Remixed Javaneseness: Lyrics of levelling adiluhung non-adiluhung

by Edi Dwi Riyanto

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, we respond to Nancy Florida's work published in 1978, which describes how adiluhung as a trait of Javanese literature was a deliberate construction, which separated it from the non-adiluhung. Here, we investigate whether the separation is still valid in contemporary Java as seen in its popular culture by analysing the lyrics of the songs produced by the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation, especially Kulonuwun and Gangsta Gapi. In this paper, we present remix as the theoretical tools, followed by the nature of Javanese language registers. The lyrics of the songs will be analysed based on their high or low register. In contrast to the separation above, the main impact of the remix in those lyrics is the levelling of adiluhung and non-adiluhung elements of the Javanese culture.

Keywords: adiluhung, Java Hip Hop, levelling, non-adiluhung

1   INTRODUCTION

This paper is a revisit of Nancy Florida's work published in 1978. The title "Reading the Unread in Traditional Javanese Literature" reflects the idea in the article that there were some unread works in the 19th century Javanese literature. Those works were intended to be unread, or should not be read, to make way for the construction of adiluhung Javanese literature. Thus, Florida concluded that adiluhung is a trait of the Javanese literature, which was a deliberate construction carried out by Dutch philologists and Javanese rulers. The deliberate act was carried out by limiting the access to those "unreadable" works for the public. This construction was quite successful, which makes Javanese culture renowned for its refinement. Stumbling on some not-adiluhung works in a Sunanate library in Solo, Florida deconstructed the formulation.

Almost three decades on from the publication of Florida's article, now I would like to present the levelling of adiluhung and non-adiluhung in remixed Javaneseness in the form of Java Hip Hop produced by the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation (JHF). Founded in 2003, JHF has successfully presented Javaneseness in its Java Hip Hop (Riyanto, 2016).[1]

This paper is an attempt to illustrate how a remix of Javaneseness was produced and presented as seen in the lyrics of Kulonuwun (Excuse me, let me in) and Gangsta Gapi (Gangsta Sh*t) as parts of the discography of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation. These are rare but powerful examples of a Java Hip Hop product, in which the Javanese language stratifications were levelled.[1]

2   REMIX, THE TWO AND OTHER VIEWS

Technology is embedded in the process of remix. In this case, a process of remix happens when an artist "remixes, or quotes, a wide range of 'texts' to produce something new"

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1. Previously, JHF had another name: Ki Jarot (Marjuki, Jahanam, Rotra). Marjuki was the leader, Jahanam consisted of Balance and Mamox, and Rotra consisted of Anto and Lukman. Thus, there were five members of JHF. However, since 2017, there have only been four members because Lukman has decided to leave the group.

(Lessig, 2009: 93). Using technology, the remix "happens at different layers", for example it "may quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over sounds" (ibid.). Although Lessig did not specifically discuss Hip Hop, it is known that sampling is the core of Hip Hop music production and the development of digital technology has accelerated the sampling process in an unprecedented way. Sampling is similar to "quoting" mentioned by Lessig. Tonya M. Evans stated that digital sampling has been "an essential and integrated component to create Hip Hop Music" (2011: 856). Using digital technology, all digitalised sounds can be captured and it "lets the engineer appropriate any sound and bend and twist it to fit onto a new record" (ibid.). Evan continued that the technology "can take any 'sample' of recorded sound, convert it into a series of numbers and manipulate it in virtually limitless ways by changing the numbers".

Thus, the advance of technology plays a vital role in the process of remix. Furthermore, as Evan suspected, instead of an artist, an "engineer" is central in the process of remix. Knowledge of technical bits is more important than artistic creativity. Musical artistry would not be able to be expressed without mastering the technology. The technology has mediated the artists and the expressions. Luckily, the technology has been produced in a much more custom-friendly way so that it becomes easier for most people to use it. The explosive progress of computer hardware and software (such as Fruity Loops, Native Instrument Traktor Po, Mixvibes Cross, just to mentioned a few) has made it much easier to become an "engineer".

However, to understand the remix production in the Javanese context, it needs the other view, which can be traced from Church's proposition that remix is more a recurrent than a new phenomenon. As Church stated, "historical antecedents to remix can be located in the rhetorical tradition" and "societies have not always recognized a specific concept of intellectual piracy" (2013: 24). Furthermore, a "pre-literate culture of orality" produced "cultural narratives and texts in a spirit of collective remembrance", in which "collective interactivity" was dominant in order to "keep cultural records alive" (ibid. 26, 28). From this viewpoint, the train of cultural transformation as the result of Gutenberg's invention is seen as a "new disruption" of a long history of oral traditions. This is because the Gutenberg invention that generated copyright culture has not totally destroyed the oral traditions. I argue that the aforementioned "historical antecedents" and "pre-literate culture of orality" cannot be applied to the Javanese context.

I argue that remix in the Javanese context tends to be a continuation of a long tradition rather than an interruption of an establishment. Two considerations can be mentioned here. The first is the common phenomenon of remix, and the second is the fact of the rarity of copyright issues, which should have been raised because of the great number of remix products.

It might be concluded that remixes have been done for centuries in the Javanese music tradition and are now becoming increasingly popular in practice. Sutton (2010) discussed the centuries-old history of mixing in Indonesian music, especially Java, in which he referred to both remix and hybrid. He defined hybrid as characterised by a process in which "at least somewhere in the process of creation/production, and perception/reception, the mix, however fused or separately perceivable the constituent elements, must be evident as mix" (Sutton 2010: 183). Sutton stressed that this "mix" should be "evident", "foregrounded", "dominant", and becomes a "trait" (ibid.). Sutton explained the hybrid in Javanese music history starting from gamelan to campursari (literally meaning the mix of the essence) and Jazz. In those three cases, real instruments were involved and became a mark of the hybrid, e.g., Javanese gamelan combined with European drum and guitar. More importantly, in contrast to the above notions of contradiction between remix and copyright, Sutton's article constitutes a piece of evidence that remix is not contradictory to the issue of copyright.

In the 1980s, campursari revived and gradually became very popular in the Javanese musical landscape. Supanggah asserted that campursari represented the "new image of Javanese society", showing "a societal shift toward the modern" (2003: 18). Supanggah indicated a problem in the process of modernity by being called pseudo-modern, for example, when Javanese people treated technology not as a means to "make their lives happier" but more

"as a status symbol" (ibid.: 4,5). While it is clearly mentioned that campursari took benefits from many existing musical pieces,[2] Supanggah did not mention that there was any indication of copyright issues.

Similarly to Supanggah, who perceived signs of cultural shifts in the Javanese society, Nancy Cooper analysed the campursari by focusing on the cultural meanings of the genre. She scrutinised the contention in choosing between Javanese and Western tuning systems, which reflects "a modernity defined more completely by powerful...outside actors and forces" against "a modernity drawn from local histories and cultural habits" (Cooper, 2015: 55, 59). It can be assumed that this "genre" has deliberately intended to accommodate any possibilities of mixing. However, instead of discussing copyright, Cooper explained about the tensions between Western and Javanese values.

Unlike Cooper, who put more weight on cultural tensions, Sutton, who analysed the tradition of mixing from colonial to contemporary periods, viewed the phenomenon as "a key locus of musical creativity in Indonesia" (Sutton, 2010: 193). Sutton continued that such endeavours and the surrounding contexts deserved close attention. In this paper, I follow Sutton's suggestion but, at the same time, present the issue Sutton avoided, which is the "dichotomous notions" such as "high-brow vs. low-brow...standard vs. deviant" (ibid.: 181).

Thus, in this paper, we fill the gap because what I am discussing here is the mixing of elements originating from different layers of Javanese culture. Furthermore, the thing I discuss here is the lyrics rather than the instrument. Thus, here I discuss the issue avoided by Sutton by scrutinising the same Javanese language constituting high and low registers. This language stratification reflects cultural stratifications of the Javanese society. At the same time, I also avoid the tendency to contradict the local versus global, because what I am discussing in this paper is the tensions inside Java's own local cultural elements.

3   JAVANESE LANGUAGE STRATIFICATION

Javanese people constitute the largest population in Indonesia. The Javanese language is spoken by more than 70 million, and it has become a marker of identity (Suyadi, 2014: 244). Among the traits of the identity is the high stratification of the community as reflected in the language itself (ibid.). "Javanese language recognizes the undhak-usuk system or speech level" (Septianingtias, V. et al.: 27).

Basically, the Javanese language is stratified into two main registers: the high register, kromo, and the low register, ngoko. There is one in between, madya. There are also many "in-betweens" producing more variations, up to nine categories according to some linguists (Wibawa et al.: 45).

As the highest register, kromo inggil (high kromo) "is used when addressing, or talking about, someone with special respect" (Quinn, 2011: 364). Meanwhile, the "ordinary" kromo is used when someone is talking "to people who are socially distant ... older, or of higher social status, or simply not well known" (ibid.). Technically, the distinctions are performed in the appropriateness of the usage of the language or unggah-ungguh, which is "intricate and elaborate" and "probably unique among the major language of the world" (ibid.). The main feature of unggah-ungguh is to show politeness, with the main idea being "to manage 'face' in many different ways so that one's partner of communication" will not be ashamed because of losing face (Sukarno: 61).

These stratifications are in line with Florida's notion of the separation of adiluhung from no-adiluhung. Krama as the highest and most refined register is part of the adiluhung culture. The separation is reflected in the notion of the "right and true" and the "face management" as quoted above. There should not be any misplacement in terms of when, where, and how to speak correctly. Otherwise, it would be a shame for the speaker as it shows his/her inability to put himself/herself in the most appropriate position.

The difference between Florida's account and the language stratification is that the first deals mainly with the literature, while the second is about the day-to-day usage of the

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2. To mention only a few examples used by Supanggah in the article: Ki Nartasabda "PrahuLayar" and "AjaLamis" and Gesang's "CapingGunung", "Ali-Ali", and "Yen IngTawang Ana Lintang".

language. In essence, both are the same, that is, separation and stratification. In practice, one is about written literature and the other is more about the daily performance of the spoken language.

In contemporary music contexts, early accounts of the use of local languages such as Javanese in Indonesian underground music showed an agreement with the above differentiation and separation of adiluhung versus non-adiluhung. This separation had been found to be a hindrance for the creative process of the musicians. Local languages had been reported as being used as everyday vernaculars in "the everyday social life of underground fans" in Indonesian cities such as Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya (Wallach, 2003: 65). However, those languages were seen as having disadvantages because of their limitation in being local and "their association with 'backward' village life" (ibid.).

Although Wallach did not mention specific languages, he did refer to a "more refined register", which can be translated as the kromo register in the Javanese language. For Wallach (ibid.), there are three disadvantages of the local languages, which caused the reluctance of the underground music artists to use them. The first was that this register was considered "inappropriate" because of its association with "elders and traditional culture". This association is in opposition to "modern and youth-oriented" culture in underground music. Second, the language (especially, the florid language of the Javanese court) was "inextricably associated with gamelan and other traditional music". It seemed that Wallach was trying to contrast this traditional music with modern underground music. Finally, the spirit of regionalism in local language is seen as incompatible with the national consciousness of underground music lyrics. Wallach then concluded that "the Indonesian underground seems quite a long way off from achieving any kind of synthesis between 'Indonesian' and 'Western' music" (ibid.: 80).

Wallach published his book in 2003, the same year as the founding of JHF. At that time, the first Hip Hop album in Java had been around for about 7 years. It is possible that the album was undetected by Wallach because it was "too local". However, I would like to discuss this locality more in this paper. Indeed, I focus on how layers in a locality are deconstructed as seen in the remix produced by JHF.

4   THE CHANGING TONE AS THE LEVELLING STRATEGY

The above speech levels, through which the language is divided into low and high registers, have been exploited by JHF. The Rotra song "Kulonuwun", released in 2007, is a mixture of high and low Javanese registers in one six-stanza song. This signifies Hip Hop music, which is strongly characterised by anti-hierarchical expressions and subject positions. The levelling is presented somewhat bluntly in a piece of Hip Hop music. It successfully attracted many listeners by presenting the high register as an elevated form of self-identification, which is then combined with low and coarse language showing a threat to those who defied the "I" presentation. It is part of the tradition of Hip Hop to present and challenge identity.

The three lines in the first stanza of the song reflect two contrasting registers, combined with a moderate register (kromomadya) in the middle. Ndereklangkung, nyuwunsewunjalukdungalanrestu, jirolu!/Akutaknyobamelumlebu/Nek oraentukmengkotakgajulmatamu, preksu! (Please excuse us, please apologise and bless us, one two three!/I will try to enter and join (the performance)/If I am not allowed, I will hit your eyes, damn you dog!).

These three lines are directed to three different audiences. The first is to the spectators, the second is to the singer himself, and the last is to any possible competitors. In rap performance, this is common, especially in the form of a rap battle. Thus, this deployment of different registers to change tones for different audiences fits in with the tradition of rapping in Hip Hop culture.

The second to sixth stanzas are all in low register (ngoko). Those are intended to challenge the competitors, for example, in stanza 2 line 2, Akuora urus kowengomongoporasah do kemlinthi, akuorawedi (I don't care what you say, you don't think that you are tough, 'cause I am not afraid) and stanza 6 line 1 Ayo dadisiji. Ngadepimusuh-musuh sing soyokemaki (Let's unite, to face the ever-growing bullies).

The second part of the song consists of five stanzas. All of them use high register and encourage peace and happiness, for example, stanza 9 line 2 …mbotenparengcrahsuloyo (you

are not allowed to create conflicts) and stanza 10 line 1 supadoskawontenannacaktentrem, ademayem, atimarem, mesam-mesemlansumringahugibungah (in order to make a situation of peace, calm and ease, content, smiles and spirited, and also happy).

It may be said that these lines were reflecting the spirit of living in harmony as an important character of the Javanese society. Thus, although it is a rap song and the existence of "enemies" is clearly mentioned, the song ends with the encouragement to be peaceful. There is a clear sign of conflict avoidance.

5   THE REVERSE LANGUAGE (WALIKAN)

To show politeness, Javanese employs indirect strategies of communication. It has become an important part of the Javanese language conventions. It prevents a Javanese from any frontal and direct conflict engagement. For Lukman, as a member of JHF, this politeness is the key marker of being a Javanese and he strives to maintain it.[3]

Javanese indirectness emerges in the slang system known as walikan or reverse language. This Javanese linguistic tool has already been available for almost half a century (Jackson and Rahmat, 2013). In some ways, this can be seen as a "new register". The employment of this "new register" creates a sense of sameness and belonging for speakers (ibid.:147).

This reverse language is a proof that the Javanese language has provided resources to be exploited by its constituents in facing the test of time. In this case, the resource is the Javanese characters, which consist of 20 letters in 4 lines with 5 letters in each line. By exchanging the corresponding letters from the first line to those in the third line and the second line with those in the fourth line, Yogyakarta people created a new and exclusive language. It is exclusive because to understand the language, knowledge of Javanese characters is necessary. With this requirement, this reverse language marks the boundary between in-group and out-group members of certain circles in the Javanese society.

The use of Basa Walikan in Java Hip Hop can be seen, for example, in the naming of the group (Rotra), which means Jogja. Rotra is a member of JHF. Other examples are in the titles of the songs, and in the lyrics, too. The titles of songs using this reverse language are "JagalPabu" (Dog Butcher), "Watch Out, Dab" (Watch Out, Mate), and "Gangsta Gapi" (Ga-pi = ta-hi or human faeces). In the lyric of "Watch Out Dab", the word saciladh appears, meaning bajingan or bastard.

It is a common view in Javanese that words such as "dog", "poo", and "bastard" are considered offensive. Worse still, Javanese stress politeness so that it is almost impossible to use those words in front of other people. However, the slang system of walikan provides a solution for that. Walikan provides a cover for the obscenity so that the content of the expression is still delivered. Only those who are able to uncover the walikan can understand the message. Thus, this has produced a condition of exclusivity; that is, only those in a limited circle of recipients can understand.

By using this reverse language, JHF was successful in presenting those words and subject matters, which are normally taboo. Those taboos should be hidden from display in "adiluhung" Javanese culture. Using Florida's term, JHF has made those "unreadable" subjects readable. As a result, JHF has shown that, in the Javanese culture, there are some "minor" and "not so-civilized" elements such as swearing (saciladh = bastard) and dog hunting to consume dog meat (as seen in the song of Jagal Pabu). Yet, this reverse language shows that JHF still maintains its Javaneseness by presenting these taboos indirectly.

6   CONCLUSION

Unlike Wallach's notion that underground music, such as Hip Hop, was not able to use local language because it was either too raw or too refined, JHF has proved its capability in using both high and low registers of the Javanese language in its lyrics. JHF had defied the

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3. Interview with Lukman, 8 March 2016.

traditional separation of kromo—ngoko by using both registers in one piece of its song. JHF has also crossed the boundary of taboo by presenting the obscene words (such as dog and poo) and themes (such as dog meat eating) in public. All of these were possible because they were remixed with Hip Hop music.

From its remix techniques, as seen in the lyrics, JHF was able to mix the high register and low register in one cultural product, such as in the song of Kulonuwun. In other cases, JHF used tone-changing strategies combined with the deployment of reverse language. These remix techniques have proved to be successful in producing popular Java Hip Hop songs.

The impact of this remixing is the deconstruction of the separation between the adiluhung and non-adiluhung. Once it was strongly preserved, the social stratification as reflected in the language has become more fluid. It shows that socio-culturally, Javanese people are changing.

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FINAL GRADE

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