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ASIAN-EUROPEAN MUSIC RESEARCH JOURNAL (AEMR)

e-ISSN: 2625-378X

p-ISSN: 2701-2689

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Colonialism and Nationalism in Traditional Javanese Gamelan Music: Changing Musical Aesthetics

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ASIAN-EUROPEAN MUSIC RESEARCH JOURNAL 12 (2023)

<https://doi.org/10.30819/aemr.12-3> pp: 25-42 2023-12-13



Traditional music, Gamelan, Colonialism, Academic arts, Felt time Cite: [APA](#) [BibTeX](#)

Abstract

Colonialization by the Dutch in Java (Indonesia) brought a dream for the natives so that traditional gamelan music could be positioned on par with European classical music. The natives (colonized) view Western classical music as having the highest peak of aesthetic achievement because it is written, formal, successfully formulated, calculated (metronomic), and relies on logic. Meanwhile, gamelan music, on the other hand, develops informally, unwritten, and undefined and depends on the deepest feelings of the musicians. Efforts to equate gamelan with Western music are full of political interests so that Indonesia is not colonized through its culture. The culmination was establishing a formal gamelan school (imitating a similar style of music school in Europe). However, this brought another problem, and the gamelan school resulted in gamelan music having to be written, formulated, calculated, and formalized. This has changed the aesthetics and character of European-style gamelan music, from the felt piece (felt time) to the logical piece (clock time). As a result, in gamelan music, "academic art" was born with a neat, complex impression and supposedly modern characteristics. This study uses a historical approach to read past events as data that are woven and interpreted in the present. This historical approach is combined with an ethnomusicological approach to see how music is contextualized with cultural polemics, political intrigue, and means of resistance to colonialism. The result is that critical notes regarding the efforts to Europeanize gamelan music have left many problems until now.

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