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**Themes of the Foreign and the Familiar in Christian
Indonesia**

by

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Introduction

According to the 2003 state census, of the roughly 245, 450,000 people living in Indonesia, approximately 12,273,000 are officially recognized as “Christian”. If practitioners of Roman Catholicism –which is recognized by the Indonesian state as a separate religion from Christianity-, are included, this number increases to around 19,637,000 people. While this means that both can with certainty be recognized as minority religions, a look at these statistics alone does not divulge the complex reality of Christianity (and Catholicism) in Indonesia today.

Although there statistically may be few Christians in many of the state’s more populous regions, particularly on Java, they can make up significant portions of the ‘outer islands’. Most significantly, East Nusa Tenggara, North Sulawesi, West Irian Jaya and Papua all have majority Christian/Catholic populations. In addition, there are also sizeable Christian groups in the provinces of North Sumatra, Maluku, South and Central Sulawesi and West Kalimantan. While this may appear to be a somewhat motley assortment of some of Indonesia’s most remote regions, many of which are quite culturally and historically distinct, all possess one thing in common: the mission encounter.

Christianity was brought to Indonesia under a quite wide variety of forms. Roman Catholicism first arrived in the archipelago with the arrival of Portuguese traders onto Flores, Timor, North Sulawesi and the Moluccas during the 16th century. The 17th and 18th centuries saw the arrival of the Dutch, who brought Protestant missionaries with them to undo the work wrought in these areas by the Papist Portuguese. From the late 19th

century until World War II, the Netherlands colonial government used Dutch, German and other European missionaries as a way to prevent a perceived potential spread of Islam into animist Batak and Toraja regions in North Sumatra and Central and South Sulawesi respectively. As recent as the 1990s, Salvation Army missionaries could still be found in Central Sulawesi working in conjunction with the New Order government to “bring religion” into the highland areas. While the most extensive period of Christianization can be said to be over, missionaries can still be found in the more remote regions of Nusa Tenggara and Papua.

However, in spite of these differences, I would argue that there are many important themes and similarities that we can see running through these encounters. From their earliest experiences in Maluku until the creation of the last missions in North Sumatra, Christianity was used as a way of stemming the potentially revolutionary spread of Islam, and, in doing so, creating more loyal subjects. In turn, the Manadonese, the Ambonese, and, to a lesser extent, the Timorese are well-known in the ways they utilized their Christian faiths as a way of obtaining greater opportunity for themselves under the colonial powers.

The mission experience itself, as it happened between European missionaries and Indonesians, could also be rather diverse. While, in general, missionaries would spend long stretches of time living amongst people in a village, becoming familiar with both local language and custom, attempting to ingratiate themselves with the people, many had notably different visions for their respective field. Some focused on converting adults, others on children. Some sought to strike a permanent balance between local custom and Christianity, while others imagined a gradual elimination of local custom. The legacy of

many of these particularities can be seen today in the operation of many of the regional or ethnic churches spread throughout the archipelago.

Many of these more common methods have had effects which can be seen throughout the archipelago. As Webb Keane discusses in his recent book *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, Protestant missionaries were not only responsible for bringing Christianity to Indonesia, but also distinct notions of religion and culture. In an attempt to appeal to groups which did not always make easily recognizable distinctions between cosmology, custom and the banalities of everyday existence, missionaries have often used local cultural forms in a newly “Christian” context as a way of appealing to potential converts. In order to do so, missionaries had to make important distinctions between what forms could be considered benign or potentially helpful to the Christian cause and thus ‘cultural’ (ie. art, music), and which were irrevocably pagan, and thus unacceptable (ie. animal sacrifice, shamanism).

In writing this essay, I would like to examine the reverberations of this encounter. In doing so, I would like to look at something that not only occurred between “missionaries” and “potential converts” or “Christians” and “animists”, but also as one which involved “Europeans” and “Indonesians” (in a loose, pre-national sense of the term). I would not only like to look at the ways the introduction of Christianity lent itself to new concepts of “religion” and “culture”, but also how these ideas were tempered by notions of the familiar and the foreign arguably inherent to the missionary encounter. How have Christianity’s distant origins played a role in its conception as a religion in Indonesia? When placed in opposition with a ‘foreign’ religion is culture necessarily a

'local' phenomenon? Have syncretism and the emergence of ethnic churches served to complicate this picture? How do they stand today?

In answering these questions, I plan to divide this paper into three discrete sections. The first will deal with the mission encounter and the ways in which it brought about the aforementioned ideas of 'religion' and 'culture' in addition to the ways in which those ideas developed 'foreign' and 'familiar' connotations. Due to an abundance of material, this portion will primarily consider late 19th-early 20th century missions in the highlands of Northern Sumatra and South Sulawesi. While there is little arguing against the fact that these missions came about in a particular social and political climate, both in the Netherlands and in the Indies, I will be examining them for themes I believe are inherent to the mission encounter throughout Indonesian history and will make parallels to other time periods where necessary.

The second will deal with the effects, both long-standing and immediate, of the mission encounter after Christianity had been established. In doing so, I plan on examining two of the most well-documented phenomena in the literature on Christianity in Indonesia, syncretism and the emergence of local churches in addition to a short section on the role Christianity played during the colonial era. Through examining these, we can see some of the most evident intersections between notions of culture, religion, foreignness and familiarity as they play out in communities which have already had extensive contact with missionaries. This section will draw on examples from multiple regions within Indonesia.

My last section will deal with the ways in which notions of the local and the foreign are disseminated by contemporary Indonesian Christians, particularly in regard to Christian pop culture. In doing so, I will be looking primarily at the popularity of the Reverend John Hartman, an American televangelist who has achieved a good amount of fame in Christian Indonesia through broadcasts of his sermons, in addition to material on *rohani* (Christian pop) music and magazines. Since I currently only have a limited amount of access to related sources, my main purpose in writing this section is to give some idea as to how ideas of a 'local culture' and a 'foreign religion' have been implemented in modern day Indonesian discourse, possibly laying the groundwork for a future project on the subject.

Part I- The Mission Encounter

As mentioned above, unless we are to consider the very beginnings of the colonial era up until the present day, it is nearly impossible to describe a single period of missionization in Indonesia. It has happened in waves, in vastly different social and political contexts, with varying results. Consequently, the impulse to consider each encounter all part of the same larger phenomenon may seem to be a mistaken one. However, when one takes a closer look at the wide array of Christian missions which have formed in Indonesia, there are many commonalities to be found stemming from the basic fact that they were interactions between Europeans and members of 'localized' groups. Missionaries had to find a way to make a religion which had been born in the Middle East and developed in Western Europe appeal to groups of people living in fairly

remote areas in the Pacific Ocean. This typically meant a good deal of time spent learning a particular group's language and cultural make-up, as well as a subsequent attempt to translate Christianity in a way that would make sense given the local context.

In this section, I will focus on the mission encounter itself, specifically the ways in which we can see ideas of "culture" and "religion" reflected on proselytizers and proselytes alike. In order to do this, I plan to look at the establishment of two missions, neither of which was very successful in their initial incarnations: the Karo Batak Highlands and Tana Toraja. In doing so, I hope to show just how such concepts were accepted, rejected and altered upon arrival into the field, which was often far from the ideal many missionaries had hoped for. As I hope the next two cases demonstrate, it could often be extremely difficult to predict if and how a particular people might accept their new religion.

1. The Karo Batak Mission

One of the most important figures in the late 19th-early 20th century effort to bring Christianity to North Sumatra was Hendrik Kruyt, of the well-known Kruyt missionary family¹. Drafted by the colonial government, which was looking to protect both European investment and its political hold in the area by shielding the Batak highlands from a potential conversion to Islam, Kruyt was initially somewhat reluctant to work in an area so different from the Javanese environment to which he had become accustomed. His early experiences in the Karo highlands don't seem too different from those of an anthropologist in the initial stages of fieldwork, as he sought to accustom himself to an

¹ His father, Jan Kruyt, was a working pastor and missionary in East and Central Java. All four of his brothers would become missionaries, including Albertus C. Kruyt, who would later become well-known for his assiduously detailed field-notes on the various 'Toraja' peoples of Central Sulawesi.

unfamiliar environment, learn a new language and gain the trust of a new people who were quite skeptical of his presence².

Perhaps one of the most enduring elements of Kruyt's work in the area can be seen in his 'cultural' approach. While he would eventually propose radical change in the region, he made a point of adapting himself to Karo culture as thoroughly as possible while living there. He learned the Karo language, contributed to work around the village and, much to the amusement of his fellow villagers, adopted Karo dress (Kipp:1990, 66). Before he had so much as mentioned religion, Kruyt spent a long amount of time considering how he should translate basic Christian words into the Karo language (66-75).

Reverberations of this approach can be seen in the work of later missionaries in the area. Perhaps due to the forever looming prospect of the Karo Bataks becoming absorbed into Muslim Coastal Malay populations, missionaries spent a good deal of time working on the preservation of Karo culture. It was thought by some that if the Karo were to become more aware of their culture, the chances would be slim that they would eventually want to convert to Islam. This effort to Karo-ize the Karo could take a number of forms; whether it was the promotion of a Karo language based press or an interest in maintaining local art forms and dress (Steadly: 1996, /Kipp: 1990, 70)

However, missionaries' interests in preserving Karo culture could only extend so far. In his book on the various missions aimed at Batak peoples, *Adat dan Injil*, the German Protestant missionary Lothar Schreiner divides custom into three categories: that which is anti-Christian, that which is neutral towards Christianity and that which is pro-

² Apparently, he had a difficult time finding a place to stay due to the fact that many assumed he was scouting for land for tobacco cultivation (Kipp:1990).

Christian (5). While there was much that fell into the first two of these categories – elements of Karo culture that missionaries could either promote or ignore- there was also a good deal that they felt they had to work against.

One issue of *adat* which proved troublesome to Christian missionaries was the Karo practice of marriage payment. By the time Kruyt first arrived in the area, bride payment was a common practice in the Karo highlands, and considered to be an important way of forming profitable alliances with new sets of in-laws (Kipp: 1990, 74). This was seen as extremely distasteful and un-Christian to many missionaries since, in their view, it put women and livestock on equal footing as commodities. When Kruyt submitted a list of changes he would like to make in the region to the Dutch Missionary Society, the elimination of bride payment was prominently listed among them (90). While most considered this suggestion to be too drastic –as DMS director J.C. Neurdenberg made mention, “Even in Christian Menado, people sometimes pay brideprice”- the debate regarding its continuation would persist. In 1916, due to further complaint from missionaries and others that Karo placed too much prestige on money, the colonial government had placed limits on how much one could pay for a bride (Stedly: 1993, 108).

As this demonstrates, becoming a Karo Christian often meant more than the simple abandonment of a previously held cosmology. Regardless of some missionaries’ intention to bring the Karo ‘religion’ and not ‘culture’, they could often not help but want their newly Christianized communities to act more like their European counterparts in other ways. While the issue of brideprice may have been phrased as a religious matter to missionaries, the colonial government considered it a matter of cultural preference, one

which could potentially cause political upset in an area they had already considered sufficiently under control. As a result, in an effort to appease both missionaries and the Karo yet could not have appealed to either, brideprice was initially only lowered, allowing it to remain a part of Karo culture, but also somehow diminishing its value.

Despite the fact that Christianity had made considerable inroads into the Karo Batak highlands, only approximately 48% of Karo living in the highland region identified as Christian in the mid 1980s (Steedley:1993, 68). When considering this figure, one should also consider that a large number of Karo probably did not convert until after 1965, when suspicion of those “without religion” (traditional beliefs have generally not been recognized as “religion” by the Indonesian state since its inception) was at a peak due to word of an attempted communist coup in the military (236). These facts should be considered when measuring the “success” of the Karo mission against the “failure” of the next one, which is currently 81% Christian.

2. The Toraja Mission

Equally instructive is case of the initial failure³ to thoroughly Christianize of Tana Toraja. This hazily defined area in the upland region around the city of Rantepao in the modern-day province of South Sulawesi is probably best-known for the elaborate funeral rituals of the Sa'dan people that are conducted in accordance with local religious law, which is now categorized as “Hinduism” by the Indonesian state. Generally not mentioned in the tourist literature on the area is that large parts of the local population are practicing Christians, some of whom may disagree with perpetuation of local tradition.

³ By this I mean that the mission in question did not work out. Although it is downplayed in much of the tourist literature, many of the people currently living in Toraja today self-categorize as “Christian”.

However, in comparison with nearby regions in Sulawesi, the Christianization of the “Toraja”⁴ people seems strangely incomplete. One of the reasons for this lies in the initial encounter between the Sa’dan and the Dutch Protestant missionary, Antonie Aris van de Loosdrecht.

The Toraja mission started in the early 20th century with aims similar to that of the Batak mission in Northern Sumatra, which was, in the view of the state, chiefly an attempt to stop the potentially revolutionary spread of Islam into highland regions. Initial attempts by missionaries to Christianize the area of Rantepao were met with resistance, as their strategy tended to focus on the conversion of children without parental consent. This angered parents, making communities extremely reluctant to even talk to missionaries, much less listen to them⁵ (Bigalke, 80).

This approach would change with the arrival of the Dutch missionary A.A. van de Loosdrecht in the early 1910s. Unsatisfied with the results of earlier attempts to convert the Sa’dan and certain that their religion was merely a corrupted form of Christianity, van de Loosdrecht called for a new method which would attempt to appeal to locals through a better understanding of their culture (81). For the first couple of months after his arrival, he made a point of avoiding any sort of overt discussion of religion and spent his time slowly learning the local language and gaining the trust of his neighbors. Once he felt he had a sufficient grasp of Sa’dan language and cultural practice, van de Loosdrecht began to tell biblical stories recontextualized into a Sa’dan setting, using local words for spirits

⁴ Originally, the term ‘toraja’ can be read to be as much of an ethnonym as ‘dayak’ or ‘batak’, a term used by lowland groups to describe uplanders with connotations similar to the American ‘hick’ or ‘hillbilly’. While some groups, such as those described as the Sa’dan Toraja spoke mutually intelligible languages, many of ‘toraja’ groups did not and probably would not think to associate each other as members of the same overarching ethnicity. (Bigalke, 8)

⁵ A similar case of a mission failing due to the baptism of children without parental approval can be found in the Catholic Church’s attempt to start a mission in the area around Kendari in South-Eastern Sulawesi between 1885 and 1887 (Steenbrink, 180-183).

and deities in place of Christian ones and capitalizing on similarities between Christian and Sa'dan creation myths (84).

However, after his first year with the Sa'dan, Van de Loosdrecht's mission was still beset by problems. The schools he would set up had low attendance, partially due to the fact that local *rajas* spread word that they were drafting grounds for the Dutch Army (82). Religion was still difficult to bring up, which, as van de Loosdrecht stated himself, was due to the reason that "as soon as they [the Sa'dan] hear that the morals and codes of their ancestors must be changed, their favorable disposition immediately disappears and they refuse to do anything" (84-85). When relating a popular Christian parable about the difficulty a rich man will have getting into heaven, van de Loosdrecht found his listeners to be more impressed than disgusted by the rich man's ability to obtain and horde goods, undermining the intended purpose of the story.

It was not until the Dutch had outlawed some forms of sacrifice and ritual headhunting that van de Loosdrecht began to make some headway. However, his results were still very meager. Soon his preaching became more heavy-handed with an open attack on Sa'dan taboo, especially that regarding social hierarchy. Due to the political implications of what he was suggesting, this was met with still further resistance. Having started his mission with a desire to make a cultural appeal to the Sa'dan, van de Loosdrecht began to make more and more open criticisms of traditional custom and religion. By 1917, van de Loosdrecht was killed in a raid on his house, allegedly planned by a local raja that had developed a rivalry with the missionary.

One of the main problems that van de Loosdrecht had to contend with had to do with his initial plan to convert the Sa'dan with their own culture. As his initial failures demonstrate, he had little chance of creating separate notions of a Sa'dan "culture" and a Sa'dan "religion". Strengthening this was the fact that Sa'dan cosmology and culture were not only well-entwined with each other, but also the existing social and political order of the day. To convert some but not all would be to alienate them from their communities. As Charles Farhadian puts it, to change one's religion often also means to join 'a new reference group, with new rules and social expectations' (23). Now, in a new reference group, which expected its members to act like proper monotheists, they would have little political recognition from their raja and would be unable to partake in many Sa'dan ceremonies, such as the famous annual funeral procession, in which other members of their families would be involved. In short, they would become foreigners amongst their own people.

The reason why this was so could be because the Dutch were not able to establish laws against headhunting and slavery until fairly late on in Tana Toraja. To make a parallel example, when missionaries arrived in Minahasa, they found their jobs to be quite easy. This is at least partially because such practices had already been banned by the Dutch for some time prior. Without such ability to perform such practices, many Minahasan groups were unable to perform other cultural practices, and were thus more open to the religion of their colonizers than they might have been otherwise (Henley, 50).

Part II-After the Establishment of Christianity

When speaking about the process of missionization in Indonesia, it is important to keep in mind that it is nearly impossible to speak of a post-mission period. In many areas, such as Roman Catholic Flores, missionaries have lingered in their fields well into old age. Even if they leave their field, many missionaries will return every few years to their pasture in order to check on a community's progress. Today, almost any "Christian" area of Indonesia is apt to be visited by missionaries from transnational Evangelical churches, looking to revitalize a particular area's Christianity with a newer, purer brand. Regardless of how important an initial baptism may be, it is evident that proselytization is an ongoing process, one which is potentially without a true end.

However, while there is no denying the importance of the actual mission encounter, it can be argued that their presence has only played a part in the development in what we may loosely call "Christian Indonesia". Just as important is what communities did with the religion once they adopted it. In some cases, it was used as an augmentation to local belief systems, while in others it was a way of consciously becoming less like their ancestors.

1. Syncretic Belief

Perhaps the most frequently discussed result of the advent of Christianity into Indonesia has been the emergence of syncretic belief. While some may argue that syncreticism has received too much attention from anthropologists in comparison with more mundane forms of Christianity, it is also a significant phenomenon well worth

looking at when considering how frequently it has been documented in some of the more far-reaching parts of the archipelago. If the literature is to be believed, a certain amount of theological cross-pollination is to be expected as a norm throughout the country, with some groups participating in it more than others.

As discussed in the last section, a certain amount of blurring between religions was allowed by missionaries in certain contexts. The Catholic Church seems to be well-known for this in particular. In the case of the Salvation Army's mission in Central Sulawesi, certain rituals related to agriculture and property were allowed in newly Christianized forms, mainly because they had no obvious Christian counterpart (Aragon, 222-225). Recently, while interviewing a missionary in the Ende regency on the island of Flores, I was told that it wasn't a problem for him if some people still practiced traditional beliefs, so long as it didn't interfere with their Catholicism.

In some cases, this mixing of local belief systems with Christianity has also involved a broader sense of Western- or foreignness. For some Christians on the island of Biak, distinctions between local belief, Christianity and a broader concept of the foreign can be tremendously hazy. As Danilyn Rutherford describes in *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners*, for many Biaks, the Bible is of significant spiritual import, not only because of the words it contains, but also because of its foreign origins (70). Consequently, the foreign words it contains are often mined for latent meanings; ones which would be obvious were the text of local production (123-129).

This sense of Western-ness/foreignness being synonymous with Christianity can also take less obviously spiritual forms. In her ethnography *Fields of the Lord*, Lorraine Aragon describes a scene in which dress shoes had become an important symbol of a

Tobaku person's Protestantism, despite their impracticality in the highly mountainous area of Central Sulawesi (134). Here we can see a concrete example of the way in which a form commonly associated with the West has become Christian as the result of associations developed during the mission encounter. In this case, dress shoes came to take on their own meaning, one which perhaps slightly deviates from the one intended by the missionary who first presented them to the Tobaku.

Although missionaries may have typically sought to merely give a group Christianity within the context of their pre-existing 'culture', they often could not help but to bring certain European cultural prejudices with them. As the above example demonstrates, this frequently involved the introduction of 'non-religious', Western material goods into to unintended 'religious' consequences. Despite the eagerness of many to accept dress shoes, the Salvation Army had a somewhat more difficult time introducing soap into some quarters of Tobaku society, due to a shamanic tradition which connected not bathing with spiritual power (). Just as assumption of a European good could demonstrate an acceptance of Christianity, here we can see it being resisted with the rejection of one.

In such cases, the dynamic between categories of "local", "foreign", "religion" and "culture" can often vary in unexpected ways. If there is one theme to be found consistently among such instances of syncretic practice it is that these categories typically become blurred and complicated. In the case of the Biaks who hold sick children in front of missionaries' houses, Christianity becomes indigenized so as to contain a kind of power specific within Biak culture. In doing so, the foreign becomes localized while the differences between "religion" and "culture" are once again mystified.

2. *Ethno-regional Churches*

Ethnic churches present us with a slightly different conundrum. While they are often ardently dedicated to a particular community –the Ambonese Protestant Church went so far as to prohibit admission to Chinese and other non-Ambonese Christians- they can often be torn as to how “ethnic” they’d like to be (Chauvel, 159). Some, such as the Protestant Church of Sumba, have developed as essentially conservative institutions, allowing some signifiers of ethnic or local identity into their services (ie. wedding clothes), while barring almost anything else that could be construed as Pagan. Others are somewhat more liberal in their approach, and allow for greater amounts of ethnic signifiers into their services in addition to some local interpretations of Christian theology.

These opposing directions are evident as early as the 1920s with controversy that surrounded the establishment of the Ambonese Protestant Church (*Gereja Kristen Ambon*). Previous to this moment, Ambonese Christianity had widely been described as “intertwined” with local *adat* custom (Chauvel, 154). In a report on the region during the late 19th century, a Dutch army officer described ordinary Ambonese as still subject to the influence of “superstition, animism and fetish”, regardless of their Christian faiths (155). What this does not mention is that the extent to which Ambonese incorporated traditional belief into their Christianity and what those beliefs were could vary greatly from area to area. In the 1920s, the first major push to create an Ambonese church was met with noteworthy resistance from Ambonese on Seram and other islands, who felt threatened

that the establishment of such an institution would mean the near certain extinction of their particular brands of Christianity in favored of a standardized version stemming from the city⁶ (159). It should be noted that, at this time, the Ambonese Protestant Church was not a wholly conservative institution itself and did seek to incorporate some elements of Ambonese tradition into its services. The problem for many of these Seramese was that these weren't *their* traditions.

In this instance, differing notions of 'Christianity' and 'locality' were brought into collision with each other with the projected establishment of an ethnic church. Through these arguments over the establishment of a church which would cater to all 'Ambonese', matters of both 'local' and religious identity are put into question. Christianity is put into an almost relativistic light, while the notion of a single, cohesive 'Ambon' seems to be temporarily dispersed in favor of particularities between regions. The idea of a 'true' Christianity which originated somewhere else doesn't seem to enter into the basic rhetoric.

Later on, in post-independence Sumba, a small uproar arose over the permissibility of polygyny within the newly formed Independent Church of Sumba. The church itself was of an official anti-polygyny position, but wasn't sure whether it should turn away potential converts who were already involved in polygynous relationships. As the 1950s proceeded, it became determined that this type of relationship was a more un-Christian choice for men than it was for women. As a result, regardless of whether they had already been baptized, many men who chose to maintain their polygyny were kept completely outside of the church, while the women in these relationships were allowed to participate along with their children (Hoskins, 103-106).

This move on the behalf of the Independent Church of Sumba makes a sharp distinction between what is and isn't Christian practice by sharply excluding those who consciously fall outside of it. However possible it is to maintain both Sumbanese and Christian identities simultaneously, one should not err too far on the side of the former, lest he be cut off from his Christian community. In this way, the church can be seen to have a relatively strict definition of what a Christian Sumbanese looks like in contrast with a 'heathen' Sumbanese.

One potential counterpoint to the conservativeness of the Church of Sumba can be found in the Gereja Masehi Injil di Timor (E: The Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor). During the late 20th century, while the church was establishing itself in the south central part of the island, many missionaries were met with the complaint from locals that Christianity did not suit their agricultural needs as well as their traditional beliefs. For example, some cited that the church lacked a specific prayer for rain (Majelis Sinode GMT, 185). In reaction to this, church officials took it upon themselves to write prayers which would attend to this problem. One such example is "Penghormatan kepada Hewan" or, loosely translated, "Reverence towards Livestock":

Teruntuk...nenek moyang saya
Berjari genap dan berjari ganjil
Yang bertanduk dan yang berkepala botok
Biarlah kita makan makanan baru
Menikmati makanan baru bersama
Agar apabila berjalan ke mana-mana
Untuk mencari makanan dan minuman
Jika tiba di pinggir kebun orang
Kiranya tunduk dan merunduk
Dan jangan memandang untuk ingin masuk⁷

⁷ Translated from an unspecified Timorese language to Indonesian by Pdt. Yanni Tahun from the words of Father K.M. LeoSaE. A rough English translation reads: Intended for my ancestors/projected whole and

(Majelis Sinode GMIT, 189)

As can be seen, this is not the type of prayer one would typically find in many North American or European congregations. Not only does it request something which might seem atypical in many Western parishes, but within its first line few lines, it makes references to ancestor worship. In doing so, the church is not only co-opting local 'culture' into its practices, but also what many missionaries would consider local 'religion'. In this respect, the GMIT is setting somewhat blurry boundaries between the localities of religion and culture.

The question as to how best to balance local custom with Christian theology has become one of substantial concern in many ethnic churches throughout Indonesia. Indeed, a small cottage industry seems to have arisen through the publication of books explicitly dealing with this topic. Books like *Adat Budaya Batak Dan Kekristenan* (E: Batak Custom and Christianity) and *Mengupayakan Misi Gereja Yang Kontekstual*, we can find books dealing with the ways in which particular churches are able to balance the two to more generalized books looking at the idea of 'culture' and religion throughout the peninsula. They appear to be written explicitly for clergy members, although it is not unimaginable that they could hold some appeal to churchgoers looking to become more pious⁸. In some, such as the aforementioned *Adat Budaya Batak dan Kekristenan*, by Dr.

projected unevenly/that which has horns and a head that is a dish/let us eat new food/and delight in new food together/so that when we travel wherever/to look for food and drink/if we arrive at the edge of man's garden/consider stepping down and bowing/and don't consider the desire to enter

⁸ There is also the possibility that some of the more ethnographic volumes may be read by members of diaspora communities looking to rediscover their roots.

Richard Sinaga, readers are taken step-by-step through ceremonies so as to illustrate just how the two can be balanced:

“3.2 Tahap Prapesta Kawin

Pada tahap prapesta kawin ini ada acara *martumpol*, yang di beberapa *luat* disebut juga namanya *marpadan*. Acara *martumpol* atau *marpadan* ini adalah untuk mengikrarkan kebulatan tekad kedua calon mempelai di hadapan penatua Gereja, dan disaksikan unsur Dalihan Natolu dari pihak *paranak* dan *parboru* serta *dongan sahuta*. Di Gereja tertentu acara *martumpol* ini tidaklah sebijai harusan. (Sinaga, 126)⁹.

Here, readers are given an example of a ceremony that successfully blends Toba Batak *adat* with Christianity. As Steadly makes mention in *Hanging without a Rope*, such descriptions of *adat* carry an almost legalistic tone (70-71). While it would be near impossible to follow the above instructions without knowing exactly what a *martumpol* or *paranak* is, the way directions are divided and placed in order seems unusually specific. The *tahap prapesta kawin* ceremony in question is given a place within the overall context of a proper Christian marriage inside a church. With *adat* confined to a specific part of the wedding, the event becomes recognizably “Christian”. However, at the same time, the fact that the church allows such a ceremony to occur within its confines also gives it credibility as a “Batak” institution.

However, this begs several questions. Can we read this as an effort not only to balance Batak culture and Christianity, but also Batak culture with Western culture? If what is called “*adat budaya Batak*” is pushed aside in favor of “*kekristenan*”, would it

⁹ Minus the Toba terms, this roughly translates to: During the Prapesta Marriage period there is a *martumpol* ceremony, which in some *luat* are also called *marpadan*. This *martumpol* or *marpadan* program is for the purpose of pledging the determination of the groom’s second candidate in facing the church’s elder, and is witnessed by a member of the Dalihan Natolu from the *paranak* and *parboru* sides, along with a *dongan sertu*. Once in church, the *martumpol* ceremony isn’t a necessity

necessarily be “*adat budaya Barat*” (Western tradition) that predominates? Would these churches cease to have the ability to make ethnic claims?

If one is to consider the New Order government’s method of promoting regional cultures, mostly out of political interest, and the ways in which it was arguably fetishized as a result, these questions become somewhat difficult to answer (Pemberton, Spyer). Many missionaries became upset at the New Order’s promotion of the emergence of “long lost” *raego* dances in Central Sulawesi; not because the dances were particularly anti-Christian, but more because their reemergence served to promote an increased interest in local tradition, which could be seen as unnecessary competition in the promotion of Christian culture (Aragon, 254-261).

In some instances, ethnic churches and the New Order state held competing definitions of what composed a group’s *adat*. In the case of the To Pamona in Central Sulawesi, missionaries made a point of establishing a “Christian *adat*” early on by incorporating previously existing elements of “local custom” –which in actuality could vary greatly from village to village- into Christian religious practice, creating a new system of “custom” in the process (Schrauwens, 58). This Christianized version of To Pamona *adat* was later institutionalized with the establishment of the Christian Church of Central Sulawesi.

As in other areas, the way in which this was arranged involved a downplaying of what could be called local “religion” and a playing up of other “cultural” forms. This formulation of To Pamona *adat* was challenged in the 1980s by the New Order government’s attempts to promote local *kebudayaan*, or culture, throughout Indonesia. In Central Sulawesi, this involved the construction of large, replica versions of traditional

To Pamona temples, emphasizing one of the elements of local tradition which the church had done its best to downplay (90).

In other areas, New Order definitions of culture and *adat* seem to have presented few obstacles in the creation of ethnic churches. The presentation of traditional culture under the New Order only rarely touched on issues of religion, animist or monotheist. Considering this, it should be of little surprise that a bride and groom being married in a church can often be seen wearing similar outfits as their counterparts on New Order era posters of models wearing “traditional clothes” (I: *pakaian adat*) by province.

3. Colonial Participation

The above anecdote regarding the Tobaku people and dress shoes is somewhat reminiscent of the fact that the Minahasans were among the first Indonesians to wear pants and Western style clothing regularly, during the 19th century (Henley). While this may have been more of an attempt to put on a decidedly European appearance than anything else, the coexistence of Protestantism and European-ness in Minahasa at this time is exceptionally difficult to disentangle. Many Minahasans, like many Ambonese, played a close, collaborative role with the Dutch in the functioning of the colonial Indies. Christianity played a large part as to why this was so.

The Minahasans¹⁰ were some of the first peoples on the archipelago to be thoroughly Christianized. Having developed a close relationship with their colonizers in the process, this was not without its benefits. With a Dutch-based education system

¹⁰ This term is somewhat controversial if used to describe those living on the northern tip of Sulawesi prior to the 19th century. As David Henley describes in *Nationalism in a Regional Context*, the notion of a single polity uniting five groups who spoke mutually unintelligible languages and were often at war with each other couldn't have existed as it did prior to Dutch involvement in the region.

available to more *pribumi* in this region than in most others at the time, many Minahasans were able to secure themselves relatively well-paying jobs within the colonial bureaucracy, often as members of the army or as clerks. In some cases, they could even work as missionaries' field assistants (Kipp:1991). This in turn brought about a sense of privilege amongst many of the people from the region and allegations of favoritism leveraged at the Dutch by other peoples.

In some cases, Minahasans, like the Ambonese who had a similar history of Dutch contact and missionization, started to request preferential treatment over other ethnic groups in the archipelago. There are instances of Minahasan and Ambonese members of the KNIL requesting different food from other soldiers, food which was distinctly non-Pribumi (Chauvel, #). The term *Belanda hitam* or Black Dutchman was sometimes thrown around as a way of categorizing these people who often did not think of themselves as "natives". Even if one is to listen to the Manadonese variant of Malay today, there is a striking amount of vocabulary that people will still recognized as "Dutch".¹¹

For these people, Christianity could be seen as a sort of gateway to Western-ness. As an indirect byproduct of their acceptance of Christianity, they could enter Dutch schools, become valued members of the colonial army and eventually obtain a status theoretically higher than other Indonesians. It gained them access to institutions that were often unavailable to other ethnic groups.

III. Contemporary Christian Pop Culture

¹¹ Examples include *forok* for "fork" instead of the standard Indonesian *garpu* and *kukis* for "cookie" instead of *kue*. During a homestay in Manado, I often had these words pointed out to me as specifically Dutch during impromptu lessons in Manado Malay.

With the advent of the nation-wide satellite broad-casting system, Palapa, and primacy of Indonesian as a national language, pop culture has become accessible to Indonesians living in even some of the most remote parts of the archipelago. As a result, to view this through an Anderson-ian lens, it is now possible for people in Jayapura, Banjarmasin, Surakarta and Nias all to be tuned into the same message simultaneously. Considering the prominence of religion in the lives of many Indonesians, it should be of little surprise that this has meant the spread of religiously themed media. While one could argue the effect this has had on the local practice of Christianity –there are plenty of different ways one can read the same magazine or film- it has provided Christianity and religion in general with decidedly national mode of discourse.

One example of a way in which ideas of the familiar and the foreign interact with Christianity in contemporary Indonesia can be found in the televised sermons of the Reverend John Hartman. Hartman, who, according to his web site, spent time as a stunt man and celebrity bodyguard in Hollywood before a near-death experience convinced him of a need to spread the word of Christ, is currently at the helm of the fairly large GOTN Mission (GOTN). Aside from this, there is little information available on the internet regarding his or his organization's background.

One of the mission's main methods of promotion is GOTV, its television channel based out of Tondano, North Sulawesi and can be viewed in most Indonesian cities with sizeable Christian populations, such as Medan, Kupang and Jakarta. This channel hosts a relatively wide array of Christian related programming, from the serialized "Sheriff John", an English language Western starring Hartman shot in North Sulawesi which

revolves around religious parables, to numerous country music specials, which also sometimes feature the Reverend (Hill). Hartman's sermons provide the network's main source of programming.

These sermons are generally one hour in length and are made up of a mixture of oration and song. While Jesus is frequently mentioned, the general tone of the sermons tends to err more towards one of generalized self-help than explicitly religious. Each sermon is filmed in different "Christian cities" –a bar at the bottom of the screen will not only remind the viewer of which city it is filmed in, but also will give the names of others accompanied by local phone numbers to which viewers can call to make a contribution- in front of a variety of audiences, ranging from a large stadium filled with openly weeping people in Kupang to a small group of well-dressed, emotionally reserved people in a hotel conference hall in Manado.

As I was occasionally reminded when his sermons would appear on television in Manado, Hartman is an American. This plays an important part of his appeal. Despite the fact that he seems to know Indonesian, almost all of his sermons are given in English with the assistance of a woman he shares the stage with who translates each of his sentences into Indonesian for the viewer (Gottlieb). This has several interesting implications concerning his presentation of Christianity.

One is that it gives the impression that the English language portions should be heard in their original form, regardless of whether one can understand them. English may not be the original language of the Bible, but, as it is categorically "Western", there is the possibility that it is a more appropriate vehicle than Indonesian for a religion that's also considered "Western". Like hearing a popular song translated into another language,

Hartman's sermons may not sound right to most viewers if he were to start producing them in Indonesian.

It could be that many viewers are utilizing a different 'linguistic ideology' altogether during these sermons¹². Although this may seem far-fetched given the cosmopolitan lives many contemporary Indonesian Christians live, English may also be seen as simply more efficacious than Indonesian in regard to the production of sermons. That many of his sermons revolve around the potency of Christianity to change people's lives may connote that his words, in their original English, have an otherworldly power of their own.

Second, it serves as a constant reminder to the viewer that the Reverend John Hartman is indeed American. As he is of Native American heritage, he may not be recognizably "Western" at first glance. In a few ways, he may not look too different from some Indonesians (see picture 1). So, it is possible that Hartman simply chooses to avoid speaking in Indonesian in order to avoid confusion regarding his origins, which in turn may speak to the value of coming across as "American" or "Western" as a television evangelist.

The use of English in the popular Christian magazine *Solagracia* presents potential way of looking at the ways in which ideas of "religion" and "foreignness" may be configured in contemporary Indonesian Christian discourse. Published out of Jakarta, its articles tend to focus on broad, typically theological issues facing Indonesian Christians as a whole, with titles such as "Bebas Beragama Namun Saling Menjelekan"

¹² Similar to that of the Anakalang on Sumba, as described in Keane:2007.

(E: The Freedom to Practice a Religion However It Maligns Others) and “Nilai Sebuah Kepercayaan” (E: value a belief).

Although the magazine is predominately in Indonesian, English does make frequent appearances in many of its articles. Usually italicized and thus set apart from the rest of an article, English words can sometimes be given Indonesian affixes which are not given the same treatment (eg. Men-*setting*). While many of the English words and phrases used can be associated with either technology (eg *Short message service*) or American pop culture at large (eg *Talent scouting*), many of them can be directly related to Christianity.

In an article about Christian militancy in *Solagracia*'s 16th issue¹³ by Dr. Erastus Sabdono, appropriately entitled “*Kristen Militan*”, I was able to find 11 examples of English phrases or words italicized. Of these 11 examples, 6 of them involved quotes taken from the Bible such as “I will exalt my throne” and “we have died to the old life we used to live” (Erastus, 29). Of these, only two are given Indonesian translations within the text. The rest are incorporated either within sentences which are otherwise in Indonesian or in parentheses clarifying an earlier reference. This seems to be privileging the English language translation of the Bible over others, including any of the Indonesian ones.

However, there are a couple of instances which serve to complicate this further. About two thirds of the way through the article, in order to clarify a point, Sabdono discusses etymology:

¹³ Dates of publication are difficult to locate within the magazine itself. However, if the advertisements are indicative of anything, this issue was published at some point between March and May 2005.

“Dalam teks aslinya yaitu bahasa Ibrani, kata “sesat” terjemahan dari “*toholah*” yang dapat diterjemahkan “folly”, bodoh atau bertandak bodoh Dalam Alkitab versi NIV kata sesat ini diterjemahkan “*error*”¹⁴ (29)

Here we can see some of the linguistic politics involved in Sabdono’s use of English, Hebrew, and Indonesian. While he has the opportunity to further clarify “*toholah*” in Indonesian, he chooses to utilize English as an intermediary between the two. Through locating this mistake in the NIV Bible, Sabdono is clearly not privileging English over Hebrew. However, he still seems to rely on it in order to communicate just what this mistake was. He does not use Indonesian in order to clarify what the difference between “*error*” and “*folly*” is.

In light of this, Sabdono’s use of English is somewhat difficult to contextualize. If the English is sometimes wrong, why use it over Indonesian -or Greek or Hebrew for that matter- when quoting from the Bible?

At this moment, I can’t say for certain, but see one possibility lying within the fact that English, for many Indonesians, is the most familiar of the “Western” languages. If we are to view Protestant Christianity as analogous to other monotheistic religions, namely Islam and Judaism, it is distinctly lacking a language. While Greek, Latin and Hebrew can be said to be the original languages of the Bible, they are almost never used liturgically in Protestant services. This is true to the extent that most contemporary Indonesian Christians would not be able to understand them if they were used to quote Bible passages in a magazine like *Solagracia*.

¹⁴ A rough translation: In the original Hebrew text, the word “*sesat*” is translated from “*toholah*” which can be translated as “*folly*”, ignorant or acting ignorant, the term “*sesat*” is translated as “*error*” in the NIV version of the Bible.

While Dutch and German missionaries may have brought Christianity to Indonesia, their languages aren't as widely known today as they may have been in the past. However, many Christian Indonesians know and understand English. It is possible that English has become marked as a sort of generic "Western" language, which has for many Indonesians become the default language of Christianity, Indonesia's "Western" religion.

However, this should not suggest that Christianity is to be considered to be of monolithically Western origins in Indonesia today. An interesting counterpoint to Hartman's sermons lies within the minor popularity of Celebration of Praise, a Bandung based Indonesian language dance and music group which primarily sings about Christianity. The group advertises itself as multi-ethnic and, moreover, Christian Indonesian. A look at any number of pictures of Celebration of Praise shows a group of young musicians and dancers, each identifiable as being of a particular ethnic group or province based on their appearance. In their performances, the group makes a point of including a wide array of material, purposefully placing overtly devotional material alongside more ethnic (*lagu suku bangsa*) and patriotic material (Sugiyanto, 67).

Here we see a decidedly nationalist take on religion, one which seems to privilege Indonesia over Europe, America or the "West" in its approach to Christianity. While English words are used in some of the titles of their CDs, such as *Bagi Negeriku* (E: For My Country), *Doa Bagi Bangsaku* (A Prayer for My Creed) and *Indonesia Penuh Kemuliaan-MU* (Indonesia Full of Your [The Lord's] Glory), their method of promoting Christianity seems to concentrate mainly on a simultaneous appeal to a listener's

patriotism and piety. In COP's delivery, one's religious and national identities can exist without conflict, and even augment each other where possible.

IV. Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated, Christianity's origins in Indonesia, as a predominately Western missionary religion, have played an important role in many of the ways it has since developed. As it was brought by many missionaries, religion, a relatively new concept in some places, ideally was to occupy a sphere in people's lives within their culture but also without it. Certain practices could certainly be kept, but Christianity was ultimately meant to replace others. This meant that while Christianity could be given local characteristics, it was also determinedly a-local in other respects. As a consequence of the fact that they brought by Europeans, these newly introduced fields of action often took on the characteristic of being "Western". As I will discuss later, this was both complicated and reified with the emergence of ethnic churches.

When considering Christianity's development as a Western religion in many areas, it is also important to examine the development of what missionaries formulated as its local complement, culture. Through the preservation of some customs, which could either be Christianized or left alone depending on what how 'helpful' they were seen to the cause, many missionaries assumed they could make a greater appeal to potential converts. With the advent of 'ethnic churches', such distinctions between what was 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' custom became institutionalized with varying results. In some regions, such as South Central Timor, 'culture' or 'custom' could involve prayers

invoking both the Judeo-Christian deity and ancestral spirits to bring rain, whereas in others, such as Sumba, such practice might be seen as pagan. It is not unimaginable that some of these churches might be deemed more “Western” than others.

With the onset of the New Order’s cultural policies, such church-sponsored notions of custom became complicated or even challenged by new ones, as defined by the state. In some cases, such as that of the To Pamona in Central Sulawesi in the 1980s and 90s, the church and state actually had different official definitions of what a group’s *adat* was (Schrauwers). This could be problematic, as it could provide for the reemergence of some cultural forms long-deemed un-Christian by missionaries and thus potentially represent a partial slide back into pagan-hood (Aragon).

In many of the above mentioned mission encounters, locality seems to play an important role in determining one’s culture. However, as one gives it a closer look, the idea of locality becomes complicated. Many of what are now called ‘Minahasan’ were in competition with each other prior to colonial contact, and would probably have been loathe associating themselves with each other under the same ethnonym (Henley). Despite centuries of different villages participating in *pela*, a system of reciprocity which is supposed to bind all Ambonese villages, there was considerable amount of controversy regarding just what “Ambonese-ness” was with the creation of the Ambonese Protestant Church (Chauvel).

In a similar way, I would argue that the ‘foreign-ness’ associated with religion can be equally vague. While his birthplace is indisputably Bethlehem, as advertisements for guided tours of the Holy Land in magazines like *Solagracia* and *Bahana* can attest, the

location of his religion can be somewhat more difficult to locate. Christ, as he is portrayed in popular Indonesian sources on Christianity, is typically given Caucasian features. Given that his word can be promoted by German, Dutch, and Spanish missionaries alike and that a large amount of contemporary Christian media comes from America, it is difficult to say what this might mean, aside from a sort of generalized foreign-ness.

As we have seen above, the definitions of what is ‘Christian’ and ‘pagan’, ‘foreign’ and ‘familiar’ have often changed with context. Thus what has been considered proper Christian behavior in South-Central Timor in the late 20th century can be seen as somewhat different from the standards previously set in Ambon during the 17th century or Northern Sumatra during the late 19th. Consequently, while parallels may be drawn between instances of missionization, it would be a rather difficult (and possibly pointless) task to come up with a rule that would apply to all of the Christian communities in question. Even the phrase ‘Christian Indonesia’ itself sometimes seems more abstract than useful.

However, this may be changing. As more Indonesians than ever have access to mass media, more have access to religious television programming, such as GOTV, and religiously themed periodicals, such as *Solagracia* and *Bahana*. Since much of this media seeks to forego geography specificities in an effort to appeal to as many people as possible, Christians are often portrayed as a single, semi-continuous community across the archipelago. One potential consequence of this may be a sort of self-fulfilling, increased level of pan-Christian awareness around Indonesia.

While many have argued that Indonesia has been undergoing a second wave of Islamicization throughout the archipelago, whereby previously nominal Muslims are becoming more aware of their religious identities, it is well worth investigating as to whether the nation's Christian areas have been undergoing a similar process of 'Christianization'. As Islamicization is frequently defined as a spread of Middle Eastern cultural values, since the root is quite easily located at Mecca, it might seem as though Christianity lacks the spiritual geography necessary to make a comparable revival possible. However, if there is one thing which almost every Christian community in Indonesia has experienced, it has been contact with the West. When considering the various roles the 'West' and 'Western-ness' have played in previous eras and the way it factors into much of Christian popular culture today, its relationship to the further development of Christian identity in Indonesia may be worth examining.



Picture 1

Reverend John Hartman with his wife, Mary Hartman

(<http://www.gotn-ministry.org/English/about%20us.htm>)

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