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STATE EDUCATION AND THE FUNNEL EFFECT: CHANGING DYNAMICS IN GAMELAN MUSIC LEARNING

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The role of state-sponsored institutions in the transmission of gamelan music knowledge in Java has been widely observed in the context of the great transition from being a matter of oral transmission and the social ties it entailed to a study program relying on writing and on the state apparatus. While the role of the educational institutions – notably the network of art academies Institut Seni Indonesia – has been framed largely in ethnomusicological terms, little has been said as of yet of the consequences it triggered sociologically. A few of the most historically-conscious contributions debating the recent developments of Javanese gamelan music have suggested an interpretative key which supported either a modernization paradigm or a transformation-incontinuity model, as formulated most recently by the work of Rachel Hand. Although both perspectives can provide important insights in the way socio-cultural change unfolds, the ethnography I sketch here offers a more nuanced viewpoint.



Therefore, the aim of this contribution is to shed light on the changing connotations of expertise and professionalism that the educational institution has brought about over the Twentieth century in which both elements of rupture and continuity can be identified, but in a quite different fashion than what anticipated by previous observers. Institutionalization participates in this process not as much in democratizing the access to formal music knowledge but rather in funnelling along socio-economic lines pre-existing pathways to professional musicianship. I intend to do this by drawing on a period of fieldwork undertaken at ISI Surakarta in 2017, grounding the observations to follow on interviews, fieldnotes and literature review.

Keywords: Javanese gamelan; modernisation theory; education; knowledge transmission; ethnomusicology

INTRODUCTION

Javanese gamelan music has undergone substantial changes over the course of the last century. One of the most notable developments has been the drastic alteration of its once family- and neighbourhood-based form of knowledge transmission. The formation of the art academies (Institut Seni Indonesia – ISI) has gradually replaced the neighbourhood as the authoritative vehicle of knowledge transmission in Java, creating on the way not only new theoretical apparatuses and music hybrids supported by academic curricula, but also new sociological configurations in the access to the art form at large. While these state-sponsored institutions then have helped in keeping the renown music tradition from disappearing under the pressure of urbanization and mass-mediatic forms of entertainment, they have also altered the wider context in which gamelan music is learned and experienced in significant ways.

Previous observers have tended to frame this move through the trope of “modernisation theory”, drawing implicitly on the writings of Max Weber (1946). Accordingly, the advent of a monolithic notion of modernity was seen as intrinsically disruptive in its erasure of “tradition”, yet inevitable on the path to progress. The writings of Judith Becker, one of the most prominent and prolific scholars of gamelan music (see especially Becker 1980) can be contextualized within this strand of theory too. The recent works of, among others, Benamou (2010) and Hand (2018) have tacitly complicated this narrative, the former by reflecting on the enduring potency of *rasa* as an experiential and formational tool in gamelan music, the latter by pointing at the continuity between the family and the academic contexts as both learning “institutions”.

In this contribution I try to show how the purported avant-garde of modernisation (engendered by the academic institution, in this instance) may act in a less deterministic way, yet without dismissing the change it entails. I do so by focussing on the institutionalization process as articulated in the context of ISI Surakarta, which may shed a more encompassing light on the non-*kraton* professionalization of gamelan musicians and on the dynamics underlying the global phenomenon of degree education at large.

ON METHODOLOGY

The observations of this contribution are the result of a ten-month ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Surakarta. Theoretically, it is informed by the anthropological literature on phenomenology, post-colonial studies and discursive analysis. Both participant observation in the classrooms of ISI Surakarta and interviews were used, as well as quantitative data in the form of



an online survey. Part of this material was also used for my larger M.A. work on gamelan music education “Playing with Culture”.

From the kraton to the academia, via radio broadcasting. Institutionalizing gamelan music.

In this section I reconstruct the history of the transition of gamelan music's imaginary centre of authority from the *kratons* to the academic institutions. This move, I argue, has its roots in the erosion of political power of the courts of Central Java as a result of pressing colonial dominance. Subsequently, the *kratons* invested greater energy in the arts, often in competition with each other. At the same time, they absorbed crucial influences from Europe, including the notion of “classical music” and of written notation as a tool for decoding and transmitting a music repertoire (cfr. Goody 2000). This more “portable” version of gamelan music, together with the urge to showcase royal artistic sophistication, merged with the appearance of radio broadcasting. The solonese royal family of Mangkunegara was one of the most opulent sponsors of gamelan radio shows. As the Dutch network of radio stations was taken over by the nationalist Radio Republik Indonesia, the bulk of pre-existing radio formats was kept intact, including the gamelan radio shows, with the major difference that now they reached well beyond the confines of Central Java (Puguh 2017).

The important sea changes that this transition points to, I argue, is a socio-economic one. That is, for the first time, the most competent and respected musicians could count on a comparable alternative source of income for livelihood, provided by government salaries. While this did not result into a desertion of the court performances, a viable and profitable alternative was now nonetheless available to technically proficient musicians. This alternative began to gradually trigger that emancipation and that uprooting necessary for individual economic mobility, which was paramount as music expertise began to migrate to the other institution being founded almost simultaneously to the state-run radio network: the music academy.

Is ISI reshuffling music expertise?

In this part, after revising the genesis of Institut Seni Surakarta and briefly describing its curriculum, I pause on the loop generated by the granting of academic degrees and the re-incorporation of the ISI graduates into its own staff. Although court performances were still kept in high regard, and many ISI teachers keep gravitating around the *kraton* to this day, the career opportunities and the comfort of a regular government salary elevated the status of ISI not only as a more desirable learning and working environment, but also as an authoritative one in setting the record for repertoire and playing styles over the court ensemble, which became now set apart as repository of a specific, delimited, “court tradition”.

Learning gamelan music at ISI. The funnel of professionalization.

Here I switch my focus from the historical and discursive aspects to the perspective and experiences of ISI gamelan students. One of the automatic implications of thrusting the entire process of gamelan learning into a four-year degree course is a considerable temporal compression. Whereas in the previous familiar pattern, learning was a slow process of osmosis and moments of active apprehension spread over many years, ISI introduced a model for which a great number of instruments and pieces had to be learned quickly, simultaneously and to a level considered satisfactory by the instructors. This generates distress among young students, who need to fulfil not only the expectations of the curriculum but also a moderate financial burden,



considered the modest economic background of the majority of them. The study shows how, in contrast with what earlier scholars predicted, the majority of ISI gamelan students does not descend from an artistic background, but enrolls out of personal acquaintance with gamelan music (often during high school classes) or the common preoccupation of cultural preservation. However, the effect of ISI is not merely a democratizing one as it would appear on the surface. I recover here the image of the funnel effect, as utilized by Giordano in the context of migration (Giordano 2018). Being the artistic job market a relatively meagre one, the considerable amount of students enrolling in ISI cluster through the academic funnel. Those who make it the easiest through the funnel, that is those who land teaching or stable performance jobs, are those who in the meantime manage to establish the best contacts. Establishing contacts is an essentially non-ISI affair, a result of intense networking outside of the classroom, including participation at music performances and *wayangs*. The minority of students coming from a family background steeped in gamelan or *wayang* have naturally a thicker address book of crucial connections, facilitating their transition into professional musicianship. Those who do not will tend to clump into the ISI funnel, often postponing their graduation of several years or, more rarely, drop out entirely.

From all this it becomes clear how in the transmission of gamelan music knowledge ISI did act as neither a thin veneer through which the older inheritance system of musicianship would be reproduced undisturbed, with the only addition of a degree title, nor as a completely democratizing educational institution, since, as I show, financial burdens bar the way to professionalization in ways that previously would not subsist and as networking is an essential auxiliary practice for landing jobs in the future more than dutiful classroom study. It is in this endeavour that family background comes back into the picture, by providing ready contacts integrating the formal prestige of the academic title.

CONCLUSIONS

In this contribution I discuss the changing dynamics in knowledge transmission that Institut Seni Indonesia brought about in the acquisition of gamelan music musicianship. Previous studies have tended to frame the introduction of academic degrees for music knowledge either within the modernization paradigm, suggesting a democratic and standardizing turn in the access to musicianship, or a de-facto continuity of the older pattern of inherited expertise beneath the surface of academic education. With this work I try to show how the reality experienced by the music students lies somewhere in between, as ISI funnels applicants and students along economic lines at first and according to the extra-class contacts created, in which an artistic family background returns as a crucial factor.

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Methodological Dilemma on Studying Diversity

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In Indonesia, like elsewhere, ethnography works have increasingly been inseparable from global connectedness which influences people's way of thinking regarding their relationships with their surroundings (Appadurai 1996, Tsing 2004). At the same time, the so-called reflexive turns in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) has called into question the often taken-for-granted positionality among the anthropologist. More than four decades have passed since legal anthropologist Laura Nader (1972) first called for anthropologists to 'study up', which calls into question the often taken-for-granted power relation between anthropologists and the people they research about (or rather, the people they do research with). Since then, Nader's question has been taken up, and even challenged by anthropologists working with those who hold 'more power'. Nader, herself, has further clarified her position that her call to 'study up' did not mean for the anthropologist to stop 'study down', but to study 'up, down, and sideways simultaneously' (2008). Anthropologists have discussed the challenges of doing 'anthropology at home'/'native anthropology', 'reverse anthropology', and other ethical dilemmas of doing ethnographic research. This panel invites abstracts that address the methodological dilemma anthropologists face in their search for 'anthropological knowledge', whether based on research in Indonesia and outside. The panel's learning objectives are as followed: - to share the methodological reflection in anthropological research in responding to increasing threat to diversity; - to learn about the methodological innovation in anthropology to document diversity; - to understand how anthropologists, negotiate consent in research; - to discuss the ways, one's positionality as a researcher define or limit our choice of methodology; and finally - to discuss the ways anthropologists (re)define research methodology in the era of 'dis'-integration.

METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMA OF DOING FIELDWORK AMONG FISHERS IN THE UK

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Abdullah (2018) in his reflexion on 50 years of Indonesian anthropology is reminding the readers that culture is not an object but a perspective used to understand human problems and concerns, which is essential for (Indonesian) anthropologist to expand their perspective. In my case, doing research outside Indonesia is part of the effort to expand and diversify the perspective. I have been doing fieldwork among fishers in the United Kingdom since July 2018, to see how their livelihood affected by European fisheries regulation and how they see their future after Brexit (Britain leaving the European Union).