



# Form, Materiality, and Symbolism in Non-Arabic Muslim Arts: A Case Study from Indonesian *Wayang* Performance

The puppet theater becomes a popular form of cultural expression in the Muslim world, even though wayang performances are not considered a central part of Islamic theology. Wayang performances are seen as having a spiritual significance among Indonesian Muslims for centuries. Such puppet theater incorporates forms, styles, and elements of Islamic spirituality and traditional Javanese cultural practices into its narratives. The article pays attention to the idiosyncratic forms, elements, and meanings of contemporary wayang through the craftsman's framework. The analysis takes into account the formulation and presentation of the wayang in contemporary Indonesian art, focusing on the creation of "Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb." This wayang is associated with the figure of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644). Umar is a historical figure who played a significant role in the early history of Islam and is revered for his wisdom and leadership by most Muslims. The discussion argues that the materiality of puppets in the non-Arab Muslim world not only functions as a traditional form of entertainment stimulating the sense of "fun" but also as complex semiotic experiences between a *dhalang* (wayang puppeteer) and his audiences using signs of two-dimensional buffalo leather and its silhouettes.

**Keywords:** Wayang Kekayon; Indonesian contemporary art; Puppet performance; 'Umār ibn al-Khaṭṭāb; Materiality.

Pentas wayang menjadi bentuk ekspresi budaya populer dalam dunia muslim, kendati pertunjukan wayang tidak tergolong sebagai bagian sentral dari teologi Islam. Pertunjukan wayang dipandang memiliki makna spiritual di kalangan umat Islam Indonesia selama berabad-abad. Pertunjukan wayang memasukkan bentuk, gaya, dan unsur spiritualitas Islam dan praktik budaya tradisional Jawa ke dalam narasinya. Artikel ini memperhatikan keistimewaan bentuk, unsur, dan makna wayang kontemporer melalui kerangka pengrajin. Analisis ini mempertimbangkan perumusan dan penyajian wayang dalam seni rupa kontemporer Indonesia, dengan fokus pada penciptaan "Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb". Wayang ini dikaitkan dengan sosok 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (w. 644). Umar adalah tokoh yang memainkan peranan penting dalam sejarah awal Islam dan dihormati karena kebijaksanaan dan kepemimpinannya oleh sebagian besar umat Islam. Diskusi tersebut berpendapat bahwa materialitas wayang di dunia Muslim non-Arab tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai hiburan tradisional yang menstimulasi rasa "gembira" tetapi juga sebagai pengalaman semiotik yang kompleks antara dalang dan penontonnya menggunakan simbol-simbol berbahan kulit kerbau dan siluet dua dimensinya.

**Kata kunci:** Wayang Kekayon; seni kontemporer Indonesia; Pertunjukan wayang; 'Umār bin al-Khaṭṭāb; Materialitas.

**Authors:**

Lutfianto Lutfianto<sup>1</sup>   
Junaidi Junaidi<sup>2</sup>

**Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup> UIN Sunan Kalijaga  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Department of  
Puppetry, Indonesian  
Institute of the Arts

**Corresponding author:**

[lutfie80@gmail.com](mailto:lutfie80@gmail.com)

**Dates:**

Received 21 Jan, 2022  
Revised 17 Aug, 2022  
Accepted 01 Oct, 2022  
Published 21 Oct, 2022

**How to cite this article:**

Lutfianto and Junaidi.  
"Form, Materiality, and  
Symbolism in Non-Arabic  
Muslim Arts: A Case  
Study from Indonesian  
Wayang Performance".  
*ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu  
Ushuluddin* 23, no. 2,  
pp. 235-244.  
<https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/ushuluddin/esensia/article/view/3212>.

**Copyright:**

©2022. The Authors.  
This work is licenced  
under [the Creative  
Commons Attribution-  
Non Commercial-  
ShareAlike 4.0  
International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

**Read Online:**

Scan this QR  
code with  
your mobile  
device or  
smart phone  
to read online





## Introduction

The puppet theater becomes a popular form of cultural expression in the Muslim world, even though wayang performances are not considered a central part of Islamic theology. Scholars have different views on the appropriateness of puppet theater in the Islamic context. Some view *wayang* as innocuous and neutral form of entertainment and aesthetic element that can be enjoyed without compromising Islamic theology.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars see it as inappropriate or un-Islamic, particularly if the performances include themes or stories that are contradictory to Islamic dogma and narratives.<sup>2</sup> There are other forms of puppet theater that are popular in different parts of the Muslim world, such as *Nang Talung* in Thailand,<sup>3</sup> *Karagoz* in Turkey,<sup>4</sup> and *Khayāl al-Zīl* in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Similar to the Indonesian wayang performances,

these forms of puppet performance incorporate polyphonic elements, including local folklore, mythology, religious traditions, satire, political commentary, and stage manipulation, into music, singing, and orchestra.

The puppet performances have been seen as having a spiritual significance among Indonesian Muslims for centuries.<sup>6</sup> Such puppet theater incorporates forms, styles, and elements of Islamic spirituality and traditional Javanese cultural practices into its narratives. The stories told in the performances are seen as allegorical;<sup>7</sup> they impart moral lessons and spiritual insights to the audience. The puppet performances depict plots, dialogues, characters, and narratives as representing universal truths or principles.<sup>8</sup> Indonesian puppet theaters play a significant role in materializing characters who embody

<sup>1</sup> J J Ras, "The Social Function and Cultural Significance of the Javanese Wayang Purwa Theatre," *Indonesia Circle. School of Oriental & African Studies. Newsletter* 10, no. 29 (November 1, 1982): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03062848208729530>; Aris Setiawan, "Polemic and Reasons for Reusing Wayang and Gamelan as A Medium for Contemporary Preaching Islam Religion in Central Java, Indonesia," *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education* 22, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 254–67, <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v22i2.37525>; Lutfianto and Fahmy Lukman, "Religious Message Abdullah Bin Umar Paraga In The Wayang Kekayon Khalifah," *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2023): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.31538/almada.v6i1.2665>.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Haris, "Innovation and Tradition in Islam: A Study on Bid'ah as an Interpretation of the Religion in the Indonesian Experience" (Doctoral Thesis, USA, Temple University, 1998), 37–38; Rohayati binti Arifin, "Elements of Bid'ah and Khurafat in Wayang Kulit: A Case Study in Kota Bharu Kelantan" (Thesis, Kuala Lumpur, Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia, 2004), 22–25; Vira Ananda Putri and Ashif Az Zafi, "Membongkar Hukum Akulturasi Budaya Sunan Kalijaga," *Tsaqofah Dan Tarikh: Jurnal Kebudayaan Dan Sejarah Islam* 6, no. 2 (February 6, 2022): 9–23, <https://doi.org/10.29300/tjksi.v6i2.3050>.

<sup>3</sup> *Thai Theatre and the Interplay of Perfection and Imperfection, Imperfectionist Aesthetics in Art and Everyday Life* (Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003251361-12>; Irving Chan Johnson and Darryl Lim, "Curating Shadows: Malayan Shadow Puppets in Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 95, no. 1 (2022): 51–88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ras.2022.0008>.

<sup>4</sup> Peter O'Connor, *Insights in Applied Theatre: The Early Days and Onwards* (Intellect Books, 2022), chaps. 18–Educational and Critical Dimensions in Turkish Shadow Theatre: The Karagoz Theatre of Anatolia.

<sup>5</sup> Nargis Abdel Ghafar Bazheir, "The Stages of the Play's Development from Ancient Arab Times," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 10 (November 6, 2022): 2804–12; "Arab Theatre and Plays: Developmental Stages and Challenges," *ARTSEDUCA*, no. 34 (2023): 167–76, <https://doi.org/10.6035/artseduca.6642>.

<sup>6</sup> Sena Wangi. *Ensiklopedi Wayang Indonesia*. (Jakarta: Sena Wangi Sekretariat Nasional Pewayangan Indonesia, 1999); RM Pranoejoe Poepaningrat, *Nonton Wayang dari Berbagai Pakeliran* (Yogyakarta. PT. BP. Kedaulatan Rakyat, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Lydia Kieven, "'The Wandering Poet'; Depictions on Ancient Javanese Relief Panels," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* 23, no. 2 (December 14, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v23i2.1106>; Achmad Fawaid, Wening Udasmoro, and Sri Margana, "Islam Behind the Court Wall: Politics and Aesthetics of Javanese Islam in Babad Tanah Jawi" (International Symposium on Religious Literature and Heritage, Atlantis Press, 2022), 76–84, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220206.010>.

<sup>8</sup> Burhan Nurgiyantoro, "Wayang Dan Pengembangan Karakter Bangsa," *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* 1, no. 1 (October 4, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpk.v1i1.1314>; for further discussion on the universal principles in Islamic tradition, see Shofiyullah Muzammil et al., "The Adaptability of Pesantren in Indonesia During the New Normal Era," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 426–54, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.2.426-454>.





spiritual wisdom and local values, either sourced from historical data or puppeteers' imaginative contemplations.

This article is a practice-based study of the creative and technical processes of wayang creation and performance in the Muslim world. It argues that the making of wayang, as an act of indirect communication to audiences, constitutes the puppeteers' embodiment of sociocultural, theological, aesthetical and educational elements. The wayang performance, in the framework of its Indonesian Muslim performers, diffuses complex intellectual and psychological effects due to its nature as means of interpersonal relations in a semiotic activity.<sup>9</sup> This study presents an analysis of the materialization and presentation of the wayang in contemporary Indonesian art, focusing on the creation of "Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭāb." As the name implies, this wayang is associated with the figure of Umar b. Khaṭṭāb (d. 644). Umar is a historical figure who played a significant role in the early history of Islam and is revered for his wisdom and leadership by most Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

The paper draws attention to the idiosyncratic forms, elements, and meanings of contemporary wayang through an artisanal framework. It argues that the materiality of puppets in the non-Arab Muslim world not only functions as a classical form of "fun" stimulating entertainment<sup>11</sup> but also as a complex semiotic

experience between the wayang puppeteer (dhalang) and his audiences using signs of two-dimensional buffalo leather and its silhouettes. The materiality of *Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb* becomes a theological-cultural transmission tool to convey spiritual wisdom.<sup>12</sup> The performance of this contemporary wayang in public spaces encourages further contemplation on the state of mankind in times of crises, thereby providing an emotional effect in re-living the coping mechanism of the second caliph Umar.

### Artisan Concern in Crafting the Wayang

In its development, wayang provides many benefits to human life. Hence, it is not surprising that UNESCO has acknowledged wayang as a world culture. It offers extensive advantages throughout the Nusantara Archipelago and other parts of the world. Wayang is a fine theatrical art, which incorporates religion, folklore, history, mysticism, philosophy, literature, music, and dance with political and social commentaries. However, wayang is most often regarded as mere entertainment for the audience. In fact, this performing arts has the potential to serve as a means of communication and transformation to the public. This art is useful to convey and spread various insights, concepts, and values, such as good characters.

<sup>9</sup> Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices* (Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts University of Gothenburg, 2005); Lilya Ainunning Puri and Dharsono Sony Kartika, "Reinterpretation of Wayang on Indonesian Contemporary Art: Case Studies 'Heri Dono Dan Indieguerillas,'" *International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Arts Creation and Studies* 4, no. 1 (December 5, 2022): 29–45; Elsa Putri E. Syafril Syafril and Nafila A. Agel, "Wayang Sada (Sodo): A Media of Indonesian Language Learning and Cultural Introduction for Foreign Learners," *London Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 4 (October 28, 2022): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.31039/ljss.2022.4.84>.

<sup>10</sup> Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān as-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2003), 89–119; Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 39–49.

<sup>11</sup> Asef Bayat, "Piety, Privilege and Egyptian Youth," *ISIM Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (2002): 23–23; "6. The Politics of Fun," in *6. The Politics of Fun* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 129–150.

<sup>12</sup> Lutfianto, "Religious Values in the Performance of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Yogyakarta," in *Prosiding Internasional: 4th International Fikrah Annual Conference "Contemporary Islam: Religion in the Humanity Context"* (Presented at the 4th International Fikrah Annual Conference "Contemporary Islam: Religion in the Humanity Context," Kudus: IAIN Kudus Press, 2020), 129–140; "Descriptive Analysis on the Plays of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah: A Collaboration Among Calligraphy, Wayang Arts, Islamic Dialogue, and Java Culture" (Presented at the 2nd Annual Conference on Education and Social Science (ACCESS 2020), Atlantis Press, 2021), 506–510.





The reproduction of forms and stories has long been a central concern in the historical trajectory. The Sultan of Demak and the Nine Saints (Walisongo), for example, issued the first decree that the unique forms and stories of wayang should contradict Islamic principles and standards. Gunungan, which has an image of Dewandaru symbolizing the tree of life, is one of the puppet forms that received the most attention. The Nine Saints reinterpreted this puppetry form into *kayon* or *khayyu*, which means the source of life, knowledge, and protection.

The presence of *Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. al-Khaṭṭab* during the pandemic proved that the wayang model does contain a philosophy of life for communities. It plays a significant role in recording and remembering the past and present events, which are, in this case, the plague during the reign of caliph Umar and the current covid-19 pandemic.

*Wayang* performance and its craftsmanship are integral parts of Indonesian culture through improvisation in order to be easily accepted by contemporary society. Therefore, the creation of wayang is also at the same time a response to the preservation of wayang culture through which the authenticity of the wayang is maintained and developed.<sup>13</sup> The creation of *wayang kekayon* considered aesthetic aspects in its manufacturing process. Three basic elements are taken into account: form, content, and appearance.<sup>14</sup> First, the shape is in the form of a gunungan made of buffalo leather. The primary material is fashioned into mountains and can be presented vertically or horizontally.

Second, the content of this work is based on the ideas originating from Umar b. al-Khaṭṭab, one of the rightly-guided caliphs (al-khulafā' u al-rāshidūn). Umar exemplifies an extraordinary character of leadership in various ways, one of which is the capacity in handling the epidemic.

The puppetry work represents hope for the birth of a leader who can protect the people. Even though leadership does not require a medium to describe it, the creation of this work uses a medium to present the character of Umar. This medium is a symbol of the depiction of the character that represents the figure being portrayed. Apart from that, this idea also departs from the Javanese cultural tradition of wayang, which is rich with moral content and teachings.

Some symbols depicting Umar include a sword, raging flame, Qur'anic letters "*Ṭā-Ḥā*", and Arabic calligraphy of his name. The symbols are crafted using traditional techniques of carving and painting, which are commonly used in the creation of wayang. Each symbol carries a distinct meaning: the sword represents strength and determination, the flame conveys passion and intensity, and the Arabic letters of *Ṭā-Ḥā* demonstrate Umar's gentleness upon hearing the Quranic letter, meanwhile, the calligraphy of his name represents his individual character.

Third, an essential aspect of the aesthetic element. This is accomplished by positioning the Umar b. Khaṭṭab symbol alongside other wayang characters. Thus the item can be displayed at the front of a classroom or in a library as a visually engaging educational tool. Ultimately, the core concept behind this creation is to produce an aesthetically pleasing learning medium

Currently, art serves various functions and aims to fulfill a wide range of needs, which are often tied to the personal expression of individual artists. However, in the case of leather craft art, the works can fulfill both personal and social functions simultaneously. On one hand, the creation of such works serves as a form of self-expression and allows for the production of useful goods. On the other hand, they also provide a means for expressing aspects of social existence based on personal experience.<sup>15</sup> This

<sup>13</sup> Thalia R. Goldstein, Megan Stutesman, and Brittany Thompson, "Moving with Puppets: Preschool Children's Gesture with Puppets during Pretense," *Cognitive Development* 63 (July 1, 2022): 101198, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2022.101198>.

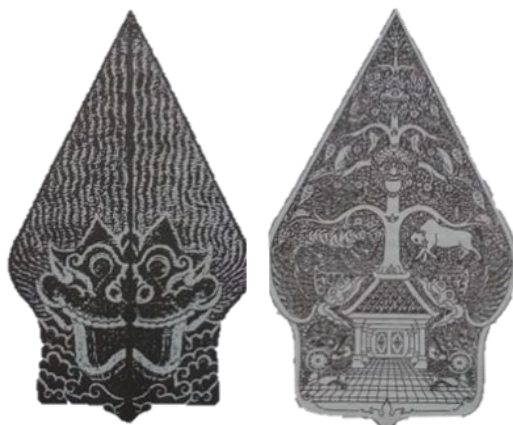
<sup>14</sup> A. A. M. Djelantik, *Estetika: Sebuah Pengantar* (Yogyakarta: Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Burke Feldman, *Art as Image and Idea* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 5–6.





work primarily serves to present beauty to society and expand the range of choices available to art enthusiasts, thereby broadening their horizons.<sup>16</sup> Its concept took inspiration from the *Gunungan of Sunan Kalijaga* and the *gunungan* typically used in wayang performances. To explain the key ideas and structure of the work, the following step scheme is employed:



**Picture 1.** Forms of Gunungan in wayang art

Initially, the aim of this creation was to produce an aesthetically pleasing and valuable educational medium, inspired by the rich cultural heritage of wayang. In particular, the *gunungan wayang* was a source of inspiration, as it carries a symbolic meaning that reflects a universal picture of the world. According to Virgil C. Aldrich, the difference between an artist and an artisan (craftsman) lies in the choice of medium, which serves as a tool, medium, and language. While artisans produce physical objects, artists create objects that are not only aesthetic but also have a deeper meaning.<sup>17</sup>

The process of designing the initial form of the wayang represents a crucial aspect of the artistic process that craftsmen must carefully consider. In the view of one artist, the materials of art include the employment of physical materials, mediums, content, form, and subject matter. The employment of materials refers to

how the craftsman can become physically and mentally engaged during the creation process, resulting in a feeling of being truly alive rather than simply producing an object.

A medium is a tool or means used to give form to an idea. The craftsman's educational background and daily activities serve as tools or means to help master the characteristics of the materials used and develop the necessary skills. Additionally, during the creative process, changes may occur that enable the craftsman to achieve greater mastery of certain techniques or characteristics.

Content refers to the message or theme that is conveyed through the artwork. In this creation, the message is to encourage good behavior in individuals, providing them with the necessary tools to navigate society. Form refers to the chosen medium of expression, in this case, an installation work composed of calligraphic elements, symbolic shapes, and colors within the *gunungan* or *kayon*. The subject matter is the central focus of the artwork, which in this case is the *paraga* in the form of a *gunungan*, wrapped in calligraphy and symbols that come together to tell a unified story or play.

### Form and Materiality of Wayang Kekayon

The creation of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab requires appropriate media and techniques. Materials as a medium in the creation of artworks need to be studied in order to understand their characteristics. This helps ensure that the designer can materialize his ideas through the media. The medium used as a means to realize this work is buffalo leather, which was chosen because of its common use in making shadow puppets. However, the use of cowhide is also allowed, except that the

<sup>16</sup> Supriaswoto Supriaswoto, "Penciptaan Kriya Logam Wall Decor Berbahan Limbah Aluminium" (Monograph, Yogyakarta, Institut Seni Indonesia, 2021), 11, <http://lib.isi.ac.id>.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Payzant, "Philosophy of Art, by Virgil C. Aldrich. N.J., Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series, 1963. pp. 116," *Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (1965): 130–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0012217300033461>.

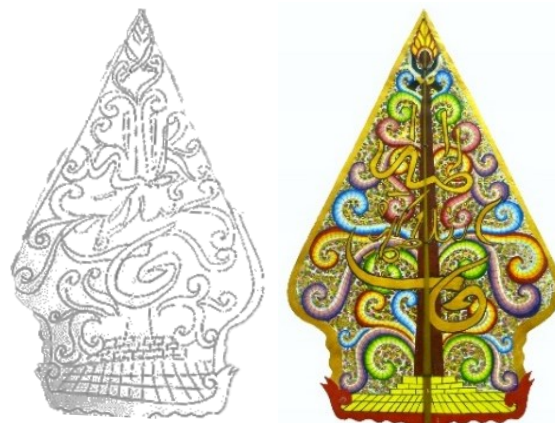




processing takes longer because it contains more oil.<sup>18</sup>

The technical aspect of leather craft work is as simple as making shadow puppets in general. However, this process must go through a number of careful steps to avoid practical mistakes that can damage materials and tools and also to be more cost-effective. The techniques used in this work are the same as in the production of puppets in general, namely inlaid work (*tatah*) and crafting (*sungging*).

The creation process requires a deeper sensibility and sufficient work experience to produce more interesting and unique forms. It starts with preparing materials and tools, by first selecting buffalo leather that is ready to be processed and crafted. Once the materials are ready, the next step is to paint a picture on the buffalo skin using glued design paper. The buffalo leather sheet that is ready to be inlaid is then cut following the direction of the mountain-shaped scratches attached to the existing design image. The buffalo leather is cut with scissors or manually inlaid according to the paper sheet stamped to it. The next process is to make an inlay with a special device according to the existing design and filling. After inlaying, the buffalo skin is then painted (*sungging*) using the desired color. The last step is the application of a pincher (*gapit*) made from buffalo horn or timber or fiber. After the work is complete, it can be displayed or stored like *wayang* in general.



**Picture 2.** The draft and final form of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab

As for the creation of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab, it includes the elements of fine art, such as points, lines, fields, colors and textures. It also adopts the principles of art, such as rhythm, balance, unity, proportion, simplicity and clarity. There are parts called the frame and the center. The frame is bordered ornamentation while the center is the name of 'Umar in Arabic, with images of swords, fire, and the letter *Ṭā-Hā* in Arabic script.

There are shapes in the form of dots on the powder inlay and small thin dots on the edge ornament. There are also curved lines on dynamic niche ornaments. The concept of using space/wide space and ornaments that are not *ngrawit* is the same as in the ornaments of Wayang Purwa. There are ornaments that fill the room with a balanced composition between left and right. The weight of the paraga contents places more emphasis on the Arabic calligraphy written by 'Umar b. Khaṭṭab. While in the presentation, it is more about conveying the leadership education of the figure of Umar b. Khaṭṭab. This puppet is played to audiences with conceptual and academic backgrounds in Javanese literature and puppetry. Meanwhile, the puppet maker is a craftsman with guidance from an artisan. The craftsman will produce physical objects while the artisan will generate

<sup>18</sup> Suyoto, The Procession of Cow and Buffalo Leather, direct interview, July 2022.





aesthetic objects. The craftsman can be physically and mentally involved during the creation process from which a sense of life is evoked, rather than simply producing an object.

The use of *dalang/surjan*, *jarik* and *blangkon* clothing during the show exhibits peculiarities of *wayang* performances in general. In addition, the show is also equipped with stage props, screens, microphones, *blencong* lighting. The stage is placed slightly higher than the audience. The audiences are separated by gender and adopt a similar concept to other religious forums (*majlis ta'lim*) in Indonesia.

### Wayang and Symbolism of the Caliph

*Wayang* has come in the form of literary works that represent life through culture. Puppet makers express that culture in their works.<sup>19</sup> At that time, the plague is represented in the puppet culture so the performance will be useful for the audience. The lesson is to what extent Umar's response in handling the disaster as stated in the religious literature and whether Umar's decision can be contextualized in the present context.<sup>20</sup>

The presentation of role models in the form of puppets is significant for future generations. Attitudes in responding to and dealing with epidemic disasters need to be presented in the community to teach the people how to deal with them. Model making in the form of *wayang* really needs to be preserved. This is due to the development of increasingly advanced and sophisticated media. *Wayang* serves as a model that is valuable and cannot be exchanged for anything.<sup>21</sup> The ideas and value-laden messages conveyed to the community in the form of *wayang* should be appreciated in the form of performances, which become entertaining and educational events in dealing with the plague.

### A. Characteristics of the Figure

This figure is an extraordinary example of leadership. The representation to be presented is the hope that every human being has the desire to be a good leader. Although leadership does not require media to depict it, the creation of this work uses media to present the character of one of caliph figures, 'Umar b. Khaṭṭab. This media is a symbol of a character that represents the figure to be presented. In addition, this idea departs from the current culture of the Javanese people who still like *wayang*, a culture that is full of moral content and manners.

Umar as a character is firm and straight in making political, social, and economic decisions. He also has extraordinary social awareness. The symbol of the sword implies Umar's message of firmness. *Tā Ḥa* is one of the Qur'anic names through which Umar found guidance and then embraced Islam. *Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab* presents a character that easily accepts the truth. He has a high Islamic spirit and outstanding assertiveness in spreading Islam. 'Umar's charisma and leadership are symbolized with the blazing fire.

Umar bin Khaṭṭab is one of the figures respected by the Quraysh. He is good at arguing, dialoguing, and discussing to find solutions for various problems in society. Nevertheless, he was also known as a short-tempered figure. After embracing Islam and being educated by the Prophet directly, he then turned into a civilized individual. He no longer preached Islam secretly but openly. When there was a call to migrate, he did it publicly. During his reign, Islam was able to spread throughout the world, including Persia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Burqah, Azerbaijan, Jurjan, Western Tipoli, Basrah, Kufa and Cairo.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad Hidayatullah and Syamsul Bakhri, "Dekonstruksi Karakter Drupadi Dalam Pewayangan: Studi Gender Dan Living Qur'an Mengenai Poliandri," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 15, no. 2 (April 23, 2021): 424–45, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v15i2.2147>.

<sup>20</sup> Z. Zuhri, "Beyond Syncretism: Evidence of the Vernacularization of Islamic Theological Terms in

Javanese Literature in the 19th Century," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (November 14, 2022): 373–98, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.373-398>.

<sup>21</sup> Rully Charitas Indra Prahmana and Afit Istiandaru, "Learning Sets Theory Using Shadow Puppet: A Study of Javanese Ethnomathematics," *Mathematics* 9, no. 22 (2021): 2938, <https://doi.org/10.3390/math9222938>.





## B. Narratives on Umar's Coping Mechanism

The attitude of someone who has become an example for generations to come, as well as the example of Umar in dealing with epidemics, needs to be conveyed to the public. Moreover, the community is experiencing a similar disaster. Attitudes and examples like this need to be expressed in the language and local wisdom models of each region, for example with wayang. In a situation like this, people need to get entertainment that gives them the enthusiasm to revive. Apart from that, it is hoped that they will also learn from their predecessor, such as Umar, in dealing with the plague.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab became a medium of performance during the pandemic. The form of puppet is made of carved leather or wood to portray characters in drama performances.<sup>22</sup> The drama conveys lessons of Umar's leadership when overcoming the plague.

The creation of this wayang paraga took into account different aesthetic values compared to other artists. Dalang or other artists mostly use the aesthetic value of liberalism, which is 'art for art's sake'. Whereas, the materialization of the wayang paraga was motivated to grow closeness toward God. Three parameters were used during the making process of this puppetry wayang artwork;

First, the process of sourcing materials for wayang, its production, and the performance of *wayang paraga* should not violate Islamic fiqh; Second, the wayang must be visually aesthetic despite that, when staged, it lacks dynamics with certain slashing movements (*sabet*); Third, the work contains a plea to social welfare. *Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab* is also created in-line with these categories indicated by the National Museum of Indonesia.

## C. Wayang Performance & Islamic Resilience

Wayang Kekayon Khalifah appears as a media presenting the visualization of an Islamic figure whose leadership once successfully overcame the plague, namely Umar b. Khaṭṭab. Wayang, as a traditional performance, is a part of culture born from society. Wayang contains elements of local wisdom in a particular area. Likewise, Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. Khaṭṭab emerged in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak.

During the wayang performances, the paraga can serve as role models in dealing with pandemic. The story of Umar in handling the plague, as narrated orally among the Javanese, has become a discourse in coping with Covid-19 that hit the world, including Indonesia. The performance of Wayang Kekayon of the caliph 'Umar, albeit through virtual performance and YouTube video, brings a sense of enthusiasm to cope with the pandemic. An Islamic caliph figure or paraga, especially Caliph Umar, gives a new nuance to the world of wayang in the sense that it provides support in handling the contemporary Covid-19 outbreak through a local wayang-based cultural approach.

## Conclusion

This study argues that wayang, the Javanese art of puppet performance, is an accessible source of knowledge and wisdom to its audience. Seeking to deepen the artisan's perspective on the materiality and artwork of contemporary wayang, the creative and technical processes of puppet creation and performance act as a form of indirect symbolic communication and constitute puppeteers' embodiment of multidimensional elements. This article argues that the materiality of puppets in the non-Arab Muslim world not only functions as a traditional form of "fun" but also as a complex semiotic experience between a

<sup>22</sup> I. Made Dwitayasa, "Mantra in the Text of Dharma Pewayangan," *Vidyottama Sanatana: International Journal of Hindu Science and Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (November 2, 2020): 269–82, <https://doi.org/10.25078/ijhsrs.v4i2.1858>; Nazifatul Ummy Al Amin et al., "Kejawen,

Multiculturalism, and Principles of Qur'an: Transformation and Resupposition of QS. al-Kafirun (109) 6 in Urip Sejati Community of Yogyakarta," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (2020): 71–90, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v21i1.2195>.







dalang and his audiences using signs of two-dimensional buffalo leather and its silhouettes.

The materiality of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Paraga Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb becomes a theological-cultural transmission tool to convey spiritual wisdom. Performances of the wayang in public spaces such as the museum and airport encourage further contemplation on the state of mankind during the disaster, thereby providing an emotional effect in re-living the coping mechanism of 'Umar. Taking lessons from a historical figure whose leadership period once overcame the pandemic, the artwork shows that handling the plague requires a firm and well-directed policy of the ruler. The study of the form, materiality, and meaning of wayang contributes to encouraging further contemplation on the state of mankind in times of crises, thereby providing an emotional effect in re-living the coping mechanism of the second caliph Umar.

### Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to all informants and acknowledge their contributions to the making of this research.

### Competing Interests

None of the authors of this research had any financial or personal relationship with others that could appropriately influence or bias the content of the study.

### Author's Contributions

All of the listed authors contributed to this article.

### Ethical Considerations

This article follows all ethical standards for research, without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding Information

This research did not receive a specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or non-for-profit sector.

### Data Availability

Data sharing does not apply to this paper because no new data was created or analyzed.

### Disclaimer

The Views and assumptions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies or official positions of any of the author's affiliated agencies.

### References

- Amin, Nazifatul Ummy Al, Egi Tanadi Taufik, Siti Mufidatunrofiyah, and Idris Ahmad Rifai. "Kejawen, Multiculturalism, and Principles of Qur'an: Transformation and Resupposition of QS. al-Kafirun (109) 6 in Urip Sejati Community of Yogyakarta." *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (2020): 71–90. <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v21i1.2195>.
- Arifin, Rohayati binti. "Elements of Bid'ah and Khurafat in Wayang Kulit: A Case Study in Kota Bharu Kelantan." Thesis, Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia, 2004. <http://ddms.usim.edu.my:80/jspui/handle/123456789/7183>.
- Ayoub, Mahmoud M. *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003.
- Bayat, Asef. "6. The Politics of Fun." In 6. *The Politics of Fun*, 129–50. Stanford University Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804786331-008>.
- . "Piety, Privilege and Egyptian Youth." *ISIM Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (2002): 23–23.
- Bazheir, Nargis Abdel Ghafar. "Arab Theatre and Plays: Developmental Stages and Challenges." *ARTSEDUCA*, no. 34 (2023): 167–76. <https://doi.org/10.6035/artseduca.6642>.
- . "The Stages of the Play's Development from Ancient Arab Times." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 10 (November 6, 2022): 2804–12.
- Djelantik, A. A. M. *Eстетika: Sebuah Pengantar*. Yogyakarta: Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia, 1999.
- Dwitayasa, I. Made. "Mantra in the Text of Dharma Pewayangan." *Vidyottama Sanatana: International Journal of Hindu Science and Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (November 2, 2020): 269–82. <https://doi.org/10.25078/ijhsrs.v4i2.1858>.
- Fawaid, Achmad, Wening Udasmoro, and Sri Margana. "Islam Behind the Court Wall: Politics and Aesthetics of Javanese Islam in Babad Tanah Jawi," 76–84. Atlantis Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220206.010>.
- Feldman, Edmund Burke. *Art as Image and Idea*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- Goldstein, Thalia R., Megan Stutesman, and Brittany Thompson. "Moving with Puppets: Preschool Children's Gesture with Puppets during Pretense." *Cognitive Development* 63 (July 1, 2022): 101198. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2022.101198>.
- Hannula, Mika, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén. *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices*. Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts University of Gothenburg, 2005.
- Haris, Ahmad. "Innovation and Tradition in Islam: A Study on Bid'ah as an Interpretation of the Religion in the Indonesian Experience." Doctoral Thesis, Temple University, 1998.
- Hidayatullah, Ahmad, and Syamsul Bakhri. "Dekonstruksi Karakter Drupadi Dalam Pewayangan: Studi Gender Dan Living Qur'an Mengenai Poliandri." *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 15, no. 2 (April 23, 2021): 424–45. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v15i2.2147>.
- Johnson, Irving Chan, and Darryl Lim. "Curating Shadows: Malayan Shadow Puppets in Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum." *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 95, no. 1 (2022): 51–88. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ras.2022.0008>.
- Kieven, Lydia. "The Wandering Poet"; Depictions on Ancient Javanese Relief Panels." *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* 23, no. 2 (December 14, 2022). <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v23i2.1106>.





- Lutfianto. "Religious Values in the Performance of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah Yogyakarta." In *Prosiding Internasional: 4th International Fikrah Annual Conference "Contemporary Islam: Religion in the Humanity Context,"* 129–40. Kudus: IAIN Kudus Press, 2020. <http://repository.iainkudus.ac.id/4872/>.
- Lutfianto, and Fahmy Lukman. "Religious Message Abdullah Bin Umar Paraga In The Wayang Kekayon Khalifah." *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2023): 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.31538/almada.v6i1.2665>.
- Lutfianto, and Abdul Munip. "Descriptive Analysis on the Plays of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah: A Collaboration Among Calligraphy, Wayang Arts, Islamic Dialogue, and Java Culture," 506–10. Atlantis Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210525.137>.
- Muzammil, Shofiyullah, Egi Tanadi Taufik, Siti Mufidatunrofiah, and Nazifatul Ummi Al Amin. "The Adaptability of Pesantren in Indonesia During the New Normal Era." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 426–54. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.2.426-454>.
- Nurgiyantoro, Burhan. "Wayang Dan Pengembangan Karakter Bangsa." *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* 1, no. 1 (October 4, 2011). <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpk.v1i1.1314>.
- O'Connor, Peter. *Insights in Applied Theatre: The Early Days and Onwards*. Intellect Books, 2022.
- Payzant, Geoffrey. "Philosophy of Art, by Virgil C. Aldrich. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series, 1963. Pp. 116." *Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (1965): 130–32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0012217300033461>.
- Prahmana, Rully Charitas Indra, and Afit Istiandaru. "Learning Sets Theory Using Shadow Puppet: A Study of Javanese Ethnomathematics." *Mathematics* 9, no. 22 (January 2021): 2938. <https://doi.org/10.3390/math9222938>.
- Puri, Litya Ainunning, and Dharsono Sony Kartika. "Reinterpretation of Wayang on Indonesian Contemporary Art: Case Studies 'Heri Dono Dan Indieguerillas.'" *International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Arts Creation and Studies* 4, no. 1 (December 5, 2022): 29–45.
- Putri, Vira Ananda, and Ashif Az Zafi. "Membongkar Hukum Akulturasi Budaya Sunan Kalijaga." *Tsaqofah Dan Tarikh: Jurnal Kebudayaan Dan Sejarah Islam* 6, no. 2 (February 6, 2022): 9–23. <https://doi.org/10.29300/tjksi.v6i2.3050>.
- Ras, J J. "The Social Function and Cultural Significance of the Javanese Wayang Purwa Theatre." *Indonesia Circle. School of Oriental & African Studies. Newsletter* 10, no. 29 (November 1, 1982): 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03062848208729530>.
- Setiawan, Aris. "Polemic and Reasons for Reusing Wayang and Gamelan as A Medium for Contemporary Preaching Islam Religion in Central Java, Indonesia." *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education* 22, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 254–67. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v22i2.37525>.
- Supriaswoto, Supriaswoto. "Penciptaan Kriya Logam Wall Decor Berbahan Limbah Aluminium." Monograph, Institut Seni Indonesia, 2021. <http://lib.isi.ac.id>.
- Suyoto. The Procession of Cow and Buffalo Leather. Direct interview, July 2022.
- Suyūfī, Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān as-. *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2003.
- Syafril, Elsa Putri E. Syafril, and Nafila A. Agel. "Wayang Sada (Sodo): A Media of Indonesian Language Learning and Cultural Introduction for Foreign Learners." *London Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 4 (October 28, 2022): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.31039/ljss.2022.4.84>.
- Thai Theatre and the Interplay of Perfection and Imperfection. Imperfectionist Aesthetics in Art and Everyday Life*. Routledge, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003251361-12>.
- Zuhri, Z. "Beyond Syncretism: Evidence of the Vernacularization of Islamic Theological Terms in Javanese Literature in the 19th Century." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (November 14, 2022): 373–98. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.373-398>.

