ABSTRACT

INDEONESIAN WAYANG DURING THE “GUIDED DEMOCRACY,” “NEW ORDER,” AND “REFORMASI” ERAS: NEGOTIATING POLITICS, RELIGION, AND ENTERTAINMENT

By Thomas Charles Nagy

This paper analyzes and demonstrates the transformative character of wayang puppetry through the first three eras of Indonesian independence: the “Guided Democracy” (1945-1965), the “New Order” (1966-1998), and the “Reformasi” (1998-c.2001). This thesis posits that wayang is a ritual and needs to be investigated in terms of its complex relationship with religion, politics, and entertainment. Specifically, during the Guided Democracy wayang was utilized as propaganda, and as the bases for an emergent Indonesian nationalism. During the New Order wayang’s role as propaganda was further institutionalized by the rules of tetekon, which served to “normalize” and regulate wayang performances. In response to the government, many dalang (puppeteers) utilized “traditional” and innovative forms of entertainment to subvert the government while preserving their integrity through valid expressions of Javanese thirdness. Finally, wayang during the Reformasi serves as the ultimate demonstration of the reality of the social tensions created by the New Order government in that Reformasi wayang was utilized as a means to freely reflect and critique the totalitarian New Order regime.
INDONESIAN WAYANG DURING THE “GUIDED DEMOCRACY,” “NEW ORDER,” AND “REFORMASI” ERAS: NEGOTIATING POLITICS, RELIGION, AND ENTERTAINMENT

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents Gentarez Iteh and Natjeh Tjandra who experienced first hand all three of the tumultuous eras I write about in this humble paper.
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Introduction

My thesis is divided into three chapters; each contributing to my assertion that wayang is a performance with three interconnected dimensions: religious, political, and entertainment. As the performance has changed over time, so has the interconnectedness of these three dimensions. This is due to certain era-changing events in Indonesian history that have affected the people of Indonesia, and wayang in general. As social, political, and religious norms have slowly changed during the first sixty or so years of Indonesian independence, so has the wayang medium. Thus, the relationship between religion, politics, and entertainment is very complex, and requires careful attention to historical context in order to make sense of the many social, religious, political, and post-colonial strands that make up the character of contemporary wayang in Indonesia. I will ultimately demonstrate by focusing on Javanese forms of wayang in the 20th century that Indonesia has indeed gone through several complex historical social re-evaluations of wayang as a political and religious medium.

More specifically, my paper will explain and demonstrate the complex character of Indonesian wayang in the 20th century and how it was transformed into a national institution by the government, and thus initiated a subversive performance rhetoric that pervaded the wayang of the latter-half of the 20th century and served as a public means for critiquing and challenging the Indonesian government. What I mean by performance rhetoric is the ability of the communicator to implicitly convey messages in such a way at to propagate a certain message, goal, or agenda. Much of my analysis revolves around Indonesia’s two most iconic and influential politicians: Indonesia’s first president Sukarno, and his successor General Suharto. I assert that in building a unified Indonesian nation Sukarno utilized his Muslim/Javanese identity, Marxist ecumenicism, and other political policies to establish an Indonesian identity and nationalism that attempted to encompass all the diverse cultures that made up the new nation of Indonesia. Also, in creating a unifying nationalism, Sukarno placed a strong emphasis on Javanese culture appropriated from his own cultural background, such as we see in his governmental appropriation of wayang. Through the encompassing and institutionalizing character of Sukarno’s nationalism, coupled with the political and religious ecumenicism of Pancasila, Sukarno set the foundation for the institutionalization of wayang, which would be fully
realized during the presidency of Suharto, who adopted Pancasila as Indonesia’s official political doctrine. In the presence of such a nationalizing doctrine wayang became a national art form that belonged to all Indonesians. This institutionalized wayang was not clearly differentiated from its Malaysian, Balinese, and Javanese origins, but seen as fully Indonesian wayang or, more importantly, as “traditional” wayang institutionalized by tetekon, a scholarly and governmental set of guidelines outlining the necessary elements for performing a “proper” wayang show. During and after the Suharto era many puppet masters in objection to the nationalizing effects on their medium utilized their background in wayang to subvert the government institution as well as maintain their artistic and/or religious integrity as demonstrated in the performance rhetoric of several wayang plays during and after the Suharto era.

What is wayang? Indonesian wayang is a stage play performed with either puppets or human actors. The word wayang also denotes the actual puppets used in such performances. The earliest historical record of wayang's existence appears on an inscribed copper plate that dates to 840 CE. A stone monument discovered in central Java that dates back to 907 CE actually mentions a wayang tale taken from the Mahabarata (Herbert 16). Wayang kulit involves the use of flat highly detailed leather puppets that are commonly referred to as shadow puppets. Wayang golek utilizes three-dimensional wooden rod puppets and is actually a rather recent form of wayang. Also, traditional wayang can be divided into two storytelling traditions. Wayang purwa tells the tales taken from the Hindu epics the Ramayana and the Mahabarata. Wayang cepak, on the other hand, tells more local stories of a later time than purwa. For example, there is wayang gedog, which is set during the time of the late Hindu kingdoms of Java and tell of the exploits of one Prince Panji. Both story-telling traditions can utilize kulit and golek puppets (Buurman 1).

Other examples of wayang cepak include local stories, as well as stories influenced by traditional Persian and Muslim tales (1). Some more obscure forms of wayang include wayang kelitik, which uses flat wooden puppets to tell the history of certain ancient Indonesian kingdoms. Wayang beber, a practically extinct form, tells Panji stories using scrolls. And finally, there is wayang wong and wayang topeng, which use human actors to tell the various repertoires of wayang tales (1-2).
A typical wayang performance involves several factors. The *dalang* or puppet master is the star of the show, controlling the puppets as well as singing and speaking the narration. The dalang is also the director of the gamelan, a percussion style orchestra of varying sizes that accompanies the actions on stage and provides entertainment for the audience while the dalang is on a break (Herbert 33). Typical wayang performances usually begin at sundown and last well into the next morning, and are usually held for special occasions like birthdays, marriages, and other transitional temporal rites (Mellema 7-8).

The focus of my thesis will predominantly be on those forms of wayang that utilize the purwa repertoire or stories borrowed or based on the *Ramayana* and *Mahabarata*; as well as stories about the demon Kala. Overall, my thesis is focused on two of the above mentioned wayang forms: *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek*. This is due to the fact that these are the most common forms of wayang still performed today.

**Methods and Theory**

Methodologically, one must be precise when writing about cultural identity. In regards to Indonesian identity, and specifically Javanese identity, it is important to point out that Indonesia boasts the largest population of Muslims in the world. However, this Muslim Javanese Indonesian identity is in actuality a very complex amalgamation of nationalism, indigenous culture, and imported religious traditions. Within the context of Islam in Java, political and religious scholarship has identified two main strands of Javanese Islam: *santri* and *abangan*. The political scientist Douglas Ramage nicely defines these terms based on scholarship done by Geertz. Ramage states, “Santri refers to devout adherents of Islam, closely attuned to daily spiritual and social behavior based on diligent reading of the Qur’an. Abangan are nominal Muslims, primarily rural Javanese, for whom Islam is the latest, symbolic overlay on pre-existing Hindu, Buddhist, and Javanese religious beliefs” (16). For my purposes, these categories are helpful in understanding the religiosity of Sukarno and Suharto towards the implementation of their nationalist policies, as well as understanding the many Indonesians who find profound meaning and identity from wayang.

Another way to conceptualize the Javanist identity it to take into consideration the idea that the Javanist identity is a consequence of Islam coming into contact with the
indigenous population of Java, thus providing the social context for the melding of Islamic and Javanese ideas and cultures into a new identity that is simultaneously Javanese and Muslim, yet also neither. Historian of religion Charles Long interrogates this issue in the context of Melanesian cargo cults. He states, “[T]he mythic element which attempts to synthesize the fragmentary forms of experience and point to a mode of conduct and behavior that will approximate not only the renewal of New Guinea culture but also the total situation of the cultural contact between New Guinea and the Westerners – in short, through the cargo cult, the possibility of creating new human beings, neither New Guineans nor Westerners” (Long 135). In other words, out of the context of Islamic and Javanese contact came forth the creation of ‘new human beings,’ neither Javanese nor Muslims. Another historian of religion Peter W. Williams utilizes the phrase *tertium quid* to explain this same kind of new creation within the context of American Judaism (294). The phrase *Tertium quid* is Latin for “third thing,” or as I prefer, “thirdness.” Thus, those peoples identified as Javanists are indicative of thirdness, a new cultural being created from the social contact between the indigenous Javanese and the imported Islamic religion.

Clearly, wayang represents a complex relationship between politics, religion, and entertainment within the ritual process between the dalang and his audience. The scholarship of anthropologist Ward Keeler clearly explains a logical way for understanding this relationship. Keeler states:

> Most important of all, however, are the relations between the artistic illusion itself and its audience, and implicit in these links, the relations between artist and spectator. These relations immediately suggest certain questions: what effect upon the audience is sought; what the nature of the spectators’ satisfaction is thought to be; and what reactions the performance elicits. Much of this material can be obtained from indigenous commentary, though perhaps as much in casual remarks about particular performances as in more formal, generalized pronouncements. But commentary must be judged in view of what actually happens at performances, as well: how performances use the conventions of the art form, and what arouses the spectators’ interest, approval, and/or censure. Commentary and practice do not necessarily coincide on any of these points, and any disparities demand particularly careful consideration. (*Javanese Shadow Plays* 17)

Keeler’s understanding of wayang performances and the relationships inherent to the art form serves as a guideline for my own investigation into specific wayang performances held predominantly after Sukarno’s time in office (post-1965). It is also in my best interest to heed Keeler’s warning that what is being described or commented on in a performance, does not necessarily reflect what is actually going on. In other words, an
outsider like me may not be privy to many of the details that make up the complex relationship between the dalang and his audience.

Keeler’s theory is further illuminated in an article by anthropologist Richard Schechner entitled “Wayang Kulit in the Colonial Margin,” in which Schechner posits a post-colonial critique of wayang scholarship, Western and Indonesian. Schechner does this by differentiating between several common scholarly categories often applied to wayang in the 20th century that are based around notions of what is “traditional” and/or “modern.” According to Schechner, the category of “traditional” or the “normative expectation” was a creation of colonialism and Western scholarship to the detriment of “modern” wayang, another category that Schechner claims has been overlooked by Western scholarship due to the imagined idea that “traditional” constitutes a pure indigenous form untainted by the West. Schechner states, “The normative expectation was developed from the last half of the nineteenth century to the eve of World War II…. which began with Dutch scholarship, led to the establishment of schools for dalang at the royal courts in Surakarta in 1923 and Jogjakarta in 1925, and continued with the dissemination of the normative style of wayang into the Javanese countryside and beyond” (192). Eventually, this normative style became the governmental standard for wayang performance, and became a primary tool in the dissemination of political ideology. Ethnomusicologist Andrew N. Weintraub strengthens Schechner’s claim when he states:

The ideology of the New Order state—capitalist economic development, national integration, the concentration of power in Suharto’s Golkar functionary group—was promoted through government, government-affiliated, and private cultural institutions. These institutions often worked hand in hand, making it difficult to disentangle the work of one from that of another… The interconnectedness of these institutions allowed government ideology to move rather freely among government and nongovernment institutions. (Power Plays 35)

As we can see, the idea behind the “normative expectation” became deeply engrained in the policies emanating from modern-day Indonesia due to “the collaboration between the courts and colonial Dutch scholars; to be even more precise, this ‘ancient tradition’ in the form so many now imagine, is a rather recent creation of the courts under the guidance of the colonialists” (Schechner 193). Ultimately, even after the Dutch left, their understanding of wayang remained, and was perpetuated by Western scholarship and New Order institutions, like the Department of Information and the Department of
Education and Culture, which were pivotal to the institutionalization of “normative” wayang. Thus, the categories of “traditional” and “modern” are crucial in understanding politics’ complex influence on 20th century wayang.

In contention to the “normative expectation” is what Schechner calls “modernization,” which he explains, “turns Westernization on its head: the slave seizes the master’s sword and uses it to her own advantage. Modernizers take ideas and techniques regardless of source” (199). This statement is viable about several of the innovative dalang, during and after the New Order, which I will discuss later in this paper. The most problematic issue revolving around the category of “traditional” is not that “modernization” is its extreme opposite, but that the imagined concept of “traditional” leads to an even more problematic imagining. In other words, why are these categories not an issue recognized by Indonesian and Western scholarship in general? Schechner explains, “But instead of seeing the construction of the normative expectation as a colonialist story, we – Javanese as well as Westerners – have been trained to see it as a model of the ‘truly Javanese’ (223). As we can see, the deep structure of this kind of nationalistic and colonialisist discourse is incredibly ingrained in both the Western and Javanese mindset. Like Schechner, I believe that this mindset is an issue that calls for a decolonization of the discourse. By challenging these categories of “modern” and “traditional”, and integrating the concept of thirdness to Schechner’s schema, I am taking the first steps towards the complex act of decolonizing these colonial discourses.

More specifically, this essay challenges the popular category of “normative” or “traditional” wayang, claiming that this category was created and is now perpetuated by colonial discourses.

As we see, this perpetuation comes out of a Western and Indonesian nationalist desire to view wayang as art, and not as propaganda (Schechner 217). Thus, “normative” wayang is mistakenly considered “truly Javanese” by both Western and Indonesian scholars (223). What Schechner considers “modern” encompasses other, less popular, forms of wayang such as wayang pancasila, an overt form of government propaganda that Schechner deems no less Javanese, unlike most of Western scholarship that sees such modernizing as a threat to the “tradition” and institution of wayang as a cultural art form. Schechner has a great deal to say about wayang as a tool for propaganda, especially
during the pre-Dutch era, and he does a good job of connecting this analysis with contemporary uses of wayang as propaganda. Schechner describes “normative” wayang as historically static, while “modern” wayang is continually changing.

To clarify certain above statements, wayang pancasila is considered “modern” within the context of the early Sukarno era, regardless of its overt political agenda. According to Schechner, the category of “normative” or “traditional” was still being developed at this time by Indonesian and Western scholars/ elites. Fast-forwarding to the late Suharto era and today, “modern” wayang is innovative in the sense that it challenges what is now fully appropriated by the government and most scholarship as “traditional” or “normative” or “true” wayang, by being ever-changing in form as opposed to wayang forms that have been institutionalized. To make matters more complicated, Schechner concludes that those dalang who “are acting independently of both the courts and the central government…are modern and traditional simultaneously” (200). If this is indeed the case, it calls into question the validity of the categories of “traditional” and “modern,” and further justifies my use of thirdness as a substitute for the colonial understanding of wayang as only either “traditional” or “modern.” Thus, it is the dalang’s ability to negotiate the line between these problematic categories and create for themselves new expressions of identity that allows new innovations in wayang to form and take place, regardless of the institutionalization of “normative” and “traditional” wayang maintained by the government.

For my purposes, the innovations in wayang during Indonesia’s years as an independent nation are expressions of thirdness and not as “new” forms of wayang that can only be categorized as either “traditional” or “modern” as many government officials, scholars, and dalangs are claiming in their critiques of so-called “modern” “anti-traditionalist” wayang. Due to the pervasive nature of this colonial discourse, many of the people I quote and analyze are participants in this discourse, and thus utilize the dichotomy of “traditional” versus “modern” as a means to discuss, critique, and deligitimize the wayang performances I claim as being expressions of Javanese thirdness. In other words, I will examine and critique the many ways other people utilize the categories of “traditional” and “modern” as perpetuations of this colonial discourse in the post-colonial context of independent Indonesia.
In terms of wayang as entertainment, we set our sites on Indonesia’s post-colonial eras where dalangs are able to criticize or subvert the government through careful use of *pasemon* or wayang language, and it is through the dalang’s ability to use wayang language that determines his talent and capability. Quite often, wayang language is used alongside humor in order to motivate the highest audience response.

Also, my understanding of the category “traditional” is that it utilizes those stories that have become “classical” or institutionalized by the government, like the Ramayana and Mahabarata. Much like Schechner’s understanding of “traditional,” the category of “classical” is equally dubious and constructed out of the same colonial discourses. Regardless, it is important, even for the most innovative dalang, to not stray too far from any classical or traditional lakon (plotlines), because in order for his talent and ability in the use of wayang language to shine, he must create secondary lakons that do not contravene the structure of the original epic. Keeler states, “For example, a dalang may make up a lakon in which a threat is posed to the security of the five Pandhawa (the righteous cousins), a marriage pact is proposed, etc. He can indulge his fantasy in working out the implications of these standard situations provided that at the end of the performance no basic element in the epics—how two familiar characters are related to each other in the kinship relations of the two factions, or how each camp is situated politically—has been affected” (*Javanese Shadow Plays* 194). In other words, “modernization” does not imply the disruption of traditional lakon, but how far a dalang can go with a secondary lakon and his use of wayang language to subvert the government. As my thesis will demonstrate, dalangs are pushing this boundary as far as their audience and the government will allow them.

Chapter 1 of my thesis is focused on the religious and political ambitions of Indonesia’s first president Sukarno, and attempts to explain his lasting influence on Indonesia and wayang performance. In *Islam Observed*, Clifford Geertz analyzes Indonesia’s recent history as an independent nation through the pivotal figure of Indonesia’s first president Sukarno. Indeed, Sukarno’s influence runs very deep in Indonesian political policy. According to Geertz, Sukarno was a master of symbol manipulation and he used this talent towards making Indonesia into a modern “theatre state.” Geertz defines the modern theatre state as “a state from whose pageants, myths,
celebrities, and monuments the small peasant or peddler, the enduring Marhaen (proletariat), could derive a vision of his nation’s greatness and strive to realize it” (86).

In other words, Sukarno appropriated things like wayang, which were not universally Indonesian, and made them into a positive synecdoche for all of Indonesia in order to further his goals of creating a theatre state. For the most part, Sukarno was a Marxist and his policies reflect this ideology; however, so much of what he appropriated was religious, and he considered himself an ecumenical man. Geertz states, “In his (Sukarno’s) expansive, world-embracing manner he once told Louis Fisher that he was simultaneously a Christian, a Muslim, and a Hindu. But it was the shadow-play stories from the Ramayana and Mahabarata that he knew by heart, not the Bible or the Koran” (87). This is a very interesting point that addresses very well the complicated and inter-tangled relationship between religion and politics in context to wayang performance because it is Sukarno’s personal sensibilities towards wayang that have shaped contemporary government policies towards religion and wayang appropriation.

It is very easy to oversimplify Sukarno’s influence on wayang’s less than sacred modern mainstream character, and to see Sukarno as only a conniving politician, and thus conclude that the propaganda wayang of the 20th century was nothing more than a political tool. After having read Geertz’s interpretation of the Sukarno years, it seems very problematic to say that Sukarno’s influence was completely political, because Geertz shows that he had quasi-religious reasons for making wayang a national symbol. Thus, only by looking at such performances from the standpoint of audience and performer can we see if Sukarno’s endeavors were successful. If he indeed turned wayang purwa into a national symbol, then it may not matter to the audience that the stories being told are Hindu, but that they are taking part in a national ritual. I argue that this is indeed the reality of Sukarno’s religious and political agenda, and thus it is important that I utilize scholarship dealing with religion and nationalism. As we see, nationalism can sometimes overlook religious and artistic particularism, and allow for the kind of ecumenicism and institutionalization that Sukarno claimed for him and wayang towards creating an imagined normative ideal for his independent Indonesia.

Another way to better understand Sukarno’s methods, as well as clarifying the concept of secular ritual, is to utilize the notion of civil religion. The historian Donald
Jones defines civil religion:

It may be said that a civil religion exists whenever a majority of the people of a nation or region ascribe ultimacy to aspects of their political society, such as their social ideals or means of governance: when they envision a transcendent goal to the political process; when they believe that a sacred reality is the source of meaning for their history and social order; and when these convictions are expressed through public rituals, myths, symbols, and a set of sacred beliefs. (1395-1396)

This definition best describes the status to which Sukarno wanted to elevate wayang. It also lays out the possibility of Indonesian communities, where wayang is not indigenous, to be able to accept it towards understanding their own national identity. Civil religion also serves as an explanation as to how secular ritual can be interpreted as being of a pseudo-religious nature, especially in the context of 20th century wayang performance.

In order to elaborate on notions of civil religion, it becomes advantageous to utilize scholarship on the concept of nationalism, and how such a phenomenon may have shaped the character of wayang in modern Indonesia. The political scholar Ernst Gellner defines the concept of nationalism as “a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond. Whatever principles of authority may exist between people depend for their legitimacy on the fact that the members of the group concerned are of the same culture (or, in nationalist idiom, of the same ‘nation’)” (3-4). This principle is clearly present in Sukarno era Indonesian politics (and today), and is a phenomenon separated from any ideologies found within Indonesia’s ancient Hindu past, for as Gellner notes, “nationalism is rooted in modernity” (13). Gellner also states, “The nationalist squares the assumption of the universality of nationalism with its widespread absence in the real world, especially in the past, by claiming that it was there, really, but it was asleep” (8). Using Gellner’s theory as a base, I interpret Indonesia’s situation as that of a government espousing a nationalist agenda by utilizing the ancient cultural memories of a golden past in order to legitimate its own existence in the present to the people it is governing. Furthermore, by playing on the people’s own cultural memory, which they may already utilize towards the legitimization of their own cultural and religious sensibilities, Sukarno’s new government in 1945 and later Suharto’s (c. 1965), were able to maintain an imagined tie to this golden past by claiming direct lineage from it. Thus, even though the golden past took place centuries ago, the current government can claim it never went away, but was only asleep until it was awakened by the current
administration. In other words, the government is playing on the notion that the great Javanese city-states of the golden past had the same sense of nationalism that they are perpetuating in the present.

Also, the fact that Geertz recognizes Sukarno as having quasi-religious motivations in his political endeavoring lends itself to Gellner’s complex understanding of nationalism. He concludes, “For those for whom human fulfillment is linked to the attainment of national consciousness, and its successful political expression, national awakening is more important than spiritual awakening; indeed, it is a form of spiritual awakening, perhaps its highest form” (8). Gellner’s insight may be an applicable description of Sukarno’s nationalist ideals. Gellner also claims that Islam maintains a knack for overcoming nationalism in the 20th century. In the Indonesian context, it came out of an inherent dislike for Marxist ideologies. In most cases, Gellner states, when Islam would come up against a Marxist nationalist regime, Islam would combat this specific kind of nationalism by combining with it (86). This theory of Gellner’s is almost a direct description of how Sukarno ultimately lost power, and the character of the Indonesian state post-Sukarno.

Regardless of Sukarno’s questionable success at “unifying” Indonesia, diversity within Indonesia still remains. A fundamental truth about nationalism is brought to light by the scholar Benedict Anderson who defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). Thus, as a political notion, Indonesians can envision themselves as belonging to a single country. Due in part to the ecumenicism or personal religion of Sukarno, as seen in his nationalism and political ethos Pancasila, the performance of wayang became a driving force in the perpetuation of Indonesian nationalism and the idea of Indonesia as a unified “imagined community.” As such, this nationalist ecumenicism allowed for the institutionalization of wayang by the government elites of Indonesia, which in turn regulated the dalang’s freedom to use wayang language as he pleased. Under such circumstances, many dalang attempted to resist the government through the use of more implicit wayang language veiled in subtle or humorous imagery,
and sometimes the use of new technologies. Either way, the social turmoils of 20th century Indonesia are being worked out by wayang’s careful negotiation of religion, politics, and entertainment.

As stated before, chapter 1 of this project is an analysis of how Sukarno’s (Indonesia’s first president) own religious sensibilities shaped his political policies, and how some of these sensibilities carried over in the policies of his successor Suharto. Chapter 1 will also focus on Sukarno’s influence over wayang in the 20th century. It was during his presidency that we see the emergence of a Marxist secular government that begins a campaign of re-envisioning Indonesia’s Indic past and appropriating wayang as a tool for propaganda, thus attempting to make wayang into a national medium. I will then move on to a political-historical analysis of wayang in the Sukarno and Suharto eras in order to establish a foundation toward answering the question: In Indonesia's modern era, how have various Indonesian dalang (wayang puppet-masters) re-evaluated the social dimensions of politics, religion, and entertainment found in the performance of wayang, and also within this context, how has the performance rhetoric of modern wayang been utilized as a challenge to government authority? It is within chapters 2 and 3 of my thesis that I will demonstrate the subversive techniques utilized by dalangs in order to reclaim wayang in the name of religious or artistic particularism, and simultaneously challenging the line between “modern” and “traditional.” Chapters 2 and 3 are also utilized in order to investigate why and how certain dalang have been able to subvert the government’s nationalizing tendencies by maintaining an ethos that provides many of the Indonesian peoples with what they want to see, as opposed to what the government dictates. As such, chapter 2 deals with such wayang performances during Indonesia’s New Order era (1966-1998), while chapter 3 does the same but with wayang performed during Indonesia’s Reformasi years (1998-c.2001).
Chapter 1: Wayang and Politics: The Birth of Indonesian Nationalism during the Guided Democracy Era

This chapter primarily focuses on Sukarno’s influence over wayang in the 20th century. It was during his presidency that we see the utilization of a Marxist secular government that begins a campaign of re-envisioning Indonesia’s Indic past and appropriating wayang as a tool for propaganda, thus attempting to make wayang into a national medium. Due to pressures from the government and the Javanese culture of Indonesia’s Muslim population, wayang has undergone several changes in the 20th century, and at the same time has retained several traditional aspects that echo Indonesia’s purwa past. The complexities of these changes and appropriations attest to Sukarno’s unique influence on politics and religion in Indonesia.

I assert that his political and religious influences are an extension of his religious worldview and nationalist agenda. Upon analysis of the importance of the wayang purwa repertoire to Indonesians and to Sukarno himself, one concludes that Sukarno and other Indonesian politicians saw themselves as heroes in the vein of Rama or the Pandawa brothers. The importance of these Indic stories to the common Indonesian, regardless of Indonesia’s Muslim majority, stems from the deep-rooted cultural association of wayang with Indonesia’s glorious Indic past. I will demonstrate that due to Sukarno’s influence, the religious character of late 20th century wayang is not only Hindu or Islamic. As I see it, Sukarno used wayang within a complex nationalist program that appropriated elements of Javanese culture, Nationalism, Islam, Marxism, and ecumenicism. I will demonstrate this by analyzing how Sukarno’s political and religious policies are an enactment of his own religious abangan Marxist ecumenical views, which is brought to the forefront of Indonesian nationalism through the conception of Sukarno’s most influential political policy: Pancasila. With a thorough understanding of Pancasila, one can better understand the importance of wayang innovation during this era as a tool to legitimize nationalist and governmental goals, and why after Sukarno’s demise, Suharto continued and strengthened the role of Pancasila and ultimately limited the freedom of wayang performance rhetoric in order to protect the public face of the government.

This chapter will serve to set up my discussion on how Sukarno’s influence is
then perpetuated by Suharto’s full adoption of Pancasila during his New Order regime. By analyzing Pancasila’s, and indirectly, Sukarno’s appropriation of wayang toward legitimizing nationalist and governmental policies, one can further validate its lasting effects.

**Sukarno: Life, Politics, and Religion**

The Sukarno era, for purposes of my thesis, is roughly the period of time from 1945-1965 when Sukarno was the president of independent Indonesia and when his political influence in Indonesia was at its greatest. In order to understand his most influential political policies one must look to the early influences in his life that contributed to the shaping of his worldview and how he envisioned an independent and united Indonesia.

By briefly analyzing Sukarno’s background it is apparent that Sukarno was deeply influenced by the philosophy of wayang, and although Sukarno was officially Muslim, his use and reliance on wayang unmasks his Javanist *abangan* identity, which is further carried over in his Marxist ecumenicism. Sukarno was born on June 6, 1901 in the city of Surabaya, the capitol of East Java. His full name was Kusno Sosro Sukarno, but he dropped his first two names and only used one: Sukarno, which was common practice in Java (Legge 16-17). As a child growing up in Java, Sukarno became well acquainted with the stories and the philosophy behind wayang purwa. More importantly, it was through wayang that Sukarno first became acquainted with Javanese culture and religion. J. D. Legge, a biographer, states, “He [Sukarno] absorbed its [wayang’s] moral pluralism and its ideas of a just ruler and a harmonious and ordered society” (23). Indeed, wayang’s “moral pluralism” or ecumenicism is the foundation for Sukarno’s political ecumenicism. The greatest evidence to suggest the deep-rooted influence by wayang themes upon Sukarno is in his political speeches.

It was common practice for Sukarno to draw upon wayang themes and characters, and to parallel them to real world events and people. For instance, in the following excerpt from a speech made on March 25th, 1963 Sukarno likens himself to the warrior king Kokrosono, a character from the *Mahabarata* who is also prominent in wayang. He states:

The feeling in my heart, if I am face to face with young men and women, if I see the gleam… see
This strategy was helpful for him, especially in front of Javanese or Sundanese crowds, because these were people who were already familiar with wayang stories and thus could relate to what Sukarno was saying. However, Legge does not see this use of wayang imagery as being merely political savvy on Sukarno’s part. Legge suggests, “Nor was this simply a matter of oratorical gimmickry for he himself [Sukarno] lived and moved to a high degree within the thought world of the wayang, seeing contemporary conflicts in its terms and even, perhaps seeing himself as the dalang, shaping events of his world and expounding their inner meaning” (23). Either way, Sukarno was very successful with this use of rhetoric, and it only served to enhance his already charismatic personality.

It is clear that there are distinct streams of Indonesian Islam, and with these different streams there will undoubtedly be clashes between groups, especially if there exist a group or strand of Islam bent on institutionalizing, within Indonesia, what they perceive to be a “normative” or “orthodox” Islam based on Qur’anic and Arabic models. As stated before, modern scholarship on Indonesia has classified two distinct strands of Islam on Java: santri and abangan. As we can surmise from the character of the santri, they are clearly non-Javanists, and those santri who are also anti-Javanist really are working toward making Indonesia into an Islamic State. The political scientist Ruth McVey notes, “The selamatan (ritual communal feast) and the wayang play accompanied by gamelan orchestra were essential rites of abangan life; now, good santri rejected them. Wayang, it was said, violated Islam’s prohibition on the representation of the human form, so that even the myth cycles with Islamic themes were unacceptable” (25). Of course, the dichotomy between santri and abangan is not absolute, especially when one takes thirdness into consideration. Certainly, the abangan identity is also indicative of Javanist thirdness because most of what I have already been calling Javanese or Javanistic, in this chapter, falls into the abangan category; however, non-Muslim Javanists do exist, but they are not the focus of my study.

I assert that Sukarno was an abangan or Javanist Muslim, which is evident in Sukarno’s personal religious practice as well as his use of wayang. The venerable
historian of Javanese literature, P. J. Zoetmulder, makes a similar suggestion about Indonesian politics as a whole. He states:

    The code of ethics, the moral values, the outlook on life, as represented in the wayang, have had an influence on Javanese thinking that can hardly be overestimated…. It would make an interesting study to trace this Javanese influence in Indonesian politics and even to try to find out in the ideas and the statements or way of acting of Indonesian politicians in particular, which hero of the wayang was his favorite, set up for imitation. (Zoetmulder 19)

Not naming Sukarno specifically, but surely thinking of him, Zoetmulder makes it clear that the Javanized versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata as told via wayang performance is so deeply-rooted in the consciousness of the Javanese that even political leaders cannot escape from its influence, even to the extent of devout imitation (19). In other words, Sukarno and others saw themselves as being real-life characters in a wayang frame of reference.

    It is documented that Sukarno identified himself with the hero Bima, one of the five Pandawa brothers from the Mahabharata, early in his political career. Sukarno, as a rising star in Indonesian politics, seemed to see himself as being like Bima, and imitated Bima’s character traits in his own life. Legge states, “His [Bima’s] qualities were those of boldness, courage and truthfulness, but certainly not refinement. He was blunt, uncompromising, rough, contemptuous of established authority and prepared to rebuke even the gods” (23). Legge also stresses Sukarno’s lack of refinement, in allusion to Sukarno’s questionable social life, as added evidence to suggest Sukarno’s continual identification with Bima. Regardless, many of Bima’s more desirable traits were surely at the forefront of Sukarno’s political life. In addition, Sukarno was certainly a man of many personas (public and private) or masks (wayang masks), and as a skilled politician played these parts very well. It is also noted in several of his later speeches that he also identified himself with Arjuna and Gathotkaca, two other heroes from the Mahabharata (Sears 220). By representing himself as a wayang-like king and warrior, he was implying to his people that he was certainly a just hero who would protect his people. The historian Laurie Sears notes that Sukarno’s outward appearance and social politics very much reflected his identification with wayang heroes, because he believed himself to be the “spokesman” for all of Indonesia (219). She also states that, “Soekarno’s real brilliance lay in his ability to combine elements of the Javanese past with the Indonesian future to present his
audiences with new ways of envisioning their identities in the postcolonial world” (222). As we can see, Sukarno saw himself as a wayang-like hero, affecting the world around him, and as long as his people saw him this way as well, they were more likely to trust his political intentions.

Let us now take a step back and further clarify what a wayang worldview and philosophy actually entails for a Javanist like Sukarno. Without going into the history of philosophical debate surrounding the wayang, there are three main ideologies that stem from a wayang point of view. The first is a belief in a supernatural world. Legge elaborates using Sukarno as an example, “Sukarno belonged in fact to a culture which sees no firmly set barrier between the natural world and the supernatural, and which assumes the possibility of drawing power from the supernatural order to manipulate events in the terrestrial sphere” (12). This belief manifested in Sukarno’s life through his frequent use of dukuns or traditional soothsayers, as well as his use of pusakas or sacred artifacts, and his reverence for sacred spaces (12). These practices and beliefs clearly demonstrate a reliance on the supernatural world, as well as solidify Sukarno’s understanding of reality from a wayang frame of reference.

In reference to Sukarno’s exercise of political power, anthropologist Clifford Geertz makes an intriguing comment. He states, “From the beginning of his career to what appears to be its end, Sukarno was forced to create the institutions he needed as he went. He was an amateur, a parvenu, an eclectic, an autodidact. He played it all by ear” (82). This comment speaks directly to the second wayang ideology I wish to mention. Legge states it clearly when he says:

> It is a Javanese characteristic to avoid formulating a long term plan of action to control the future and to provide a criterion for the making of immediate choices. Rather a Javanese will allow the forces about him to work themselves out – to reveal themselves and enable an immediate course of action to be determined. He will tend not to look too far ahead but to leave the next phase of development to reveal itself in due course. At the political level actions will tend to be in terms of the forces which are deployed at a particular moment. Sukarno frequently seemed to reflect that disposition in his own political behavior […] (12)

This ideology follows suit with the belief that supernatural forces can affect terrestrial ones. In other words, Sukarno looked to supernatural signs and portents in order to make his next political move or policy.

The third and most important ideology speaks to the cosmology of the universe.
Zoetmulder explains:

In the wayang there is a dramatic opposition between the two parties, good and bad, self-restraint and unbridled passion, reflected in the mutual position of the puppets, to the right and the left of the Dalang, the puppet player. Yet both parties are indispensable and essential to the universal harmony of which they are both a part. This opposition and unity is found everywhere in the Javanese way of thinking and in the evaluation of what happens. (19)

This ideology is important to note because it is directly reflected in Sukarno’s most influential political policies. The concept of “unity” is the major focus of Sukarno’s undertaking in preserving his newly independent Indonesian nation. His Javanese religious ideas of balance and universal harmony clearly influence his ecumenicism, even in the face of a constituency made up of a Muslim majority. Legge adds to this understanding of wayang ideology by stating, “[T]hese polarities do not include a simple opposition between good and evil. On moral questions there is no such simple dichotomy, but rather an inherent ambiguity which leads to a moral pluralism” (22). In other words, wayang takes into consideration the complexities of morality, questioning the nature of good and evil, dismissing an absolute morality for an inherent cultural tolerance. Thus, the nature of Sukarno’s Marxist politics is balanced with his ecumenical Javanism, creating his very own Marxist ecumenicism.

In order for Sukarno’s political ecumenicism to be accepted, it must be assumed that many Indonesians shared his worldview. But, how is this possible with such a massive Muslim population in Indonesia? In order to answer this question, one must look to the actual nature of Islam in Indonesia. As stated before, many scholars identify the bulk of Muslims in Java, and Indonesia as a whole, as being “Javanists.” The anthropologist Andrew Beatty states, “Javanists can be defined simply as those people who tend to stress the Javanese part of their cultural inheritance and who regard their Muslim affiliation as secondary” (158). Exactly how prominent are these Javanist Muslims? Zoetmulder remarks, “Knowing that Indonesia is ninety percent Moslem, one might infer that Indonesia is an Islamic country with all the consequences that this implies. This assumption, however, would lead to a lot of surprises and perplexities, because the expected consequences very often cannot be found in Indonesian reality” (11). The reality then is that there is an internal struggle between “Muslims” in Indonesia. This is clearly due to the engrained traditions of Javanism in Javanese culture. Zoetmulder states, “For most of the Javanese, especially in Central Java which is the
Javanese country *par excellence*, where the kingdom of Mataram, the heir (though not the immediate successor) of the Majapahit kingdom, had its capital, Islam is not an all-determining factor in their lives” (12). These traditions are incredibly important to Javanese identity, and even though Zoetmulder is unfamiliar with the categories of *santri*, *abangan*, and thirdness, he is attempting to clarify these distinctions.

When we take thirdness into account, it is no surprise that Javanists combine Muslim elements such as being married in a mosque, performing daily prayers, and having a Muslim funeral with such Javanist/ *abangan* activities as giving offerings to the spirits of the dead and maintaining the *slametan*, a ritual meal that can be held for several different significant occasions. Zoetmulder remarks, “These *slametans* do not have their equivalent in Moslem life elsewhere and reflect what we may here, for the sake of convenience, and very loosely, call animism” (13). Indeed, but it is a lot more complex than just an Islam with animistic tendencies. The character of Javanism has been infused and changed by several outside forces. Zoetmulder makes a very profound conclusion when he says:

> It seems we can say for the period of Indianization more or less the same as for the period of Islamization: Java and the Javanese underwent a tremendous impact of foreign ideas, of culture, of religious concepts, etc., but they were not swept away by them. They molded them in their own way. They made from the foreign cultural infusions something that was not there before, but still had its own Javanese character. This might be called Hindu-Javanism, as much as what is now found may be called Islamic-Javanism. In both cases the stress must lie on Javanism and there are very important elements in it that remained essentially the same. (16)

Many of these elements Zoetmulder considers to have remained the same through the ages include the three Javanist ideologies I discussed previously in this chapter: belief in supernatural signs, ideals of universal harmony, and the *slametan*.

With Sukarno’s *abangan* philosophy in place, it becomes the foundation for Sukarno’s vision of an Indonesian nationalism, a nationalism based on his own personal ideals. Clearly, Sukarno was a man of many masks or personas; however, each of his masks, Marxist, theist, Javanist, or Muslim, was seen by him to be ultimately compatible with being Indonesian. On the other hand, of his masks, his Javanist persona was the most public. McVey states, “For him [Sukarno], as for most Javanese, there was no incompatibility between the two [Being Javanese and Indonesian]: to be Javanese was one way, very likely the best way, to be Indonesian” (26). This, of course, created
resentment from the outer islands of Indonesia. Regardless, the language of Indonesian politics and nationalism became saturated with Javanese symbols and rhetoric well into Sukarno’s presidency, and lasted well after Suharto’s reign. In essence, Indonesian nationalism became Javacentric (McVey 27). This makes a lot of sense in the context of Gellner’s definition of nationalism, which conceptualizes nationalism as “a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond. Whatever principles of authority may exist between people depend for their legitimacy on the fact that the members of the group concerned are of the same culture (or, in nationalist idiom, of the same ‘nation’)” (Gellner 3-4). It was pragmatic for Sukarno to choose the cultural reality most familiar to him, and that also made up a majority of what was now known as Indonesia. This cultural reality that I am speaking about is the thirdness that pervaded Indonesian society, and for which Sukarno was a representative. Sukarno’s positionality and focus encompassed both Javanese and Islamic cultures within Indonesia, and thus allowed him to stand on a political, social, and religious platform that represented an inclusive compromise between the various factions that made up the majority of Sukarno’s constituency.

Before Indonesia became an independent nation in 1945, its political elites were hotly debating what kind of government Indonesia should have. Sukarno’s voice, in this matter, was by far the most prominent. In his mind, shaped by his worldview and Javanese upbringing, Indonesia needed to be guided towards a new nationalist identity. His inspiration for what this new Indonesian identity would entail came from one of his many mentors Ki Hadjar Dewantara who in 1922 set up the Taman Siswa school system, which “rejected reformist Islam and adopted Javanese culture as the philosophical basis for a new national character” (Ricklefs 173). It was already in Sukarno’s mind that Indonesia should not be an Islamic state, which was certainly a viable option at the time, except there was a large enough secular and non-Muslim opposition to it. It was only under Sukarno’s nationalism that compromise was found, because Sukarno stressed the important Javanese ideology of unity.

Sukarno believed that if Indonesia was going to work as a nation, it needed to be united. At the time, there were several Muslim factions within the burgeoning Indonesian government that wanted Indonesia to become an Islamic state. However, there
also existed several other political factions that wanted to utilize a more secular and Western model of government, and were adamantly against an Islamic state. Sukarno, on the other hand, believed that it was more important that Indonesia officially proclaim its independence and nationhood as quickly as possible, so he proposed a governmental model that stressed the unity found in Javanese thirdness, and thus served as a swift compromise between the most vocal political factions. This concept of unity that ultimately instigated Indonesia’s nationhood, and Sukarno’s sovereignty over it, came out of his Javanese mindset. What Sukarno would ultimately establish was a Marxist government that was open to religious concerns. Sukarno’s Marxism catered to the secular factions, while at the same time, the santri factions could relate to his plea for swift unity, being soon to be Indonesians themselves, and were thus satisfied, for the moment, because they still held considerable social and political power in Indonesia’s new government.

Sukarno’s call for unity was also a declaration of his own personal destiny as Indonesia’s leader. Legge states, “Not only was there the traditional emphasis on harmony and accommodation between conflicting ideas in harmony. Sukarno was able to argue for the possible unity of all currents of nationalism because he felt himself to be a Marxist and a Muslim simultaneously. This capacity could, in Javanese terms sustain a claim to power” (83). What Sukarno is doing is demonstrating how he himself is an embodiment of his kind of nationalism, and that this kind of unity is spiritually viable in Javanese terms, and because of this, he alone is powerful enough to transform Indonesia into a real nation. In essence, Sukarno wanted to be an accommodationalist par excellence, and the ideology that allowed for such religious ecumenicism was his Javanism. As stated before, Geertz made the observation that Sukarno saw himself as being “simultaneously a Christian, a Muslim, and a Hindu,” but felt more inclined toward the traditions of Javanese wayang (87). By creating a nationalism modeled after his own personal synthesis of Marxism and religion, Sukarno sets out to shape an Indonesia based on his own image through the use of several influential government policies.

For purposes of this essay, Sukarno’s political legacy will be understood through four of his most influential policies or “ideological phases”: “Marhaenism,” Pancasila, Guided Democracy, and NASAKOM. Geertz describes a good way to
understand them in terms of historical progression. Geertz states, “Being phases, and growing out of one another, the later ones do not replace the earlier ones but merely engulf them in an expanding complex of symbols” (84). That is until Suharto takes power, and during his presidency these policies go through various re-interpretations by the newly instated president.

Sukarno’s earliest political phase was his acceptance of Marxism, which he dubbed “Marhaenism” in honor of a peasant farmer he claimed to have met in the late 1920s. In many ways, Sukarno’s “Marhaenism” is another example of thirdness in that it exemplifies the coming together of Javanese ideals with Western politics to form a new and unique political position. Political scientist, Angus McIntyre, states:

Within Marxism, Sukarno’s particular view of history owed a good deal to the orthodox school, with its emphasis on the laws of history as an extension of the laws of nature and the cognate notion of historical necessity, of which Engels was the progenitor and the Anti-Duhring an important text. One can imagine the appeal of this form of Marxism to a Javanese who was familiar with the traditional “cosmo-magic principle” concerning parallelism between macrocosmos and microcosmos; further, it is not surprising that Sukarno occasionally spoke as if the ancient task of organizing the empire as an image of the universe could be accomplished by acting in concert with the Marxist or Marxist-derived laws of history. (81)

McIntyre’s statement correlates with the notion that Sukarno’s political mind-set was shaped and motivated by his Javanese world-view and ideologies. Out of his Marxist and nationalist beliefs, Sukarno established “Marhaenism” as the creed for his newly founded Nationalist Party. Geertz states that “Marhaenism” “rested on a distinction between the small peasant, market seller, artisan, cart driver, and so on, who owns his own land, tools, horse, or whatever, that is to say, is propertied, but who is yet impoverished, and the true proletarian in the Marxist sense, who sells his labor power without participating in the means of production” (84). The farmer, Marhaen, was meant to represent the countless Indonesians who were impoverished by Dutch colonialism and the Western market. Also, it can be theorized that by dubbing his Marxist ideals “Marhaenism,” Sukarno was attempting to create the perception that his Marxism was actually an indigenous concept and not a Western import. This makes sense in that Sukarno envisioned an independent Indonesia that was free of its current Western dependencies and with his new form of Marxism could create an Indonesia that was populated by content and classless
Marhaens. Geertz considered this policy to be nothing more than “primitive populism, a mass-action mystique, and it never became anything more than that” (85). In other words, “Marhaenism” was conveniently vague in order for Sukarno to have leeway in the creation of future policies.

Of all of Sukarno’s policies, Pancasila is perhaps the most reflective of Sukarno’s almost spiritual obsession with unity and the most important policy reflecting the government’s appropriation of wayang. “Pancasila” is a Sanskrit-derived word literally meaning “five principles.” On June 1, 1945, Sukarno established these five principles in a famous speech entitled The Birth of Pancasila, in which he outlined his vision of an independent Indonesia united under this doctrine of unity. Clifford Geertz puts it simply, “There was in the Five points—Nationalism, Humanitarianism, Democracy, Social Justice, and Belief in God—something for everyone, suitably distributed” (85). Indeed, this concept is steeped in a great deal of symbolism in order to appeal to several different Indonesian communities. According to political scientist Christine Drake, “The very number five is of symbolic importance (because of the five senses, the five obligations of Islam, the five heroes in the Hindu epic Mahabarata, and so on). The symbols representing the five principles are embodied in the coat of arms on the garuda (a mythical bird related to the eagle and the phoenix), which is the national emblem of Indonesia” (77). Indonesia’s motto is fittingly Bhinneka Tunggal Ika or “Unity in Diversity” or “they are many; they are one” (Drake 78). Keep in mind that 1945 was a precarious time for Indonesian unity due to several factors; most prominently those Indonesians who wanted to make Indonesia into an Islamic state, which was greatly contested by non-Muslims and abangan. Thus, Pancasila represents a nationalistic compromise in order to promote quick and clean independence on Sukarno’s part.

The principle, belief in God, was clearly a concession to monotheism and Islam (Ramage, 11-12). The anthropologist Jane Monnig Atkinson elaborates:

Monotheism is linked here with the central political and social values of the state. The use of the Indonesian term bertuhan for “monotheism” is deliberate and revealing. Tuhan is the Indonesian word for God. By specifying belief in Tuhan rather than Allah (the Islamic word for god), the doctrine of monotheism is skillfully phrased to allow for religious diversity in a nation whose population is predominantly Islamic. Symbolically, the appeal of the Pancasila is compelling. Like the Indonesian motto “Unity in diversity” (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) it proposes a consensus—belief in god—that transcends the ethnic and religious differences in a population as large and varied as this one.” (176-177)
Once again, it is clear that unity was at the forefront of Sukarno’s ideology: religious diversity over an Islamic state. Pancasila was and remains to this day a driving force in Indonesian politics. The complexities of how Pancasila has prevailed in the 20th century will be further analyzed later in this chapter.

By 1957 it was clear to many Indonesians that Sukarno’s “Marhaenism” and Pancasila were not working out as well as Sukarno had promised. In order to maintain the support of his countrymen, Sukarno set out to reshape his previous two ideologies “and with them the political morality of the national government to more faithfully reflect it” (Geertz 86). This new program was dubbed “Guided Democracy,” and according to Geertz it was nothing more than “a modern version of the theatre state, a state from whose pageants, myths, celebrities, and monuments the small peasant or peddler, the enduring Marhaen, could derive a vision of his nation’s greatness and strive to realize it” (86). Indeed, while Indonesia was going through economic crisis, Sukarno was spending a considerable amount of the government’s money towards nationalist fanfare in order to satisfy those Indonesian groups who represented the greatest threat to his power: Muslims, Communists, and the military. This time period was also filled with several secessionist movements headed by various Islamic groups who were growing restless with Sukarno’s seemingly ant-Islamic state politics. Because of this, Sukarno took steps to further limit santri voices within the political sphere, such as banning the largest Islamic political party for their involvement in militant threats to his regime (Ramage 19). The main objective of Sukarno’s “Guided Democracy” was to solidify his concept of unity toward ideologically balancing the main political forces in Indonesia: Islam, nationalism, and communism. He was also attempting to control the political rivalry between Indonesia’s Communist Party (PKI), and Indonesia’s military.

Political scientist Angus McIntyre explains Sukarno’s situation very well when he states, “The initial configuration of these political actors was shaped by a competitive and cooperative relationship between President Sukarno and the army leadership under General Nasution, in which the former protected the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and resorted to its numbers and influence to counterbalance the power of the latter” (25). In order to control these factions Sukarno relied on re-advocating Pancasila and then establishing the concept of “NASAKOM.” “NASAKOM” was quite literally an anagram.
for the unity of nationalism, Islam, and communism (*NASionalis, Agama, and KOMunis*) (McIntyre 72). In the end, “Guided Democracy” proved to be Sukarno’s undoing. Simply put, his undoing came about because “Sukarno spent much of the country’s resources on huge unproductive national monuments and extravagant world tours, while inflation soared and tension increased among the major political groupings” until these tensions finally reached a climax on September 30, 1965, when the military lead a successful coup, ultimately forcing Sukarno out of power (Drake 49).

Returning to Pancasila, I assert that it has pervaded Indonesian politics since Indonesia’s independence from the Dutch. As a direct result of Sukarno’s own Javanism and Marxist ecumenicism, Pancasila has set the bar for Indonesia’s nationalizing policies. Upon being recognized as Indonesia’s core ideology by the New Order regime, Sukarno’s lasting influence on Indonesian policy is substantiated by Suharto’s full adoption of it as Indonesia’s official doctrine. Also, through the appropriation of wayang forms, the governments of the Guided Democracy era and the New Order era attempted to nationalize and unify the Indonesian people by demonstrating their legitimacy as the true government for all Indonesians, regardless of ethnicity or religion. As a consequence of this appropriation, the Indonesian government privileged unity over diversity, creating a sense of civil religiosity based on Javanese models. This sense of pervasive secularized religiosity can be seen in Pancasila’s effect on wayang performance rhetoric during and after the Guided Democracy era.

**Pancasila and Wayang**

As stated before, Sukarno had a spiritual affinity for wayang, and saw his regime and personage in terms of wayang language and ideology. The early Guided Democracy era was an optimistic time for many Indonesians, and several of the government sponsored wayang performances at this time reflected the people’s optimism and trust in the new regime. Sukarno’s use of wayang was centered on the wayang principle of *pasemon*, which Sukarno utilized to his own advantage, and by playing on the optimism of the time period, was able to protect himself from open criticism. *Pasemon* is one of the most common wayang performance techniques that contribute to the advantageous appropriation of wayang by the government. The word *pasemon* comes from the Javanese root *semu*, which means, “to seem like” (Sears 7). This story-telling
Technique pervades most, if not all, wayang performances of the past and present. Sears states, “Many Javanese shadow play stories ask what in the present, believed to be real, can be explicated by the past…In Javanese performance traditions, pasemon can refer to the use of a story as a subtle caricature of reality; thus, the technique of pasemon serves to bring the observer/hearer’s attention to those domains which often lie outside the boundaries of any particular story” (7). In other words, it is a way for the dalang to comment on current affairs while still performing something as allegedly traditional as the Ramayana.

Pasemon is also a way for the dalang to capture the attention of his audience by manipulating his commentary to conform to the interests of his said audience. In essence, pasemon allows the dalang to create a special relationship with members of his audience. This mentality is very much prevalent in government appropriation of wayang. However, the ethnomusicologist Andrew Weintraub uses the term “wayang language” to denote this same technique stating, “In the New Order, the use of wayang language was a necessary strategy that enabled dalang to mount a critique of political actors and events without fear of reproach” (Power Plays 211). This understanding of pasemon demonstrates how it can be manipulated by the dalang to be used against the government.

As previously mentioned, this use of pasemon as a tool to subvert those in power is nothing unique to the 20th century, but has been a key feature in Javanese wayang performance since as long as anyone can remember or has written about. In context to Sukarno, he understood well enough the power of pasemon, and thus understood how to use it in order to legitimize his policies. Sears explains:

During the 1960s, when many aspects of Javanese—and Indonesian—life were politicized, shadow plays were used to convey Marxist, Islamic, and nationalist messages. Both before and after the fall of the Soekarno government… The technique of pasemon allows puppeteers to insert veiled political allusions and commentary into performances. (10-11)

Sukarno was very ingenious to use this popular medium in order to inform and legitimize his policies, especially “NASAKOM,” which Sears alludes to in the above block quotation when she speaks of “Marxist, Islamic, and nationalist messages.”

In Sukarno’s attempt to universalize wayang he ultimately secularized the tradition. This secularization was a consequence of Sukarno’s appropriation of wayang as a potent political tool. The process of universalizing and popularizing wayang had to fall
within the standards of Pancasila, which, as we know, espoused the ideal of ecumenical nationalism. McVey, writing about the late 1980s, states, “The religious aspects of the wayang has declined; indeed, from the viewpoint of most members of the modern big-city elite it is effectively dead. The wayang purwa is fast becoming straightforward entertainment; even in rural areas, performances on traditional ritual occasions become more matters of custom and enjoyment than spiritual significance” (41). Thus, the strongest remnants of religion that may still exist in wayang remain in Pancasila’s nationalizing effect on the medium, which I construe falls within the definition of a civil religion mentality.

It is important to point out that although Sukarno was the head of the government it was many of his followers and political groups like the PKI that were directly involved in the nationalizing of wayang. Regardless, it was Sukarno’s core policy to nationalize wayang that initiated “reforms” to the wayang medium. McVey’s basic argument is that during the Sukarno era, wayang in its pre-independence form was seen as being in conflict with Marxist doctrine, thus it was advantageous to transform it into something that would coincide with Sukarno’s Marxism and still help gain the support of the masses. A scholar by the name of Politburo Sakirman convincingly established wayang’s authenticity as a Javanese cultural treasure sometime in 1961. Regardless, he too felt that wayang purwa required certain “improvements” if it hoped to survive the modern era.

Ultimately, the PKI had the same idea as Sakirman, and went about reforming wayang not by trying to destroy wayang purwa, but by introducing new forms of wayang (c. the late 1940s) into the mainstream, and hoping that these new forms would “rub-off” onto wayang purwa. Some examples of these new forms or innovations of wayang include wayang suluh, wayang perjungan, and wayang Pancasila. Historian of theatre James R. Brandon writes about these new wayang styles as “spin-off” forms. Brandon states, “Wayang Pantja Sila was created in the aftermath of President Soekarno’s proclamation of the doctrine of Pantja Sila as the spiritual foundation of the new Indonesian Republic… In 1947, wayang suluh was created to tell stories about modern Indonesia. Shadow puppets represent Nasser, Tito, Nehru, Soekarno, and other contemporary figures in realistic fashion” (45). Also, in wayang Pancasila we see the five Pandawa brothers each representing one of the five points of Pancasila, as well as the
other minor good characters symbolizing things like “Miss Freedom, Health Services, Education, Agriculture” while certain evil characters represent such things as “Plant Disease, Devaluation, Inflation, and Loss of Moral Standards” (Brandon 287-288). A dalang of the wayang cepak tradition, Oton Rasta, recalls the inception of wayang suluh in an interview by art historian Mimi Herbert. Rasta explains, ‘This type of wayang was developed by the Ministry of Information. I remember stories about the first president, Sukarno, and vice president Hatta. The puppets looked just like real people, with shoes, trousers, and even military uniforms’ (Herbert 71). It is clear that Sukarno saw the advantages to presenting himself as a real player on an epic or romantic stage as a way to present his policies in a language he felt would engage and convince the bulk of his target constituency: the abangan. Political historian Ruth McVey states:

Indonesian Communist strength was, in fact, concentrated in that part of the population for which wayang had particular meaning. Sometimes called abangan, they were Muslims whose belief were heavily influenced by the island’s older faiths—Hinduism, Buddhism, and more ancient ideas often called animism but more deeply concerned with man’s relationship with his immortal ancestors. For this amalgam—the Agama Jawa, or Religion of Java—wayang was the supreme expression. (22)

Indeed, this cultural fact coupled with Sukarno’s charisma made for a winning combination towards unifying Indonesia.

On the other hand, these new forms never really caught on in the popular mind since they were never performed after the Guided Democracy era. According to Brandon, “Wayang Pantja Sila is very seldom performed any more. It disappeared as quickly as new propaganda needs pushed it aside” (289). However, policies to reform wayang purwa did indeed have a profound effect on the character of wayang purwa (Brandon 288). Sadly, very little scholarship has been written on these forms of wayang. According to Schechner, “Until Clara van Groenendael and Sears, no Western scholar gave detailed attention to, no less praise for, styles like suluh, pancasila, rebo lagi, padat – or any other non-normative wayang” (223). Also, considering the fact that the scholarship of Clara van Groenendael and Sears, pertaining to such wayang styles as suluh and pancasila, are not textual explorations, there is very little quoted from these innovative productions save for the introduction to one wayang suluh play translated by historian of South-east Asia James R. Brandon.

In a comparison to a typical wayang kulit introduction, Brandon demonstrates the
nationalizing tone of *wayang suluh* (c. 1962) and the new elements this form of wayang brought to the medium:

*(The dalang narrates.)* Now, for the country I am going to mention first. Even though there are many countries created by Allah under the heavens, on the earth, and between the oceans that are favored by the sun and the moon, they are far different from the country lying between Asia and Australia, between the Pacific and Indian oceans, consisting of thousands of islands, “from Sabang to Merauke,” and looking like a necklace of jewels on green velvet, that is called Islands of the Indies or the Republic of Indonesia. Thus do I introduce this country, for if you search among a thousand countries you would not find ten equal to it..... The principle of the nation is our treasure—the Pantjasila... Our flag is the red-and-white banner. They all show that Indonesia carries a high torch casting bright light across the world, its smoke rising high. Not only are Indonesian people united, but even foreign countries are close friends, without compulsion, because they adore the perfectness of the country. Near, they bow flat to the ground before her perfectness; farther afield, they still incline to show their respect... We can say the founder, both mother and father, of our country is President Ir. Hadji Mohammad Soekarno, or Brother Karno. We can see he is working hard, holding twenty important duties. In fact he is loved by the people for he knows religion, is fair in justice, guards public morality, enjoys military knowledge, and justice prevails. His Excellency is loved by the people. More and more popular is he for having held the Asian Games successfully. It would take all night just to tell the many qualities of Indonesia. (qtd. in Brandon 319-320)

Brandon points out such changes as “the Republic of Indonesia” in the place of the mythic kingdom of Astina, or “Allah” in the place of Hindu-Javanese deities (320). Towards the end of the *wayang suluh* introduction, Sukarno is spoken of as a great leader and hero. As a character in his own wayang play it is no surprise that Sukarno is presented as the embodiment of Indonesia, and vise-versa. As a man who wanted to make Indonesia into a microcosm of his own religious and political ideals, it is logical that Sukarno and his regime would wish to present his actions and policies as being the core to Indonesia’s greatness.

Other innovations attributed to Guided Democracy era wayang can be best described as, “technical and ideological. The first included shortening the playing time (a change on which almost everyone could agree), the use of electric light rather than the flickering blêncung oil-lamp to illuminate the screen, the use of a stage without a screen, the use of more than one dalang, and abandoning the customary requirement that the dalang wear traditional Javanese dress” (McVey 31). For the most part, technical innovations were not seen as “having ideological implications” (31). However, these technical changes ended up having the largest impact on the sacrality of wayang. McVey concludes:

*The real threat to wayang purwa lay not in such departures but in an outwardly unexceptional kind of change, to which even the PKI’s cultural conservatives had felt they had to agree—the
‘technical’ reforms aimed at making the art easier to perform and responsive to the exigencies of modern life. To understand why this was so, we must bear in mind that the distinction between form and content is basically a modern one. For a traditional and sacral art such as the wayang purwa all elements of the performance are symbolically laden, and such changes as the substitution (now almost universally practiced) of petromax or electric light for the flickering bléncong diminish wayang’s meaning. Moreover, some changes viewed as technical are in fact ideological, reflecting new ideas as to proper cultural models and thus denying wayang’s centrality: for example, the use of a regular proscenium stage, rather than the kelir, in imitation of Western theater and cinema. (38).

If we return to Schechner’s understanding of how Western scholarship deplores anything that diminishes the “artistry” and “tradition” of wayang, we can see in McVey’s language the “traditional” versus “modern” colonial discourse that Schechner writes about. Certainly, such innovations that McVey comments on may have “Westernized” or “secularized” wayang, but I disagree that such innovations have decentralized wayang from its culture. Taking Schechner into consideration, all wayang in Java is Javanese, and thus a valid expression of Javanese culture at the time of these innovations. Declaring that such innovations are diminishing wayang, and somehow “less Javanese” is a colonial discourse perpetuated by scholars who are invested in the idea that wayang is a set and unchanging medium, who have also redefined wayang under the colonial and Western notion of what is “traditional.”

Another innovation suggested by the PKI, and still argued over to this day, was the idea to perform wayang in Bahasa Indonesia instead of Javanese. As an enactment of a sacred story, it was important to most Javanese that the performance retain its sacred language because, “Conveying sacred truths through a profane tongue and homely imagery, exchanging spiritual resonance for secular relevance, had little appeal to Javanese who were not so far separated from their traditions as to wish to delatinize their mass” (McVey 29). Once again, McVey demonstrates the dubiousness of her language by comparing the use of Bahasa Indonesia in the place of “traditional” Javanese language with the vernacularization of the Roman Catholic mass post-Vatican II. This comparison may have some merits since both innovations met with strong resistance at first; however, both issues came to very different outcomes. By reducing this innovation into Western terms, McVey is overlooking the differences between these two very different and historically complex events. Superficially, McVey’s comparison can be well understood, but it ultimately assumes that the Javanese perceive their wayang performance the same
way a pre-Vatican II Catholic perceived the Latin mass. Such language does a disservice to the unique history and development of Javanese wayang, because it does not analyze Javanese wayang within its own unique cultural context. In other words, any comparison that attempts to describe anything non-Western in Western terms leaves much to be desired in attempting to solely understand the medium of Javanese wayang. Regardless, this innovation of language did not completely catch on during the Guided Democracy era; instead, it became sparse and would later see a renewal after the fall of Suharto. All in all, the PKI could not oversee every idea they had for wayang, and in the end their appropriations were done with some compromise with the already established norms of wayang performance.

It is also important to note that the wayang innovations of the late 1940s are only understood as “modern” innovations upon reflection of the Guided Democracy era, because at this time the dichotomy between “traditional” versus “modern” was not as fully developed a discourse as it is today. This reality is due in part to the New Order government’s deep participation in the institutionalization of wayang and the purposeful perpetuation of the “traditional” versus “modern” discourse that would come after the fall of Sukarno. As such, I can write about how current wayang scholarship views the wayang of the late 1940s and the wayang innovations during and after the New Order as being “less” Javanese in comparison to “normative” wayang purwa, but the wayang of the late 1940s is only a “modernization” in the context of the Guided Democracy era. However, wayang innovations during and after the New Order are certainly “modernizations” in the colonial sense because it was in regard to those forms of wayang that the “traditional” versus “modern” discourse was created. Regardless, I can still understand all innovative Javanese wayang of the 20th century as being valid expressions of Javanese thirdness.

In conclusion, Sukarno’s influence on Indonesian nationalism and politics has been established, as well as the importance of Pancasila and wayang in perpetuating this nationalism. The following chapter traces and analyzes the influence of Pancasila during the New Order regime, and determines Suharto’s investment in Pancasila and his regime’s use of wayang towards perpetuating Indonesian nationalism by institutionalizing the rules of tetekon as a way to determine and institutionalize a normative or “traditional” wayang performance. I will then continue my argument with a
textual analysis of certain Javanese wayang performances and their controversial negotiation of the categories of “modern” and “traditional” through the use of subversive rhetoric, on the part of the dalang, in order to critique and comment on the nationalizing policies of the Indonesian government during the reign of Suharto, all the while pushing the boundaries of tetekon. Nationalism, specifically Indonesian nationalism during the New Order was “ecumenical,” and it thus whitewashed the religious and artistic particularism of Javanese wayang, while the category of “traditional” attempted to whitewash the validity of modernized wayang innovations by declaring them as not really being “truly” wayang or “truly” Javanese. Regardless of this institutionalized bias against wayang innovation, many dalang have continued to “modernize” their trade and speak out in defense of their religious and artistic particularism and autonomy, simultaneously maintaining a Javanese thirdness that attempts to invalidate the categories of “modern” and “traditional” that are forcibly applied to them.
Chapter 2: Pancasila, Tetekon, and Wayang

After the 1965 coup and the destruction of the PKI, new forces replaced the political party involvement in wayang affairs. One such force came in the form of upper class sponsorship of wayang events, especially for celebratory occasions. McVey states, “Such sponsorship became particularly active after the 1965 coup, which effectively ended political party involvement with the arts and brought an upsurge of interest in cultural roots on the part of the ruling military-bureaucratic elite” (40). With this new involvement by the Indonesian upper class, the idea for reviving and preserving “traditional” wayang became a pressing concern for the Indonesian government. Coupled with the perpetuation of Indonesian nationalism in the form of Pancasila, the stage was set to institutionalize wayang as a traditional and national medium indicative of Indonesian culture as a whole. In order to institutionalize and regulate New Order wayang, the twelve rules of tetekon were developed to create a normative standard for all wayang performances. Tetekon was not the only regulating policy administered during the New Order, but it serves as the most quantifiable example. Thus for many dalang, tetekon and the such were seen as being governmental forces that served to limit the artistry and use of wayang language (pasemon), directly challenging their artistic or spiritual integrity and the long standing history of wayang language as a tool for necessary social commentary. Indeed, the New Order provided new challenges for these dalang, however several notable superstar dalang have maintained their traditions by utilizing wayang language in the face of government interference, and in such a way as to avoid government reproach. By continuing to push the limits of tetekon through the use of wayang language or veiled imagery, these dalang continue to implicitly critique and challenge the nationalizing discourses of the government, “traditionalists”, and tetekon towards an ideal of Javanese wayang that is free to change, modernize, and innovate.

Pancasila in the New Order

As implied in prior chapters, the leader and mastermind behind the 1965 coup was the Indonesian military commander Suharto (b.1921-). He would ultimately replace Sukarno as Indonesia’s second president. His regime was eventually labeled the ‘New Order’ as a way to differentiate itself from Sukarno’s ‘old order’ (Ricklefs 272). The point I want to establish is that due to Suharto’s own Javanism, he retained Sukarno’s
Pancasila as a governmental policy, thus continuing the official acceptance of religious ecumenicism within Indonesian politics. Ricklefs states, “He [Suharto] was deeply rooted in the quasi-Islamic mysticism of rural Java, which gave him invaluable inner strengths” (272). Coupled with Zoetmulder’s understanding that Suharto’s consultation of soothsayers also expressed his “Javanese character,” it is very clear that Suharto, much like Sukarno, was a Javanist abangan and thus followed the philosophical precepts of Javanism as seen in his retention of Pancasila (Zoetmulder 18). In a speech discussing the qualities of Pancasila Suharto states, “some of the things I have said will be difficult to follow if you are not Javanese like I am. But everything we have now [spiritual knowledge and the Pancasila] is an inheritance from our forefathers, Javanese or not” (qtd. in Ramage 34-35). As one can see, Suharto’s coup was not about overthrowing Sukarno’s Javanist policies, but was instigated by Sukarno’s poor economic policies and unpopular Marxism, which according to Suharto contradicted the inherent purity of Pancasila and its Javanese roots.

Indeed, as Ramage states, “According to the New Order, Sukarno’s greatest sin against Pancasila was his encouragement of the PKI [Indonesia’s Communist Party], which by definition was anti-Pancasila because communism was incompatible with the first principle, belief in God” (26). Due to the political and social turmoil that tends to come out of coups and regime changes, Suharto and his supporters had the complex duty of reorienting governmental policies in order to get the country back up and running. In order to legitimize themselves as Sukarno’s successors, the New Order rallied around Pancasila as a point of unity. Ramage states, “From the ideological milieu of the Sukarno years the new government extracted Pancasila as the only basis of the state and hence the most appropriate formula for legitimizing its authority” (23). It is important to stress that Pancasila became something more than what it was during the Sukarno era; it became the ideological pillar of the New Order. Ramage explains, “It [Pancasila] now emerged as the fully-fledged ideological justification of the ruling group, no longer simply a common platform where all ideologies could meet” (24). The initial purpose behind rallying around Pancasila was to achieve several specific goals: it simultaneously legitimized the New Order, it justified Sukarno’s overthrow, it delegitimized Islam and Communism as political forces, and it promised a prosperous future for all Indonesians (Ramage 26).
Clearly, the full adoption of Pancasila was seen as having immediate benefits towards reestablishing the Indonesian government after the coup.

As we can see, Pancasila has been prevalent in Indonesian politics for over fifty years, and certainly has played an important part in the relationship between government and religion. So, we might ask, then why has Pancasila remained so prevalent in Indonesian politics? Ramage states, “It is because Pancasila provides legitimacy for open political discourse in an otherwise highly restrictive political system” (4). Indeed, how else could an “ecumenical” government maintain a middle road between communism and Islamic fundamentalism while maintaining an authoritarian presidency? To a certain extent, in order to make Pancasila successful, it needed to be ingrained into Indonesian society. As stated by Drake, “As a unifying national philosophy, it [Pancasila] is taught in schools throughout the nation and, along with a picture of the president, is framed and hung in every government-related office from the highest administrative levels down to the level of the village leader and school head. In addition, courses on the system of *Panca Sila* are obligatory for all civil servants” (78).

It is now advantageous to analyze the New Order’s direct effect on the medium of wayang so as to demonstrate and provide more concrete reasons as to why certain dalang were motivated to challenge the government under pains of censorship and withdrawal of government funding. As stated before, the mythic stories of the *wayang purwa* tradition are seen in many ways to be “true” Javanese history, and in accordance with such thinking the idea that the past serves as an idealized model for the present is certainly demonstrated in the governmental appropriation of wayang. On the other hand, this idea that “the Ramayana and Mahabarata characters serve as a standard against which to measure the behavior of living people” is ultimately a double-edged sword (Sears 8). While Sukarno was successfully able to convince his people that he was acting in accordance to wayang tradition by characterizing himself as a modern-day Bima or Arjuna, Suharto found himself being characterized by dissident dalangs as someone unable to live up to the precedence of the glorious wayang past. However, this result did not mean that Suharto did not attempt Sukarno’s utilization of wayang. Weintraub states, “Performance of wayang golek during Suharto’s New Order regime (1966-1998) always included some government message” (*Power Plays* 5). Thus, we see that wayang can be
used to either praise or subvert a person or ideology because it is understood that the
purwa past is something rather difficult to live up to. Weintraub explains,
“Simultaneously, wayang golek is a form of public entertainment that incorporates
popular music, colloquial language, and carnivalesque humor. It can be used as a tool of
propaganda for local and national government interests or, conversely, as a vehicle for
criticizing the hegemonic sociopolitical order” (Power Plays 9). As history will show,
Suharto implemented several harsh policies in order to control the performance rhetoric
of the wayang ceremony through the agency of either The Department of Information or
the Department of Education and Culture (Power Plays 36). Despite Suharto’s totalitarian
politics, wayang still remained a discursive and potentially subversive enterprise. Thus, to
what extent was the New Order regime able to subdue the use of pasemon or wayang
language within this era’s wayang performances?

Matthew Isaac Cohen, a scholar of theater studies, harshly criticizes western
scholarship on wayang during the New Order era. He states:
Study after study published (outside of Indonesia) during the New Order described how the
Soeharto regime was steadily rising to hegemonic domination over all expressive fields…. In
summery, performing arts scholarship presented an image of New Order Indonesian performing
arts as an instrument of symbolic domination, deracinated of residual traces of the sacred, political
protest, or populism. This being said, the actual degree of state control over the arts during the
New Order through (self-) censorship, surveillance, and policing remains an open question.
Regulations existed, for example, banning all mention in performance of matters pertaining to
policies or ethnic, religious, and racial relations (SARA). But, as one puppeteer put it late in the
New Order (here I paraphrase), ‘Wayang is built out of conflicts. If I can’t mention politics or
SARA, what conflicts are left to make a story out?’ (Cohen 110-111)

As Cohen points out, government restrictions on performance rhetoric was not
threatening enough for most dalang to cease utilizing pasemon as a way to comment on
contemporary political and religious issues. Such issues are considered by many dalang
to be the foundation for their wayang performances, and without the ability to comment
on these “conflicts,” wayang loses its most fundamental element (McVey 23). Tizar
Purbaya, a master dalang of wayang golek theatre makes a similar comment in an
interview with Herbert. Purbaya explains:
The mid- to late 1960s, following the fall of President Sukarno, the rise of President Suharto, and
the establishment of a new government, was a time of great transition in Indonesia…. Under these
circumstances I had no interest in performing legends that were hundreds of years old. What
purpose would they serve? These old stories had nothing to do with our life then. I wanted to plant
fresh seeds by performing stories that had real meanings for the problems we were facing…. How
did I feel about national development, about the military? I expressed all this in my performances.
I felt an intense sense of satisfaction. But there were also many obstacles for us to overcome.
Some of us were blacklisted. This led to problems. We no longer had a proper venue for our work, for example. It was difficult indeed. (Herbert 180)

As we can see, for an idealistic dalang, the New Order regime could prove quite the obstacle to social commentary. On the other hand, many dalang continued to press these restrictions and hold fast to their spiritual and artistic convictions about wayang performance.

Due to the dalang’s significant role in society, the government saw the advantages to enlisting the support of these puppeteers in circulating government news and policies. The government officially recruited these dalangs as “information officers,” but unofficially they were propaganda officers. As stated before, many dalang were not very pleased about following government policies restricting the performance rhetoric of their art, due to the artistic and spiritual integrity many of the dalangs wished to retain. The ethnomusicologist, Andrew Weintraub, explains:

The profound contradiction between the dalang’s role as a propaganda officer and his impulse to elicit pleasure from his audience emerged as a crucible of social tension between official discourse and popular consciousness…. The Janus-faced nature of wayang golek performance prevented dalang from being reduced to propaganda officers, insofar as their popularity and appeal rested largely on their ability to represent the voices of ordinary people. (“Contesting Culture” 88)

In other words, even though many dalang were faced with the totalitarian guidelines of Suharto’s regime, many of them felt an obligation to appeal to the common people. This feeling of obligation may have resulted from artistic ethos, religious sentiment, or an inherent distrust and dislike for the New Order rule. Thus, as wayang had to conform to these new social and political guidelines, the dalang had to likewise conform and reinvent his role in this new society while negotiating his understanding of what being a dalang “traditionally” meant. The dalang understood the benefits of utilizing his trade as a means to help his audience come to terms with the social tensions of the changing era. Weintraub states, “During the New Order period, wayang golek became a privileged space for managing tension and conflict as well as enacting real and imaginary reconciliation between Sundanese regional ethnic identity and Indonesian national identity” (“Contesting Culture” 87). As we can see, wayang performance became a means for the Indonesian government to integrate West Javanese wayang into their perception of a united Indonesian identity.

Furthermore, in 1968, the New Order regime implemented an unprecedented
institution thru the Central Wayang Foundation of West Java: the first annual Sundanese wayang golek purwa competition. With the inception of this prestigious competition also came the further regulation of wayang performance via government sanctioned performance standards entitled “tetekon,” which set the minimum twelve guidelines for performing an acceptable wayang show (Weintraub, “Contesting Culture” 88). According to Weintraub the twelve criteria (tetekon) or guidelines for “normative” wayang performances during the New Order was developed by writer and educator M. A. Salman through his reading of Javanese and Dutch scholarship (“Contesting Culture” 92). Weintraub lists and abbreviates tetekon as:

1. Antawacana: differentiate accent (lentong), style of speaking (lagam), and voice (sora) appropriate to particular character types.
2. Renggep: maintain a high degree of energy and enthusiasm while performing; never favor one character over another.
3. Enges: “arouse the feelings”; spectators should feel the mood portrayed by a character.
4. Tutug: do not leave anything important out of a story.
5. Banyol: make jokes, but not in certain situations, and not too many. Jokes must always be appropriate to a character, and anomalies are discouraged.
6. Sabet: introduce wayang [puppets] from appropriate sides; in scenes with more than one wayang, they must be positioned correctly in relation to each other.
7. Kawi-radya: correctly introduce and describe the attributes of the king and his court, especially in the opening scene of a performance, in the Kawi language.
8. Parama kawi: know the Kawi language, especially derivations of names based on dividing a word into individual syllables and defining the syllables.
9. Amardi-basa: understand the rules for using different language levels which function according to social status and age.
10. Parama-sastra: know the historical and legendary aspects of events described in the wayang repertoire.
11. Awicarita: know the stories and wayang characters.
12. Amardawa-lagu: know the music. (“Contesting Culture” 93-94)

Guideline number five has the most significance to my argument.

Once again, “5. Banyol: make jokes, but not in certain situations, and not too many. Jokes must always be appropriate to a character, and anomalies are discouraged” (Weintraub, “Contesting Culture” 93). Often than not, the dalang will utilize humor and jokes in order to subvert the government. In most cases, humor serves as an accessible means towards communicating and entertaining the dalang’s subversive message, while simultaneously masking the dalang from government censure. Weintraub states, “To evade censorship, political messages are interwoven with humor and satire. In wayang golek, criticism is directed at individuals and programs but not institutions” (Power Plays 124). Thus, by critiquing individuals within the institution, the dalang is indirectly
criticizing the institution. It is this indirect attack that protects the dalang from reproach. Traditionally, humor is deployed through the use of *panakawan*, which are specific wayang characters that represent servants, clowns, and ultimately the voice of the common people. These staple characters are practically utilized in every form and genre of wayang. The four main *panakawan* used for comedic relief are Semar and his sons Cepot, Dawala, and Gareng (*Power Plays* 117). Thus, the warning found in guideline number five telling the dalang to not tell too many jokes, and that “anomalies” are discouraged is clearly an attempt on the government’s part to limit the creative performance rhetoric of any dalang who might wish to state his true feelings on a public matter via wayang language. As such, *tetekon* was established as a means for the government to control the performance rhetoric of wayang.

According to the government, it is the dalang’s duty to “awaken” the masses to governmental issues by conforming to the standards of *tetekon* in order to properly convey these important messages. As stated before, the end result was not everything the government intended. Within dalang circles the twelve criteria of *tetekon* were considered ‘what is usually done,’ in that most dalang considered *tetekon* reasonable, but stifling for creativity (“Contesting Culture” 91). Weintraub says, “A dalang who adheres too closely to *tetekon*, as prescribed by official cultural apparatuses, will not be able to satisfy his audience. In their tendency to fix the rich variety of performance, therefore, *tetekon* are potentially limiting factors in the artistic development of the performer and the evolution of the form” (“Contesting Culture” 91). Weintraub asserts that with the influx of Western technologies and mass media, the wayang industry began to fall behind. In order to keep the interest of a more technologically minded audience, dalangs needed to keep moving wayang to the next pinnacle of rhetorical and visual innovation. It is obvious that Weintraub is very sympathetic to the creative aspect of wayang, and is thus a harsh critic of the New Order and its *tetekon*. I assume this concern stems from the fact that Weintraub, himself, is a trained dalang. The bulk of his scholarship is focused on the superstar phenomenon that has recently emerged in popular wayang. He states, “In fact, it is precisely those dalang whose styles have been described as ‘outside *tetekon*’ (*luar tetekon*) who are often the most successful with the public” (“Contesting Culture” 92). It seems that it is also these same dalang who are able to achieve superstar status.
Weintraub continues, “Superstar dalang have been the subject of the most intense criticism for transgressing tetekon in favor of communication (komunikasi) and entertainment (hiburan). These dalang pose a challenge to regulatory interests because, through their popularity, they preserve their autonomy and privilege artistic and communicative criteria that cannot be fully circumscribed by institutional mandates” (“Contesting Culture” 93). As such, it is mainly in contention to guideline number five that we see the superstar’s preference for communication and entertainment over what should be “normative.”

All in all, the regulatory policies of the New Order regime found their core in the national ideology of Pancasila. Although Weintraub does not say this outright, he implies the connection when he states, “the slogan ‘Unity in Diversity’ in the national discourse submerged ethnic difference, inequalities of power, and class relations in an image of harmony and social cohesion (“Contesting Culture” 87). This slogan certainly describes the unifying goals of the New Order regime, as first implemented by Sukarno before them. Weintraub admits, “Nonetheless, wayang golek contests and organizations sponsored by the state created strong links between Sundanese culture and New Order politics” (“Contesting Culture” 88). As we can see, even Weintraub admits that New Order policies ultimately had a lasting effect on wayang performance in Java.

Wayang: Politics, Religion, and Entertainment during the New Order Era

Returning to Schechner’s post-colonial concerns, it is clear that the government’s inception of tetekon was done as an attempt to institutionalize wayang, and indirectly define, once and for all, the guidelines for “traditional” Indonesian/Javanese wayang. Overall, who has the right to define what is “traditional” or “modern,” truly Javanese or nominal? Certainly, what many contemporary innovative dalang are doing during and after the New Order do not fit into what the government dictates to be “traditional” or “truly Javanese.” Also, it is logical to assume that dalang have been innovating wayang since its inception, and that institutions like the government and Western scholarship have drawn an imaginary line between those innovations they have institutionalized from those innovations of the last fifty or so years that they have deemed “modern.”

Schechner continues, “The modernizers who won nationhood for Indonesia have often had a very different opinion of wayang’s history, essence, and uses than did the
Dutch scholars. And more and more dalangs are acting independently of both the courts and the central government. These dalangs are modern and traditional simultaneously” (200). Indeed, the dalang who have been the most successful during and after the New Order, are those dalang who have been able to maintain a wayang form that borrows from innovative sources, while keeping within the confines of traditional lakons. For instance, several well-known dalang during the New Order and Reformasi eras began utilizing the character of the ogre in new and unique ways, such as making it the lead hero. This new emphasis on the ogre goes against tetekon’s warning, “while performing; never favor one character over another” (“Contesting Culture” 93). One well-known entrepreneur in the world of wayang, Tizar Purbaya, is very much invested in his own wayang creations, be it self-designed puppets or new stories. He states:

I am not an ordinary dalang. Sometimes I perform to express what is bothering me, especially if it’s a moral, social, or political issue. I particularly like that type of story and am truly gratified when I get a response from the audience. Sometimes I make up my own stories. Do you remember the story I told you about an ugly giant with a good heart who goes to school and wins the hearts of the children even though they were terrified of him at first? I made that up for the modern puppets that I have created for children. It’s not a traditional wayang story. There are many interesting stories, and so many wonderful characters. (Weintraub, Power Plays 183)

Purbaya is well aware of his innovations, and is not afraid to give the people what they want because their responses gratify him. Yet, his innovative use of ogre characters is a very sore issue for many “traditionalists,” such as dalang Otong Rasta who exclaims, “But nowadays some puppeteers have Arjuna studying at the feet of the ogres. Heaven forbid! His duty is to expel ogres. Oh how his character has changed! Now an ogre can become a priest! It’s too much!” (Power Plays 77). Not only Purbaya, but also several modern dalang, most notably the superstar of superstars, Asep Sunandar, utilizes the traditional ogre characters in new ways. Just as ogres have been elevated to new roles (i.e. lead hero), many modernizers have decided to entertain new possibilities for traditional characters.

Returning to Schechner, when he speaks of contemporary innovative dalang as being “modern and traditional simultaneously,” he is clearly implying the notion of thirdness, which harmonizes the melding of these two categories into a category that better exemplifies wayang in the modern day as a real Javanese social expression because the categories of “traditional” and “modern” are inadequate colonial constructs that
attempt to hide and discourage the fact that wayang changes over time in response to the changing currents of Indonesian society. Overall, I am in agreement with Schechner when he rhetorically exclaims, “Isn’t it all Javanese [?]” (222). It is, and thusly acts as the impetus for the creation and perpetuation of the superstar phenomenon, a phenomenon that exemplifies the popular acceptance of the thirdness of modern wayang.

According to historian William Frederick, a superstar is “not only an important and recognized figure, but one who is clearly significant beyond a relatively small economic or intellectual elite, to a genuinely mass audience. There have been entertainment ‘stars’ for many years in Indonesia, but it is only relatively recently that superstars have become a possibility from the point of view of economics and technology” (qtd. in Weintraub, *Power Plays* 13-14). Weintraub understands this new sense of popularity in a dual sense. The superstar status allows for the greatest amount of exposure, which is coupled with a performance practice that is constructed from two opposing forces: the state and the “desires and aspirations” of the people (*Power Plays* 16). It is in the role of entertainment, Weintraub asserts, where successful dalang “creates a space from which the voices, preferences, and interests of the audience emerge and become represented. In their desire to entertain and to please their audiences, dalang become vehicles for public representations of the people’s desires and interests in the realm of culture, even when popular enfranchisement is otherwise repressed in the realms of politics and economics” (*Power Plays* 18). The key issue here is that it is ultimately the dalang’s desire to reach his audience that initiates his drive to innovate and modernize, as well as the fact that he is also competing against other forms of mass media such as TV and cinema that further motivates him to stay up to date with his technologically aware modern audience.

Thus, I return to the idea that wayang is a performance that can be either religious or secular in nature and still maintain a performance rhetoric that can covertly press the limits of tetekon through the subversive use of humor and wayang language. In contemporary Indonesia, a prime example of a religiously motivated wayang performance is the exorcism play. There is also considerable evidence that suggests that an exorcism performance is also a prime example for the necessity of working out social crises in contemporary Indonesia. This is especially apparent during the years following
the fall of Suharto, in 1998, known as the Reformasi. According to Andrew Weintraub, “studies of actual [wayang] performances illuminate the stylistic and formal elements and situate wayang golek as a social process, deeply embedded in the changing conditions of Sundanese [or West Javanese] culture and society” (Power Plays 7-8). Weintraub’s observation can be applied to all forms of wayang performed in Indonesia past and present.

To further elaborate on certain religious elements found in wayang performance the theatre historian Kathy Foley comments on an exorcism play she witnessed in 1978 in the village of Cibintinu located in West Java. She states, “The Origin of Kala (Murwa Kala) is an exorcistic performance (ruwatan) done in West Java to release people from the harm the god-demon Kala might inflict. Anyone who has attended a performance will know that even at present a sense of awe and danger surrounds the play” (Foley 1). Foley, an experienced dalang herself, would not have made this observation if she did not contend that a real ontological fear of demons motivated the sponsoring and support for this production. Furthermore, most sponsored wayang performances are held in conjunction with a hajat or ritual feast undertaken to receive the blessings of ancestral or positive spirits. As stated before, such events are held to bless such events as weddings and circumcisions (Weintraub, Power Plays 39). Thus, occasions for most wayang performances are already within the context of Javanese religious ritual. In an interview conducted by art historian Mimi Herbert with a dalang by the name of Aki Mama Taryat, Mama Taryat authoritatively explains the importance of sponsoring an exorcism performance for the well being of one’s children. He states:

It is the spiritual obligation of parents to perform this exorcism ceremony for a child. This is a way of paying homage and ensuring the well being of their descendants. The purpose of the ceremony is to seek the origin of the human spirit, that fine breeze that emanates from the inner heart, and then to nurture and improve it, to wipe out bad elements and all passions that impede goodness and spoil the body. We exorcise evil spirits that reside in mortal beings and disturb human life. (Herbert 94)

It is no coincidence that Herbert refers to Mama Taryat as a “revered shaman,” a title that implies that Mama Taryat sees himself as taking on the role of a priest when he performs wayang. Indeed, Mama Taryat is adamant that, “The wayang purwa to be performed here today is not entertainment. It is a message from the ancestors” (Herbert 92). Given the inherent solemnity surrounding an exorcism play, it is obvious that the performances’
religious elements are the most important factors. However, this does not mean that the dalang is not allowed to add his own personal touches in the vein of humorous commentary, as we soon see in the Cibintinu performance. Also, it is important to note that Mama Taryat’s spirituality is framed by Islamic morals; however, his belief in ancestral spirits is certainly of Javanese origin, an indication of the prevalence of Javanese Muslim thirdness. All in all, the religious aspect of the wayang exorcism play is apparent, and even prompts Herbert to exclaim, “This performance was indeed a sacrament” (97).

Wayang scholars, such as Mimi Herbert and Suratno, also note how asceticism is an important aspect to the lives of specific dalang. Suratno writes about one such New Order dalang named Warsena Slenk, whose sphere of performances include several villages within Central and Eastern Java. Warsena is an open practitioner of kejawen, which stresses ascetic practices. Suratno states, “For those who follow kejawen belief system, asceticism is an effort to achieve goals that are important to living a disciplined life and controlling one’s passions. Dhalangs consider asceticism to be a basic obligation because their duty in the society is very difficult” (156). Herbert writes about another New Order era practitioner of kejawen who is more philosophically inclined towards his practice. It is also important to note that this dalang, Saini Kosim, at the time of his interview with Herbert was the director of ASTI, the Bandung Academy of Performing Arts. Saini’s position and many of his sentiments about wayang really speak to Schechner’s critique of institutionalized wayang. Saini is very much invested in the discourse pertaining to “traditional” wayang as an art form. He states:

Today there is too much commercialism in the wayang. One problem is that many of today’s puppeteers are less well educated than the people who form their audience... When I was a child there were many puppet masters with profound philosophical and mystical knowledge, but now such a dalang is rare. Indeed, the position of the dalang has lost much of its meaning, and the dalang today is just an entertainer, not a spiritual leader. (Herbert 54)

As we can see, a man of his position is invested in the idea that the “traditional” dalang, the dalang of his childhood, was the way the dalang has always been, until the “modern” dalang began to corrupt the sanctity of his position with the use of “modern” wayang. Saini critiques contemporary innovative wayang, with all its uses of modern media and trick puppetry, rather harshly and with great authority. He even says, “Furthermore, the
aesthetic value of the wayang is being destroyed by unsuitable innovations such as ogres
made of rubber or synthetic materials… If a dalang makes a puppet incorrectly, it means
that he does not understand the philosophy behind it” (Herbert 53). Thus, it is dalang and
scholars like Saini who see modernization as a detriment to the art, and his religious
motivation behind protecting “traditional” wayang serves as an authoritative means
towards criticizing modern innovations and perpetuating the “traditional” versus
“modern” discourse.

For Saini, wayang performance is more about the art and his own religious
nostalgia than about the people, although the people still maintain a significant role in the
perpetuation of the art. Due to the fact that Herbert conducted her interview with Saini
during the New Order, Saini’s feelings about the government are carefully worded and he
is watchful about what he says in order to hide any anxiety about his feelings toward the
state, save in respect to wayang. He states:

There are five young puppeteers in training here. I want them to be both learned and spiritually
aware… I ask them not to preach in their performances; some misguided puppeteers use their
performances to promote government programs. Don’t misunderstand me, I’m not against
government programs. The dalang is a citizen like everyone else, and should support government
efforts to improve the welfare of the people and the prosperity of the country. But first and
foremost, the dalang must respect the art form. If there’s a message from the government, he must
adapt it to suit the wayang. The message should not be allowed to destroy the structure of the
performance. It should not be too obvious, for one important feature of art is indirection. Further,
an essential feature of the wayang theater is audience participation. If audiences are treated like
children, if they are preached at, they will go away and the art will die. (Herbert 55-56)

In other words, Saini maintains that the art comes before the government, and must
provide the audience with the impetuous to watch the performance to its end. It seems
that Saini’s reliance on and understanding of the role of the audience does not necessarily
coincide with the modern ethos to give the audience what it wants. A modernized dalang,
on the other hand, might change the performance in order to meet audience expectations.
Saini is of the mind that if wayang is performed “correctly” the audience will conform to
and maintain the tradition. His constructed ideal of tradition also guides his wariness
towards preaching governmental programs. He does admit that such preaching is
necessary, but it should never compromise the tradition, which he asserts happens quite
often. I assume that due to his position as the director of ASTI, his freedom to critique the
government, even implicitly, is more limited than a dalang who works for himself. Thus,
Saini touts the institution because he is within it. Perhaps his mode for making wayang
performance his own is by being religiously and philosophically minded about the way he believes wayang was and should be.

In the following example, one sees how a religiously motivated wayang performance serves to subvert and critique the government, and specifically the Suharto family. As guideline number five of tetekon implies, a dalang should limit one’s use of humor, and the vagueness elicited in the word “anomalies” suggests that a dalang should also try to avoid making jokes about certain subjects or unfortunate events. Regardless, even during a solemn exorcism play, several jokes and intriguing illusions are made for the sake of criticizing Suharto’s corrupt family.

The said exorcism performance was performed on December 24, 1978, in the West Java town of Cabintinu, by the dalang Abah Sunaryu who weaves his wayang play around his disappointment in the Suharto family. According to Kathy Foley, who both witnessed and translated this play performance, “President Suharto—and even more so his children and wife—were being charged in the papers with using their position to enrich themselves while the people’s needs were neglected” (38). Thus, debates at this time were focused on the proper conduct of one’s leaders. Within the play itself, the character of Batara Guru or Siwa appears to represent President Suharto. Batara Guru accidentally fathers the demon Kala and must come to terms with the violent appetite of his demonic son. In a revealing passage, Kala sarcastically warns his father against being a dishonest ruler:

Kala: Well, if you’re a ruler you can’t favor one side, favor the black, lean to the yellow. You can’t just wink at something if you’re the ruler. Be honest in your actions. Be fair with your son. Don’t let it come to this—to give me rotten, bitter food and hide the good stuff! What way is that for a ruler to act? (Foley 5)

On the part of Abah Sunaryu, he is clearly making reference to Suharto’s current scandal about allowing his family to get rich off of communal funds. In another set of lines between Guru and his brother Narada, this implication against Suharto is made more apparent when Narada scolds his brother for giving Kala a sword in which he will, no doubt, wreak havoc amongst the populace regardless of Guru’s list of only thirty-three allowances:

Guru: Why are you angry?

Narada: Nice ruler you are! If this is how you act, you are no noble leader. What I just saw [was] despicable! Good to your child to the extent that you give him a sword like that! What kind of an
aristocrat are you? What do you think of a ruler as cruel as this?

Guru: (Defensively.) Only thirty-three cases were allowed. [i.e. thirty-three instances when Kala can claim a victim]

Narada: In the world you indicated from west to west, from east to east, from north to north, from south to south, how many million humans are there? It is sinful to take thirty-three cases! How many millions will become victims? If Kala doesn’t get his victims fairly, he’ll take them at will. If asked, he’ll say they fall under this condition or that or the other. Just think! (Foley 10)

As we can see, due to Guru’s weakness, he is the initial cause of the Kala threat. Just as Suharto’s weakness as a leader allowed for his children to gain while the people suffered. Also, Foley notes that these references to Suharto’s inability to control his family members elicited much laughter from the audience, which demonstrates the audience’s knowledge and approval of Abah Sunaryu critique.

In order to remedy the Kala problem, Guru decides to send Wisnu and Narada down to the earth, so that they may perform the exorcism ritual that will vanquish Kala:

Guru: You must descend into the world along with Wisnu, for now is the time for Wisnu to descend into the world as a dalang, a dalang who can perform the ruwatan. I will explain it later. But first, I myself will go as a victim. Then those who lie under the threat of Kala can be liberated by the dalang. You too must join the troupe for the wayang ruwatan. (Foley 10)

So as to make amends for his weakness, Guru allows himself to become one of Kala’s sacrificial victims, which thrills the bloodthirsty Kala who states, “It’s not fair to threaten the common people and let the rulers go free” (Foley 11). However, at the last moment, Guru is able to trick Kala and free himself by utilizing a loophole in the thirty-three cases:

Guru: Those carrying out justice should not let themselves be bribed. It was not even a big bribe, just a lullaby, and you wanted it. Justice cannot be played with. It must be like rice: if you tie a ream, tie it tight. Now I, myself, am no longer in the wrong: you are in the wrong for failing to execute justice.

Kala: Hey this must be OSTIP.

Lurah Sekar/Momod: (Correcting him.) OPTIB.

Kala: I didn’t think OPTIB would investigate. Forgive me!

Guru: I cannot. Justice is not mine. Rulers only carry out justice; they cannot change it. Justice knows no mother, no father, no grandmother, no grandfather, no relative, no family. If I was guilty, you should have executed the conditions of number twenty-five, not done just as you pleased! Condition twenty-five is now withdrawn, and I am free of your threat.

Kala: Now he changes the rules, takes away the condition! He goes free, and threatens me! Hey! Okay. You go free, but the important thing is: keep the condition! (Foley 14)
As a further slight, Abah Sunaryu makes reference to the OPTIB or Operasi Tertib, the government organization in charge of tracking corruption within the government, through the use of a comic pun (Foley 40). Through Guru’s ability to play the system and get himself out of trouble, Abah Sunaryu is questioning Suharto’s accountability in the matter. Although Guru claimed willingness to make amends, he ultimately saved himself through a legal loophole, much like Suharto’s ability, as a despotic politician, to gloss over his involvement in the scandal.

In a comedic turn of events, Kala loses his sword in a similar fashion to Guru’s escape. As we see in the following correspondence between Kala and a personified Narada, Kala is tricked out of his sword by one of the musicians in the dalang’s troupe, which ultimately gets him implicated in an illegal exchange of government property and sets him up to be finally vanquished by Wisnu the dalang:

Lurah Sekar/Narada: You’re badly behaved. Don’t you know it’s corruption, selling government property!

Kala: (Defensively.) Not selling, trading.

Lurah Sekar/Narada: Trading government property, then. Awful! If you can’t appear here with it in your hands in five minutes, I’ll throw you out and withdraw all thirty-two conditions!

Kala: Too much, these musicians! He wheedles it out of me, the good-for-nothing, gets the sword, and…

Lurah Sekar/Narada: YOU have exactly five minutes now!

Kala: Crazy musicians, they ruin you! That government property was wheedled out of me. I was a sick person then. In buying and selling, a sick person can’t be held responsible. I had a headache. (The baby cries.) There it goes again! Shut up! Be quite, still, silent! (To self.) This dalang is just like Daddy Guru. (To Lurah Sekar/Narada.) Let me speak to the dalang. (Foley 33)

Thus, by taking away Kala’s sword, the threat to the people is vanquished. According to my own observations, this portion of the play is a way for the dalang to work out and resolve the social tensions created by the Suharto scandal. Due to Kala’s vanquishment, and the return of government property via Kala’s sword, the people are saved from Kala’s threat, just as the Indonesian people would be better off if the money laundered by the Suharto family were to be returned. In this instance, the ritualized exorcism of the demon Kala is in reality a social exorcism of the Suharto family, because in both cases the return of government property and the purging of either the Suharto family or Kala, results in the betterment of the people.
Beyond the religious motivations for maintaining dalang identity and ethos, many dalang are motivated to express their political opinions because they feel that it is their artistic and creative abilities that are being stunted by both the government and the “traditionalism” of the institution of wayang. This censorship was especially the case during the oppressive New Order regime. During this time, many dalang equated modern wayang with the spreading of propaganda. A dalang by the name of Otong Rasta stated, “I wouldn’t want to perform the modern way. Today, the government expects puppeteers to deliver messages about family planning, social welfare programs, and so on. It wasn’t like that before” (Herbert, 74). This statement is in contrast to Schechner’s observation that wayang has historically been about spreading propaganda for the government or ruling class. It is unavoidable that “traditionalist” rhetoric would reduce modern wayang innovations to nothing more than selling out to the government, or selling out one’s trade. Many modernizing dalang have faced criticism to this effect. On the other hand, I have pointed out that the best audience-minded dalang tout the ruling class, but also simultaneously critique it with pasemon. However, during the New Order, an era with stricter performance guidelines, the act of supporting the government had to be more carefully emphasized. As I will demonstrate in the following section, a superstar dalang, during the New Order, negotiates a very ironic reciprocal relationship with the government.

Returning to the modernizing endeavor, we see that it does indeed often employ the tactic of spreading government messages. As Weintraub reminds us, “While superstar dalang capitalized on the performance opportunities the state had to offer, they also used these opportunities to debate and contest the power and authority of the state, effectively creating new narratives of the nation” (Power Plays 7). As I explained before, it is through the efforts of the government that allows the dalang to reach the largest amount of people, thus perpetuating the superstar phenomenon.

When it comes to the actual critique of political issues, the dalang has to take a certain care in order not to bite the hand that feeds him. This balancing act can be very difficult when the hand that feeds the most popular dalang belongs to both the people and the government. Consequently, “Dalang have noted that it was essential to phrase comments in such a way as to make it possible to defend oneself from any accusations of
subversion by insisting that such accusations stemmed from misreadings of remarks that really referred only to the moment at hand in the play” (Keeler, “Wayang Kulit” 98). In other words, a dalang must be careful not to be too explicit in his comments, lest the government accuse him of overstepping his position. Yet, at the same time, he must provide adequate entertainment so as not to alienate his audience. Ultimately, the message of a dalang is very powerful, and has certainly made an impact on the Javanese perception of political figures. Keeler remarks, “Javanese speak of political figures always with a curious skepticism. They tend to see in an obvious leader the puppet of a more powerful but self-effacing agent. For years, Indonesians in the know spoke of President Suharto as too weak, passive, or unlettered to exercise real control over the national government” (Javanese Shadow Plays 200). It is rather doubtful that any dalang straightforwardly denounced Suharto as a ‘weak, passive, or unlettered’ leader. However, through implicit means, the dalang creatively got the message through and had irrevocably influenced Javanese perceptions of Suharto, regardless of the government’s watchful eye over subversive messages, as we see in the following examples taken from the work of superstar Asep Sunandar.

The most effective and subtle way for the dalang to comment on social and political issues is to utilize humor, usually through the use of the panakawan. Asep Sunandar is especially adept at this tactic and has used it to good effect to comment on the army and Suharto himself, as well as many other important issues. In the following conversation between the character Cepot and a number of Asep’s musicians, they attempt to straighten out Cepot’s misreading of a new government slogan. In actuality, Asep is utilizing humor to subvert the message of the government slogan and focus the audience’s attention onto the absurdity of its imagery:

Cepot: Deeds—people, and their deeds. There’s a saying about it: “An elephant…dies…means…elephant dies tiger stripes tusks,” which means a person’s deeds by the tiger tusks stripes elephant. Yes, that’s what the proverb says. Why are you guys making an uproar?!

[Musicians: That’s not only incorrect, it’s ridiculous!]

Cepot: What do you mean, ridiculous? That’s the right proverb, isn’t it? “Dead elephant tiger stripes tusks, stripes become elephant stripes tusks.” So a tusked elephant the striped tiger becomes a person’s deeds by the tiger. So people have tusks.

[Musicians: Come on!]
Cepot: So what is the correct way of saying it? (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 121-124)

The musicians attempt to correct Cepot, but this only leads to further confusion as the musicians and Cepot continue to butcher the phrasing of the slogan by employing various puns to perpetuate the ridiculousness of the scene. Weintraub comments on this skit by noting, “The dalang’s impulse to entertain and satisfy the demands of the audience for entertainment, above all, through the use of humor, causes him to speak in a voice that is distinctly resistant to the slogan and unilateral mandates of government authority” (*Power Plays* 121). Therefore, Asep, by being subversive to this slogan, is indicating his and his audience’s disenchantment with government authority. He is simultaneously giving the people what they want and protecting his interests through the use of humor.

In another performance, Asep comments on a recent bank scandal connected to several powerful government officials. In the following monologue, Asep uses Cepot to satirically question the faith people put into government officials; especially those who allow such scandals to take place:

Cepot: So put your faith in the experts. If you put your faith in someone who’s not qualified, you can expect disaster. Go ahead and ask a plow driver to drive your car; your car is going to get wrecked, right? You have to be careful. As for the country, “according to the rules, a leader must be honest and authoritative. Someone who is honest and authoritative is not going to give a recommendation to just anyone.” (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 124-125)

Later in the monologue, Cepot begins an amazing discussion about Suharto and the future of Indonesian leadership. The imagery Asep evokes about the president’s weakness and old age is very daring. He states:

Cepot: Human flesh isn’t even worth eating. It doesn’t taste good. So what is left of you? Your deeds, that’s what. Think about the president, Mr. Suharto. When he leaves this world, he’s going to be taken from his house and there’s no way his wife, Mrs. Tien, is going to allow him back in. Now compare the president’s corpse with a small anchovy you can pick up at the market. What’s more valuable? The anchovy! And why? Because human meat doesn’t taste good! But the deeds of President Suharto, who’s now called the Father of Development, are going to live on. (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 125)

As Cepot implies, after Suharto’s death the Indonesian people are only left his deeds, as is true with any government official for better or worse. By envisioning the inevitable death of Suharto and the worthlessness of his life, Asep is focusing his audience’s attention onto Suharto’s mortality, stressing that he is just a man. That there will one day be a future without him and that Indonesians must be careful not to put their trust in men.
who will only be remembered for their negative deeds. Of course, Cepot’s monologue is
done in a humorous and satirical fashion. Weintraub explains:

The audience is treated to an image of Suharto’s dead and worthless body being consumed by
worms and disposed of by his own wife! While such a comment may seem mild compared to
public political discourse in Europe or the United States, it has a special salience in a country
where free speech was severely limited and public protest banned. The reference to the death of
Suharto demonstrates the significant role that humor and entertainment play in communicating
views that are critical to the state. (Power Plays 126)

Asep is careful to keep his comments within the realm of humor; however, he has been
censured and criticized on several occasions for pushing the boundaries of his rhetoric,
modernizations, and political critiques.

Oddly enough, the criticisms leveled at Asep by his political enemies and fellow
dalang are aimed more at his modernizing style than at his controversial humor. While
his humor may critique the government, it is his style that is physically challenging and
changing the “traditional” understanding and institution of wayang through the popular
support he has been able to gain from his innovations. Weintraub describes Asep’s style
as hybridized, in that he borrows from several sources such as American pop culture and
other local and non-local dalangs. As a result, Asep’s style is also indicative of thirdness.
Of course, hybridization or thirdness is not exclusive to modern wayang, but for my
analysis I am specifically looking at modern wayang forms as indicators of hybridity and
thirdness. Overall, this understanding of Asep’s style conforms to Schechner’s
understanding of modernization in context to wayang performance as well as implying
the thirdness of Asep’s innovative wayang form. As such, Asep’s innovations are
credited with almost single handedly rejuvenating wayang golek for the younger
generations in Indonesia (Weintraub, Power Plays 97). In spite of his contributions to
wayang, Asep is bombarded with criticisms due to his non-traditional methods as an artist
and promoter of wayang. Weintraub states, “In the eighties critics had charged that Asep
Sunandar’s fight scenes, especially those that could rival even the most violent martial
arts and action films, were ‘sadistic’ because he incorporated innovative puppets whose
heads exploded during battle scenes” (Power Plays 106). When it came to Asep’s daring
strategies at commercializing, “Asep Sunandar’s competitors criticized him for selling
out by inserting advertisements for commercial products into his narrative and song”
(Power Plays 6). It is clear that Asep has created for himself many enemies, but exactly
who are these enemies? In conformity with Schechner, Asep’s enemies are older dalang, as well as government-sponsored institutions.

Historian of theater Robert Petersen states, “The authorities [the Center for Indonesian Wayang Arts (P.P.I.)] cited Asep as being seriously detrimental to their efforts. They argued that Asep had been neglecting wayang’s traditional values by only performing new stories; and that he failed to educate people and promote government programs…. These accusations by the P.P.I. represented a common sentiment among cultural scholars and the older generation” (135-136). Again, in a conversation with a “traditionalist” dalang, Weintraub notes, “He had told me that contemporary dalang like Asep Sunandar had degraded the art form by turning it into a cheap form of entertainment” (Power Plays 6). Regardless, Weintraub also notes that these scathing critiques of Asep, by the older generation and the government, have only served to further promote Asep’s performances and superstar status (Power Plays 106). Ultimately, although Asep’s “flashy puppets and jazzy gamelan offend some purists” his motivations lie in fitting “the needs of today’s audience. He believes that if wayang is not in tune with the times it will stagnate and fade in popularity” (Herbert 193). Indeed, Asep’s main defense against his critics is that he is doing everything for the people, because if the people are not given what they want, wayang will die out.

In an interview with Weintraub, Asep declares, “I sell something, as [at] a food stand, a store…if you want entertainment it is, if you want philosophy, it’s philosophy. So it depends on the conditions and circumstances of performance” (Power Plays 99). In an interview with Herbert, he further elaborates this point. Asep explains:

Today, society is more secular, more worldly. The puppeteers must keep up with these changes if the wayang is to be accepted. The dalang must constantly re-educate himself so that he will not be left behind in this era of advanced technology. If he does not do this, the wayang will decline. It will survive only as long as the dalang is creative. But we still have to present the inner meaning of the wayang stories. We cannot leave this out. But first we must get the audience’s attention, and the entertainment is the bait. The dalang makes the people happy and then, when they are caught up in the tale, he can slip in the philosophy. Most important of all, the dalang has to be sensitive to his audience and divine from them how and on what level to perform. (Herbert 201)

As Asep implies, he holds positionality very much in conformity with Schechner’s understanding that innovative and modern dalang occupy a space that is simultaneously “modern” and “traditional.” In other words, a thirdness exemplified in Asep’s independent nature and willingness to defy and challenge the government, decolonize the
“traditional” versus “modern” discourse, and thus changes the traditions of the court schools (Schechner 200). Regardless of his modern innovations, he still relies heavily on the ‘inner’ meanings and philosophy inherent to wayang performances.

In conclusion, Indonesian nationalism and Pancasila ecumenicism had a profound effect on New Order era wayang through the Suharto regime’s implantation of tetekon as a regulatory tool used to control wayang language, maintain a “traditional” wayang form, and limit the modernization and innovation of emerging wayang discourses. Thus, the more popular dalang took it upon themselves to protect their integrity as dalang by pressing the limits of tetekon through the continual use of implicit wayang language. Although these dalang had to remain careful in what they said and performed, they were able to get their messages across to a very open public, and were thus able to negotiate and work through the social crises of the New Order period. All in all, the following chapter serves as the final piece of evidence to suggest that the tensions and the hardships of the New Order really existed for both the dalang and his audience. During the Reformasi era, following Suharto’s loss of power, wayang became a means for overtly reflecting on the ordeals created by the New Order regime, thus becoming as a ritualized process for finding peaceful closure.
Chapter 3: Wayang Innovations during the Reformasi Era

Upon the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998, wayang re-gained its overt “political edge,” where during the New Order it had to remain somewhat implicit. Cohen remarks, “in 1998 and early 1999, puppeteers throughout Java were busy creating new lakon reformasi (reformation plays), allegorizing and commenting upon the political upheaval of the time” (111). On the other hand, the New Order regime was the initial force behind the superstar phenomenon due to the government’s totalitarian influence on wayang performance and exposure. It was fair to assume that the superstar phenomenon would continue into the Reformasi era, but this was not necessarily the case. Despite this new freedom in the use of performance rhetoric, the post-New Order era saw a drastic decline in live wayang performances. This decline was due to the economic instability that instigated the New Order collapse and Suharto’s resignation. Without the patronage of the government and other private sponsors, many dalang found themselves without a money source. According to Weintraub, with the decline of live performances came the increasing demand for cassette and VCD recordings of wayang performances. Weintraub explains, “it is not surprising that people sought out wayang golek recordings to fill the cultural gap” (Power Plays 209). However, certain dalang have been able to maintain their superstar status through overt critique and reflection upon the New Order period, coupled with innovative visual styles that continue to push the envelope. Although the New Order regime is gone, its ideals for what is “traditional” still linger. However, now that the government is less involved in the regulating of wayang performances, dalangs are now allowed hypothetically limitless opportunity.

As stated before, many dalang utilized the government as a wellspring for performance, sponsorship, and funding; however, with the economic crisis of 1997 and the removal of Suharto from office in 1998, government funding for public wayang performances virtually dried up, leaving many dalang, including many superstars, without their regular venues. The three or so years to follow Suharto’s fall would be named the Reformasi, and it would usher in a period of new social freedoms that loosened several restriction on wayang performance rhetoric, and allowed dalangs like Asep Sunandar to openly and explicitly reflect upon the hardships created by the New Order regime (Weintraub, Power Plays 208-210). As we know, the use of wayang
language or subtle subversion was necessary during the New Order regime because to do otherwise would have been suicide. Asep, out of concern for his audience, decided to take full advantage of the new freedoms provided by the Reformasi. According to Weintraub, “Asep Sunandar, on the other hand, felt that the majority of his audience did not understand the abstract language of wayang golek…. Asep Sunandar believed that wayang language opened up the possibility for a multiplicity of meanings to emerge through New Order performance but that it also closed off communication with audiences who had become increasingly unaware of the ways that symbolic language works in wayang” (*Power Plays* 211-212). Asep’s solution to this issue was to replace the use of wayang language with explicit and straightforward dialogue that got to the heart of his audience’s concerns.

In a *Ramayana*-based production entitled “Rahwana Pejah” or “Rahwana dies a slow death,” Asep clearly denounces Suharto and the problems he caused during the New Order. In the following excerpt the character Aswani Kumba (representing the people) chastises Rahwana’s General Sayungsrsana (representing Suharto) about the misuse of power by government and religious officials:

Aswani Kumba: What were your goals when you came to power? Those goals were to protect the country and its people and to be ready to help the people. Prove it! In the past, I heard you say, “I will protect and serve the poor.” Where’s the proof?! (*applause*). . . .

Sayungsrsana: Little brother, don’t speak so openly. The religious experts will hear you.

Aswani Kumba: So what, let them! Religion can be a mask. To others, one should give tithes [in rice or money paid on the last day of Ramadan], but do they? They wait for people to give money to them! (*applause*) You scoundrels! Religion is used as a mask. They act like *santri* from the *pasantren*, reading the Qur’an and Hadits since childhood, but [in reality] they are not practicing what they preach. They live and eat as a result of their corruption. You idiot! (*laughter*) Where is the proof? Where is the proof of faith and piety? Why won’t you agree to be tried in front of a public court? Hypocrite! (*applause*) (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 215)

As we can see, the explicitness of this excerpt is nothing like what was performed during the New Order, and as Weintraub notes, Asep’s use of explicit language met with astounding approval from the audience. It is no coincidence that this is a play taken from the *Ramayana*, where the hero Rama goes to war against the demon king Rahwana. With Aswani Kumba representing the voice of the people and an ally to Rama, one can see the dichotomy created with Sayungsrsana, Rahwana’s top general, representing Suharto (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 215). In the above passage, Aswani Kumba rages about how
certain leaders only pretend to be religiously moral, using their public persona as pious Muslims as a “mask” to hide the reality that they are gaining their wealth through the exploitation of the people. Speaking directly to Sayungsrsana (Suharto), Aswani Kumba asks, “Where is the proof? Where is the proof of faith and piety? Why won’t you agree to be tried in front of a public court? Hypocrite!” (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 215). In essence, such Reformasi era performances act as a way for the dalang, as the voice of the people, to ritually chastise Suharto and reflect upon the hardships of the New Order. The people are literally working out their rage and disgust at having to live through the oppressive New Order regime, and thusly, Asep provides this outlet in his explicit rhetoric, which he does so for the sake of the people and his fame and fortune.

Although Asep has garnished a lot of support for his explicitness, he was not the only dalang to take advantage of the Reformasi; however, it is fair to say that Asep was certainly the most successful. Many “traditional” dalang saw this Reformasi trend as being a detriment to the art. One such dalang stated, “You can’t be vulgar in wayang… We live in an era of elections and reforms. D’alang shouldn’t use the word Reformasi! Use wayang language: how can people change their ways from a bad situation to a good one? That’s Reformasi, isn’t it? You don’t need to use modern words” (Weintraub, *Power Plays* 211). As we can see, the new explicitness of the Reformasi era was also considered a “modernization” by the “traditionalists.” Regardless, many dalang eventually followed step with Asep. Derived from an interview between Suratno and the dalang Warsena Slenk, Suratno describes Warsena’s position as:

Confused about the attitude he should take and on whose side he should be because on his way to building a career he had been very much helped by the officials of Soeharto’s New Order era. Finally, he decided to follow the current of the society, that is, to be on the side of reformasi. In his performances, he has followed the trend (ikut-ikutan) of criticizing the wrongdoings of the New Order government. He has taken this up in order to continue to be sympathetic to the people. (165)

Many dalang, like Warsena Slenk, have taken up the cause of the Reformasi out of sympathy for the people, as well as for the financial advantages behind following the trends.

In addition to the rejuvenation of performance rhetoric during the Reformasi, we also see rejuvenation in the ritual aspect of wayang, and a revival of a priestlier dalang, by which I mean a dalang who is meant to “provide a role model by praying.” Headley
asserts that, “It is the village that sponsors the performance, just as it makes the offerings, but the dalang’s role is to execute the ritual duties” (235). With the turmoil brought on by the economic crisis of 1997, and the fall of Suharto, many villages went through economic and social upheaval. As a way to work through this trying time period, many villages looked to the purification or exorcism genre of wayang performance. The anthropologist Stephen Headley reports on two specific ruwatan performances that he claims acts as a “social reconstruction of confidence,” because “the agency of wayang during exorcisms addresses the current needs of the local populace” (227). Both performances were done in the city of Solo, the first over the opening of a new shopping mall, and the second over a sacred well. The purification performance held for the Beteng Plaza involved the basic exorcism of the demon god Kala as a way to ensure the betterment of Solo’s future. In other words, Headley’s case studies reflect exorcism rituals performed in order to challenge and work through the current social crises plaguing Solo.

The obvious importance of this performance to the people of Solo is demonstrated in the opening dramatized exchange between the sponsor and the dalang, where the sponsor requests of the dalang the staging of this exorcism performance. The play begins:

Sponsor: Please Sir, I request your assistance that you stop at the Beteng Plaza here. I request that younger brother dalang be willing to do a Birth of Kala purification of the Beteng market plaza here in order that our families who are merchants in whatever, might [do business] smoothly and that later on no impediments whatsoever may appear.

Dalang Kandha Buwana: Yes, I have already received your request. I, an ordinary mortal and subject to the authority of the Almighty Lord, my action will initiate the purification without any obstacles. After I hold the exorcism ritual, every trader here will be prosperous. Later no obstacles will be encountered. Those I have “cooled” will be healthy, selling quickly, whoever has suffered also. They will be able to carry things according to [their] plans. Let’s start holding this purification for the authority of Hyang Widi can make one impervious to any obstacle… (Headley 229)

The dalang’s response demonstrates the reassurance of success and the coming of better times his performance will deliver. As a pious and humble man, the dalang utilizes his spiritual position and power to ensure the happiness of his audience. In context to the actual story, we see a realization on the part of Kala not present in the New Order production witnessed by Foley. In the following monologue, Kala actually admits his errors and promises not to ever endanger the people in Solo again. Kala states:

Kala: Oh, oh, oh, Dalang, you’ve made my heart feel so relieved. That is the good feeling of the
“light letters.” Mankind should worship each according to his own beliefs. Since this is the way it is, sire Dalang, never again will I create obstacles [or] riots in the Beteng Plaza here. May those who are engaging in commerce, operate with ease. Let there be no obstacles whatsoever. I will return to the Southern Ocean. (Headley 229-230)

I interpret Kala’s change in sentiment as being an actual reflection on the turmoil that he has inflicted upon the people of Solo during the Reformasi, as well as an expression against the recent acts of rioting. In order to work out these social tensions that were relatively different from anything that had occurred to these people prior to the Reformasi, the expulsion of the demon Kala has to be equally definitive. It is understood that the problem will not be solved with only a single performance, but the prospect of any performance certainly brings hope to the assurance that these tensions will eventually end and that unity will be restored.

Headley concludes that “through the interplay of the identities of the actors, masked in the leather puppets, the puppeteer and spectators attain mutual attunedness, providing one kind of the inner satisfaction (kapuasan bathin) that contributes to the inner clarification (pernyataan jati diri) needed after such a trauma as the sacking of Solo city” (238). Accordingly, both the audience and the dalang benefit from this performance. Thus, in the new social context of the Reformasi, certain dalang are called to ritually and spiritually purify and exorcise the obstacles created by this new era of social turmoil. We must note that this phenomenon goes hand in hand with the new explicitness and freedom of expression found in the performance rhetoric brought about by the fall of the New Order regime, where we see the necessity to explicitly remark, critique, and reflect upon the tensions in daily life, past and present. It stands to reason that the actual working out of these tensions required a more open and explicit assurance of success that only a spiritually powerful dalang can deliver. These new outcomes of the Reformasi can be viewed as rejuvenated innovations, in that the use of explicit language and the new importance placed on exorcism performances can be understood as old ideas given new birth out of the new social tensions created out of the Reformasi era.

**Conclusion**

As I have demonstrated, the wayang still performed in contemporary Indonesia falls within the context of a complex relationship between religion, entertainment, and politics. As the introduction to my thesis implied, wayang is performance that is made up
of a complex blend of religious, political, and humorous elements determined by the sensibilities of the dalang and his close relationship with the audience. The character of contemporary wayang is also a contested space between those who subscribe to the discourse of “traditional” and “modern,” and those who want to be seen as equally Javanese as any other wayang performance. I agree that a key factor in modern wayang, which scholars like Schechner claim as being a historical component, is the use of wayang as propaganda. Through the use of certain forms of performance rhetoric, namely wayang language, the dalang is able to disseminate implicit information to the audience, be it propaganda, subversive critique, or issues of morality.

As chapter 1 demonstrates, the nature of wayang in contemporary Indonesia has deep roots in the religious mentality of President Sukarno and his Javanist/Marxist ecumenicism, which influenced many of his political policies, especially Pancasila. Sukarno’s presidency was mainly focused on uniting several culturally distinct islands under the independent nation of Indonesia, and thus he implemented several nationalizing policies that would create the illusion of a united homogenized country. Utilizing Marxism, his personal Javanese ideals, and ecumenism he was able to lay a foundation for a united secular country sympathetic to religious diversity. Although, Sukarno was successful in unifying the country, he ultimately laid the foundation for the harsher totalitarian nationalism found during the New Order era. As we know, Sukarno was eventually forced from office, but his ideal of Pancasila remained an important factor in the New Order regime, where President Suharto implemented it as a way to control the dissemination of information thru wayang and other public mediums. Both Sukarno and Suharto understood the potency of wayang language and performance, and utilized them to their best advantage; on the other hand, Suharto’s repressive policies made him the implicit target of many wayang performances during and after the New Order.

Upon reflection of chapter 1 there is much more that can be said about President Sukarno. He was a unique individual who made manifest his religious and political ideals through the founding of Indonesian independence. Sukarno is certainly an intriguing case study for any further analysis into his cult of personality. A larger and more detailed study of Sukarno’s unique religious and political thirdness through the textual analysis of his letters, writings, and speeches would be a logical follow up to a paper such as mine. A
project with the sole emphasis on Sukarno as a religious leader, and as a main player in the institutionalization of Javanese Muslim thirdness would make for an interesting and detailed account of Sukarno’s true influence on contemporary Indonesian society and religion, serving to further illuminate the complexities found in Javanese Pancasila ecumenicism, and wayang’s pivotal role in Sukarno’s nationalist framework.

Another important issue that I discuss in chapter 1 that deserves further study is the innovative character of such Guided Democracy forms of wayang as wayang suluh and wayang pancasila. As stated before, very little scholarship has been done on these forms, and the longer these forms are neglected the harder it will be to retrieve them from the cultural memory of modern day Indonesia. An actual study on the successes and failures of these forms would further illuminate the social mindset of Indonesians during the Guided Democracy era. Being able to textually analyze these plays and somehow record the memory of these productions would also serve to better understand these forms as plausible outlets for the dissemination of propaganda, social critique, and new ways of imagining the world and philosophy of wayang. Furthermore, such a study would do a service to the decolonization of such discourses as found in the dubious dichotomy between “traditional” and “modern” by placing these innovative productions back into a Javanese frame of reference, where they can be discussed as valid expressions of Javanese identity within the context of the Guided Democracy era.

In chapter 2 of my thesis, I demonstrate how the subtle use of wayang language is used to implicitly subvert the government and certain political figures like Suharto during and after the New Order regime. As demonstrated, Suharto’s regime attempted to institutionalize wayang through the rules of tetekon, which many dalang did not appreciate, and thus we see in several performances that their acts of subversion are also responses to the stifling nature of tetekon. Also, we see that the power of wayang performances and rhetoric is actually grounded in an intricate play between the inadequate categories of “traditional” and “modern” that pervade the contemporary wayang Javanese landscape. As such, tetekon was also an important tool in the preservation of “traditional” wayang. As Schechner suggests and I agree with, all forms of wayang to emerge in Java are equally Javanese, and that the most successful dalang create for themselves a positionality of thirdness that is simultaneously “modern” and
“traditional,” which ultimately calls into question the validity of this dichotomy, as we see in the performances of Asep Sunandar et al. Thus, the idea of thirdness is a more adequate understanding of modern Javanese wayang in that it does not attempt to disregard its unique indigenous nature. Also, the success of such dalangs is ultimately derived from their ability to deduce the desires of their audiences and determine whether they wish to fulfill those desires, because wayang performance is a changing landscape, and a dalang can choose whether or not to keep up with the times, which is tantamount to the dynamic of modern wayang. The majority of scholarship on wayang performance is focused on the New Order political landscape, and thus my thesis can offer very little to the vast amount of work already produced on wayang. On the other hand, the most logical elaboration one could make from my second chapter is to continue the decolonization of the colonial discourse found in the perpetuation of the categories of “modern” and “traditional” that pervades wayang studies, and re-analyze the character of New Order wayang through a lens that calls this discourse into question.

Finally, in chapter 3 I demonstrate how wayang regains its full use of performance rhetoric to overtly reflect and criticize the toppled New Order, thus demonstrating that the tensions and social crises experienced during the New Order were indeed a social reality. Along these lines it would be incorrect to assume that with the end of the Reformasi came an end to the need to overtly reflect on the tumultuous years known as the New Order. Indeed, it is not clear as to whether the Reformasi has even ended in Indonesia circa the date of my thesis. I can honestly say, having just returned from a month long stay in Jakarta, an Indonesian cousin of mine told me that he does not believe the Reformasi to be over. His sentiments were vague, but he spoke as one maintaining a transitional position facing an unknown and unpredictable future for himself and his country. As long as the social and political landscape of Indonesia continues to change and come up against the slew of crisis that every country in this world faces, wayang will also continue to change and reflect the social concerns, investments, tensions, and general atmosphere of the Indonesian, Javanese Muslim, abangan experience.
Works Cited


