

Titih Hala: Exploring Human-Tiger Entanglements in Malay Theatre, Ritual, Song, and Film

Patricia Ann Hardwick
Sultan Idris Education University
e-mail: hardwick.patricia@gmail.com

Abstract

The Malayan tiger is critically endangered. Its population has declined from more than 3,000 individuals in the 1950s to fewer than 150 left in the forests of Malaysia today. While the tiger continues to disappear from Malaysian forests at an alarming rate, the weretiger remains an important symbol of liminality, ancestral heritage, ritual, horror, and raw animal power in the arts of Malaysia and the Riau Archipelago of Indonesia. Human-tiger entanglements are referenced in oral-historical narratives, the traditional theatrical forms of *mak yong* and *nora Melayu*, and the ritual healing performances of *main 'teri*. However, the Malaysian fascination with the conflation of nature and culture, the animal, and the human, is not just confined to traditional dramatic forms and esoteric healing rituals. This paper will investigate the role of the weretiger and its links to history and healing in *mak yong* theatrical and ritual traditions and explore how the concept of *hala*, the weretiger continues to be invoked, reimagined, and recreated in popular genre like *dikir barat* and contemporary Malaysian film.

Keywords: *dikir barat*, *main 'teri*, *mak yong*, tiger, *Tiger Stripes*

Introduction

In many Southeast Asian cultures, humans are recognized as enmeshed in a web of interdependent relationships with plants, animals, spirits, and even important features of the landscape (Roseman, 1991; Arhem & Sprenger 2016). “Animals may fuse, refuse, and confuse nature–culture categories and ontologies,” particularly in cultures that acknowledge a sense of continuity and kinship between animal, human, plant, and spiritual realms (Kirksy & Helmreich, 2010, p. 553; Willerslev 2007; Nadasdy 2007). Ancient lifeways that acknowledge a shared existence between human beings and animals are in the process of being lost at an incredible rate, in part due to the accelerating rate of mass extinction brought on by deforestation and rapid climate change. “While scientists scramble to conserve dwindling populations, writers and artists direct attention to the other horn of the dilemma: how to preserve ways of being in a world that humans traditionally shared with other creatures, and that along with them are threatened with conventions of modern living” (Woodward & McHugh, 2017, p. 2).

Since the 1950s, the Malayan tiger population (*Panthera tigrus*) has

precipitously declined from approximately 3,000 to fewer than 150 estimated individuals in the wild today (Chen Ly, 10 November 2023). Despite this rapid decline, tigers and supernatural tiger spirits have long been described within the oral history, folktales, and fables of the Malay world. Ancestral tiger spirits, tiger familiars and weretigers are common motifs in the historical literature of Java, Bali, Sumatra, and the Malay Peninsula. Tiger-human transformation is an important aspect of the history of the Malay theatrical tradition of *mak yong* in the Riau Islands (KEPRI), Indonesia, and in the *main 'teri* healing performances of Kelantan, Malaysia. This paper will investigate the role of the weretiger and its links to history and healing in *mak yong* theatrical and ritual traditions and explore how the concept of *hala*, the weretiger continues to be invoked, reimagined, and recreated in popular genre like *dikir barat* and Malaysian films.

The Tigrine Historicity of Mak Yong

In KEPRI, *mak yong* performers on Bintan Island and on the nearby island of Mantang Arang trace their ancestral and performance lineage to Patani, in Southern Thailand. According to Tengku Muhamad Satar, the leader of *Sanggar Seni Teater Mak Yong Warisan*, his maternal ancestors were Patani performers who passed through Kelantan and Temasek before settling on the island of Mantang Arang. Although the date of departure of his maternal ancestors from Patani is vague, Pak Satar estimates that they may have left as early as the 1780s. According to historian Francis R. Bradley (2013, p. 150), the defeat and destruction of the Patani sultanate by Siam took place over the course of five wars from 1785–1838. Bradley argues that Siam employed four tactics to subdue the polity of Patani including massacres, slave-raiding, environmental warfare, and the expulsion of refugees. “The Patani people, who escaped death or capture in 1786, fled by the tens of thousands into the neighbouring polities of Kedah, Kelantan, Perak and Terengganu” (Bradley, 2013, p. 157). Although it is impossible to ascertain if Pak Satar’s maternal ancestors were Patani refugees, the estimated time of departure from Patani, and the stories of sojourn in Kelantan before migrating to Temasek and the Riau Islands, suggest that the political unrest in Patani in the late 18th and early 19th centuries could have provided a push factor for the emigration of refugees from Patani to the Riau Islands.

The late Pak Ghani, a *mak yong* performer from the island of Mantang Arang, told a different tale of the history of *mak yong* in KEPRI at his home on March 11, 2019. His grandfather passed to him a story of a Patani trader named Solat who went on a trading mission to Sumatra. After Solat had finished trading, he was caught in a typhoon, swept the length of Sumatra, and sucked into a whirlpool. Out of the centre of the whirlpool grew a sea coconut tree, the *pokok pauh janggi*, where a garuda came to feed before flying to land. Solat devised a plan to tie himself to the legs of the garuda to escape the barren wasteland where he was stranded. The garuda landed in a large field, and Solat freed himself to wander into the forest until he reached a cave where he met a tiger king. Solat was advised to hide by the tiger king under a large cooking pot. From the safety of the cooking pot, he observed tigers dancing during a festival. From his observations he learned *pencak silat*, *mak yong*, *zapin*, and *joget*

dangkung. Solat then travelled to the end of Sumatra where he met a sailor from the Malay Peninsula, who helped him sail back to Southern Thailand. Once he had reached home, Solat taught the arts that he had learned from observing the dances of Sumatran tigers. Subsequently, Solat and his family sailed from Patani to Kelantan to Singapore and finally to Mantang Arang where his family settled, bringing their mystically obtained *mak yong* tradition with them.

What I know, I learned from my own grandfather. At that time, he told a story of a person named Solat who was a trader. He liked to sail here and there in a large boat. So, one day he went on a trading mission to the area surrounding the island of Perca. Perca is Sumatra. Before they arrived at the island of Perca they were hit by a typhoon, a typhoon storm. The boat broke apart. So, when the strong storm winds came, the boom of the sail was flattened and travelled the length of Sumatra, because Sumatra is very long, so said my grandfather. After the boat had run its course, it broke apart. He was stranded. Stranded in a place named *Pusat Tasik Pauh Janggi Tempat Air Lenggong*.

There he was stranded and he broke away from that boat. He was under it like that, a brown cloth, under a twisted calico cloth. He took two nails and a hammer. At this place there was a *pauh* tree. Apparently at that place it appears that there are ships all around and very old, like a reef that rises up. But the largest exposed reef is covered by a *pauh* tree.

Every day that *pauh* tree descended the largest garuda from the blue skies and it perched there. It ate that *pauh* fruit. After the garuda ate the *pauh* fruit it would fly to the fields and into the middle of the forests to search for its victims. So, after he was stranded, Solat was aware and used his reason. Because that place was far away, and there were no people, there wasn't even any water surrounding him. So, he had the thought to use a cloth to cling to the garuda to save himself from that place. And when the garuda was eating from that tree he tied the cloth to carry him to each of the garuda's legs here and there and he entered into the middle. And after that he clung there, the garuda descended to an open field to eat. At that time, he descended and began to walk wherever his feet would take him.

He came to a cave. That cave was a tiger cave. When he had arrived the king of the tigers asked him "Where are you from? To this he answered "I am a person who is lost. When I left my home, I was a trader. I brought things to trade. My boat was wrecked in a storm." He spoke like this.

"You" he said, "If it is like this then now where do you plan to hide yourself? Because my people are still roaming in the forest. Later this evening they will gather. If you do not have a place to hide later, they will eat you."

So, it was forced. "What is the best way for me to be protected?" "Ok" said the king of the tigers, "it is better if you hide yourself in a large pan like this." So that day passed like that, and there was the sound of tigers. "Guam!" "Guam!" They want to come back, right? Pak Solat went under the cooking pan.

And that night they held a big festival. With many types of dances. And from there,

this Pak Solat got all the dances, *pencak silat*, *dangkung* and many types of dances and many types of performances. Because he spied on them, yes because he watched them all the tigers performed. So, when it was morning, he asked “Why did you hold the festival?” “Certainly, it is like that, every night we hold it.”

So, after that he said “May I excuse myself to find a place to return to my home. I want to go to the end of Sumatra. The very end.” So he went to the very end, near the sea. And from there he saw a sailing ship, a sailor. When he was near, he called the sailor. It seemed that the sailor was from Malaysia, Malaysia is in the east *lah*. There he was able to follow him back to his home.

When he returned home, he remembered dances like *zapin*, *mak yong*, many forms of *dangkung*, *pencak silat* and many others. And when he was in Thailand, Terengganu, Kelantan he demonstrated and taught everything. And after that, the art grew . . . From Thailand to Kelantan, Kelantan to Tumpat. . . So, after that they brought it here [to *Mantang Arang*] (Ghani, 2019).

Pak Ghani’s incredible tale of *mak yong* origins incorporates elements of the legend of the *pauh janggi* tree. The *pauh janggi* or the sea coconut, is the largest palm in the world. It is endemic to the Seychelles archipelago in the Indian Ocean. Variants of the Malay legend of the *pauh janggi* can be found in British anthropological texts including W.W. Skeat’s *Malay Magic*, but tales of the underwater forests of sea coconut trees guarded by garudas drifted with the Indian Ocean tides back to 16th and 17th century Europe and the Maldives where the sea-coconuts were highly valued (1972 [1900]). Sea coconuts found in the sea or on shore no longer had husks, so they resembled a woman’s voluptuous hips. Sea coconuts were prized by Europeans of the 16th and 17th century for their supposed healing and magical properties. In 1769, Jean Duchemin sailed to Praslin in the Seychelles, where he found many sea coconut trees. This discovery dampened the world market for the legendary fruit.

In Malay narratives, the navel of the sea continued to be said to drain the waters of the world, with the *pauh janggi* tree at its centre serving as a submerged *axis mundi* linking the underwater world to the human realm and the airy heavens. Malay variants of the legend describe a whirlpool in the middle of the sea, in which the *pauh janggi* tree grows. At the base of the tree sits a giant crab that controls the ebb and flow of the tides. A garuda nests in its branches, and a naga is often entwined with its roots. Like many tales of the Malay world, the drift of the *pauh janggi*, navel of the seas, is difficult to trace. Some legends place its location at the tip of Southern Sumatra, while others claim the whirlpool is in Bagan Datuk, at the mouth of the Perak River, the exact location of its waterborne cosmology perpetually afloat in waters of the Malay world.

Pak Ghani’s tale links the cosmology of the navel of the seas to a KEPRI *mak yong* origin tale that claims that the art of *mak yong* originated from Solat’s mimesis of the furtively observed performances of Sumatran tigers during their festivals. Solat’s study of *mak yong* amongst Sumatran tigers is an interspecies exchange between human and animal worlds that gives birth to art forms that spread from Sumatra to Southern Thailand, the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, and finally KEPRI. Pak Ghani’s origin story further underscores the linkages between Patani,

KEPRI and Sumatran *mak yong* traditions, and exemplifies how myth and historicity, ontology and international commerce continue to intertwine in the oral histories in maritime Southeast Asia.

Tiger Trance and *Main 'Teri* in Kelantan

Main 'teri ritual performances have been used for generations by Kelantanese practitioners to treat spiritual disturbances, psychological conditions, and social disruptions. The term *main 'teri* is thought to be a shortened form of *main puteri* or *main peteri* (Laderman 1991). While some practitioners speculate that the term *main puteri*, to play the princess, originates from tales that link the birth of the genre to the legendary Kelantanese princess *Puteri Saadong*, researchers and performers that choose to emphasise the healing aspects of the performance, often interpret *'teri* as a shortened form of the Kelantanese Malay word *peteri*, meaning to solder (Ghulam-Sarwar, 2004; Laderman, 1991). Associating *main 'teri* with the metallurgy technique of soldering contributes to some practitioners' understanding of their art as a way to repair broken bodies and make whole fractured souls.

Main 'teri currently coexists with Western medical practice in Kelantan as a complementary medical system based on traditional East Coast Malay understandings of the body (Hardwick, 2013a). *Main 'teri* patients often seek Western medical care for their ailments first, turning to *main 'teri* practitioners only if they find that their condition is unresponsive to, or untreatable by Western medical practice (Hardwick, 2009, 2013a). Kelantanese healers regard each individual human body as a miniature state, metaphorically referred to in *main 'teri* as a royal palace ruled over by an embattled sovereign: the human person a microcosm that reflects the social macrocosm, full of contending forces (Kessler, 1977; Hardwick 2013a). Intrigued by the symbolic system at play in *main 'teri*, anthropologist Clive Kessler theorised that *main 'teri* ritual events were a form of political negotiation as ritual specialists seemed to wage an internal battle for a patient's health through the use of political metaphors (Kessler 1977).

Angin hala, weretiger "wind", is a common affliction found in Malay communities that inhabit Southern Thailand and the East Coast of Malaysia and is treated through *main 'teri* performances. In this section, I will briefly explore the history of the *hala* phenomena in Malaysia's East Coast through an examination of legends regarding the origin of the weretiger. Then, I will explore how some Kelantanese Malay ritual healers continue to understand *hala*, the weretiger, as a *benda luar*, a phenomenon that originates from outside the body, but that can manifest in a patient with specific internalised physical and psychological symptoms. I will investigate how some Kelantanese *main 'teri* practitioners have begun a process of reinterpreting *angin hala*, transforming the aetiology of an affliction traditionally understood to manifest as a result of the neglect of an ancestral or supernatural tiger familiar to a psychological illness where *hala* is understood as a metaphor for various human desires and anti-social behaviours including repressed, uncontrollable anger. Finally, I will explore how patients are encouraged to *lupa*, or forget themselves, as they are transformed into tigers by *main 'teri* ritual specialists through trance during

a theatrical form of healing that allows them release their weretiger wind.

Early ethnographers of the Malay Peninsula documented local legends regarding supernatural tigers, tiger familiars and weretigers. Walter William Skeat, of the Civil Service of the Federated Malay States, recorded the following legend regarding the origin of the weretiger in the late 19th century from a Malay man in Selangor:

An old man picked up a boy in the jungle with white skin, green eyes, and very long nails. Taking the boy home his rescuer named him Muhammad Yatim (i.e. 'Muhammad the fatherless') and when he grew up sent him to school where he behaved with great cruelty to his school fellows and was therefore soundly beaten by his master (Toh Saih Panjang Janggut i.e. 'Toh Saih Long-beard'), who used a stick made of a kind of wood called a *los* to effect the chastisement. At the first cut the boy leapt as far as the doorway; at the second he leapt to the ground, at the third he bounded into the grass, at the fourth he uttered a growl, and at the fifth his tail fell down behind him and he went upon all fours, whereat his master (improvising a name to curse him by) exclaimed 'This is of a truth God's tiger! (Harimau Allah) Go you', he added, addressing the tiger, 'to the place where you will catch your prey—the borderland between the primaeval forest and the secondary forest-growth, and that between the secondary growth and the plain—catch there whomsoever you will . . . Hence too, he carries on his hide to this very day the mark of the stripes with which he was beaten at school' (Skeat, 1972, pp. 158-159).

More than seventy-five years later, anthropologist Carol Laderman collected a version of this legend from Tok Daud, a *main 'teri* practitioner in Machang, Terengganu. Tok Daud told Laderman this legend to illustrate the origins of *hala*, the weretiger that is invoked during *main 'teri* ritual performances.

Once there was a young virgin named Siti Zarah who plucked some *buah kemunting* [a kind of berries] and ate them. After a while her belly began to get big. She was pregnant, and she had no husband. The berries that she had eaten had drops of weretiger's semen on them. She gave birth to a son who she named Abdul Jinah. As the boy grew older, he acted more and more like a tiger. He started to demand raw meat for his dinner and he couldn't learn the Koran as quickly as other children did. Finally, his Koran teacher became furious at his behaviour and picked up a cane. He beat Abdul Jinah hard, marking his body with forty stripes like the fur of the tiger. The teacher chased Abdul Jinah into the jungle, where he turned into a dangerous weretiger (Laderman, 1991, pp. 71-72).

An examination of both versions of this weretiger origin story provides interesting insights into *hala*, the weretiger. Both tales stress the mysterious origin of the weretiger child. In the tale collected in late 19th century Selangor by Skeat, the weretiger child is a pale skinned forest foundling, in Tok Daud's tale, the weretiger child is the illegitimate offspring of a weretiger father and human mother. Both Muhammad, an *anak yatim*, or orphan and Abdul Jinah, an *anak haram*, an illegitimate child are individuals denied full incorporation into the fabric of Malay society due to their illegitimacy and lack of familial ties. Skeat's weretiger child, the orphan Muhammad, manifests his tiger-like personality through cruelty to his

schoolmates, while Tok Daud's weretiger child, Abdul Jinah, reveals his tigrine nature through his lust for raw flesh and his inability to recite the Qur'an. These events demonstrate that the weretiger is viewed as a cruel, antisocial being beyond the redemption of formal education or religious instruction. Both Muhammad Yatim and Abdul Jinah make their dramatic transformation from human to tiger as they are beaten with a cane by their school masters-figures of societal authority that whip the stripes of the tiger into the fur of their former charges before they banish them from human society. From the tale recorded by Skeat, we learn that weretigers are beings doomed to inhabit the liminal frontier between the human and animal worlds, cursed to wander the borderlands of human settlement – between the secondary growth forest and the plain.

Skeat notes that Betara Guru, or Shiva in his manifestation of Kala, the destroyer is understood by many Malays of the late nineteenth century to be an inhabitant of the liminal, or intermediate zones which are also understood as zones of spiritual and physical danger (Skeat, 1972). The frontier zone between the forest clearing and the *primaeval* forest, the village, and the jungle, is the home of the weretiger. The expression used to refer to the beast that inhabits this realm between nature and culture Skeat records as "Grandsire Long Claws", a polite euphemism for the tiger. Skeat speculates that the tigrine being that stalks the edge of human society may signify a special manifestation of Shiva on land in the guise of Kala.

While the *primaeval* forests continue to shrink as palm oil and rubber cultivation expand, *hala*, the weretiger continues to stalk the imagination of Malay communities. *Main 'teri* healing practitioners note both physical and psychological manifestations of weretiger wind in their patients. Physical manifestations can include high blood pressure, circulatory problems, or heart rhythm irregularities. Psychological manifestations of weretiger wind can include patients who are weak, quick to anger, lustful, deeply depressed, or often frustrated to the point of violence. Patients diagnosed by *main 'teri* practitioners with weretiger wind are led through a ritual process of releasing their inner tiger through specific songs and chants that call for the tiger spirit to arise.

On October 18, 2005, during the month of Ramadan, I discussed *angin hala* with the late Ali bin Ibrahim. The late Pak Ali was a renowned *mak yong* performer who often participated in village *main 'teri* healing performances as an actor and musician. Pak Ali classified *angin hala*, weretiger wind, as a *benda luar*, something that originates from outside the body. This he contrasted with characters that are also evoked and embodied in *main 'teri* healing performances but that are considered metaphors for the human embryo, the human placenta, the birth waters, and the amniotic sac. Pak Ali classified *hala* as *manusia ghaib*, or a supernatural being kept by people trained in traditional knowledge as a form of protection. *Hala* could be invoked by its keeper to *pagar kampung*, to gate the village, protecting it from outsiders or *pagar rumah*, to gate the house, protecting a home from robbery or forced entry. Attempting to enter a home protected by *hala*, was said to cause a tiger to appear. Tigers were reported to sit before the steps of village houses, guarding them while their occupants were away. Pak Ali explained that *hala* was often invoked by those who travelled at night to protect them from behind, and that in ancient times *hala* could be called upon as a form of transportation, even to Mecca.

During our conversation, Pak Ali explained that in our current age of electricity and airplanes, *hala* was no longer needed to guide people through the night or carry them over long distances. Pak Ali noted that while the practical needs for keeping a *hala* tutelary spirit may have decreased, *hala* and care for the spirit was something that continued to descend within family lines. If an ancestor had made use of *hala*, and an individual was aware of it, a sacrifice was required once a year to keep the tiger spirit satisfied. Otherwise, he or she could fall sick with *angin hala*, weretiger wind. Pak Ali claimed that in the past his own ancestors had kept *hala* and that once a year a sacrifice of a roast chicken, glutinous yellow saffron rice, puffed rice, one young coconut, and *menisang*, a ball like sweet similar to palm sugar, needed to be offered to feed the spirit of *hala* in order to keep it from turning to devour its masters.

Pak Ali's understanding of weretiger wind developing due to the neglect of an ancestral tutelary weretiger spirit is a belief that is undergoing a process of re-evaluation by many *main 'teri* ritual practitioners who are actively examining and reinterpreting the belief system that underpins their traditional healing practices. Malaysia and Indonesia have been experiencing a post-colonial Islamic revival since the mid-nineteen seventies, which has resulted in a proliferation of religious movements and the introduction of interpretations of Islamic theology and Islamic practice into local and national politics (Hefner & Horvath, 1997). Part of this process of re-negotiating traditional belief systems in response to changing perceptions of Islam in Southeast Asia involves reframing long-standing concepts of supernatural beings as agents of disease. Many contemporary Kelantanese healers openly discuss the supernatural beings addressed, described, and confronted in *main 'teri* healing rituals as symbols or metaphors of an internalised physical or social dysfunction materialised in the body of a patient.

In the following excerpt from an interview with the accomplished rebabist, *mak yong* performer and *Tok Minduk*, Omar bin Awang, or Che Amat, Che Amat eloquently articulates how he understands *angin hala* not as a disease of the body, nor a supernatural affliction, but as an illness of repressed desire. He reasons that the offering of glutinous yellow rice, roasted chicken, flour, and young coconut that Pak Ali notes was necessary to offer to the tutelary spirit should be viewed as food offered to sustain a weakened patient. The weretiger of legend, he interprets merely as a sublimated symbol of the human emotion of anger. Che Amat notes that his chants and prayers are not meant to call the spirit of *hala* from the jungle to come to the ritual healing event, rather his words and actions are addressing the *hala*, the anger and frustration residing within a patient to arise and be released through ritual catharsis.

Hala is not related to high blood pressure, diabetes, heart problems, no, it doesn't follow that. It doesn't follow that because the seven *hala* are our desires, that is the seven *hala*. . . When the seven *hala* appear in *main 'teri* we give it to eat water, yellow glutinous rice, grilled chicken, flour, young coconut, and so on because the patient has been ill for a long time and not eaten. We can eat all those things, no issue, but the other is symbolic as it is truthfully for the *hala Wali*. The seven *hala* then bless the seven parts of the body, the seven articles of faith, overall, what it means is that the blessings that God gives to us, that is the meaning. A person that makes us mad. When we want to become angry at a person, it is like we will look like a tiger. If we

want to get mad at a person . . . people who make us angry will also look like tigers to us, they look like tigers. Their face will be red, and we will be frightened by their angry faces.

The seven *hala* then bless the seven parts of the body, the seven articles of faith, overall, what it means is that the blessings that God gives to us, that is the meaning. . . That's it, there is nothing wrong, it is not that we want to call the *hala* tiger from the jungle to come to us, if we see it, we will take off running! It is the *hala* within us, let's not misunderstand these things. Because what we play, they don't understand, but they punish us for what, why don't they ask? They don't ask. They punish what they see as wrong, they confess that they see that the way Che Amat *main 'teri* is judged as forbidden, they are speaking about how it appears externally, they don't examine it in depth. (Omar bin Awang, August 2013)

Many *main 'teri* performers continue to acknowledge the existence of a parallel supernatural world, but, like Che Amat, have begun to emphasise that supernatural beings, like the weretiger, are but metaphors for unfulfilled human desires. Part of this adaptation includes *main 'teri* practitioners de-emphasizing their belief in tutelary spirits and spiritual possession—reframing their long-standing concept of supernatural beings like *hala*, the weretiger, as agents of disease as symbols of an internalised physical or social dysfunction that materialises in the body of a patient.

Weretiger Transformations in Song: *Titih Hala*

While *main 'teri* and *mak yong* have faced nearly three decades of prohibition by PAS in Kelantan, *dikir barat* performances by young men have continued unabated in Kelantanese villages. *Dikir barat* is a form of choral singing that originally arose from *zikir*, the repetition of the names of Allah in a collective communal prayer. Current performances of *dikir barat* are led by a *Tukang Karut*, or song leader who sings the initial chorus, that is repeated in a call and response pattern by a group of young men, or *awok-awok*, who sit in a circle and energetically synchronise their movements and clapping to embody the poetic phrases sung by the *Tukang Karut*.

The *dikir barat* song *Titih Hala* sung by Nasran combines the genres of *dikir barat* and *main 'teri* to create *dikir 'teri* a form of *dikir barat* that is used by some in place of a full *main 'teri* ritual healing performance to *segar angin*, or heal internal wind. *Titih Hala* references *main 'teri* in its melodious singing style, poetic ritual language, use of the *serunai*, and interlocking *gendang* drumming patterns that are used to signal *lupa* or trance in *main 'teri*. The lyrics of *Titih Hala* sung by Nasran describe the descent of a weretiger spirit from the hills, its country, to take part in a one day, one night healing event. The lyrics then address the patient, noting that a lullaby is being sung by the healer to awaken the weretiger wind of the patient from slumber.

The lyrics then describe the old one, the original one who awaits dawn in the river. This is possibly an allusion to the crocodile, who upon entering the hall of a home, a metaphor in *main 'teri* for the body of a patient, becomes a tiger. The crocodile and the tiger are symbols of liminality and danger as they reside in the

secondary forest and the intertidal wetlands and represent a powerful and potentially deadly concealed force that can strike humans without warning. Crocodiles and tigers are also often associated with ancestors who are said to transform into these animals when they leave their human forms behind. In Kelantanese legends, powerful *Tok Nora* are said not to die, but to become white crocodiles. In *Puteri Timun Muda*, a tale performed both in the *nora Melayu* and the *mak yong* theatrical traditions, one of the main characters transforms into a white crocodile. The Temiar indigenous people of Kelantan call their healers Hala'. Hala' are understood to have the power to turn into tigers both in life and when they die and become ancestral figures. The *mak yong* tale of *Bongsu Sakti* also features a tiger to human transformation.

The *Titih Hala* lyrics that describe the crocodile to tiger transformation note that the patient has become just any tiger, but the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening, the same tiger invoked in *main 'teri bangkitan* to raise the wind of the weretiger and the *mak yong* tales of *Dewa Muda* and *Bongsu Sakti*. The following verse describes how the patient in the guise of the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening is presented with the standard ritual offerings of a breast of roasted chicken and glutinous yellow saffron rice. *Tukang Karut Nasran* then addresses the beings that live in the village and the beings that live in the hills, metaphorical language for the unseen spiritual entities that are understood to inhabit these spaces alongside with human beings, to release the patient from illness. The last two lyrics sung by *Tukang Karut Nasran* allude to releasing the patient from weretiger wind. The *Tukang Karut* sends greetings for the patient, who is bathed in sweat from their exertions as the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening. That which has sprouted from the patient during the healing event is cast away, the sharp becomes dull, that which is hot is cooled through sweat, and *Tukang Karut Nasran* requests that the spirit of the weretiger to return back to the liminal realm of the twilight.

Titih Hala - As performed by Nasran

Ala bobon, bobonlah tabe
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit
Asal negoro, naik negoro,
Awe-eeee, Seghi semale

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
 I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
 It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
 It originates from the country, goes up to the country
 Awe-eeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]

Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
 I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
 It originates from the hills, returns to the hills

Asal negoro, naik negoro
Awe-eeee, naik negoro.

It originates from the country, goes up to the country
 Awe-eeee, goes up to the country

Aiiii kejut jago Awe diulik lego tido doh

Aiiii awake Awe, I sang you a lullaby as you slept soundly

Tido diulik jago digerok
kejut jago Awe lego tido
Tido diulik jago digerok
Awe-eeee, Seghi semale

Sleep, I sing you a lullaby to awake
 Awake Awe, I sang you a lullaby as you slept
 Sleep, I sing you a lullaby to awake
 Awe-eeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]

*Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit
Asal negoro, naik negoro
Awe-eeee, naik negoro*

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeee, goes up to the country

*Aaa oghe tuo, seoghe berasal
Mengarah ceroh didale sungai
Bilo naik dilame awah menyentap bulu*

Aaaa the old one, the original one
Directing the light of dawn in the river
When he climbs into the hall, fascinated with fur

*Menjadi rimau
Awe-eeee. Seghi semale*

Becomes a tiger
Awe-eeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]

*Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit
Asal negoro, naik negoro,
Awe-eeee. naik negoro*

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeee, goes up to the country

*Aaa mu rimau besa' Sarje Kilat
Sejano Wongi diberi gela'
Mu rimau besa' Sarje Kilat
Sejano Wongi diberi gela'
Awe-eeee. Seghi semale*

Aaa you are the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening,
Sargent Fragrant Lightening is the name you are called
You are the great tiger Sargent Fragrant Lightening,
Sargent Fragrant Lightening is the name you are called
Awe-eeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]

*Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit
Asal negoro, naik negoro,
Awe-eeee, naik negoro.*

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeee, goes up to the country

*Aaa pulut kuning aye pangge dada
pelepit
Nok mintok ke pelepah, nok suruh pulih*

Aaa turmeric glutinous rice, roasted breast of chicken
I ask that you be released, I want you to be healed

pulut kuning aye pangge dada pelepit

Aaa turmeric glutinous rice, roasted breast of chicken

Nok mintok ke pelepah, nok suruh pulih

I ask that you be released, I want you to be healed

Awe-eeee. Seghi semale

Awe-eeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]

*Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit
Asal negoro, naik negoro,
Awe-eeee naik negoro*

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
It originates from the country, goes up to the country
Awe-eeee, goes up to the country

Aaa hok dok kapong, de dudok di bukit

Aaa those living in the village, those living in the hills

*Mintoh tabek belako-lako
hok dok kapong, de dudok di bukit*

I ask all of you for permission
Those living in the village, those living in the hills

Mintoh tabek belako-lako
Awe-eeee. Seghi semale

I ask all of you for permission
 Awe-eeee, One day, one night [of healing]

[chorus]

Ala bobon, bobonlah tabek
Ambo nok bageh, titih hehalo
Asal dibukit, kelek bukit
Asal negoro, naik negoro,
Awe-eeee. naik negoro.

Ala bobon, bobonlah I ask for permission,
 I want to heal, the lineage of the weretiger
 It originates from the hills, returns to the hills
 It originates from the country, goes up to the country
 Awe-eeee, goes up to the country

Berkak tanggoh, demi saghi soghilah,

Thank you for your blessings one day at a time

Lacek gak, silo ucap bicaro sale
Aaa guru turun melepaph turun
Guru turun, lacek gak
Membwe cendeh

Sweating then, I give my greetings
 Aaa the teacher descends, and is released
 The teacher descends, I am sweating then
 Casting away that which has sprouted

Aaa wak taje jadi tumpul
Wak panah lacek gak
Balek senjo

Aaa may that which is sharp become dull
 That which was made hot, be cooled through sweating
 Return to the twilight

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEtorsHcXH>

Titih Hala continues to be a popular *dikir barat* song and is often performed both in Kelantanese villages and on proscenium stages in cities in Peninsular Malaysia. These performances often include performers who take on the dramatic roles of a *Tok 'Teri* and a patient who undergoes the enactment of a ritual “healing” embodying the actions described in the song. *Main 'teri* healing rituals to release weretiger wind are encapsulated and referenced in *Titih Hala*, which in turn has become a musical reference that continues to inspire a new generation of Malaysian artists to explore their fascination with the weretiger and the boundaries of human-animal entanglements in Malaysia.

Tiger Stripes: Horror and Tigrine Feminist Critiques in Malaysian Film

Tiger Stripes is a Malaysian Malay-language horror film produced in 2023 that was written and directed by Amanda Nell Eu. *Tiger Stripes* won the Critics Week Grand Prize at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival. The film features a twelve-year-old Malay girl, Zaffan. Zaffan is portrayed as non-conforming schoolgirl who removes her uniform headscarf to film TikTok dances in the school toilet with her friends during class time. Zaffan and her friends Farah and Mariam often play in the forest and rivers on the way home from school, and the audience witnesses Zaffan removing her river-drenched school uniform to walk home in her undergarments, flesh-coloured shorts and a tank top. Once she arrives home, her mother, newly returned from work, is appalled both by Zaffan’s river-soaked school uniform and her lack of modesty. She further humiliates her daughter by chastising her loud enough for the entire village to hear and physically throws her out of the house in her wet undergarments in an attempt to shame her into more appropriate, modest, “lady-like” behaviour.

Zaffan is soon disturbed by the physical changes to her body as she undergoes

the process of puberty as she is the first in her peer group to get her period. Her friends notice that she is beginning to wear a bra, and that she has been excluded from Muslim prayers by the school *ustazah* during her menses. Horror begins to overtake Zaffan when she discovers that her fingernails and toenails are dropping off as she grows claws, her body is covered with purple bruises, whiskers begin to grow on her face, and she begins to bald. Beyond alerting her mother that she needs to have her blood-soaked bed linen changed and requiring her maternal assistance to unclog the family toilet when accidentally flushing a sanitary pad, Zaffan avoids communicating with her mother about her concerns regarding her troubling physical changes. Zaffan's mental state continues to deteriorate as her hearing and eyesight are affected, she begins to bound up the trunks of trees, and to feast on the blood of animals. Zaffan is ashamed and continues to hide her physical changes from her mother, teachers, and friends with even more layers of modest clothing, donning gloves and refusing to remove her headscarf, even when she sleeps. Zaffan's physical changes mean that she is increasingly isolated from her peers Mariam and Farah. She begins to take solace in being alone in the forest, where she sits on a rock in the river or floats near her favorite waterfall.

Mariam and Farah begin to remark frequently on Zaffan's poor physical hygiene and note that she has begun to smell horrible. After Zaffan urinates in class when denied a bathroom break by their teacher, Mariam and Farah begin to ostracise her. Eventually Mariam and Farah corner Zaffan in their former TikTok haven of the girl's school toilet. Farah leads the bullying, dragging Zaffan out of a toilet cubicle to beat her and accuse her of promiscuity. As Mariam and Farah attack Zaffan she escapes, crawling away from them, snarling, on all fours. The girls who attacked Zaffan in the school toilet are suddenly overwhelmed by fits of hysteria. Their young female teacher is alerted by their screams and comes to investigate. She is also overcome by the mass hysteria and required to take a leave of absence from teaching. As a result of this incident, the girl's toilet is locked by the school and made unavailable for student use.

Soon after the mass hysteria, a jauntily dressed young *ustaz*, made famous by his healing sessions featured on social media, visits the school making his presence known at a school assembly. The *ustaz* and his assistants begin to search the school for the source of the spiritual disturbance. Zaffan is identified as the cause of the school's mass hysteria and a communal healing event is organised in a village home. During the healing session the *ustaz* sprays water in Zaffan's face with a spray bottle and tries to verbally goad her into anger so that her inner tiger emerges. The *ustaz*'s performative actions of spraying water in the face of a sick and emotionally distressed girl leads some villagers to question if his methods are efficacious, or if he is indeed just a charlatan.

Echoing the weretiger legends recorded in Skeat and documented by Laderman, the *ustaz* decides that the only way to get the beast to emerge from Zaffan is to beat it out of her. The *ustaz* begins to flog Zaffan with a metal rod, beating the stripes of the tiger into the flesh of the schoolgirl as she tries to escape him and begs him to stop. Zaffan, like Muhammad Yatim and Abdul Jinah before her, transforms into a weretiger as she is brutalised by the *ustaz*. However, in a feminist twist to the tale, she attacks the *ustaz* in her tigress form and beheads her tormentor before fleeing

the village for the safety of the jungle. Zaffan is chased cautiously out of her village by scared neighbours carrying farming tools as improvised weapons.

At the end of *Tiger Stripes*, the audience witnesses Mariam beginning to undergo her own transformation. The radio tells us that it has been two weeks since Zaffan's disappearance, and now it is Mariam who is wearing long gloves and a headscarf to hide her claws and balding head. Mariam sneaks out of her house in her pyjamas, past her sleeping parents, to play in the forest at night with her friend, Zaffan the weretiger. Farah follows Mariam, and the fate of all three girls is left ambiguous as the film ends. The audience is left to assume that all three girls are now experiencing the horrors of bodily changes as their girlhood worlds collapse around them. Zaffan and Mariam rebel against the patriarchal status quo, choosing instead to embrace a wild, but powerful tigrine femininity that isolates them from Malay village society. Farah, the school prefect who has been the most critical of Zaffan's non-conformist behaviour, follows her friend Mariam into the darkness, trying to bring her back home. Ultimately Farah is gouged in the leg by a weretiger, foreshadowing that she will also become what she has most feared, a wild non-conforming woman in the guise of a weretiger.

Conclusion

The Malayan tiger is critically endangered, and yet the weretiger remains an important symbol of liminality, ancestral heritage, ritual, horror, and raw animal power in the arts of Malaysia and the Riau Archipelago. Human-tiger entanglements are referenced in oral-historical narratives, the traditional theatrical forms of *mak yong* and *nora Melayu*, and the ritual healing performances of *main 'teri*. However, the Malaysian fascination with the conflation of nature and culture, the animal, and the human, is not just confined to traditional dramatic forms and esoteric healing rituals. Contemporary performances inspired by *Titih Hala* are examples of how legendary creatures like weretigers and werecrocodiles continue to be referenced and invoked, and how the lineages of human-animal-spirit entanglements continue explored through the medium of popular song. In turn, the independent film *Tiger Stripes*, provides a feminist spin on an old legend that explores how the flogging of a socially isolated teenager by a religious teacher continues to have the power to turn anyone into a beast.

Acknowledgement

Research for this paper was supported by the Malaysian Higher Education Fundamental Research Grant Sustaining Sustainability-Fundamental Research Strategies of Resilience and Adaptive Management in Malaysian Performing Arts (FRGS/1/2020/WAB10/UPSI/02/4).

References

- Arhem, K., & Sprenger, G. (Eds.). (2016). *Animism in Southeast Asia*. Routledge.
 Bradley, F. R. (2013). Siam's conquest of Patani and the end of mandala relations, 1786–1838. In P. Jory (Ed.), *Ghosts of the Past in Southern Thailand: Essays on the*

- History and Historiography of Patani* (pp. 149–160). NUS Press.
- Boomgaard, P. (2001). *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600–1950*. Yale University Press.
- Chen, L. (2023, November 10). Stunning photo of rare Malayan tiger snapped by a camera trap. *NewScientist*. Retrieved from https://www.newscientist.com/article/2402215-stunning-photo-of-rare-malayan-tiger-snapped-by-camera-trap/?fbclid=IwAR3vfilgJccMZqk8yeeR1Teu2Y5nY_pPwPOWhpHVgEZDhI7wq-nDYjeU7lo
- Ghulam-Sarwar, Y. (2004). *Panggun Inu Essays on Traditional Malay Theatre*. Unipress The Centre for the Arts, National University of Singapore.
- Hardwick, P. A. (2013a). A king, a palace, a country: Exploring the conceptualization of the body in Mak Yong healing performances in Kelantan Malaysia. In M. A. M. Nor, P. Matusky, T. S. Beng, J. P. Kitingan, & P. Prudente (Eds.), *(Re)Producing Southeast Asian Performing Arts & Southeast Asian Bodies, Music, Dance and Other Movement Arts. Symposium 2012, International Council for Traditional Music Study Group on the Performing Arts of Southeast Asia* (pp. 155–161). Philippines Women's University.
- Hardwick, P. A. (2009). Stories of the wind: The role of Mak Yong in shamanistic healing in Kelantan, Malaysia (Publication No. 3386680) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Hardwick, P. A. (2013b). Embodying the divine and the body politic: Mak Yong performance in rural Kelantan, Malaysia. In T. Daniels (Ed.), *Performance, popular culture and piety in Muslim Southeast Asia* (pp. 77–104). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hefner, R. W., & Horvath, P. (1997). *Islam in an era of nation-states: Politics and religious renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kessler, C. S. (1977). Conflict and sovereignty in Kelantanese Malay spirit séances. In V. Crapanzano & V. Garrison (Eds.), *Case studies in spirit possession* (pp. 295–332). John Wiley & Sons.
- Kirksey, E. S., & Helmreich, S. (2010). The emergence of multispecies ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(4), 545–576.
- Laderman, C. (1991). *Taming the wind of desire: Psychology, medicine, and aesthetics in Malay shamanistic performance*. University of California Press.
- Nadasdy, P. (2007). The gift in the animal: The ontology of hunting and human–animal sociality. *American Ethnologist*, 34(1), 25–43.
- Nasran Titih Hala. (2018, September 9). Karya emas [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEtorsHcXH>
- Roseman, M. (1991). *Healing sounds from the Malaysian rainforest: Temiar music and medicine*. University of California Press.
- Skeat, W. W. (1972). *Malay magic: Being an introduction to the folklore and popular religion of the Malay Peninsula* (B. Blom, Ed.). Benjamin Blom. (Original work published 1900)
- Wessing, R. (1986). The soul of ambiguity: The tiger in Southeast Asia. Special Report no 24. Center for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series on Southeast Asia: Northern Illinois University.
- Willerslev, R. (2007). *Soul hunters: Hunting, animism, and personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs*. University of California Press.
- Woodward, W., & McHugh, S. (2017). *Indigenous creatures, native knowledges and the arts: Animal studies in modern worlds*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Biography

Patricia Ann Hardwick is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University. She holds a dual PhD in Folklore & Ethnomusicology and Anthropology from Indiana University, Bloomington. Her research has been published in Asian Ethnology, JMBRAS, Folklore Forum, Midwestern Folklore and Music and Medicine. Her research has been supported by the Institute of Sacred Music (Yale), Fulbright (MACEE 2003-2004, AMINEF 2018-2019), AIFIS and the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship Program (U.S. Department of Education). Dr. Hardwick's current research interests include intangible cultural heritage, digital humanities, archiving and cultural sustainability. Currently she is leading a Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) project funded by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education titled Sustaining Sustainability - Fundamental Research Strategies of Resilience and Adaptive Management in Malaysian Performing Arts.