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USING JAVANESE LYRICS WHILE THE DUTCH CALL THE TUNE POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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In the first part of this paper, I would like to present a story of the entrance of Javanese music into the Catholic liturgy in Yogyakarta in 1926. I found this story when I was doing research on the creative history of a Javanese musician, R. C. Hardjasoebrata. In the history of Javanese *gamelan*, Hardjasoebrata is well known because he introduced a novelty in the rhythm of *gamelan*. He introduced rhythm of a triple meter ($\frac{3}{4}$) into Javanese music, which had always been in quadruple meter ($\frac{4}{4}$). He also created almost one hundred *lagu dolanan* for the newly founded elementary schools. In my research I found that his first experimentation in music was done with liturgical music. In this story I want to draw attention to the importance of music in religious studies because music is one of the fundamental features of religious experience. In the second part of this paper, I present a possible new orientation for religious studies in Indonesia. My aim is to challenge religious studies to solve our poverty in religious discourse.

“It feels like it does not fit”

“Rasané ora sreg – laguné cara Landa kok tembungé basa Jawa. Apa ora bisa yèn laguné uga cara Jawa?” (“It does not seem to fit - the music is in Dutch but the lyrics are in Javanese. Is it not possible the music could also be Javanese?”) - R. C. Hardjasoebrata¹

These words came from the mouth of R. C. Hardjasoebrata (1905-1986), a student of the Kweeck School in Muntilan, commenting on hymns chanted in a Catholic worship in Yogyakarta in 1925. As explained in her memoirs by Mrs. Hardjasoebrata² (R. C. Hardjasoebrata’s wife), in 1925 the Catholic liturgy in Yogyakarta still used “Dutch” (western) hymns with Javanese texts, which made it helpful for most Javanese Catholics to follow the worship. For R. C. Hardjasoebrata, however, western music with Javanese texts does not feel right, or “*ora sreg*.” That is why he tried “secretly” to compose Javanese music with Javanese texts for Catholic worship. In only a few days, by using *tangga nada pelog*, he succeeded in composing three hymns (*Atur Roncèn*, *O Kawula Punika*, and *Sri Yesus Mustikèng Manis*). He then showed them to his friend Brother Clementinus, FIC, who was also a choir leader in Muntilan. The choir leader was quite happy with this new type of chant.

But this is not the end of his success story. Hardjasoebrata and the Muntilan community wanted these Javanese hymns to be chanted not only in their limited community, but also among all Javanese Catholics. An occasion came when the Vicar of Jakarta, Msgr. Van Velsel, visited Yogyakarta in January 1925. Brother Clementinus explained the intention of the Muntilan community to the bishop. The Bishop answered diplomatically: “Personally I cannot say if Javanese songs are good or bad for the church. It is better if we speak first.” When the idea of introducing Javanese music into the church was explained to teachers

¹ Mrs. Hardjasoebrata’s unpublished diary.

² Idem.

of religion (*guru-guru agama*), most of them, surprisingly, did not agree. They argued that Javanese songs are too cheap (*murahan*) for Catholic worship. But after a long debate, the church officials gave Hardjasoebrata opportunity to present his composition. In her memoirs, Mrs. Hardjasoebrata wrote this about the presentation:

*Sunday evening, 31 January 1926 can be mentioned as an historical event because Javanese culture was allowed to enter the church. Msgr. Van Velsen in the companion of Dutch priests and brothers... listened to the choir of students of H. I. S. Bruderan Kidul Lodji under the leadership of Br. Clementinus.*³

After some hymns were chanted, the audience gave a warm applause. A Dutch priest then approached the audience, asking them to comment. “Wonderful, Father (*Rama*), it is like the royal songs (*lagu kraton*), even better than Dutch songs!” Brother Clementinus then asked the vicar if these new songs were allowed to be chanted in the church. The vicar answered: “I do not object to that.” Then he added: “But not for the mass!” Indeed, at that time the liturgical songs for the mass were still Gregorian music with Latin texts. For Hardjasoebrata and Brother Clementinus, however, what they accomplished on January 31, 1926 was an important step to worshipping with their own music. In a letter to Hardjasoebrata, Brother Clementinus wrote: “*Cajetanus, Proficiat! Wij zijn geslaagd! Ga door!*” (“Cajetanus, Congratulations! We succeeded! Go on!”). After that Hardjasoebrata tirelessly composed Javanese chants. The collections are published in *Kulo Sowan Gusta*.

Religious music is one of the fundamental elements in religious life and plays an important role in the formation of religious identity. The pioneering work of Hardjasoebrata in liturgical music has been studied in terms of “inculturation.”⁴ Inculturation is a term designating a

³ Idem.

⁴ *Fajar Baru: Sebuah Kisah Singkat Inkulturasi Musik Gereja* (Yogyakarta: Fakultas Teologi Wedabhakti Universitas Sanata Dharma, 2002). (Unpublished documentation)

process by which new religion conforms to the local culture. Inculturation is considered an important step for religion to accommodate indigenous cultures. The introduction of songs from different Indonesian traditions into the liturgy is a part of inculturation. The spirit and practical steps of inculturation are still encouraged by the church. The bishop of Semarang, in his preface to Kidung Adi (1983), a collection of religious hymns for Javanese-speaking Catholics, insisted that the book is “[trying] to fulfill the ideal of the Second Vatican Council in renewing the way of worship concurring with our own language and culture” (“*nyoba minangkani idham-idhamané Konsili Vatikan II nganyaraké corak carané ngibadah sing laras karo basa lan budayané dhéwé*”).⁵ In terms of inculturation, “the historical event” in Yogyakarta in 1926 would be read as the success of the church to use the local culture to articulate the Christian faith.

Somewhat different from the perspective of inculturation, I shall read the collective experience above in term of transculturation, by which new cultural texts are produced.⁶ This cultural interaction takes place in liturgical music as a “contact zone”. With this approach we can measure the different elements in the formation of collective identity and subjectivity. We begin by analyzing three instances (in the Lacanian sense) that intersect one another in the formation of the collective identity.

The first instance is represented by Hardjasoebrata. By saying “*ora sreg*” (does not fit), Hardjasoebrata refused the existing liturgical hymns because they do not match with the desired subject during the worship. *Cara Landa* (the Dutch way) combined with Javanese texts does not produce musical harmony because it fails to constitute “the unity

⁵ Kidung Adi: *Buku Sembahyang saha Kekidungan* (Yogyakarta: Pusat Musik Liturgi), 3.

⁶ Cfr. Mary Louise Pratt “Transculturation and autoethnography: Peru 1615/1980” in *Colonial discourse/ Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Francis Barker and P. Hulme, M. Iversen (Manchester – N. Y.: Manchester University Press, 1994), 24-46.

between music and texts” (*manunggaling tembang lan tembung*).⁷ Thus the refusal to use *cara Landa* seems to be primarily based on musicological judgment. But if we focus on his saying “*Apa ora bisa yèn laguné uga cara Jawa?*” (Is it not possible the music could also be Javanese?) we suddenly hear a voice of challenge to the *Landa* (Dutch) music as the only liturgical music. This voice is almost silent but it is there. If we believe in the existence of this voice, then his refusal is not only based on musicological judgment but on something else. It is noteworthy that at that time *cara Landa* did not signify Dutch music only. In the context of Hardjasoebra’s community, *cara Landa* includes Gregorian music and other Western music. The fact that *cara Landa* is used instead of Western music shows that *cara Landa* had already become, borrowing a Lacanian term, the primary signifier that served as law among the Catholics in the colonized societies. *Cara Landa* is the language of “the Other” that was being overlooked by the body of Javanese Catholics. *Cara Landa* is the imperial gaze towards Javanese Catholics. Understood in this context, what Hardjasoebrata was doing can be read as his attempt to negotiate with *cara Landa*.

The Second instance is represented by the church officials (bishops, priests, and brothers) who have authority to decide on what is legitimate music for worship. This authority is demonstrated when they “are going to listen to the choir of students of H. I. S. Bruderan Kidul Lodji under the leadership of Brother Clementinus.” Personally – as acknowledged by Van Velsel – they have no capacity to judge the quality of Javanese music, but officially they are regarded as being in a position to judge. They are the personification of *cara Landa* that was challenged by Hardjasoebrata. But here we have to distinguish between real *cara Landa* and symbolic *cara Landa*. I believe when they are listening to a Javanese choir they feel different culturally. They also feel “*ora sreg*”

⁷ F. Atmadarasana, *Mardawa-Swara: Theorie & Praktijk Seni-Suara Djawa* (Semarang: Penerbit Jajasan Kanisius, 1956).

as did Hardjasoebrata. Thus they also intend to negotiate. Different from real *cara Landa*, symbolic *cara Landa* tends to judge, to gaze, to normalize.

The third instance is represented by those who accepted the existing hymn with silence. They consist of *guru-guru agama* (religious teachers) and *umat* (congregation). They seemingly thought that chanting *lagu Landa* (Dutch songs) is part of being Catholic. *Lagu Landa* has become part of their identity. Thus they defended *lagu Landa* from *lagu Jawa* (Javanese song). *Lagu Jawa* would never fit with liturgy because it is “*murahan*” (cheap).⁸ They changed their mind only after a Dutch priest asked them to express their feelings after listening to the presentation – “Wonderful, Father, it is like *lagu kraton* (royal songs of the palace), even better than Dutch songs!” They were no longer silent, since they were being addressed by the Dutch. *Lagu Jawa* was wonderful not because it met with their desired subject, but because it is so much like *lagu Kraton*!

The arrival of western hymns into different cultures in Indonesia has evoked different responses. The “historical events of Sunday evening in Yogyakarta” is only one example among others. As we have seen from close examination, the creation of a new genre of liturgical hymn was an effect of cultural contact with its complexity. In the colonial era, *cara Landa* serves as a primary signifier that speaks of ethnicity and catholicity, but also of imperialism. It is with such a signifier that the “newly converted” in Yogyakarta were struggling for their identity. Hardjasoebrata’s creation of new genre of hymn has to be read as an effect of this struggle. As a result, what Hardjasoebrata claimed as “Javanese culture” or “*lagu Jawa* with *tembung Jawa*” was no longer “impure” Javanese. I would say that this newly-created genre serves as a symptom of the split of the subject of the new converts who wanted to “return to Java” and who were compelled to “turn to *Landa*.” Or, I could

⁸ Mrs. Hardjasoebrata’s diary.

also say that this newly-created genre serves as substitute for a new reality that he does not want to accept (“*ora sreg*”). This substitute is needed in order to protect his sense of fit (“*sreg*”). “*Ora sreg*” is an act of negation. It is a beginning to find an appropriate signifier that is more appropriate with one’s desired subject. It is a refusal to be overwritten by the dominant signifier.

The impurity of his Javanese-ness can be seen in the form of his new genre of music. Unlike the traditional Javanese forms, this new genre is shorter than the form of existing hymns. Likewise, he introduced polyphony usually used in a choir. The most important element is, as mentioned above, his introduction of triple meter ($\frac{3}{4}$). Thus his Javanese hymns flow more dynamically. All these new elements concur with the pentatonic system that is fundamental in Javanese music. Thus, looked at from the musical perspective, the Javanese identity of this genre is ambiguous. Is this process not the normal contact between different cultures? Is a pure Javanese-ness an illusion? *Lagu Jawa* is extra - musical, it is a name altogether outside of musicality.

Following the birth of new signifier, **the new subject is also born.** The new subject was born from a daring question: who am I? *Landa*? Catholic? Ordinary Javanese? Aristocratic Javanese? No answer. They were in an ambiguous yet pleasurable situation because of the exchange of identity. Borrowing a Lacan expression, the music serves as *hysterical* discourse in that they are “symptoms embodying and revealing resistance to the prevailing master discourse,” and even they can cross the boundaries between sacred music and secular music. For the Dutch priests who were working in Yogyakarta, these new forms of liturgical music also determined their subjectivity.

“*Rasané ora sreg – laguné cara Landa kok tembungé basa Jawa. Apa ora bisa yèn laguné uga cara Jawa?*” (“It does not seem to match - the music is in Dutch but the lyrics are in Javanese. Is it not possible that the music is also in Javanese?”) Did the Javanese Catholics arrive at

their Javanese-ness after they had their own hymns? No, they are always split. New forms have to be explored by means of the logic of transculturation rather than inculturation. The Javanese believers were ordinary people, but the music they introduced was the music of the palace (*Kraton*). They created a new identity for themselves: they were Javanese peasants, singing Catholic hymns with the music of Javanese royalty. Perhaps they became Catholics to raise above the level of Javanese *abangan* (nominal) peasants. But it didn't stop with them becoming like the Dutch. The new music they created was even better than that of the *Landa*. It was Javanese high court music.

Religious studies and the poverty of religious discourse in Indonesia

*How 'to talk religion' – of religion? Singularly of religion, today? How dare we speak of it in the singular without fear and trembling, this very day? And so briefly and so quickly? - Jacques Derrida*⁹

In discussing religious studies in Indonesia, we also have to speak of its relation to theology, because theology is the most institutionally established discipline in the study of religion. In the Indonesian context, we can say that the need for religious studies is to transcend the limit of theology in facing new situations. Theology is practiced in certain religious faiths. A theologian speaks about religions based on his/her faith. In Indonesia the need of different ways of speaking about religions is urgent because of the increasing religious experience characterized by the intense and rich interreligious encounter. The emergence of a theology of dialogue, for instance, confirms this new phenomenon and at the same time confirms the need for theology to renew itself from within. But in speaking of this new situation theology is still framed within its theological boundaries. The need of religious studies has to be understood in this context.

⁹ J. Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. (ed.), *Religion*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1.

An important attempt to study religious experiences outside the theological boundaries in Indonesia was introduced by N. Driyarkara (1913-1967). I mention him because of his consistency in dealing with religious experiences in different manifestations and his confidence in crossing different disciplines. One of his important writings is an article entitled "*Ilmu Jiwa Agama*" ("Psychology of Religion", 1962).¹⁰ In this long article Driyarkara does not use the term "religious studies," but his concern is in fact similar to the so-called religious studies. The task of psychology of religion is to understand human beings by observing their "doing of religion."¹¹ By the term "*ilmu jiwa*" he means psychology in an Aristotelian sense (peri-psyche) rather than psychology in the modern sense. In other words, Driyarkara puts psychology of religion in the context of anthropological philosophy. For that purpose, he adopts the ideas of "the varieties of religious experience" of William James and Das Heilige of Rudolf Otto. He also uses the criticism of religion from Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Freud.

Driyarkara does not stop there. From this perspective, he then studied religious experiences as manifested in Javanese religious literature such as *Serat Centini*, *Serat Sunan Bonang* and *Bhagavad Gita*. He shows the rich traditions of religiosity without trying to put them in a hierarchical order. Adopting the phenomenological approach, Driyarkara is consistent in dealing with religious experiences, as can be seen in his other writings such as "*Seni dan Religi*" ("Art and Religion") and "*Pancasila dan Religi*" ("Pancasila and Religion").¹² He uses the term "*religi*" instead of "*agama*". By *religi*, he means doing religion, the active aspect.

In the history of studies of religions in Indonesia, the attempt initiated by Driyarkara is important in that he produced different kinds of religious discourses. But unfortunately, the production of religious

¹⁰ A. Sudiarja et. al. (ed.), *Karya Lengkap Driyarkara*, 769-816.

¹¹ A. Sudiarja et. al. (ed.), *Karya Lengkap Driyarkara*.

¹² A. Sudiarja et. al. (ed.), *Karya Lengkap Driyarkara*.

discourses of this kind is not supported by any institution. Rather, this kind of discourse is dominated (if not repressed) by religious discourses produced in terms of a confessional tradition or bureaucratic interest. Religious discourses usually function to classify rather than to communicate. Thus we are unprepared to speak about our religious experiences in their complexity and ambiguity. We are indeed experiencing a poverty of religious discourses. *Religi* is apparently dying in the hands of *agama* because the language of *religi* is castrated by the language of *agama*.

Religious studies might solve our poverty of religious discourse if religious studies also deals with the means of production of religious discourse. It is in this context that a postcolonial perspective is needed. If we agree with Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, we have to rethink our institutions of theology because orientalist discourses are produced there. Most Islamic studies and the comparative study of religion are mostly based on the logic of confessional theology.

The impact of our poverty in religious discourse is tremendous, as is manifest in our discussions of religious education in schools. On the one hand we acknowledge the importance of interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism. But what are the teachers of religions taught in schools, if they are trained in the tradition of theological institutions? It is indeed an old question. In his "*Pengajaran Agama di Sekolah*" ("Religious Education in Schools"), Ki Hadjar Dewantara argued that religious education should be oriented toward the "cultivation of religious sensibility" ("*pemeliharaan rasa keagamaan*"). But, he wrote, "... difficulty arose since there is a demand to formalize the cultivation of religious sensibility into 'religious instruction,' the essence of religiosity (*religi*) into certain religious laws".¹³ The spirit of Ki Hadjar is clear: the concern of religious education is the cultivation of religious

¹³ *Karya Ki Hadjar Dewantara. Bagian Pertama: Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Luhur Persatuan Taman Siswa, 1962), 188.

sensibility or ethics. This is similar to Najib Mahfûz, especially as narrated in his “*Jannat al-atfâl*”. But this ideal is difficult to attain because the discourse on religious sensibility is repressed by the discourse on confessional religions.

Conclusion

Postcolonialism assumes that colonization left many traces in societies as shown in different forms of symbols. These traces emerged from interaction between different powers during colonial era. They have been repeated unconsciously until now even though we are no longer a colony. Consequently, both the former colonizers and the colonized find it difficult to improve on their subject. We are thus in the condition of - borrowing Freudian terminology - *Wiederholungszwang*. The task of postcolonial analysis then is to diagnosis this condition by isolating signifying traces that compel us to repeat them unconsciously. For that purpose, different techniques have been developed. Most techniques are oriented toward reinterpreting the signifying traces in such a way that we recognize that our identity and subjectivity, as well as other things, are culturally conditioned by colonialism.

The promising responses to the entrance of postcolonial analysis in Indonesia can be seen from the discussion of Edward Said's Orientalism, which may be considered as one of the founding texts of postcolonialism. This most debated book opens our eyes to how our understanding of the Orient and the West is conditioned by the production and reproduction of the so-called Orientalist discourse. Adopting Foucauldian discourse analysis and a Gramscian concept of hegemony, Said succeeded in exploring the discursive and institutional powers supporting the production and reproduction of knowledge about the Orient.

A postcolonial perspective contributes to religious studies in that it recovers our desired subject that is suppressed by colonial traces. There

is no other way to restore this subject but by creating what Lacan called hysterical discourse.¹⁴

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¹⁴ According to the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, there are four main kinds of discourse, one of which is the discourse of the hysteric, which embodies and reveals resistance to the master discourse. See, Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVII* (English Translation - New York: Norton, 2007). See also, Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Duke University Press, 1993).