass. 3). "Public speech" such as mentioned by Ki Anom Suroto was generally addressed to the lower rank officials who were themselves middle class or even lower class. The upper rank officials were not aware that they themselves were the ones who actually abused power.

With the *dalang's* freedom to manipulate *panakawan's* speech, the establishment's messages were delivered effectively. The *dalangs* would

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<sup>28</sup> It is also interesting to discuss *wayang kulit* from feminist perspective.

do it simply because they had always been under the establishment's patronage. During colonial time, driven by his political ambition, Mangkunegara VII, a sultan of one of the Javanese kingdoms who had close relationship with the Dutch, disseminated *wayang* stories to the village *dalangs* (Sears, 1996, p. 203). This led them to believe that attending the court schools would increase their popularity (p. 204). As they went to the court schools, they were "patronized by the courts, and were influenced by the hybrid Javanese-Dutch values which predominated to courts" (p. 204). During the New Order, the *dalangs* even had to take "*Penataran P4*"<sup>29</sup> (a kind of *Pancasila* workshop), so that they knew what to do to help enhance the development programs. Those who did not comply would risk their popularity, since in general only the establishment could afford to pay for the performances.

*Panakawan's* speech can also be a means of political propaganda. Semar has three children, and it happened that in the New Order there were three parties. Let's see how curious is Petruk's speech below:

PETRUK. Grandpa only has three children: 1. Gareng, 2. Petruk, 3. Bagong. Plus *ABRI* (the military) and *Pegawai Negeri* (Government Officials). Let the three of us unite. We need not show numbers now; we do it only when there is a general election. Gareng, Bagong, and I are one place, one language, one nation, and one country. Don't quarrel. Let's help Grandpa because he has now the will to develop the country. The development can work well if we work together in one "*cipta*," "*rasa*," "*karsa*"<sup>30</sup> to. We, young people, have heavy tasks. Our father's job was to free the nation. Our job is to "fill out" the freedom. Let's not fill out the freedom with quarrels, what would be the benefits of quarrels? In a battle, the winner becomes "*pindang*" and the loser becomes "*rempah*."<sup>31</sup>

BAGONG. But, you are the only one who is big and tall, so please protect your brothers.

<sup>29</sup> *P4* stands for *Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila* (Guidelines for the Comprehension and the Implementation of *Pancasila*).

<sup>30</sup> See the introduction.

<sup>31</sup> Another expression is "The winner turns charcoal and the loser turns ash," showing that both the winner and the loser suffer. In this context, Ki Anom Suroto uses *pindang* (salted fish) and *rempah* (chopped or shredded fish/meat.)

PETRUK. Don't worry, Gong. I will not use my being big and tall to step on my brothers. (Suroto, 1989, *Semar Boyong*, Cass. 3).

Even an uncritical member of the audience would immediately see that what Petruk means by children were the three existing political parties at that time: PPP, Golkar, and PDI.<sup>32</sup>

Who did the *dalang* speak for? We can be sure that he spoke for the establishment. The New Order government had the passion to develop the country on the expense of the political freedom of the people. In the political constellation of the New Order, apart from the three parties, there were two strong groups which supported the establishment: The military and the government officials. As groups they should not join the election, yet as individuals they automatically gave their votes to Golkar. Therefore, Golkar had always won the election with a very wide margin. Golkar was the party of the government which in some ways ran like a kingdom. The two small parties were there just to show the world that Indonesia was a democratic country, a democracy that was—as an expert once put it—“run by remote control.” Golkar, as Bagong requests, would happily ‘protect the brothers’ since with such an arrangement they could always keep the power to themselves. It was often said in ‘coffee break discussions’ that to make political moves, the top leaders of those ‘brothers’ should get the consent of the one who handled the remote control.

The remote control was, of course, in the hands of the “almighty” Suharto whom the *dalang* addressed with ‘grandpa.’ ‘Grandpa’ was developing the nation; he was the *Bapak Pembangunan*, which literally means the Father of Development (of the nation). Petruk's speech was a call to support the establishment, on the top of which was Suharto as the president. In fact, in the second half of the 1980s Indonesian economy was prosperous so that people would only accept such propaganda without vacillation. Suharto, to some people, was the subject of admiration, although to some he was also the subject of fear. He was the ‘king’ of the new feudalistic Indonesia, with Javanese neo-feudalistic ideology in its center.

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<sup>32</sup> PPP: stands for Unity for Development Party, Golkar (*Golongan Karya*) means Functionary Group, PDI stands for Indonesian Democratic Party.

Suharto (the grandpa), in the modern Javanese frame, was a king as well as a Semar. However, he was on the top of the hierarchy only. Although originally he was said to be a villager himself, the reference to Semar was taken only in his being father and protector of the country. To some people, he was probably even Semar the god, who had delivered the nation to prosperity. Suharto was never Semar the servant since he was the president, not a head of the village as Semar. At best, “the head of the village” may be used as a metaphor of “the head of the country” when it is addressed to Suharto. This “king” once talked about ‘*lengser keprabon*’ (stepping down from the throne) and ‘*madeg pandita*’ (becoming a *pandita*/guru). Unfortunately, he was too late to do it until finally the students made him step down. In the aftermath, he did not become a guru either.

## CONCLUSION

The history of Javanese shadow puppet has been investigated since the colonial time. However, traditional (positivistic) approach on history of Javanese shadow puppet neglects values and biases in it. Traditional historical study is obsessed with the ‘objective truth’ about Javanese shadow puppet and it finally falls into the descriptive account of the theatrical form as well as its development only. Using cultural poetics, we can investigate meanings related to those values and biases, and the issues of power can be dealt with critically.

From the discussion we can see that the feudalistic ideology as a consequence of the stories that are taken from the mythical *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* is brought to the modern performances. With a government that had unlimited power as the New Order once did, the feudalistic ideology could be used to legitimize its power and enhance its programs. In fact, the New Order had, consciously or not, used *wayang kulit* for their purposes through the mouth of the *panakawan*. The *dalangs*, therefore, were effective spokesmen of the establishment. Furthermore, we can note that some *dalangs* could speak ‘louder’ for the establishment, while some others spoke ‘unconsciously’ through their stories. From the three *dalangs* whose works are discussed in this paper, it is evident that Ki Anom Suroto spoke for the establishment more blatantly than the other two. The other two, on the other hand, spoke for the establishment more subtly or unconsciously.

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