

The fall of Singapura: The necessity of unjust violence in the *Sejarah Melayu*

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In the Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals, the fall of Singapura is widely appraised as an act of divine retribution unleashed upon rulers who have committed injustice. Implicit in this theodicy is the promise of moral justice enshrined in the Bukit Siguntang covenant, which ensures mutual reciprocity between the rulers and the ruled. But a cautious approach to the narrative of Singapura's demise reveals how justice is suspended, rather than upheld, in service of power. Enabling this suspension of morality is the transformative capacity of violence. This article performs a close reading on three consecutive episodes of unjust violence inflicted on a foreigner, a child, and a concubine, respectively, prior to the sacking of Singapura by Majapahit. In scrutinising the symbolic significance of these victims as persecuted by injudicious rulers, this article posits that violence functions as a rhetorical trope in the retelling of a Malay history. As victims are made scapegoats, unjust violence brings about the fall of Singapura and, by the same token, necessitates the birth of Melaka. Violence impels the forward movement of a royal genealogy by permitting an uninterrupted sequence of reigns through a sequence of crises.

Commissioned by the royal court, the *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals* consists of the genealogy of the Melaka Sultanate, accounts of ceremonial customs, diplomatic missions, and court intrigues.¹ Despite being a work of historical literature, historical

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1 Numerous written versions of the *Sejarah Melayu* exist. This analysis is based on the oldest surviving recension Raffles MS 18. This version is dated to 1612, but its content was very likely written, according to R.O. Winstedt, 'at least eighty years before 1612'. The text traces the history of Malay rulers until Sultan 'Alauddin Ri'ayat Syah II, who ruled Johor in the 16th century. See R.O. Winstedt, 'The date, author and identity of the original draft of the Malay Annals', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16, 3 (1938): 34. On the variant versions, see R. Roolvink, 'The variant versions of the Malay Annals', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 123, 3 (1967): 301–24; Henri Chambert-Loir, 'The history of a history: The variant versions of the *Sulalat al-Salatin*', *Indonesia* 104 (2017): 121–77; Henri Chambert-Loir, 'One more version of the *Sejarah Melayu*', *Archipel* 94 (2017): 211–21; Ahmat Adam, *The Sejarah Melayu revisited: A collection of six essays* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2020), pp. 51–60. In this article, English quotations from the *Sejarah Melayu* are taken from C.C. Brown's translation. Published in 1952, archaic spellings in Brown's translation are modified for

verisimilitude is of secondary importance to the author. Originally titled *Sulalat-us-Salatin*, the ‘genealogy of kings’, the text has been more generally known as *Malay Annals* or *Sejarah Melayu* ever since the publication of John Leyden’s English translation and Munshi Abdullah’s edition in the nineteenth century.² Both titles have unfortunately achieved greater recognisability in the popular imagination, if not unknowingly canonising the text as *the* history of the Malays. Throughout the *Sejarah Melayu*, moral judgement is tacitly made to impart lessons for prospective rulers and court officials.³ Interspersed with moral anecdotes and injunctions, the text is unconcerned about documenting the past other than to abide by ‘the needs of the present’.⁴ Included in the preface is the decree of the king, declaring outright the ideological underpinnings of writing the chronicle:

It is my wish that the Treasury shall make a chronicle setting forth the genealogy of the Malay Rajas and the ceremonial of their courts, for the information of my descendants who come after me, that they may be conversant with the history and derive profit therefrom.⁵

Here, history is in the idea that knowledge of the past could benefit the future of a designated audience. The literature of the Malay courts as such was not produced for silent reading, but for performance, to be read aloud to regale audiences with their oral-aural eloquence.⁶ By being heard, the text is activated, and the meanings and truths thereby conveyed, emerge more luminously.⁷

readability and consistency. Some adjustments are made with reference to Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail’s romanised transliteration published in 1998. Romanised Malay quotations are also provided, either in parentheses or in footnotes, for the convenience of readers. C.C. Brown, ‘The Malay Annals translated from Raffles MS 18’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25, 2–3 (1952): 5–276; *Sejarah Melayu: The Malay Annals (MS Raffles No. 18, new romanised edition)*, ed. Cheah Boon Kheng and Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1998). In the following, Brown’s English translation and Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail’s romanised transliteration will be respectively cited as ‘*Malay Annals*’ and ‘*Sejarah Melayu*’.

2 John Leyden, *Malay Annals* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1821); Ibrahim bin Ismail, ‘The printing of Munshi Abdullah’s edition of the *Sejarah Melayu* in Singapore’, *Kekal Abadi* 5, 3 (1986): 13–21.

3 Cheah Boon Kheng, ‘Ketidakadilan raja dan keruntuhan kerajaan Melaka: Pengadilan moral dalam *Sejarah Melayu*’, in *Kekerasan dalam sejarah: Masyarakat dan pemerintah*, ed. Qasim Ahmad (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993), pp. 66–91; Cheah Boon Kheng, ‘The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire: Moral judgement in Tun Bambang’s *Sejarah Melayu*’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 71, 2 (1998): 104–21.

4 P.E. de Josselin de Jong, ‘The character of the *Malay Annals*’, in *Malayan and Indonesian studies: Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on his eighty-fifth birthday*, ed. John Bastin and R. Roolvink (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 240. See also Umar Yunus, *Sejarah Melayu: Menemukan diri kembali* (Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1984), pp. 11–17; Cheah, ‘The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire’, p. 110.

5 In Malay: ‘Bahawa hamba minta diperbuatkan hikayat pada hari pertuturan segala raja-raja Melayu dengan isti’adatnyanya supaya didengar oleh anak cucu kita yang kemudian dari kita dan diketahuinyalah segala perkataan syahadan beroleh faedahlah mereka itu daripadanya.’ *Malay Annals*, p. 12; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 65–6.

6 Amin Sweeney, *Reputations live on: An early Malay autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. viii; Amin Sweeney, *A full hearing: Orality and literacy in the Malay world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

7 Ian Proudfoot, ‘From recital to sight-reading: The silencing of texts in Malaysia’, *Indonesia and the*

In recognition of the political function the *Sejarah Melayu* performs, the scope of this article is confined to a select portion involving three consecutive victims of unjust violence before the fall of Singapura.⁸ The victims are Pasai mystic Tuan Jana Khatib, an unnamed child, and an unnamed daughter of the state's treasury officer Sang Ranjuna Tapa, all of whose victimhood is a direct consequence of slander and jealousy, insinuating the imprudence of the ruling kings. The reading will proceed with a conviction that these accounts of unjust violence, beyond signalling the fall of Singapura, set forth the dawn of Melaka. And within this epochal shift of power from Singapura to Melaka, violence emerges as a constant to bypass moral melt-downs, acting as a rhetorical engine that drives and intuits what must arrive.

Probing the depictions of violence in the early parts of the *Sejarah Melayu* allows one to look deeper into the preconditions for the founding of Melaka that form the crux of the genealogy. This specific focus on the chronicle's beginning is partly indebted to O.W. Wolters' scrupulous reading of the text. Duty-bound to present the vision of 'uninterrupted sovereignty', the author of the *Sejarah Melayu* is essentially a 'genealogist', claims Wolters.⁹ According to the *Sejarah Melayu*, Melaka is founded immediately after Singapura, thereby purporting an uninterrupted sequence of reigns from Srivijaya to Singapura and to Melaka. For Wolters, the Singapura episode is strategically lodged in between Srivijaya and Melaka to create a chronology that elides an embarrassing interregnum in Malay history.¹⁰ This gap can be situated in the eleventh century, which marks a turning point for Srivijaya's dominant position as an entrepôt in coastal Sumatra. From the Chola invasion of the Straits of Melaka in 1025 to the subsequent rise of Malayu-Jambi, in addition to intensified Javanese trade with China, these successive setbacks had contributed to awkward moments of hiatus and ignominy in the retelling of a Malay royal genealogy.¹¹ 'The function of the Singapore story,' as Wolters avers, 'would thus have been to provide evidence of the way Malay sovereignty was represented by the family which ruled in Palembang and eventually in Malacca.'¹²

Grafted onto the preceding passages of Melaka's establishment, the 'Singapore story' is literally the pre-text to power. It is an episode symptomatic of the genealogical structure, since, what remains at stake in the crafting of the *Sejarah Melayu* is the genealogist's overt desire to guarantee the unbroken dominion of his rulers.

Malay World 30, 87 (2002): 123. See also Jan van der Putten and Al Azhar, eds, *Di dalam berkekalan persahabatan—In everlasting friendship: Letters from Raja Ali Haji* (Leiden: Department of Languages and Culture of South-east Asia and Oceania, University of Leiden, 1995), pp. 62, 161.

⁸ *Malay Annals*, pp. 49–52; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 117–20.

⁹ O.W. Wolters, *The fall of Srivijaya in Malay history* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), pp. 80–82.

¹⁰ The 'history of Singapore,' Wolters observes, 'might have been fabricated as a substitute for the inglorious period when Malayu-Jambi succeeded Srivijaya-Palembang.' *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹¹ O.W. Wolters, 'A note on the capital of Srivijaya during the eleventh century', in *Essays offered to G.H. Luce by his colleagues and friends in honour of his seventy-fifth birthday*, vol. 1, ed. Ba Shin, Jean Boisselier and A.B. Griswold (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1966), p. 228; O.W. Wolters, 'A few and miscellaneous pi-chi jottings on early Indonesia', *Indonesia* 36 (1983): 51–2; Paul Michel Munoz, *Early kingdoms: Indonesian archipelago and the Malay Peninsula* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), pp. 167–9; John N. Miksic and Geok Yian Goh, *Ancient Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 397–9.

¹² Wolters, *The fall of Srivijaya*, p. 81. See also Charles Bartlett Walls, 'Legacy of the fathers: Testamentary admonitions and the thematic structure of the *Sejarah Melayu*' (PhD diss., Yale University, 1974), pp. 66–9.

And in the making of this genealogy, it is violence, as this article argues, that helps shape a sense of continuity by creating ruptures to circumvent moral dilemmas so that a genealogy unfolds uninterrupted in the hands of the scribe. By foregrounding the narratives of violence in the text, this study is historiographical in nature, that is to say, it examines the written discourse of history instead of history in itself. It is principally concerned with the use of violence as a rhetorical force in re-inscribing the past, and hence, its scope is more literary and historiographical as opposed to historical.

It must be stated beforehand that none of the selected incidents are described as 'violent' in the text. Using 'violence' as an analytical framework gives an etic perspective. Contemporary Malay equivalents of 'violence', such as '*kekerasan*' and '*keganasan*', are starkly absent. The root '*keras*' is mostly used to describe a character's demeanour such as 'strict', 'stubborn', or 'harsh' rather than a violent event.¹³ Words like '*ganas*' and '*buas*' are intended for criminals.¹⁴ Wars and conflicts resulting in the deaths of many are never described as violent. Excessive use of force is described in the chronicle as '*kesangatan*', meaning 'excessiveness', which acts as a neutral qualifier.¹⁵ The closest term is perhaps '*zalim*', meaning 'cruel', a characteristic attributed to oppressive rulers. And yet, '*zalim*' is sparingly used.¹⁶ Given these varying contexts, what constitutes 'violence' in the *Sejarah Melayu* refers not only to the brute power of conferring death, but the moral deficit of the sovereigns who wield excessive, absolute power.¹⁷

Power and violence are natural bedfellows. Filtering the politesse of sovereign rule, one is left with violence. Yet, existing scholarship on the *Sejarah Melayu* gravitates towards discussing the ideology of power without laying stress on the violence that ensues. The view that the *Sejarah Melayu* is a political text, a legitimation narrative, articulating notions of justice and power, has been of considerable longevity.¹⁸ The entwinement between traditional concepts of sovereignty (*daulat*) and treason (*derhaka*) too has been recognised as the basis upon which status hierarchy is played out and contested.¹⁹ But inherent in these formulations is the widespread supposition

13 *Malay Annals*, pp. 114, 153–4; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 200, 249.

14 *Malay Annals*, p. 113; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 199.

15 *Malay Annals*, p. 185; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 289.

16 *Malay Annals*, p. 26; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 86. It is probable that the scribe avoids these descriptors for fear of repercussion. Additionally, committing violence against disloyal subjects is permitted under the traditional laws of Melaka. Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, 'Kekerasan pada zaman Kesultanan Melayu Melaka: Penelitian berdasarkan *Sejarah Melayu*', in Qasim Ahmad, *Kekerasan dalam sejarah*, pp. 39, 54–5.

17 In the *Sejarah Melayu*, an act of killing could appear reasonable, so long as the severity of violence is commensurate with the gravity of one's crime. Violence, then, is a moral definition, and is concomitant with injustice. Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, 'Kekerasan pada zaman Kesultanan Melayu Melaka', p. 48.

18 Brown, 'Introduction', in *Malay Annals*, p. 8; Josselin de Jong, 'The character of the *Malay Annals*', pp. 235–41; Virginia Matheson, 'Concepts of Malay ethos in indigenous Malay writings', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, 2 (1979): 351–71; Cheah, 'The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire', pp. 104–21; Chambert-Loir, 'The history of a history', pp. 131–60; Alan Chong, 'Premodern Southeast Asia as a guide to international relations between peoples: Prowess and prestige in "intersocietal relations" in the *Sejarah Melayu*', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 37, 2 (2012): 87–105.

19 J.H. Walker, 'Autonomy, diversity, and dissent: Conceptions of power and sources of action in the *Sejarah Melayu* (Raffles MS 18)', *Theory and Society* 33, 2 (2004): 213–55; J.H. Walker, 'Patrimonialism and feudalism in the *Sejarah Melayu* (Raffles MS 18)', in *The politics of the periphery in Indonesia: Social*

that unjust rulers will receive divine retribution in due course; that a prophetic vision of justice will somehow prevail. Ergo, the collapse of Singapura, when set within this scheme of theodicy, illustrates a kind of moral lesson. A closer look at the indispensability of violence in the *Sejarah Melayu*, however, reveals that the maintenance of the status quo demands that sovereignty prevails, irrespective of injustice.

In a distinctive essay elucidating the use of violence in a different variant of the *Sejarah Melayu*, Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail speaks of how 'violence from above' (*kekerasan dari atas*) is instigated for justificatory purposes.²⁰ When a violent punishment is incommensurate with the offence, he adds, conflicts and transgression happen.²¹ Citing instances of unjust killings in the *Sejarah Melayu*, Syed Hussein Alatas appraises how power dominates through an insistence on 'the demarcation line between what is permissible and what is prohibited'.²² One could further add that violence is situated precisely at this threshold of permissibility. And by transgressing the threshold, violence carries power into effect. This article therefore examines how violence is emplotted in the *Sejarah Melayu* to transgress the confines of a historical narrative. It matters, then, how violence is storied, and how violence creates ruptures to bypass narrative inconsistencies, in order to maintain the structure of a genealogy. If the *Sejarah Melayu*, as the royal decree states, belongs to a work that brings 'profit' (*beroleh faedahlah*) to royal descendants, it is necessary to interrogate how violence exists within a composition to tell a 'profitable' story that preserves the status quo of sovereignty.²³ The transgressive capacity of violence is that which preserves the absolutism of power: it suspends, rather than enforces, justice. In shifting the scholarly focus from power to violence, this study highlights victimhood over kingship, it analyses the symbolic and rhetorical significance of violence, it looks at power from the receiving end, from the shadow it casts on the victims, and to read history—and historiography—against the grain.

The subsequent section opens with a summary of the three episodes of unjust violence. The focus then shifts to the ways in which violence is approached in this reading, looking at how victims of violence are scapegoated to become surrogate victims, as well as the implication of narrating death against the current of history. The article then gives prominence to all three victims of violence in each episode to explicate how each character embodies alterity vis-à-vis the Malay court. Typifying the figure of the foreigner is Tuan Jana Khatib whose magical prowess rivals that of the ruling king. The second victim is a child indifferent to the status quo and whose future potential triggers a fatal accusation. The third victim is Sang Ranjuna Tapa's daughter,

and geographical perspectives, ed. Minako Sakai, Glenn Banks, and J.H. Walker (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), pp. 39–61.

20 Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, 'Kekerasan pada zaman Kesultanan Melayu Melaka', p. 46.

21 Ibid., pp. 48–50.

22 Syed Hussein Alatas, 'Feudalism in Malaysian society: A study in historical continuity', *Civilisations* 18, 4 (1968): 582.

23 *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 66; *Malay Annals*, p. 12. Elaborating on the characteristic of 'profitable' court writing, G.L. Koster and H.M.J. Maier acutely contend: 'The Malay textual heritage, in describing what the world looked like, simultaneously prescribed what it had to be like.' G.L. Koster and H.M.J. Maier, 'A medicine of sweetmeats: On the power of Malay narrative', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 141 (1985): 447. See also Nancy Florida, *Writing the past, inscribing the future: History as prophecy in colonial Java* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

a royal concubine, constituting the female subject victimised by slander. In all three accounts of unjust violence, the foreigner, the child, and the concubine are scapegoated. As surrogate victims, their crimes are seldom discernible, but in their embodiment of alterity, they bring about distinctive moments of transgression and are easily implicated in crimes of passion. Rulers and accusers who incriminate the innocent, on the other hand, are never brought to justice. Violence, then, as the penultimate section shows, is woven into a narrative not to presage a divine eventuation of justice, as is usually assumed, but to reinstate sovereign hegemony. To end, the article considers the aftermath of violence in restoring order and in suppressing the perils of transgression it initially sets forth.

When Singapura falls: Surrogate victims in the space of death

The end of Singapura begins with an episode about Tuan Jana Khatib, a Pasai mystic who has just arrived in Singapura.²⁴ As he saunters past the royal palace of Singapura, he spies the queen who is eyeing him keenly. He then casts a magic spell to turn a single betel palm in his vicinity into two trees. This display of magic infuriates the king of Singapura, Paduka Seri Maharaja, who then orders his execution on charges of trying to impress the queen by demonstrating his prowess. Just at the moment Tuan Jana Khatib is executed, his blood drips to the ground, his body vanishes and reappears in Langkawi. A drop of his blood coagulates into a rock that remains in Singapura to this day.

After a period of time, a school of swordfish strikes Singapura. With their snouts, they stab the people on the shore. Singapura takes fright at the ambush. Paduka Seri Maharaja surveys the coast with his ministers and courtiers, and commands his soldiers to fortify the island with hard wood palisades (*betis*).²⁵ But the swordfish are able to leap over the fence, killing even more of his people. Then comes a young boy who recommends Paduka Seri Maharaja to barricade the island with banana stems. The king agrees and the shore is immediately lined with banana stems, putting an end to the catastrophe as the swordfish snouts are stuck inside the stems. Soon enough, the child's genius draws unnecessary attention from wary courtiers, who hoodwink Paduka Seri Maharaja into killing the child. Upon execution, it is said that the consequence of his death shall be borne by Singapura. After the reign of Paduka Seri Maharaja that has lasted for twelve years and six months, Sultan Iskandar Syah succeeds to the throne.

Sultan Iskandar Syah has a treasury officer named Sang Ranjuna Tapa whose beautiful daughter is one of the ruler's concubines. Her incomparable beauty ultimately spawns jealousy among spiteful concubines. To get rid of her, they accuse her of infidelity. An enraged Sultan Iskandar Syah instantly orders that she be exposed

24 The following summarises events precipitating the fall of Singapura and the birth of Melaka. See *Malay Annals*, pp. 49–52; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 117–20.

25 The word '*betis*' denotes two different meanings: the shin or calf; or, the name of a tree with a hard trunk (*Payena utilis*). The double meaning of the word is first noted by Roger Tol, who contends that C.C. Brown's translation of '*betis*' as 'leg' had resulted in subsequent misinterpretation of the swordfish attack. Roger Tol, 'The persistent misinterpretation of the swordfish attack on Singapore', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 35, 102 (2007): 247–52.

at one end of a market.²⁶ Her father, Sang Ranjuna Tapa, is deeply humiliated by the punishment and connives with Majapahit to lay waste to Singapura. As a result, Singapura is sacked by Majapahit. Innumerable lives are sacrificed and their blood inundates the shores of Singapura, which, to this day, can still be seen on the country's plain. For betraying his ruler, Sang Ranjuna Tapa and his wife turn into stone that exists to this day. As Singapura is defeated, Sultan Iskandar Syah flees northwards and settles at the Bertam River. There, he finally establishes a new kingdom called Melaka, the paragon of Malay power in the *Sejarah Melayu*.

Perhaps there is little wonder why the victims in this tripartite expression of violence comprise a foreigner, a child, and a woman. All are essentially scapegoats, sacrificed for the legacy of a kingdom that perseveres violently and miraculously. Within the ecology of the scapegoat mechanism, René Girard detects a tendency that violence always impinges on subordinated groups; they are 'either outside or on the fringes of society'.²⁷

What we are dealing with, therefore, are exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. Their status as foreigners or enemies, their servile condition, or simply their age prevents these future victims from fully integrating themselves into the community.²⁸

In the *Sejarah Melayu*, the symbolic elimination of the foreigner, the child, and the concubine²⁹ echoes the Girardian sacrificial logic that identifies a 'surrogate victim' as a scapegoat who provides a justification for the recourse to bloodletting, if

26 The specific word being used to describe this punishment is '*perjenggikan*', meaning 'to expose'. But numerous spelling variants or other words exist in other editions, thus the nature of this punishment is subject to debate. W.G. Shellabear's edition writes '*sulakan*', meaning 'to impale'; A. Samad Ahmad's edition writes '*percanggaiakan*'; Muhammad Haji Salleh's edition writes '*diperjangkangkan*'; Muhammad Yusoff Hashim's Siak edition uses '*percacakan*' instead, meaning 'to erect upright'; while Ahmat Adam's relatively recent edition, based on the Krusenstern manuscript, writes '*perjangkikan*'. What remains consistent throughout is Sang Ranjuna Tapa's reaction claiming that his daughter was being unfairly shamed ('*diberi malu*') because of the punishment. See *Malay Annals*, pp. 51, 218; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 118; W.G. Shellabear, *Sejarah Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 68; A. Samad Ahmad, *Sulalatus Salatin (Sejarah Melayu)*, 4th ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1986), p. 69; Tun Seri Lanang, *Sulalat al-Salatin ya'ni perteturan segala raja-raja*, ed. Muhammad Haji Salleh (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan; Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1997), p. 48; Tengku Said Ibni Tengku Deris, *Sejarah Melayu (Sulalatus Salatin): Versi Siak*, ed. Muhammad Yusoff Hashim (Melaka: Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka, 2015), p. 52; Ahmat Adam, *Sulalat u's-Salatin yakni per[tu] turan segala raja-raja* (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Karyawan, 2016), p. 94.

27 René Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 12.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

29 In regards to the female subject, however, Girard remarks an exception: 'In many cultures women are not considered full-fledged members of their society; yet women are never, or rarely, selected as sacrificial victims. There may be a simple explanation for this fact. The married woman retains her ties with her parents' clan even after she has become in some respects the property of her husband and his family. To kill her would be to run the risk of one of the two groups' interpreting her sacrifice as an act of murder committing it to a reciprocal act of revenge.' Notwithstanding this exception, Girard's elaboration strangely corresponds to the narrative in the *Sejarah Melayu*. While the concubine is the subject being scapegoated, it is her father, Sang Ranjuna Tapa, who directly causes the fall of Singapura. Unlike the persecutions of Tuan Jana Khatib and the child, incriminating a female subject indeed leads her family to reciprocate the violence in pursuit of revenge. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

anything, to atone for the sovereign's lapses into fits of envy and jealousy.³⁰ The endemic violence that punctures the *Sejarah Melayu* is also analogous to what Michael Taussig formulates as the 'space of death', within which terror is deployed to establish cultural hegemony over the production of truth and meaning.³¹ At once destructive and generative, the space of death permits 'terror to stun permanently, yet also revive and empower with new life'.³² In the three instances of victimisation, unjust violence produces surrogate victims while setting forth a genealogy that necessitates the fall of Singapura and the birth of Melaka.

The discursive role of violence in buttressing state power has been convincingly argued by Tony Day in his study of Southeast Asian literary texts.³³ Using a plethora of examples, Day observes how the ubiquity of violence and death is represented as 'beautiful' and bears a transformative capacity that is likewise 'destructive and creative'.³⁴ Is this not the operation of 'necropolitics', to borrow Achille Mbembe's term, where the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in 'upholding the work of death'?³⁵ Pronouncing who deserves to live and whose life is to be disposed of marks the essence of sovereign power. It is evident in the *Sejarah Melayu* that unjust rulers—from Paduka Sri Maharaja to Sultan Iskandar Syah, or even Sultan Mahmud Syah, who is beyond our scope of analysis—continue to live and rule regardless of their arbitrary killings. While the narrative arc has the effect of incriminating the rulers, its outcome is predictable. The Malay kingdom may rise and fall as a result of the rulers' misdeeds, leading to further catastrophes and deaths, but once the kingdom is reestablished elsewhere, their reign continues unequivocally for more than a decade. The victims, meanwhile, are swiftly annihilated without hesitation.

Hence, the convention of reading the *Sejarah Melayu* as a 'moral discourse' begs critical evaluation. This framework, which usually attributes the fall of Singapura to the workings of moral divine providence, goes back to an agreement of reciprocity between the king and his subjects otherwise known as the Bukit Siguntang covenant. The Bukit Siguntang covenant is a contract between Demang Lebar Daun and Sri Tri Buana. Both entered into an agreement of mutual reciprocity when the former married his daughter to the latter and abdicated his throne in favour

30 The Malay ruler's profound fear of competition is exemplary of Girard's 'mimetic rivalry'. *Ibid.*, pp. 169–92.

31 While Taussig's formulation is rooted in encounters between the coloniser and the colonised, this article considers the wider appeal of the space of death beyond colonialism—the space of death as an expression of power asymmetry between ruler and ruled. Without pretence, the *Sejarah Melayu* is a by-product of absolute power relating a legitimisation narrative that relies on, in Taussig's words, 'creating an uncertain reality out of fiction, a nightmarish reality in which the unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a social force of horrendous and phantasmic dimensions'. It is not too difficult to gauge how the *Sejarah Melayu* develops this 'epistemic murk' through the creative weaving of history and ideology in its depictions of violence. Michael Taussig, 'Culture of terror—space of death: Roger Casement's Putumayo report and the explanation of torture', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, 3 (1984): 492.

32 Michael Taussig, 'History as sorcery', *Representations* 7 (1984): 94.

33 The aesthetic of violence that Taussig evokes in his formulation seems to coincide with Tony Day's understanding of power's intrinsic relation with beauty in Southeast Asia. Rather than identifying violence as an instrument of power whose legitimate use is monopolised by the state in a Weberian sense, Day sees violence as the very device that brings into existence the idea of the state. Tony Day, *Fluid iron: State formation in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).

34 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

35 Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, 1 (2003): 14.

of the latter.³⁶ A significant component of the Malay ethos, the contract forms the cornerstone of harmonious relations between the ruler and the ruled. Sovereignty (*daulat*) guarantees unstinting loyalty from the ruled who must not commit treason (*derhaka*), and in return, the ruler must rule wisely, and not treat his subjects in a manner which brings disgrace to the realm, which could elicit treason.³⁷ But divine retribution in the *Sejarah Melayu* clearly evokes a different effect: as a succession of victims are unfairly punished due to the rulers' ignorance, the latter hardly gain any wisdom from their previous miscalculations.

To return to Mbembe, 'terror and killing become the means of realizing the already known telos of history'.³⁸ The narrativisation of violence signifies the space of death within which the subject is 'cast into the incessant movement of history'.³⁹ Palace literature as such is an absolute expression of necropower, where the space of death is introduced to chronicle an uninterrupted genealogy, to engender truth and impress cultural norms upon the receiving Malay public. Such power to manage the distribution of violence is manifested absolutely in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Genealogical knowledge and truths are produced precisely through this inscription of violence that finds ways to conjure new sets of social relations and to rid the court of all embarrassing impediments.⁴⁰ In this regime of truth-making and necropolitics, history is written and renewed, as if from a clean slate after a sequence of crises. When the *Sejarah Melayu* is foisted upon the Malay public as a historical text, terror is disguised as history. With the collapse of the Singapura kingdom, the injustices committed by its rulers are expediently elided, and the sequence of reigns is guaranteed.

The foreigner: Rivalry with Pasai

The victim in the first narrative unit, Tuan Jana Khatib, is a foreigner from Pasai, a geopolitical rival of the Melaka Sultanate. He is a stranger and foe outside the body politic of the Malay centre. Keeping his gaze fixed on the queen who is looking at him, regrettably cost him his life. But it is made clear that Tuan Jana Khatib is at the receiving end in the exchange of gazes, as the Malay prefixes attached to the verbs convey: '*maka Tuan Puteri pun ada menengok, maka terpandang oleh Tuan Jana Khatib*'.⁴¹ The verb '*menengok*', meaning 'to see', suggests that the queen takes an active role in instigating the interaction. Meanwhile, the second verb '*terpandang*' is formed with the passive prefix '*ter-*' and indicates a state of being seen. In all likelihood, the queen is the suitor, enamoured by the presence of Tuan Jana Khatib who is admirably described in the text as '*hamba Allah di Pasai*', literally, the 'servant of Allah in Pasai'.⁴² Reacting to the queen's instigation, Tuan Jana Khatib magically

36 *Malay Annals*, pp. 26–7; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 86–7.

37 Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the same tree: Trade and ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), p. 71; Maziar Mozaffari Falarti, *Malay kingship in Kedah: Religion, trade, and society* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2013), pp. 69–95.

38 Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 20.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

41 Brown's rendition is suggestive: 'the queen was looking out of the window and Tuan Jana Khatib saw her'. *Malay Annals*, p. 49; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 117.

42 Brown simply translates this as 'a man of Pasai'. The *Tuhfat al-Nafis* writes of him as '*ulama aulia Allah*', which connotes the status of sainthood. *Malay Annals*, p. 49; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 117; Virginia

splits the betel palm into two. No less intriguing is the careful selection of the word *'ditilikkan'* in describing Tuan Jana Khatib's action.⁴³ In a paragraph already replete with a crisscross of gazes, the word *'tilik'*, meaning 'to glance at', intimates yet another ocular experience.⁴⁴ Is Tuan Jana Khatib mustering his attention on a tree as he attempts a distraction from what is otherwise an amorous gaze from the queen?

There is much room for speculation as to why a betel palm is invoked in this fleeting encounter. Given the playful rhetoric of Malay court tradition, the use of the Malay word *'pinang'* for 'betel' may be subject to metaphorical interpretations. *'Pinang'*, as it is, denotes the areca nut, but in the wider cultural context, it carries a supplementary meaning of marital or sexual union. 'The offering and acceptance of betel,' as Anthony Reid explains, 'were so much identified with courtship and betrothal.'⁴⁵ Serving the betel quid is often a precursor to discussions on matrimony and is an integral social lubricant among Southeast Asian societies. Chewing the quid releases the areca juice, which creates a mild euphoric sensation, allowing interlocutors to ease into amicable conversation. The Malay linguistic tradition abounds with betel imagery implying romance and courtship: denominalising the noun *'pinang'* brings about the verb *'meminang'*, which means 'to ask in marriage'; while proverbial sayings such as *'bagai pinang dibelah dua'*, literally 'to split an areca nut into two', implies 'similitude' or 'a compatible relationship'.⁴⁶

If commissioned Malay scribes were esteemed literati adept at rhetoric, it is not a stretch to conjecture that the betel palm is an analogy of romance, in which the queen reveals her interest in Tuan Jana Khatib, a man of spiritual standing. But to salvage the reputation of the royalty, the queen's illicit flirtation with him is artfully and diplomatically concealed in metaphorical garb.⁴⁷ The splitting of the betel palm tree may further signal Tuan Jana Khatib's outright rejection of the queen's advance, making him blameless of any offence against the king. Yet, his action whets more than it allays the suspicion of the king, Paduka Seri Maharaja. Out of jealousy, Paduka Seri Maharaja exclaims: 'That's the sort of man Tuan Jana Khatib is! No sooner does

Matheson Hooker, *Tuhfat al-Nafis: Sejarah Melayu-Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991), p. 130.

43 To quote the Malay passage in full: *'Maka ada sebatang pinang hampir istana, maka ditilikkan oleh Tuan Jana Khatib, menjadilah dua batang pinang itu.'* *Malay Annals*, p. 49; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 117.

44 Referring to this exact account in the *Sejarah Melayu*, R.J. Wilkinson defines *'tilek'* as 'Observation; careful ocular examination or notice—as distinct from a mere casual look; looking at anything with a purpose, usually with the idea of prophecy or second sight.' Wilkinson deems Tuan Jana Khatib's action as a passive one, writing that he 'observed the splitting of the *pinang* trees'. R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English dictionary* (Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, 1901), p. 210.

45 Anthony Reid, 'From betel-chewing to tobacco-smoking in Indonesia', *Journal of Asian Studies* 44, 3 (1985): 531.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 531–2; Dawn F. Rooney, *Betel chewing traditions in South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 34–9.

47 Haji Awg Asbol bin Haji Mail, 'Dibalik tersurat, apa tersirat: Pentafsiran sejarah alam Melayu menurut Hamka', paper presented at Seminar Nusantara Buya Hamka, Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 8–9 Dec. 2011, p. 16. On the manner in which court writings are diplomatic, restrained, yet playful with words and parables, see Koster and Maier, 'A medicine of sweetmeats', pp. 444–5; Henk Maier, *We are playing relatives: A survey of Malay writing* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004).

he know that the queen is looking at him than he shows off his powers!’⁴⁸ The king then gives the order for his execution.

That Tuan Jana Khatib is a learned man originating from Pasai suggests that his foreign identity comes into play in the unfolding of his tragic death. In the *Sejarah Melayu*, Pasai is recognised as a major centre of Islam, for envoys are sent to Pasai twice by the Melaka Sultanate to seek answers on theological matters.⁴⁹ Letters received from Pasai too are accorded considerable prestige: ‘If it was a letter from Pasai it was received with full ceremonial equipment.’⁵⁰ Yet, beyond giving praise, these episodes also expose Pasai’s ignorance and hypocrisy—an attitude symptomatic of Melaka’s ambivalent relations with Pasai.⁵¹ Mentions of Pasai end with additional commentary disapproving of Pasai’s misreading of Melaka’s generosity:

The three countries [Melaka, Pasai, and Haru] (were of equal greatness, so that) their Rajas, however they stood to each other in point of age, still sent ‘greetings’ only to each other, though the people of Pasai were wont to read as ‘obeisance’ the word ‘greetings’ in any letter, no matter whence it came.⁵²

To prevent Pasai from misreading Melaka’s ‘greetings’ as ‘obeisance’, the minister Bendahara Seri Maharaja even decides to avoid writing a letter altogether, suggesting instead to ‘send an envoy but without a letter and we order the envoy to commit the message to memory’.⁵³ Beyond these dilemmas demanding diplomatic finesse, fifteenth-century Melaka was competing with Pasai in trade as it adopted Islam and partook in the Islamic trading network, attracting Gujarati Muslim merchants who were then frequenting Pasai.⁵⁴ Insofar as Pasai and Melaka competed for influence in the fifteenth century, Pasai mystic Tuan Jana Khatib and Singapura’s Paduka Seri Maharaja, too, engage in a rivalry in the *Sejarah Melayu*. Contextualising the seventeenth-century *Sejarah Melayu* text, Ulrich Kratz notes this mirroring between distinct temporal dimensions:

48 In Malay: ‘*Budinya Tuan Jana Khatib! Lagi diketahuinya isterinya kita menengok, maka ia menunjukkan pengetahuannya!*’ *Malay Annals*, p. 49; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 117.

49 In both episodes, Pasai’s exact answers are not cited since they are sacred and esoteric in nature, harbouring knowledge of veritable secrecy, not to be simply divulged. *Malay Annals*, pp. 100–102, 154–5; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 183–5, 249–51. See also H. Overbeck, ‘The answer of Pasai’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11, 2 (1933): 254–60.

50 In Malay: ‘*jikalau seperti surat dari Pasai, dijemput dengan selengkap alat kerajaan!*’ *Malay Annals*, p. 55; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 124.

51 R. Roolvink, ‘The answer of Pasai’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38, 2 (1965): 129–39. See also Amin Sweeney, ‘The connection between the Hikayat Raja2 Pasai and the Sejarah Melayu’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 40, 2 (1967): 93–105.

52 In Malay: ‘*Pada zaman itu sebuah pun negeri tiada menyamai Melaka melainkan Pasai, Haru; tiga buah negeri itu, tuha muda pun rajanya, berkirin salam juga. Tetapi orang, barang dari mana surat datang, dibacakan “sembah” juga.*’ *Malay Annals*, p. 98; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 180.

53 In Malay: ‘*kita menyuruh janganlah bersurat sudah, kita suruh hafazkan pada utusan!*’ *Malay Annals*, p. 154; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 250.

54 Manuel Lobato, ‘“Melaka is like a cropping field”: Trade management in the Strait of Melaka during the sultanate and the Portuguese period’, *Journal of Asian History* 46, 2 (2012): 231–2; Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A history of early modern Southeast Asia, 1400–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 152. See also M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian trade and European influence: In the Indonesian archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 33–4.

the *Sejarah Melayu* was composed at a time when a relatively weak Johor endeavoured to strengthen its position as the rightful heir to the Melakan tradition; and it is no accident that what is described here is the delicate situation when the ruler of Melaka who always expected deference from the other Malay rulers, was to convey his own deference to another ruler.⁵⁵

Such a historiographical approach is typical of court literature that inscribes dynastic genealogy and projects power through text when crises of power occur.⁵⁶ By judiciously composing and reworking the *Sejarah Melayu*, the diplomatic insecurity that once shrouded Johor in the seventeenth century is delicately recast as diplomatic contestation between Melaka (or Singapura as its predecessor) and Pasai, allegorised in the form of Paduka Seri Maharaja's jealousy levelled against Tuan Jana Khatib. The image of Pasai as a foreign rival is effortlessly transposed onto a character known as the servant of Allah, possessing great mystical prowess, captivating even the attention of the queen. If history is written from the centre of power, the killing of Tuan Jana Khatib in the *Sejarah Melayu* stands as a metonymic representation of Melaka's imperial desire to eclipse Pasai.

The child: The threat of *akal*

Almost instantly, the death of Tuan Jana Khatib occasions the scourge of a swordfish attack on Singapura. The onslaught continues until a child proposes a workable solution that overthrows the king's ineffectual proposal of barricading Singapura with hard wood palisades. As soon as the threat of the swordfish is averted, Paduka Seri Maharaja is warned of the child's dangerous future potential. 'Your Highness,' the conspiring court officials alert him, 'that boy will grow into a very clever man. It would be as well to be rid of him.'⁵⁷ The allegation makes clear that the child must be put to death for a crime he has yet to commit. Due emphasis must be accorded to the use of the Malay word '*akal*', herein translated as 'clever'. *Akal* is derived from the Arabic '*ʿaql*' and denotes 'intellect' or 'rationality'. It is a trait expected of adults but lacking in children who too easily succumb to indiscipline and instinctive passion.⁵⁸ Recounted in this story of the swordfish attack is therefore a child who acts contrariwise. He is a boy whose intellect rivals that of an adult. By calling into question the king's idea, he has unknowingly transgressed the threshold of permissibility with his unsolicited advice.

Adding weight to the indecorum is the very juvenescence of a child. Within the purview of Malay feudalism, the boy's intellect is ill-suited to his age. Indifferent to the trifling social protocols engrossing the royal court, he operates unpredictably and fails to grasp the severity of his transgression. Insofar as the court officials are concerned, it is the child's future potential that poses an eminent threat to the

55 Ernst Ulrich Kratz, 'Yang tersurat dan yang tersirat: Historicity and historical truth', *Archipel* 60 (2000): 32.

56 Vladimir Braginsky, *The heritage of traditional Malay literature: A historical survey of genres, writings and literary views* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), p. 489.

57 In Malay: 'Tuanku, budak itu jikalau sudah besar, nescaya besarlah akalnyanya. Baiklah ia kita bunuh.' *Malay Annals*, p. 50; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 118.

58 Michael G. Peletz, 'Neither reasonable nor responsible: Contrasting representations of masculinity in a Malay society', *Cultural Anthropology* 9, 2 (1994): 148–9.

king. In an insightful reading of the swordfish incident, Roger Tol pays close attention to the child's recommendation of using soft banana stems for the barricades instead hard wood (*betis*). He adduces 'the opposition hard versus soft' as a significant symbolism reflecting 'the use of force versus the use of brains, troops versus a boy, the powerful versus the powerless'.⁵⁹ When 'hard' is outplayed by 'soft', hierarchy is upended. Fully cognisant of what the child is capable of when his 'intellect develops' (*besarlah akalnya*), the court officials appeal to the king to order his execution. Shrewdly scripted in this consternation is perhaps the imprudence and juvenile behaviour of the king. If the capacity to reason is a palpable sign of maturity, an adult overshadowed by a child thus has his intellect ridiculed.⁶⁰ Falling prey to accusation, Paduka Seri Maharaja demands the execution of the child as a preventive measure. Hence the boy is executed, not only for his exceptional intelligence, but for what he is destined to become.

The figure of a child is threatening because he is marginal, inadequately socialised, while remaining unaware of the violation he is bound to commit. The 'new-born Malay child', says J.L. Massard, encapsulates '*different potential natures*' and possesses 'a relative *perviousness*, or *receptivity* to influences coming from certain domains, such as that of the supranatural world or that of animals'.⁶¹ Being a liminal figure, the child is permeable to forces beyond the immediate realm. Indeed, at the moment of executing the child, it is said that 'the guilt of his death was laid on Singapura'.⁶² In the Malay worldview, causing a premature death is akin to tempting a curse, and among all stages of life, the adolescent soul is prone to hold a vengeful grudge against its executioner.⁶³ Since the child is a symbol of innocence and vitality, child death is always unwarranted, untimely, and can be construed as—to borrow an anthropological explication—a kind of 'bad death'.⁶⁴ Horrific consequences ensue from bad death for 'the victim has been forced to relinquish life prematurely with the result that his embittered ghost is liable to return to afflict the survivors'.⁶⁵ What is threatening about bad death is the possibility of a spectral return of the accursed soul, whose lifespan has been brutally truncated. The use of the Malay phrase '*menanggungkan haknya*' in the passage, which can be translated as 'to lay his rights as a burden', reinforces the illegitimacy of the killing and implies that retaliation is forthcoming.⁶⁶

To offer another angle from which to probe the symbolic significance of killing a child in the narrative of violence, one can turn to two Barus chronicles, which consist

59 Tol, 'The persistent misinterpretation', p. 250.

60 Peletz, 'Neither reasonable nor responsible', p. 148.

61 Italics original. J.L. Massard, 'The new-born Malay child: A multiple identity being', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 58, 2 (1985): 71.

62 Brown's translation is slightly modified here: 'But when this boy was executed the guilt of his blood was laid on Singapura.' Blood is never mentioned in Malay: '[...] *tatkala ia akan dibunuh itu, maka ia menanggungkan haknya atas negeri itu.*' *Malay Annals*, p. 50; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 118.

63 Abortion, for instance, is gravely tabooed because the fetus has a soul and would curse the guilty mother. Massard, 'The new-born Malay child', p. 72.

64 'Bad death' has been described as 'the death of one whose youthfulness belies the likelihood of a conscious and voluntary renunciation of life'. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, 'Introduction: Death and the regeneration of life', *Death and the regeneration of life*, ed. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 16.

65 Jonathan Parry, 'Sacrificial death and the necrophagous ascetic', in *Death and the regeneration of life*, ed. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 83.

66 Brown, 'Commentary', in *Malay Annals*, p. 218.

of a similar swordfish incident. Produced in the nineteenth century, the Barus chronicles—namely the *Asal Keturunan Raja Barus* and *Tambo Barus Hilir* (*Sejarah Tuanku Batu Badan*)—adopt the swordfish attack episode from the *Sejarah Melayu* corpus and refashion it to recount the genealogy of Barus.⁶⁷ As in the *Sejarah Melayu*, the swordfish incident is employed for the same purposes. In both the Barus chronicles, the victim is a child who befriends Sultan Ibrahim, the prospective founder of the Barus kingdom hailing from Tarusan. In the *Asal Keturunan Raja Barus*, when the child is first prompted for an idea to fend off the swordfish attack, he is reticent about it: ‘It is of no use for me to say it, for people will resent me.’⁶⁸ In the preceding passages, the child is expressly dubious of the competence of the chiefs (*penghulu*), whom he characterises as ‘*orang tuha-tuha*’ or old folks. His retort suggests an awareness of consequence should a person of lesser seniority, such as himself, offer an advice. Only when the king summons the child does he relinquish his silence, thereby revealing his ‘*akal*’ in suggesting the use of banana stems to barricade the shore.⁶⁹ A clear demarcation between the young and old comes to the fore. The *Tambo Barus Hilir* illustrates a similar dichotomy, since the senior minister, known simply as ‘*menteri yang tuha*’, is rivalled by a resourceful young boy known as ‘*budak kecil*’ or ‘*anak kecil*’, meaning ‘small child’, whose ‘*akal*’ is unmatched.⁷⁰ Once the child’s proposal of setting up a blockade of banana stems accomplishes its purpose, his fate is more or less sealed. The minister’s envy of his genius sounds his death knell.⁷¹ Acting on ministerial advice, the king commands the child’s death. Sultan Ibrahim, upon realising his parents’ complicity in his friend’s death, is deeply aggrieved and parts from his family. He embarks on a journey during which he founds the kingdom of Barus. As a subsidiary character, the child is introduced, and killed, with the sole purpose of necessitating Sultan Ibrahim’s departure from Tarusan. Violence, again, is necessary as a plot device, for the child’s death brings about the condition for renewal and the impetus to establish another kingdom afresh.

A trope becomes evident as the swordfish incident is variously outlined above. More than a vignette of moral collapse, an overlooked rhetoric undergirding this specific episode is the recalibration of power, the violent replacement of the old with the new.⁷² In the case of the *Sejarah Melayu*, this betokens the receding of Singapura and

67 Jane Drakard, *Sejarah raja-raja Barus: Dua naskah dari Barus* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama; Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 2003), pp. 178–80, 216–21. Other texts include the *Salasilah Berau*. Anton Abraham Cense, *De kroniek van Bandjarmasin* (Santpoort: C.A. Mees, 1928), pp. 174–5. See also Virginia Matheson, ‘Strategies of survival: The Malay royal line of Lingga-Riau’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17, 1 (1986): 36.

68 In Malay: ‘*Tidak aku guna katakan nanti orang jadi marah kepadaku.*’ Drakard, *Sejarah raja-raja Barus*, p. 179.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 216–8.

71 The chief persuades the king to put the child to death in the following lines: ‘*Ya Tuanku Syah ‘Alam adapun selama todak sudah habis mati sebab oleh budak kecil itu, melainkan tiada saya berhati senang sebab saya pikir jikalau umurnya kiranya panjang niscaya dianya jadi keraja’an karena bicaranya terlalu tajam sekalian yang tuha-tuha dibarikan kanjal sebab dianya sangat ber’akal. Adapun sepanjang pikiran saya baiklah nyawanya kita hilangkan supaya senang akhir kemudian.*’ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

72 Examples can be multiplied. In the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the swordfish incident takes place in Inderapura. Hang Kadim, the son of Hang Jebat, plays the gifted child implicated in the case. Like the snippet in the *Sejarah Melayu*, his death is a result of envy and *fitnah* circulated by court officials.

the birth of Melaka. The swordfish attack and its aftermath are interpolated into a narrative as an enabler of future potential. In this transgressive and forceful advancing of power, a scapegoat is sacrificed. The child becomes a 'surrogate victim' par excellence, scapegoated to necessitate a crisis that permits power to reinvent its grounding. Indeed, from a Girardian perspective, especially vulnerable to the violence of rivalry is a child, because the child neither possesses the means to reciprocate, nor is he conversant with the social protocols that consign him to victimhood.⁷³ Often, as Girard intriguingly puts it, the child 'reaches out for his model's objects with unsuspecting innocence' while the adult would 'interpret the child's actions in terms of usurpation'.⁷⁴ And the inevitable outcome in this relation is the unjust violence inflicted upon the child.

In the *Sejarah Melayu* as in the two Barus chronicles, the significance of '*akal*' is fleshed out to reconceive a new kingdom that will possess greater power and moral legitimacy than that of its predecessor. At the forefront of this tragic tension, manifested through the envious allegation made by conspiring adults against the child, is the familiar collision of *akal* and *nafsu*.⁷⁵ To the extent that the killing of the child signals the deprivation of reason, it brings to fruition a moral meltdown through which power can be radically reinvented, and the genealogical structure maintained. Unjust violence creates a necessary paralysis to stun and reshuffle the conditions of narrative. It is this narratological impulse of violence that inscribes power into history.

The concubine: The spread of *fitnah*

The death of the child does not deter power from slipping further into moral ruin. Paduka Seri Maharaja's inept judgement is doomed to recur during the reign of his successor Sultan Iskandar Syah. The victim, this time, is a royal concubine, the unnamed daughter of the state's treasury officer Sang Ranjuna Tapa. There is scant description of her character apart from her charming appearance, but this trait alone is deemed sufficient to relate her story. Being the ruler's most treasured jewel, she inspires jealousy among the other concubines who accuse her of misdemeanour. The concubines eventually succeed in persuading an irked Sultan Iskandar Syah to inflict a humiliating punishment on her.

What needs to be noted in this narrative is the use of the provocative word '*fitnah*', which can be translated as 'slander' or 'calumny', signalling the spread of misinformation with an intention to harm.⁷⁶ As an Arabic origin word, *fitnah* carries

When Melaka knows of Hang Kadim's death in Inderapura, they immediately send the military to take over Inderapura. While this account is less demonstrative of the supplanting of the old with the new, violence has nevertheless enabled the reordering of power. The unjust execution of the child legitimises Melaka's expansionist desire. See Kassim Ahmad, *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1964), pp. 415–24. For a comparison between the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, see T. Iskandar, 'Some historical sources used by the author of *Hikayat Hang Tuah*', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 43, 1 (1970): 38–44.

73 Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, pp. 174–5.

74 Girard also highlights the figure of the child as one who has 'not yet undergone the rites of initiation', making it more expedient for adults to scapegoat a child. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 174.

75 Michael Peletz, *Reason and passion: Representations of gender in a Malay society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 225–56.

76 Jane Drakard, *A Malay frontier: Unity and duality in a Sumatran kingdom* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 19, 98–9.

immense weight and must be used with considerable discretion. In Malay sources, the dissemination of *fitnah* is coterminous to wreaking destruction; accusing others of *fitnah*, too, is a grave allegation for it tarnishes one's reputation by suggesting that the person's statement should not be taken as reliable truth.⁷⁷ In her commentary on the nineteenth-century *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, Virginia Matheson regards *fitnah* as 'a mixture of propaganda, malicious gossip, scandal mongering and defamation', consistently employed in the narrative 'to spread dissension and worsen a turbulent situation'.⁷⁸ In most cases, the root of *fitnah* lies in motives of envy and rivalry.⁷⁹ The desire to seek vengeance and to besmirch potential rivals is premised on unreciprocated love or the unequal distribution of care.⁸⁰ In this particular episode where Sultan Iskandar Syah is the principal object of desire, the concubines have conspired to eliminate the lover he cherishes the most by committing *fitnah*.

There is little doubt that the concubines were the ones who incite the wrath of the king, but it is Sultan Iskandar Syah who acts upon their allegation without thorough investigation. He is additionally culpable for mismanaging his private affairs as he ignites jealousy among his concubines by favouring one over the rest. Exposing Sang Ranjuna Tapa's daughter in public, and probably naked,⁸¹ is a heavy-handed punishment to boot. 'Even if my daughter is guilty of misconduct, let her merely be put to death', Sang Ranjuna Tapa bemoans, 'why humiliate her like this?'⁸² In the Malay tradition, being shamed, or '*diberi malu*', is more severe a punishment than death.⁸³ Worse still is perhaps the father who does not query the veracity of the accusation, but as implied in his lamentation, provisionally acquiesces to her guilt, preferring that she be put to death rather than prolonging this shameful punishment.

Throughout the *Sejarah Melayu*, the female body is implicated in the guilt of passion.⁸⁴ Female characters are mostly described in physical terms, since their roles are

77 Stephen C. Headley, *Durga's mosque: Cosmology, conversion and community in Central Javanese Islam* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), p. 508.

78 Virginia Matheson, 'Concepts of state in the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*', in *Pre-colonial state systems in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and Lance Castle (Kuala Lumpur: Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1975), p. 19.

79 Jan van der Putten, *His word is the truth: Haji Ibrahim's letters and other writings* (Leiden: Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies, Universiteit Leiden, 2001), p. 66.

80 On the intimate relations between *fitnah*, envy (*dengki*), jealousy (*iri hati* or *cemburu*), and vengeance (*dendam*) in Malay literature, see Amida Abdulhamid, *Persoalan dendam dalam sastera Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 2004), pp. 102–33.

81 Timothy Moy believes that 'she was exposed publicly, quite possibly naked, and probably not done to death at all'. Timothy J. Moy, 'The "Sejarah Melayu" tradition of power and political structure: An assessment of relevant sections of the "Tuhfat al-Nafis"', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 48, 2 (1975): 72.

82 In Malay: '*Jikalau sungguh sekalipun anak hamba ada berbuat jahat, bunuh ia saja-saja; mengapalah maka diberi malu demikian?*' *Malay Annals*, p. 51; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 118.

83 On the relations between violence and *malu*, see Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, 'Kekerasan pada zaman Kesultanan Melayu Melaka', pp. 52–4. See also A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay political culture on the eve of colonial rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), pp. 106–7.

84 The female is inextricably tied to the baser human passions: '*Kerendahan mertabat wanita dari kaca mata pengarang Sejarah Melayu berkait rapat dengan sikap materialistik mereka, fungsi seksual yang mereka mainkan dan keupayaan mereka memukau lelaki sehingga tergugat kestabilan sosial dan politik sesebuah negeri*'. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan, 'Identiti dan citra wanita berasaskan *Sejarah Melayu*', in *Kedudukan dan citra wanita dalam sumber-sumber tradisional Melayu*, ed. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan and Rashila Ramli (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan

confined to sexual and reproductive functions. Exceptions, such as Tun Fatimah⁸⁵ and Puteri Gunung Ledang,⁸⁶ exist. They are women reputed for their unparalleled beauty, yet, they are bold characters with unflinching demands, often exerting profound influence on the rulers.⁸⁷ Notwithstanding their courage, both are discursively constituted as objects of desire and are defined in relation to men. Female characters as such are deemed as lodestones of passion, typically portrayed as disruptive and capable of leading the realm astray should the king become preoccupied by their emphatically absurd requests.

Indeed, whenever feminine beauty is brought into the picture, the dialectics of passion and reason, *nafsu* and *akal*, reappear as if to put to test the ruler's rectitude. This gendered framework is already in place moments before the fall of Singapura. Prior to the episode of Tuan Jana Khatib, the fraternal relationship between Sultan Malik al-Zahir and Sultan Malik al-Mansur foreshadows the peril of passion stirred by yet another unnamed concubine. The brothers are affectionate with one another until one day, when Sultan Malik al-Mansur visits his brother and catches a glimpse of his brother's concubine, thus 'conceiving a passion' (*berahi*) for her, and decides to bring her back to his place.⁸⁸ Expressing regret over his action, Sultan Malik al-Mansur bewails to his chief minister:

Alas, my friend, something that was too difficult for me has come upon me. Conquered by my fleshly lusts my discretion vanished. What I have done has been my ruin, my fleshly lusts were too strong for me.⁸⁹

In this woeful statement, the term '*nafsu*' is explicitly used to describe his 'fleshly lusts' that render him powerless. In tandem with this is the word '*fitnah*', which in fact occurs earlier—in his minister's cautionary advice not to visit his brother for fear of an unforeseeable '*fitnah*'.⁹⁰ The dialectics of *nafsu* and *akal* are herein laid bare, not only through the king's internal struggle with desire, but through his refusal to see reason, as advised by his chief minister, a '*menteri tuha*'.⁹¹

Malaysia, 1998), p. 28. See also Noor Azah Catherine bt Abdullah, 'Archetypes of ideal men and dreamed women in Leyden's translation of *The Malay Annals*' (PhD diss., Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2006).

85 *Malay Annals*, pp. 158–60, 165–7, 171; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 256–7, 264–6, 272.

86 *Malay Annals*, pp. 103–4; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 186–7.

87 Cheah Boon Kheng attends to the women's role in Malay historical sources and summarises that women 'were capable of great guile, manipulation and ruthlessness which could produce deadly results'. In spite of his almost positive evaluation, the monarchical and feudal patriarchy within which the scribe operates tends to portray the female subject as a secondary character or as interference. Cheah Boon Kheng, 'Power behind the throne: The role of queens and court ladies in Malay history', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 66, 1 (1993): 2.

88 *Malay Annals*, p. 47; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 113.

89 In Malay: 'Hei bapaku, bahawa aku kedatangan suatu pekerjaan yang termusykil, dan hilanglah budi bicaraku karena tertalu-talu oleh nafsuku, dan binasalah pekerjaanku sebab terkeras hawa nafsuku.' *Malay Annals*, p. 47; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 113.

90 To Sultan Malik al-Mansur, the minister said: 'I pray your Highness, go not. There may be trouble'. In Malay: 'Jangan tuanku berangkat, kalau fitnah.' *Malay Annals*, p. 47; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 113.

91 'But Saidi Semayad [the minister] did not approve, for he was an old minister and of wide experience and he realised that trouble was inevitable.' In Malay: 'Pada Saidi Semayad tiada berkenan padanya karena ia menteri tuha lagi tahu pada segala pekerjaan, tiada dapat tiada fitnah juga.' *Malay Annals*, p. 47; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 113. The state of seniority, or '*tuha*', once again is by itself an indication of '*akal*',

While the interplay of *nafsu* and *akal* is often recognised as inherent to human life, looming beneath these narrative threads is the female figure serving as the seed of rupture, the enabler of conflict. As a consequence of taking his brother's concubine, Sultan Malik al-Mansur is dethroned and his chief minister is beheaded. More instructive is the expressed repentance of the surviving brother Sultan Malik al-Zahir: 'Just because of a woman I have dethroned my brother and killed his minister.'⁹² Not unlike his brother, Sultan Malik al-Zahir too has submitted to *nafsu*, resorting to the impulse of anger and renouncing reason altogether. From this episode of strained fraternity to Tuan Jana Khatib's unintended gaze, the female subject is comparable to a saboteur, one who is determined to upset the judgement of the sovereigns and is always culpable for the guilt of male rulers.

Read against this backdrop, the punishment of Sang Ranjuna Tapa's daughter signals a scapegoat mechanism coming into fruition within the circuits of passion and reason.⁹³ All too characteristically, the female subject is scapegoated as a result of malicious gossip. Anchored in this episode is an emotive vocabulary tied to the heat of passion. *Fitnah*, committed out of jealousy, initially brings *malu* to the king, but it is subsequently exacted on the concubine suspected of lewdness. *Malu* is relayed to her when she is publicly exposed (*perjenggikan*).⁹⁴ Violence enters into the picture as the sovereign attempts to extricate himself from *malu*, making a surrogate victim out of the persecution. The character is not only a victim of *fitnah*, she is a victim of unbridled *nafsu*, collectively exemplified by her rival scandal-mongers as well as the king.

Necessary and generative violence

Reverberating through the three episodic outbursts of violence thus far examined is the triumph of *fitnah*, the primacy of *nafsu* over *akal*. Violence comes to light as a result of the ruler failing the test, when reason resigns to passion and gives in to the immediacy of *nafsu*. The injustice embedded in these accounts of violence is glaring.⁹⁵ It reminds the audience to be mindful of the Bukit Siguntang covenant, makes clear that the rulers' exercise of violence cannot be reasonably justified beyond the mantle of sovereign immunity, and it conveys instructive moral lessons to prospective Malay

virtue, and intellect, which explains precisely why, in our previous account, a child with *'akal'* is regarded as transgressive and is executed.

92 In Malay: '*Karena perempuan seorang, maka saudaraku kuturunkan dari atas kerajaannya, dan menterinya pun kubunuh.*' *Malay Annals*, p. 48; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 115.

93 Equally amusing to note here are the subtleties contained in the name of the father 'Sang Ranjuna Tapa'. 'Ranjuna' is a localised spelling of 'Arjuna', the heroic warrior from the epic *Mahabharata*, whereas 'Tapa' means 'meditation'. The distinct Javanese sound to the father's name is no accident too, as he would later become an agent for Majapahit. Perhaps reminiscent of Tuan Jana Khatib, Sang Ranjuna Tapa appears to be a man of learning and reason. The paternal figure here emerges as yet another authority attempting to regulate the flow of his daughter's *nafsu*.

94 The text does not specify the crime she is being accused of committing, but the context of the passage sheds light on the nature of her misconduct. That her punishment entails that she be 'publicly exposed at one end of the market' (*perjenggikan di ujung pasar*) is indicative of a crime that could bring shame to her. *Malay Annals*, p. 51; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 118.

95 The *Sejarah Melayu's* thematic focus is 'not the greatness of the Melaka Sultanate', as Cheah Boon Kheng pointedly remarks, pace Brown, 'but injustice'. Cheah, 'The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire', p. 111; Brown, 'Introduction', in *Malay Annals*, p. 8.

rulers so that disasters could be averted. Accordingly, the *Sejarah Melayu* is perceived as 'a form of moral discourse'.⁹⁶ The fall of Singapura, in the wake of unjust violence, often attests to the intervention of divine retribution in fulfilment of the Bukit Siguntang covenant.⁹⁷ The connection between the swordfish incident and the demise of Singapura is accepted as evidence that the *Sejarah Melayu* text contains notions of moral justice, coupled with a subtle criticism levelled against the king.⁹⁸ The Portuguese conquest of Melaka, too, produces the same effect.⁹⁹ This line of argument, however, overlooks the fact that the rulers directly responsible for the fall of Singapura survive unscathed. Both Paduka Seri Maharaja and Sultan Iskandar Syah easily evade the consequences of their unruly actions and continue their grip on power with injustice.

To extract a 'moral discourse' from this perpetuation of power is to gloss over a substantial amount of intervening information. It is necessary to reconsider the rhetorical purpose in the accounts of unjust violence that precipitate the fall of Singapura. The common understanding that a putative divine overseer is at work to rectify royal misconduct blatantly disregards the resultant establishment of Melaka, which picks up from where Singapura left off. Moreover, despite Paduka Seri Maharaja's acts of injustice, he rules for twelve more years and six months,¹⁰⁰ after which he is succeeded, peaceably, by Sultan Iskandar Syah, who, again yields to baseless accusation and replicates Paduka Seri Maharaja's impulsive deeds. Sultan Iskandar Syah then commits the same mistake of punishing the concubine out of jealousy and hearsay. Subsequently, the concubine's father Sang Ranjuna Tapa conspires with Majapahit to ravage Singapura. In strict conformity with the Bukit Siguntang covenant, divine punishment is then meted out to Sang Ranjuna Tapa who has committed treason. However, whereas Sang Ranjuna Tapa and his wife turn into stone, the ruler only relinquishes the Singapura kingdom, with his legacy to be reinvigorated later in Melaka. The end of Singapura is not a fatal blow to Malay rule. Far from it, Sultan Iskandar Syah escapes to Muar unharmed, he builds a fort elsewhere and founds Melaka, where he rules for two impressive decades.¹⁰¹

The oft-perceived notion of mutual obligation as stipulated in the Bukit Siguntang covenant falls unevenly on the governed subjects, because 'Malay subjects ... shall never be disloyal or treacherous to their rulers, even if their rulers behave evilly or inflict injustice upon them.'¹⁰² The rulers, on the other hand, are only punishable by God, and even so, only by 'a sign that his kingdom will be destroyed'.¹⁰³

96 Cheah, 'The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire', p. 111.

97 Ibid., pp. 112–14.

98 Walls, 'Legacy of the fathers', pp. 62–9; Cheah, 'The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire', p. 119; Tol, 'The persistent misinterpretation', pp. 250–51.

99 Cheah, 'The rise and fall of the great Melakan empire', p. 117; Chambert-Loir, 'The *Sulalat al-Salatin*', pp. 151–2.

100 *Malay Annals*, p. 50; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 118.

101 *Malay Annals*, p. 52; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 120. Even Sultan Mahmud Syah, one of the most detested rulers in the *Sejarah Melayu*, reigns for 48 years, having relocated his centre of power from Melaka to Muar, to Pahang, and to Bintan, before he dies in Kampar. See *Malay Annals*, p. 193; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 298.

102 *Malay Annals*, p. 27; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 87.

103 *Malay Annals*, p. 27; *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 87.

Yet, unjust violence augurs ill for Singapura inasmuch as it necessitates the birth of Melaka. A kingdom is destroyed, another is established; the legacy continues unabated. In pursuit of an uninterrupted sequence of reigns, the Bukit Siguntang covenant preserves the absolutism of sovereignty. Without any allowance for justice, the covenant is only an insurance of domination in the guise of justice.

Contemporary scholarship tends to overstress the salience of moral justice when the *Sejarah Melayu* is simply reinforcing the sovereign's hegemony. Such a moralistic framework, as Clive Kessler astutely notices, emerged from an ideological milieu at the end of the twentieth century when Malay nationalism and Islamic populism held sway in the hermeneutics of Malay philology.¹⁰⁴ In part a result of Islamisation and modernity, progressive ideas of justice were given prominence and the Bukit Siguntang covenant in the *Sejarah Melayu* offers an expedient moral backbone with which to rationalise postcolonial resistant politics within the ambit of Malay feudalism. Kessler remarks that this 'cry of populist insurgency'—primarily observed in the revisionist and nativist inquiries into the *Sejarah Melayu* as well as the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*—is compatible with the view that 'Malays shall remain loyal to their rulers so long as their rulers rule over them with justice'.¹⁰⁵

As a legitimisation narrative, the *Sejarah Melayu* offers theological explanations for political ends, doing so not only through the supernatural sanctions of the royal genealogy, but more importantly, through violence deemed necessary for the maintenance of power and order. The Bukit Siguntang covenant guarantees the survival of Malay rulers and their legacy while it punishes treacherous subjects. Political and divine authorities converge in the covenant to present a tenuous reciprocity between the ruler and the ruled, with an agreement that is inconsequential to the former, while the latter is inescapably bound by divine decree and whose transgression is punishable by death. A semblance of justice appears only to the extent that it is enshrined in the agreement, but the selective distribution of divine intervention clearly invalidates any notion of justice so eagerly sought by revisionist and nativist renditions. In the moral universe of the *Sejarah Melayu*, the fall of Singapura is neither divine retribution nor the revenge of the weak, but simply a recalibration of the powerful. Rulers escape and relocate their centres of power, all the while continuing their rule in anticipation of even greater power and praise from the scribe. The narratives make scapegoats of victims in order to convey an ideal genealogy. A sequence of crises is necessitated only to reconstitute power in ever-new ways that ensure an unperturbed sequence of reigns. The space of death and the injustice therein generate a respite, a suspension of morality, alluding to an absolute power that does not fall absolutely. It is in this sense that unjust violence is almost always necessary, since, it warrants a narratological overhaul in which power could reinvent itself relentlessly.

Conclusion: Of blood and bodies turning into stone

Unjust violence, acting as a form of ritualised persecution, is vital to the preservation of the status quo. Scapegoats, as surrogate victims, are symbolic proxies chosen

104 Clive S. Kessler, 'Archaism and modernity: Contemporary Malay political culture', in *Fragmented vision: Culture and politics in contemporary Malaysia*, ed. Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), pp. 146–7.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

‘not for the crimes they are accused of but for the victim’s signs that they bear’, reminds Girard.¹⁰⁶ It is useful to regard violence as an instrument of control. By exterminating potential transgression, violence guards against the many crimes of passion and restores the symbolic system of order consistent with the existing status quo. ‘All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving’, Walter Benjamin notes.¹⁰⁷ Should the order be unhinged, the wrath of God is incurred, sovereignty threatened and violence unleashed. In the cases of the foreigner, the child, and the concubine, restoring order means putting them to death, effectively immobilising the spread of *fitnah*, annulling the transgression their presence has brought to bear.

The ideological orientation of the *Sejarah Melayu* makes explicit that the source for derailing order is passion or *nafsu*. In the Malay cultural milieu, enabling the flux of passion are the orifices of the human body—the sensory organs from the mouth, ears, eyes, to nose—that expose the self to the world, the internal to the external.¹⁰⁸ Not by coincidence, all three episodes of violence above are sprinkled with suggestions of desiring bodies channelling their passion through these orifices. In the first episode, it is the ocular exchange of the gaze through the eyes of the queen and Tuan Jana Khatib; in the second and third episodes, it is the mouth that informs and spreads accusation among courtiers and consorts. Sight and speech activate the flow of *nafsu* and inspire seduction, provocation, allegation, and so forth. Ending this vicious cycle of passion entails violence, and of course, death, during which the eyes could no longer see, and the mouth could no longer speak. If violence and the space of death, following Taussig, could serve the purpose of reinventing and stabilising meanings, one may also read violence as a technique of immobility, a method for hardening the fluidity of passion.¹⁰⁹ Consider how the culmination of violence ends with the hardening of blood and bodies: the blood of Tuan Jana Khatib, the bodies of Sang Ranjuna Tapa and his wife, all turn into stone upon death.¹¹⁰ Suggestive of arriving at a finality in the aftermath of unjust violence, this phenomenon of hardening could imply the final touch in the cycle of violence: it is violence against the body, and perhaps, a violence that ends all violence, eliminating entirely the possibility of vengeance, of retributive justice, as triggered by *nafsu*. With the hardening of blood and bodies, the vicious circulation of *nafsu* is pacified, thus putting an end to the perils of transgression. Additionally, this hardening transcends time, since, the passages describing the events usually conclude with a statement that the stone, as a residue of passion, can be witnessed ‘to this day’ (*datang sekarang, yang ada sekarang*). The memorialisation of unjust violence has never been so pronounced. Order is restored and the status quo is preserved.

With the fall of Singapura, comes the dawn of Melaka. The legacy lives on with all acts of injustice being paid for in the blood of others. The sovereigns remain

106 René Girard, *The scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 24.

107 Walter Benjamin, ‘Critique of violence’, in *Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), p. 287.

108 Peletz, *Reason and passion*, p. 205. See also Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

109 Taussig, ‘Culture of terror’, pp. 467–8; Taussig, ‘History as sorcery’, pp. 94–5.

110 *Malay Annals*, pp. 50–51; *Sejarah Melayu*, pp. 117–19.

untarnished as state-sponsored history advances forward, perhaps with more confidence than ever, owing to the paradigmatic establishment of Melaka. If the *Sejarah Melayu* is understood as a text filled with moral precepts, then, most lessons are learnt through the space of death, through the narration of violence by scapegoating victims and not by the failings of the kings. Unjust violence committed by the kings provides only a cathartic paroxysm through which an uninterrupted Malay genealogy is retold. In enabling a sequence of moral crises, violence allows sovereign power to reinstate status hierarchy through an unbroken sequence of reigns. The genealogy of kings is exempted from the consequence of injustice and from the rules of the Bukit Siguntang covenant. Reading the *Sejarah Melayu* from the particularities of its surrogate victims, violence crops up as a rhetorical trope, a method of writing power into history, and a narratological springboard for rulers to continue ruling, come what may.