


An implicit good news in a Javanese indigenous religious poem

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Contextualising biblical teaching entails the adoption of certain forms, terms or thought patterns that might confuse the original message, especially if the effort takes place in a Javanese culture context that is full of subtlety and indirect communication. This study analyses a Javanese poetry form that contains the narrative of Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman. The indigenous poems are widely sung by the adherents of Javanese indigenous religions. However, only a few studies are conducted on such indigenous poems that contain Christian messages. This study examines whether or not the poetry form and religious terms that the writer used could serve as a vehicle to convey the good news message of the narrative of John 4:4–42 instead of creating impediment. Through literary form analysis followed by content analysis, the results showed that the Javanese poem contains several cantos, each with an embedded meaning. Finally, it intends to demonstrate how a combination, instead of contestation, of the indigenous, Islam and Christian terms is effective for the writer's purpose. Thus, the writer's choice was suitable in his effort to communicate the original teaching.

Contribution: This study contributes to inter-religious communication by identifying the Javanese indigenous communication pattern, particularly the placement of their messages inside their poem's structure and in various terminologies. Strengthening inter-religious communication to create a mutual understanding in Indonesian pluralistic society is needed especially as the Javanese indigenous religions are often misunderstood.

Keywords: indigenous poem; inter-religious communication; indirect communication; Javanese; spiritual teaching; narrative.

Introduction

The Javanese indigenous religions use various forms of arts, such as literature, music or dance, to communicate their philosophy, spiritual teachings or ethics. One of them is *suluk*. In its essence, *suluk* is a spiritual teaching that takes the form of a poetry. According to Prabowo (2015:1), the word *suluk* in the Javanese literary tradition is used for writings containing a mystical mixture of Islamic teachings and Javanese indigenous spiritual views. Similarly, in his study, Akbar points out that *suluk* is a journey to gain God's acceptance by emptying one's self from uncleanness and filling it with what Allah wants (Akbar 2006:82). Thus, the essence of *suluk* is teaching about the mystical journey and human existence.

When conveying their *suluk*, spiritual leaders also voice or sing it. Hastanto (1983) mentions that the Javanese call such spiritual teaching poems that they sing *tembang* and Suwardi (2015:19) calls them *tembang macapat*. *Tembang macapat* has a set of strict rules related to the number of syllables, lines, melody or cantos to be voiced to create the intended atmosphere for the audience. *Macapat* is multi-functional as it can serve as the bearer of a message, narrative, teaching or as a medium to convey ambiguity, puzzles and others (Purna, Astuti & Wahyuningsih 1996:3). Darsono states that for their spiritual ceremonies, the Javanese have developed hundreds of *tembang macapat* since around the year 1500 (Darsono 2016:30). In short, *tembang macapat* is an indirect communication method that offers the audience a space to reflect on the meaning of reality or their lives.

Concerning indirect communication, Sukarno (2010) mentions that the Javanese people more significantly observe some concepts that are well rooted in their culture; among those concepts is the concept of *tanggap sasmita* or being able to catch the hidden meaning. A good Javanese audience is expected to be able to discover the real meaning of the message, although it might be multi-interpretable. Kierkegaard mentions that such inwardness cannot be communicated

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directly because expressing it directly makes it orientate outwardly, not inwardly (Kierkegaard 1992:260). Inwardness means that in the process of interpreting an embedded message, it is often suggested that the audience delve inwardly into their existing insights. Oppositely, in much direct communication, when everything is expressed more explicitly there is no need for the audience to actively find its meaning, as the meaning is clear and not multi-interpretable.

In his study, Turnbull (2008:15) mentions that a Javanese indigenous religious poem, one of their indirect communication methods to convey the message of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, might cause impediment, multi-interpretation or ambiguity as the poem has an embedded message in its structure or flow. Yet according to Nagamoto (2000), the Javanese seem to live with 'the logic of not'. The finding of Nagamoto concerning 'the logic of not' echoes the cultural dimension concept. It means the Javanese, including the adherents of their indigenous religion, live in a high-context culture instead of a social relationship where everything is spelt out explicitly (Hofstede 2011).

In 1923, Sie Siau Tjong wrote *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah* (hereafter referred to as *Suluk Samariyah*). The title means *The Spiritual Text for a Samaritan Woman*. Prabowo (2015:34), who first researched the Biblical message in *Suluk Samariyah*, states that this poem is a *tembang macapat*. He mainly analyses the term 'living water', and then finds that the message is similar to the original one.

The Javanese who use *suluk* mostly belong to a belief or religion that in Indonesia today is known as *Penghayat Kepercayaan*. The term *penghayat* means 'practitioners' and *Kepercayaan* means 'faith or belief' (Muttaqin 2012:29). *Penghayat Kepercayaan* (hereinafter referred to as *penghayat*) are the followers or practitioners of an amalgamated group of indigenous spiritualities. In Indonesia today, the term *penghayat* can also mean the indigenous religion.

The effort of Sie Siau Tjong to produce an indigenous literature in the form of a Javanese poem shows his appreciation for Javanese culture and beliefs because, as Hastanto states, the Javanese poems have strict rules concerning their structure, syllables, the number of sentences and melodies (Hastanto 1983:120).

The focus of this study is to uncover the author's method in using the Javanese indigenous poetry forms, including the modification of its features, as the embedded Javanese indigenous religious teachings in them can obscure the original message of good news about Divine love and grace from John 4:4–42. It also explores whether the writer's use of various religious vocabularies or terms in the content of the poem obscures the original meaning. The findings are expected to enrich inter-religious communication methods mainly by adopting a certain literary form as an indirect communication method or to convey implicit messages.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive qualitative research, with *Suluk Samariyah* and John 4:4–42 as its sources. Four publications concerning *Suluk Samariyah* serve as the source. Firstly, the original book in Javanese script was written by Sie Siau Tjong in 1923 (Sie 1923). Secondly, the Javanese language edition is written in the Latin alphabet that the writer published in 1925 (Sie 1925). Two published translations of the *suluk* into Indonesian were also used. The first translation is the work of Prabowo (2015) contained in his research article, although it consists of only the main part of *Suluk Samariyah*, and the other translation is done by Sunyoto in 2021, which is the whole text in Indonesian (Sie 2021).

Firstly, using literary form or poetry analysis, the study collects the data about the narratives in the cantos contained in *Suluk Samariyah*. Secondly, the study also checks data concerning the sequence of the cantos in the poem. Thirdly, the study lists the differences in the message of the narratives in *Suluk Samariyah* with John 4: 4–42 by also focusing on the writer's choice of the Javanese indigenous religious or other religious terminologies to describe the identity of Jesus.

After the above steps, the study analyses the implicit and explicit messages that might exist in the *suluk* and performs a textual interpretation of their combined meaning. The focus is to analyse the implicit messages in the combination of the cantos, and their sequence; then an analysis is also done on the explicit message in the usage of terminologies that derive from Islam or Javanese indigenous culture and spirituality. At last, the combined meaning of the implicit and explicit messages is explored.

Based on the results of the analyses, the study presents the conclusion concerning the consequences of the adoption or modification of the indigenous forms of communication and terminologies, with the risk of deviation from the original message of the good news.

Results and discussion

Background

The *penghayat* live on various islands; however, the largest numbers of them live in Java, and most Indonesians might interchangeably name those who live in Central and East Java as the followers of *Kebathinan* [inner life], *Kawruh sanyutaan* [knowledge of the truth], *Kejawen* [Javanese spirituality] or *agama Jawa* [Javanese religion] (Muttaqin 2012:26). The term *agama Jawa* originates from the book of Clifford Geertz (1976). Many Indonesians still view the indigenous religions as syncretic, superstitious, pantheistic or monistic and their indigenous literature as illogical and mystical (Hamudy & Rifki 2020:51). The study of Zoetmulder (1991) explores whether the Javanese indigenous religions are more pantheistic or monistic, a classification that does not come from the framework of their own beliefs. Their believers still retain their spirituality, beliefs and ethics in their communities. A study conducted by Arafah et al. (in

Samsurijjal et al. 2019:954) in the Lombok area shows that they convey their philosophy, spiritual views and teachings indirectly by using poems that they chant.

Since the 17th century, Islamic leaders have developed various creative contextualisations (Hidayatullah 2019:102). Fathurahman (2017) proves that their success is significant. Ricklefs (2006) also shows that many Islamic leaders embed their teachings in the traditional rituals or indigenous poetry forms. Mulyono (2012) shows that Islamic views influence the form and values contained in traditional Javanese literature including *macapat*. In comparison, only a few Christian leaders make the effort to bridge the cultural and spiritual gaps between them and the indigenous religions, even today.

Suluk Samariyah was written by Sie Siauw Tjong in 1923. He is of Chinese descent and a member of a *Gerevoormeerde Kerk* (a reformed church) that *Nederland Zending Vereniging* [the Netherland mission fellowship] started near his hometown. As a businessman, he is conversant with Dutch, Javanese, everyday Mandarin and Malay languages. The work might indicate that he is a real pioneer in creating inter-religious appreciation, especially between Christians and *Penghayat*.

Analysing the literary form of *Suluk Samariyah*

The published translation of *Suluk Samariyah* in Indonesian consists of six major parts or cantos. Subsequently, there are 16, 18, 19, 33, 14 and 22 stanzas in those cantos. The first stanza in the opening canto is as follows:

wuryaning kang sinarkarèng tulis
tèsing sèdya syaga malat prana
nènangi conging tujune
juwèt ngawit mrih jumbuh
danurwedha wêwarah jati
dédamar kauripan
māngga dipun gayuh
saiyêg saeka praya
yèn wus nyandhak ywa sinimpên tan wèh mijil
nging sami dèn wradinna (Sie 2021:14)

[Apparent the meaning of writing,
contained in the words,
to calm down the heart is the goal,
because it is an attractive wish that fits,
with the knowledge of the sacred teaching
that illumines life,
go reach with the spirit of one word, one intention,
when it is obtained,
should not be saved,
but to be shared with our fellows].

After the first stanza, the canto describes the journey of Jesus:

Kawuwusa wau kangjeng nabi
Arsa kundur mring tanah dunungnya
Galileyah doh parane
Lampahira karuhun
Anglangkungi tanah kekalih
Preyah Samariyah
Nging satunggilipun

Yeku kang aran Pereyah
Yen medala ing ngriku saklangkung tebih
Nging dadya padatannya (Sie 2021:17)

[It is narrated that the Lord Prophet
will return to his homeland
Galilea which is far
The normal journey
will pass through two regions
that is called Samariyah
and the other one is Parea
passing through those regions makes the journey farther
but it has been customary].

Furthermore, the first canto describes the well and the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans, as well as Jesus' decision to stop by the well. In the end, there is an explanation that the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman has been God's intention.

In the second canto, the writer describes Jesus' request for water and the woman's response. She begins by speaking to herself about Jesus' initiative to speak to her. She then questions Jesus. The narration continues with Jesus' word concerning the living water; the woman questions Jesus about his words for her, but he does not have any pail to get any water. She even speaks about Jacob.

In the third canto, Jesus shows his understanding of the woman's questions. The canto begins as follows:

Nabi Ngisa ngandika rus
Nini away wancak driya
Sun warah tilingna age
Banyune sumur punika,
Sing sapa anginuma,
Maksih ngelak akiripun,
Analyane punang toya (Sie 2021:39)

[Gently the Prophet Jesus speaks,
O lady, do not be bothered,
Let me inform you,
See the well next to you,
the water of the well,
Whoever drinks from it,
Will be thirsty again in the end,
there is another water]

This canto is ended by the description of how the woman feels sad and remembers her past, after Jesus mentions that she has lived with five husbands and that the man who lives with her now is not her husband. Then, the canto places the last line in the last stanza '*Lir mendhung ngumpul nglimputi, ilang kabuncang maruta*' [like a dark cloud gathers to cover, disappears blown by the wind'] (Sie 2021:48).

The fourth canto consists of the continuation of Jesus' words for the woman, mainly about the true worshipper who worships in Spirit and Truth. There are few explanations about its meaning and the description of the woman's response. The last two stanzas depict the woman's happiness for the encounter and Jesus' declaration that he is the one that the woman has been waiting for.

Dhuh babo sang awiku
 Cecengkluken gyan ulun mangayun
 Majanmane utusanira Hyang Widhi
 Upami lamun wus rawuh
 Wewarah in karahayon
 Sang Ngisa ngandika rum
 Amalehken ig kaananipun
 Adhuh babo kalingane sira nini
 Wreuhanta kang sira ruruh
 'Ya ingsun ingkang kawiyos' (Sie 2021:63)

['O Teacher,
 in each of my steps, I look to find
 the representative of the Almighty
 when he comes
 will teach about salvation']

Jesus speaks to change the condition
 'O, Lady, remember
 and know that who you see
 Yes, I have already come']

The next canto describes Jesus' disciples who rejoin him after buying food in a nearby place and their responses. This canto also emphasises the woman's impact on her village as she speaks about Jesus. The last canto is the closing of the narrative with the teaching given by Jesus to the disciples. The writer also adds a comment that the happiness of Jesus is like a farmer who sees the growth and harvest of what he or she has planted. Then, the last line of *Suluk Samariyah* describes Jesus' return journey home.

According to Prabowo (2015:34), *Suluk Samariyah* is a teaching of how to live in perfection after God gives living water or salvation to a human being. *Suluk Samariyah* in the Javanese traditional alphabet was published in 1923 in Gemblegan, Solo, Central Java (see Sie 1923) and then in 1925 in Bandung (see Sie 1925). Prabowo, from the Language Institute of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, translated the main part of the work in 2015. The complete text in the Javanese Latin alphabet with Indonesian translation appeared in 2021 as the work of Sunyoto (see Sie 2021). Those translations do not have significant differences.

In John 4:4–42, the author depicts Jesus as a weary person who decides to take a rest near a well. As he rests, a Samaritan woman comes to the well. According to the narrative in John 4, Jesus straightforwardly requests water from the woman. In comparison, the first stanza of the second canto of *Suluk Samariyah* describes Jesus observing the woman before speaking to her with the lengthy wording 'do be careful when you draw the water, can you give me a bit to quench my thirst' (Sie 2021:11). Jesus appears as a gentle person.

This *suluk* takes the form of *tembang macapat*, which means that it is a poem to be sung or voiced and consists of many *cantos* (major divisions of a poem). Santosa demonstrates that *macapat* is multi-functional, to be used for a traditional aesthetical ceremony that contains spiritual guidance and a traditional incantation (Santosa 2016:89–92). As a method of teaching, a religious teacher often combines *tembang*

macapat with a shadow puppet show (*wayang*) and *gamelan* (a traditional musical instrument) to surround the audience with an atmosphere intended for deep spiritual reflection.

Suluk Samariyah is to be sung as *tembang macapat*. It consists of 11 cantos and each has its unique poetry metrum (Saddhono & Pramestuti 2018:16). The names are *Maskumambang* [a foetus in the womb], *Mijil* [birth], *Sinom* [growing], *Kinanthi* [educating], *Asmaradana* [love and romance], *Dhandhanggula* [adulthood and sweet expectation], *Pangkur* [principles], *Durma* [sharing], *Gambuh* [connecting and uniting], *Megatruh* [separation of body and spirit] and *Pocung* [death]. The most authoritative researcher in this field, Padmosoekotjo, posits in his study that there are nine cantos in *tembang macapat*. He states that there is one Kawi song (namely *Girisa*) and five *macapat tengah* (namely *Gambuh*, *Mêgatruh* or *Dudukwuluh*, *Balabak*, *Wirangrong* and *Jurudêmung*) which are often combined with *Macapat* songs although they belong to a different category of poems (Padmosoekotjo 1953). When listening to a canto, its audience is thereby given a clue about its embedded message or the spiritual teaching to be reflected upon (Padmosoekotjo 1960).

The different views concerning the number of cantos in *tembang macapat* are understandable because, based on the language and structure, *tembang macapat* can be categorized as *tembang gedhe* or 'great poem' with its high-level language or *tembang cilik* and *tengahan*, which use the simpler Javanese language but are different in length (Padmosoekotjo 1960).

As shown in some *suluk* such as *Suluk Wujil* (Fanani 2018) or *Serat Suluk Padmoroso* (Fanani 2018), they only consist of several cantos to emphasise the message that they teach. Thus, not the whole cantos that depict the total sequences of life are included in some *suluk*. Each name and set of characteristics indicates its embedded message.

The writer of *Suluk Samariyah* constructs his *macapat* by choosing only six *cantos* instead of the whole 11. As they appear in order, they are *Dhandhanggula* [adulthood or sweet expectation], *Sinom* [growing and struggling], *Asmaradana* [love], *Gambuh* [harmonizing and uniting], *Mijil* [birth], and *Kinanthi* [educating]. In short, the six cantos describe only parts or stages of the whole life cycle. He begins with *Dhandhanggula*, which means expectation for good things as adults. His message and reason can be described as follows:

1. In reciting *Suluk Samariyah*, one finds the *Dhandhanggula macapat* in the beginning. Conventionally, this poetry division conveys an adult dream or expectation for goodness to come. The word *Dhandhanggula* means expectation, yearning and fantasy of a person in the adult stage of life, while *Gula* means 'sweet' (Noviati 2018:51). The writer places this *Dhandhanggula* instead of *Maskumambang* or *Mijil*, as the beginning of the whole narrative of the *Suluk Samariyah* might signify that he intends to use the poem to make the audience reflect on sweet dreams or expectations in life instead of focusing on the meaning of human birth.

Although the narrative in *Dhandhanggula* is the same as the original one at the beginning of John 4:4–42, it conveys a different atmosphere or tone. The original tone is related to Jesus' intention to have a pause after his long journey. By using *Dhandhanggula*, the author gives us clue that the audience is led to reflect on a good dream or longing to be fulfilled. In stanza 15, the author explicitly writes, '*pambukanya kang kinantha ring hyang, mangkana pan wus pashine, dhawahirèng kang wahyu, nugrahane punang pawèstri*' which means 'from the beginning of the Almighty has ascertained, revelation will come down for the woman' (Sie 2021). Thus, the good dream belongs to the Almighty, who has planned that the woman would receive Divine grace, later to be liberated from a curse and cleansed from bondage. In short, at the beginning of *Suluk Samariyah*, there is a direct and indirect message that the whole teaching of this *suluk* is about God's sweet dream, expectation or intention to give grace to beloved humans or about humans' sweet expectation of their lives when they encounter Jesus:

2. Directly after the *Dhandhanggula*, there is *Sinom*. The number of lines, the stanza and the vowels at the end of each sentence of *Sinom* differ from *Dhandhanggula*, and the audience recognises the clue that it describes the growing stage of youth (Saddhono & Pramestuti 2018). *Sinom* teaches about a journey to find the real self while struggling with curiosity and emotional issues. The placement of *Sinom* directly after *Dhandhanggula* might indicate the author's embedded message that after humans have a dream, there are struggles.

In its narrative, Jesus takes the initiative to start a dialogue with the Samaritan woman, an act that intrigues the woman, as shown in the last part of *Dhandhanggula* and the first part of *Sinom*.

The last stanza of *Dhandhanggula* is as follows:

Nabi Ngisa tan samar pangèksi
 mring pawèstri kang tigas kawuryan
 kadadyanira ing tèmbe
 sinawang calon punjul
 bisa tampi wasitèng gaib
 wus pinasthi dening Hyang
 rahayu tinèmu
 ing dunya praptèng ngakerat
 kangjèng nabi arsa ngruwat mring pawèstri
 tarunaning tyasira (Sie 2021:24)

[The Prophet Jesus does not hesitate
 to watch the innocent woman
 who in the future
 will become significant
 in receiving revelation
 that God determines
 salvation everlasting
 as the Prophet Jesus will restore the woman
 youthful life.]

The *Sinom* stanza is as follows:

Nabi Ngisa lon ngandika
 hèh nini mara dèn aglis
 nimba aywa ringa-ringa
 sun jaluk banyu sathithik (Sie 2021:25)

[The Prophet Jesus says
 O young lady,
 do draw the water carefully
 give me a bit]

The author follows the original script in the Gospel which describes Jesus' request for water from the woman, but the woman responds differently. She does not directly reply but speaks to herself. There are words such as 'surprised' and 'questions' explicitly placed in this canto that strengthen the implicit message of the *Sinom* canto. As *Sinom* indicates struggle or, more precisely, inner struggles, this canto might describe the struggle of the woman in her youthfulness and her life. Thus far, the narratives in the first two cantos are the same as the original narrative:

3. The third canto is *Asmarandana*. By listening to the vowels and number of lines, the audience recognises that it is a longing, love, care and intimacy canto. According to Mulyono, the audience know that they are led to reflect inwardly on the meaning of love, longing, care and intimacy by being immersed in the atmosphere created by the sound, melody, music and rhythm (Mulyono 2012:107).

The content shows the characteristics of the Samaritan woman, who has a perceptive mind besides being reflective. She also keeps her feelings inside. In short, although the narrative is the same as the original one, the author depicts the Samaritan woman in the *poetry* as a Javanese woman who has been walking on the wrong path of life. Thus, in *Asmarandana*, the indirect teaching is communicated: to achieve one's dream, a struggling phase takes place. Only by filling one's heart with God's love can life become meaningful. God through Jesus gently offers it as an unconditional gift or good news:

4. The following canto is *Gambuh*, which communicates a harmony or agreement concerning the steps to be taken in life. Connected with the *Asmarandana*, *Gambuh* depicts harmony or even intimacy between two persons. To be able to receive such an opportunity as a grace, *Gambuh* stanza 14 explicitly introduces a concept of God as *rama amèngku wiraos* or 'Father who controls the human heart' (Sie 2021). The concept of God as a father is alien to most of the Javanese indigenous religions, as they view God as abstract and beyond human words to explain. In *Gambuh* stanzas 15 and 16, the writer inserts an explicit teaching about a loving God who relates to humans like a father. This concept is compared with the Samaritan image of God (Sie 2021). Undeniably, *Gambuh* stanzas 15 and 16 explicitly introduce the audience to a concept of God from the original teaching of John 4:4–42. Furthermore, *Gambuh* stanza 30 points out that the Samaritan woman has a turning point experience as her dream to encounter the messenger of the Almighty and God's love is fulfilled.
5. The following part of *Suluk Samariyah* is *Mijil*. It consists of a reflection on birth. Purposely, the author does not place *Mijil* as the beginning of *Suluk Samariyah*, an unusual

order that his audience recognises. Implicitly, the writer uses it to convey that when the woman receives God's grace, she experiences a new life or a turning point in life.

6. Finally, *Kinanthi* closes *Suluk Samariyah*. The word *Kinanthi* comes from the word *kanthi*, which means 'holding hands'. The poem indicates a flavour of joyfulness. It depicts two persons who have encountered each other deciding to continue their life journey by doing it together. In *Kinanthi*, the author explicitly explains the message of his poem, something that the original narratives in John 4 do not have.

Through the analysis of the characteristics of each canto of *Suluk Samariyah*, this study finds that the teaching is communicated implicitly. The author draws his audience to reflect on the meaning of their lives, which consists of a dream, struggle, mistakes, needs for reconciliation, turning point and commitment to a meaningful life. The unique message in *Suluk Samariyah* centres on a loving God who gives grace and new life to humans.

The writer placed implicitly the central teaching of John 4:4–42 about God's unconditional love and grace in *Asmaradana* canto. The canto is his effort to signify the encounter of Jesus and the woman as the encounter between a human being and a loving heavenly figure who cares for that human being. The loving, gentle and caring character of Jesus is explicitly described therein. As the woman does not easily accept the grace, later the author uses *Gambuh* to elaborate the teaching explicitly. In *Mijil*, the writer also communicates that each person could experience a new spiritual birth or a turning point when receiving God's love. Thus, the poem teaches that in the human journey, there is a point when God offers love and intimacy as grace for them or the good news. The analysis shows that Sie Siau Tjong manages to use the forms of cantos with their embedded meaning that the audience is familiar with to convey the good news about God's love and grace.

Analysing the usage of the indigenous religious vocabulary or terminology

Concerning many terms that the author places in the poems, there are two kinds of terminologies. The first kind originates from the Javanese indigenous religions and the second comes from either Islamic or Christian vocabularies.

Ruwatan

In *Dhandhanggula*, stanzas 12–15, there is the following sentence: 'kanjeng nabi arsa ngruwat mring pawestri' [the Lord Prophet intends to clean the woman] (Sie 2021). In indigenous spirituality, *ngruwat* (verb) or *ruwatan* (noun) can be translated as an act to cleanse dirt and disruption to free human beings. According to Rukiyah, the term is similar to 'recovering', 'balancing', 'healing' or 'reharmonising' (Rukiyah 2017:5). Kristriyanto states that *ruwatan* can also be understood as expressed by this sentence: *ruwatan minangka tumindak manungsa kangge pados kawilujengan* [*ruwatan* is the human act in seeking salvation or freedom from disaster]

(Kristriyanto 2018:42–43). To be free as such, humans need to take the initiative, especially in finding a divine figure to help. Thus with the term *ngruwat* in *Suluk Samariyah*, the author portrays a woman who needs to find someone who can help her obtain recovery or reconciliation, similarly with John 4:4–42.

In the last three lines of this canto, the writer inserts terms such as 'salvation', 'forgiveness' and 'life' as three dimensions of grace, something that in John 4:4–42 does not exist. The addition of such a line might signify the author's effort to merge the biblical concept of unconditional grace, love and God's initiative that is foreign to the audience with the idea of *ruwatan* that they are familiar with.

Two-in-one, Jurubasuki, Plawanganira and Rohullah wa kalimatu

In *Asmaradana* stanza 7, the author writes *Nabi Ngisa wrangkanèki dadya loroning atunggal*, which means, 'Jesus the Prophet blends to become *two-in-one*' (Sie 2021). The term *two-in-one* does not derive from the Javanese indigenous or Islamic culture. In the indigenous beliefs and Christian faith context, the adherents might interpret such a term to mean that Jesus is the manifestation of divine-human union. Zoetmulder (1991) finds in his study that the Javanese indigenous religions teach a concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* or divine-human union. Thus, the usage of the term *two-in-one* can help the audience who are familiar with such a concept to understand that Jesus' essence is not the same as that of all humans, but a union of God's and human essence in one person.

In *Gambuh* stanza 28, when the writer summarises the teaching of Jesus to the woman, three more terms appear: *Jurubasuki* [peacemaker], *plawanganira Hyang Agung* [door to God] and *Jêng Ngisa Rohullah* [Jesus, the Spirit of God] (Sie 2021). The concept of the peacemaker is common in many cultures. The term *Ngisa Rohullah* needs to be analysed carefully. Ibn Manzûr states that the word *ruh* or spirit comes from the word *al rih* or in plural *kalimah*, which means 'wind' or 'breath'. Breath means the human activity of inhalation and exhalation. Also, as humans cannot live without breath, *ruh* means life. Thus, *Ngisa Rohullah* means that Jesus originated from the Spirit of God and can give life (Ibn Manzûr 2011:356).

Mahmoud Ayoub, an Islamic scholar from America, explains that Jesus Christ was a special case among the prophets: he did not receive the revelation or the word of God as a divine communication, but he was the very 'word of God' sent to Mary. According to him, the term *kalimah* concerning God has three aspects: decree or ordinance (Q. 10:33), source of blessing or judgement (Q. 7:137) and revelation (Q. 2:37, 2:124) (Ayoub 1986:70).

More fundamentally, the Qur'ân relates the term 'Spirit of God' not exclusively to Jesus. The Spirit of God breathed into Adam so that the first human could live (Q. 15:29). The birth of Jesus also happened by such an inspiration of God, as one verse says. Thus in Islam, Jesus is not the incarnation of God (Harmakaputra 2013:92).

Two scholars, Badhurulhisham and Hambali (2018), state in their study that the word *Rohullah* indicates that the essence of Jesus as God's creation is beyond human understanding, based on the Qur'ān verse in Surah al-Nisa 4:171–172:

[T]ruly, the Messiah Jesus of Mary is only God's ambassador and God's word that God has conveyed to Mary, and he is also the breath of the Spirit that derived from God. (p. 88)

Theologically, McGrath (2001) states that the concept of the Spirit of God in the term *Rohullah wa kalimatuhu* in Islam might be similar to the Christology of the Gospel of John, as it never portrays Jesus as identical to God, but rather as God's legitimate (and only) agent. However, two scholars differ from him: Koester (2003:83) states that the author of the Gospel of John conveys Jesus to the readers by using familiar categories only to make them realise later that Jesus cannot be limited to any one of them; similarly, Van der Merwe (2019) states that in the Gospel of John, the author presents Jesus as a 'puzzle'. Undoubtedly, he is human, yet he is one with God. He is a rabbi and a healer who provides life by dying. However, in the end, Merwe concludes that 'the Gospel of John's uniqueness in early Christian literature entails its special patterns of language to describe Jesus who is the Christ, the Son of God' (Van der Merwe 2019:1).

However, concerning the message of John 4:4–42 in the text, Jesus affirms that he is the Messiah; thus no difference appears with the meaning of *nabi Ngisa Rohullah* in Islam. A Muslim audience might hold the concept that Jesus is simply a superior prophet or divine messenger. Indigenous religious believers might conclude that Jesus is a mysterious Spirit of God or even the divine incarnation. Javanese Christians can accept such a message from John 4, but only by connecting it to the whole message concerning the Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John. Therefore, the writer of *Suluk Samariyah* communicates the message by using a term that can become multi-interpretable.

There is also a description of Jesus as *plawanganira* or the Door. Such a term is echoed in John 10:9, which teaches that Jesus does not play the role only as an entrance in John 10, but also his function as a loving God is to keep the sheep inside after they enter.

It can be summarised that the writer uses terminologies that can be classified as belonging to the Javanese indigenous religions, Christian concepts and Islam. For those who only pay attention to the combination of them, the meaning can be obscure. However, the Javanese indigenous religion adherents might view it differently as they relate the terminologies with the forms or cantos and their embedded meaning as has been described above.

Discussion

The Javanese *Penghayat* adherents in particular often use implicit messages in their communication. Their habit to use indirect communication and hidden messages frequently might contribute to many misunderstandings in the

Indonesian society about their belief. People view them as obscure, superstitious or animistic and pantheistic. Even the modern Indonesian government has only shown them equal treatment to other believers since 2017.

Sie Siauw Tjong's choice to combine the usage of *tembang macapat* as a literary form does not create an impediment or obscurity for the audience. In his studies about one of Asian poems, Franke (2016) states that it is customary for them, particularly in China, to use implicit or indirect messages and even nothingness in a poetic form to make sense. Bowe et al. (2012) state that they are accustomed to grasping hidden or implicit meanings in the characteristics of each canto where the narrative is placed or in the terminologies.

There is no explicit description of Jesus as the Son of God, but indirectly, using the terms 'the Peacemaker', *Rohullah* or 'the Door', added with Christian terms related to God such as 'grace', 'salvation', 'love' and the Javanese terms 'two-in-one' and *ngruwat*, implicitly the poem gives hints that Jesus is God's spirit who loves human beings. Indirectly, the writer gives space for the audience to reflect that either Jesus is a divine incarnation where God and his humanity unite, or he is neither divine nor human. Jesus becomes a complex puzzle, which mirrors the view of the indigenous religion's adherents, which holds that God's reality is too complicated to be expressed anthropomorphically.

Hofstede's concept of cultural dimensions as discussed by Sari (Sari 2021:39) might support the statement and signify the value of the writer's usage of multi-interpretable or ambiguous vocabularies or terminologies. As the Javanese culture is often classified as a high-context culture, such ambiguity enables the audience to connect each poetry element with the cantos, terminology, sound, atmosphere or the narrative in the communication process. Speakers who use such an indirect method to convey the message are valued as giving space for the audience to take part in revealing its meaning. The writer creates such a method as he is also aware that his Javanese audience lives with what Cox-Joseph names the neither-nor or both-as-well-as logic (Cox-Joseph 2020), which can help them recognise the good news message in the teaching of *Suluk Samariyah*, which is the original message of John 4: 4–42.

Conclusion

Indigenous religious poetry as the form that communicates the message of John 4:4–42 indirectly fits with the Javanese *Penghayat* adherent's custom. This finding is significant as most studies about their poems primarily focus on their contents or vocabularies instead of the structure or form.

By using many Javanese indigenous religious terminologies besides the Christian or Islamic ones, the writer opens a space for his audience to reflect on the whole message of *Suluk Samariyah*, which is about the good news that God in Jesus grants unconditional love, an idea that the writer explicitly elaborates several times. Such a method of giving

the audience space to recognise the hidden message fits their culture and might cause positive responses.

The result of this study hints that indirect methods of communication might fit in a communication process within the *penghayat* context rather than direct messages. As the study is based more on literature, an empirical survey might be needed to prove its findings.

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