

## SIN, THE BODY, AND TRUTH: Religious Discourse in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* The G. Francis (1896) and O. S. Tjiang (1897) Versions from a Foucauldian Perspective

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### Abstract

This study examines discourses of power and religious doctrine in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* by comparing two early versions of the text: the prose version by G. Francis (1896) and the poetic (*syair*) version by O. S. Tjiang (1897). Starting from the fact that Nyai Dasima is a highly popular figure in colonial literature and has been continuously reproduced across different media, this study approaches religion not as a neutral theological system, but as a discourse that regulates morality, the body, and relations of power. The study employs Michel Foucault's discourse analysis, focusing on the concepts of episteme (The Order of Things), discourse archaeology (The Archaeology of Knowledge), and sexuality, the body, and confession (The History of Sexuality). The analysis shows that G. Francis's version represents religion as a rigid and punitive regime of truth, in which Nyai Dasima's sexuality is positioned as the locus of sin and her suffering is legitimized as a moral consequence. By contrast, O. S. Tjiang's version deploys a subtler and more persuasive discursive strategy, while still operating within the same colonial episteme. These differences are not merely aesthetic, but reflect the authors' distinct subject positions within the colonial power structure. This study concludes that religion in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* functions as a productive and historical technology of power, and remains relevant for understanding practices of moral judgment and bodily regulation in contemporary Indonesian society.

**Keywords:** Nyai Dasima; Discourse; Episteme; Religious Power; Doctrine

### Introduction

Nyai Dasima is one of the most popular colonial literary figures with remarkable longevity in the cultural memory of society, particularly among Betawi (Jakarta) communities and surrounding regions (Tsuchiya, 1991; Sungkowati, 2011). Her popularity has not only endured across generations but has also transcended the literary medium in which she was first produced. As a result, Nyai Dasima functions as a cultural text that is continually reinterpreted in response to

changing social and ideological contexts (Junus, 1999; Wahyudi, 2010). Nyai Dasima was first introduced through *Tjerita Njai Dasima* by G. Francis (1896), a work of popular colonial literature that was soon transformed into various forms and versions. These include the *syair* version by O. S. Tjiang (1897), a development that indicates the wide reach of reader reception at the end of the nineteenth century (Watson, 1971; Sykorsky, 1980).

Alongside this ongoing process of reception, Nyai Dasima is no longer understood merely as a fictional character, but is believed by some communities to have been a historical figure who actually lived in Batavia (Tsuchiya, 1991; Wahyudi, 2010). This belief is reinforced by claims of historical realism attached to the narrative, as well as by the repeated reproduction of Nyai Dasima's story across various forms of popular culture, including folk performances (*lenong*, *tonil*), drama, film, television series, music, and contemporary performance art (Sungkowati, 2011; Wahyudi, 2010; Novianti, 2017). Nyai Dasima has thus shifted from being merely a colonial literary text into a form of collective cultural memory, whose persistence is sustained not only by its aesthetic value but also by its narrative appeal in bridging colonial history with the social experiences of Indonesian society across different periods (Junus, 1999; Tsuchiya, 1991).

Historically, *Cerita Nyai Dasima* was first written in prose form by G. Francis in 1896. Notably, within the span of only one year, the story was adapted into a *syair* by O. S. Tjiang in 1897. This remarkably rapid development indicates that *Cerita Nyai Dasima* quickly found a wide audience and resonated strongly within colonial Batavia society. The shift in medium from prose to *syair* cannot be separated from the context of readership and strategies of circulation, given that *syair* at the time was a literary form that offered particular appeal and accessibility to a broad audience. Accordingly, O. S. Tjiang's adaptation not only reflects the story's popularity, but also points to specific cultural interests and discursive concerns shaping the process of adaptation.

The different authorial backgrounds of G. Francis, a writer of European descent, and O. S. Tjiang, a writer of Chinese descent, constitutes an important aspect in understanding how the meaning of the Nyai Dasima story is reconstructed. G. Francis's prose version frequently employs sharp, satirical language and is heavily charged with moral judgment, particularly in its portrayal of the religiosity of indigenous characters. By contrast, O. S. Tjiang's *syair* version tends to use more restrained diction and avoids expressions that directly pass judgment on the beliefs or religious practices of specific groups. These differences indicate that the transformation of the story is not merely aesthetic in nature, but also involves discursive strategies shaped by the authors' social and cultural positions within the colonial structure.

Building on this premise, this study views religion in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* not as a neutral system of belief, but as a discourse of power operating through

language, morality, and the regulation of the body. Michel Foucault's perspective is employed to examine how religious doctrine is produced, circulated, and functioned within literary texts as a mechanism for disciplining and shaping subjects. The study formulates its main question around how the discourse of religious doctrine operates as a relation of power in G. Francis's version of *Cerita Nyai Dasima* and O. S. Tjiang's *syair* version. Through discourse archaeology and Foucauldian analysis of sexuality, the research aims to reveal differences in discursive strategies in representing religion, the female body, and morality, as well as to demonstrate that what appears as the "gentleness" or "harshness" of language is, in fact, an effect of the author's subject position within the colonial power network. To address this question, the study draws on Foucault's theories of discourse and power as articulated in his three major works.

First, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault presents a radical understanding of discourse by rejecting the notion that discourse is merely a collection of signs representing reality or expressing the subject's consciousness. Foucault emphasizes that discourse should be understood as a practice that actively shapes the objects it discusses. Discourse analysis, therefore, is no longer about "treating discourses as groups of signs" (p. 49), but about examining them as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). In this framework, discourse does not reflect a pre-existing reality; rather, it produces social reality, including categories of morality, truth, and subject identity. Within this perspective, religion, morality, and norms are not understood as absolute truths, but as the outcomes of discursive practices governed by specific rules of emergence, circulation, and legitimacy. Foucault asserts that "the regularity of statements is defined by the discursive formation itself" (p. 116) and that statements are subject to the "laws of coexistence" within a given discursive practice. Consequently, the analytical question shifts away from who is speaking or the author's subjective intentions, focusing instead on why certain statements are able to appear, be repeated, and accepted as valid, while others are excluded.

Secondly, Foucault (1978), in *The History of Sexuality*, argues that sex does not disappear from the social sphere, but is compelled to appear through discourse, confession, classification, and increasingly detailed analysis. Sexuality, therefore, is not repressed through total silence, but is managed through the intensive and organized production of discourse. Foucault emphasizes that the relation between sex and power operates not primarily through prohibition, but through an "incitement to discourse". Sex is treated as something that must be continuously spoken of, examined, and directed, making discourse the primary means of control. For Foucault, sexuality is a strategic field in which power functions productively: shaping subjects, regulating bodies, and disciplining life through the language of truth.

Finally, in *The Order of Things* (1994), Foucault seeks to demonstrate that what is called “knowledge” does not develop linearly or cumulatively, but is shaped by historical rules that are not always consciously recognized by the thinking subject. He introduces the concept of episteme as the historical condition that allows knowledge to emerge in a given period. An episteme is not a collective consciousness or a comprehensive worldview, but “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems” (p. 168). Thus, knowledge is not understood as a reflection of reality, but as the outcome of discursive relations that determine what can be thought, said, and regarded as true in a given era.

## Literature Review

Early studies of *Cerita Nyai Dasima* situate the text as a product of popular colonial literature imbued with social and ideological content. Tsuchiya (1991) views G. Francis’s *Tjerita Nyai Dasima* (1896) not as lowbrow, moralistic literature, but as a cultural archive reflecting the tensions of race, class, and power in colonial Batavian society. He highlights the ideological transformation of Nyai Dasima from 1896 to 1965: from a tragic colonial victim, to a self-aware modern individual (1940), and finally to a female figure who “returns to the people” within the context of nationalism (1965). This perspective is reinforced by Junus (1999), who asserts that Nyai Dasima was from the outset a discursive construction rather than a transparent representation of historical facts, and by Watson (1971) and Sykorsky (1980), who position the *cerita nyai* as an important subgenre of pre-Balai Pustaka low Malay literature, documenting the dynamics of urban life, race, and gender.

Several feminist and postcolonial studies highlight Nyai Dasima as a female figure subjected to layered forms of oppression. Susanto (2008) and Esaliana et al. (2021) demonstrate that G. Francis’s text systematically constructs the relationship between the Self and the Other, with colonialism operating through strategies of “benevolence”, exoticism, and morality to subjugate indigenous women. Saputra (2011) extends this reading through Spivak’s subaltern framework, emphasizing that women’s resistance in postcolonial literature—including Nyai Dasima—often culminates in symbolic silence. Hellwig (1993) and Wardani (2020) situate Nyai Dasima within the context of the representation of Asian/Eurasian women and lower-class women who are sexualized, ambivalently portrayed, and caught between European colonialism and local patriarchy. The historical context of prostitution as a colonial institution that oppressed women is also underscored by Handayani & Hardini (2016).

Reception and adaptation studies emphasize that the meaning of Nyai Dasima has continuously evolved across time and media. Sungkowati (2011)

shows that from 1896 to around 2010, Nyai Dasima was repeatedly reproduced in various forms—*syair*, novels, drama, folk performances, film, and television series—as a result of active reception by readers across generations. Wahyudi (2010) describes this enduring vitality as an effect of exotic-realist appeal, which combines historical claims with colonial fascination, transforming Nyai Dasima from a literary text into a collective cultural memory. Novianti (2017) demonstrates how this reinterpretation continues in dance, as an effort to culturally re-read the figure and to challenge the stigma associated with the term “*nyai*”.

Meanwhile, studies on rewriting and authorial perspectives reveal ideological complexities that have not fully liberated female subjects. Kananda (2023) and McFulvia (2021) argue that S. M. Ardan’s version, although seemingly progressive and nationalist, still operates within colonial and patriarchal symbolic networks. Ashari et al. (2024) show that the construction of religion—particularly Islam—in both G. Francis’s and Ardan’s versions is ideological, albeit with different strategies. In the context of Peranakan Chinese literature, Susanto (2012) emphasizes that adaptations of Nyai Dasima, including O. S. Tjiang’s, reflect shifts in collective thinking within the Chinese community regarding prostitution, which is neither singular nor static but historically fluid.

## Research Methods

The research method employed in this study is qualitative. In qualitative research, the instrument is human-centered, meaning the researcher themselves serve as the primary instrument (Sugiyono, 2016). Qualitative research produces descriptive data, and the method involves collecting, describing, and subsequently analyzing these data. The data in this study consist of excerpts from various linguistic units in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* by G. Francis (1896) and O. S. Tjiang (1897). Both texts were obtained from the Digital Collection of Leiden University and accessed online.

The data maintain the original spelling of Indonesian used at the time to highlight the historical specificity of the period in which the stories were produced. The data were analyzed, categorized, and then interpreted to reach conclusions (Nafila, 2021). The analytical method employed is critical discourse analysis, chosen because the data are embedded within the texts themselves and require systematic examination. According to Foucault, critical analysis primarily focuses on the control of discourse (Faruk, 2012: 251–264). Therefore, the data obtained are analyzed through a critical discourse lens based on Michel Foucault’s theoretical framework.

## Results and Discussion

### *Episteme and the Regime of Religious Truth*

The concept of *episteme* is used to understand that the way religion is represented in both texts operates within the colonial knowledge order of the late nineteenth century, where European morality, Orientalism, and racial hierarchies shaped what could be considered “true,” “civilized,” or “deviant”. Within this framework, the differences between G. Francis and O. S. Tjiang are not read merely as stylistic variations, but as reflecting distinct subject positions within the colonial episteme: (1) G. Francis writes from the position of the European colonial episteme, which assumes the authority to judge, and (2) O. S. Tjiang writes from the position of an intermediate subject, exercising greater caution in producing religious truths.

Within Michel Foucault’s (1994) framework, the concept of *episteme* refers to the historical order of knowledge that determines what can be thought, said, and considered true at a given time. The representation of religion in G. Francis’s *Tjerita Njai Dasima* (1896) and O. S. Tjiang’s *Sjair Njai Dasima* (1897) both emerge within the late nineteenth-century colonial episteme—a regime of knowledge shaped by European morality, Orientalism, and racial hierarchies. Within this episteme, religion is not positioned as a personal spiritual experience, but rather as a tool for moral classification.

G. Francis’s (1896) version reflects the author’s position as speaking from a European colonial episteme that assumes the authority to judge. This is evident in the way Islam is represented in an extreme, dogmatic, and threatening manner. Religious doctrine is produced as an absolute truth that cannot be questioned, for example, through narratives describing hell for “infidels”:

*“Jang Nabi Moehamad ada sediaken boeat orang Kafir toedjoe noraka... di sitoe segala orang Kafir ibarat orang Serani ataoe Tjina bakal dibakar,”* (Francis, 1896 p. 7).

“According to the Prophet Muhammad, hell is prepared for Infidels... there, all Infidels, whether Christian or Chinese, will be burned.”

Such statements function not merely as theological descriptions, but as mechanisms of a regime of truth that generate fear, guilt, and compliance. Within the colonial episteme, religious truth is reduced to a tool of discipline, particularly targeting indigenous female subjects like Nyai Dasima, who are positioned as “unaware” in practicing the pillars of Islam and therefore must be “corrected” (Tjiang, 1897, pp. 20–21).

By contrast, O. S. Tjiang’s *Sjair Njai Dasima* (1897) reflects the author’s position as an intermediate subject within the colonial episteme. As a writer of Chinese descent, Tjiang does not speak entirely from the center of the European colonial episteme, nor is he completely outside its power structures. This is evident in the way religious doctrine is still conveyed, but through language that

is more rhythmic, persuasive, and less harsh than in Francis's prose version. For example:

*"Kita misti toeroet Agama Moehamad, / Itoe Agama jang perloe amat, / Misti pladjarin biar sampe tamat, / Makanja diri bole djadi slamat"* (Tjiang, 1897 p. 21).

"We must follow the Religion of Muhammad, / This is a religion that is greatly needed, / We must study it thoroughly until the end, / Only then can one be safe"

Here, religion is still produced as a normative truth, but the threat of hell and symbolic violence is not as severe as in Francis's version. This indicates that within the same episteme, strategies for producing truth can vary depending on the author's subject position. Tjiang appears more cautious in producing religious discourse, so the regime of truth operates through persuasion and subtle morality rather than through brutal symbolic terror.

Quotation from <i>Tjerita Njai Dasima (1896)</i>	Quotation from <i>Sjair Njaie Dasima (1897)</i>	Discourse Notes
<p>Hlm. 7  <i>Maka di itoe hari ma Boejoeng masoek kerdja, djadi penjapoe dan penjoetji di roemahnja Toewan W. Ma Boejoeng djaga bae pekerdjahannja, apa djoega ada pekerdjan di dalem roemah dia ikoet kerdja sama-sama; semingkin hari semingkin dapet kepertjajaan Njainja. Pada soewatoe hari dia membraniken dirinja dan tanja pada Njainja: "Apa Njai masih pegang atawa soedah boewang agama Islam?" Njai Dasima menjaot: "Akoeh masih pake agama Islam, mengapa angkae tanja?" Ma Boejoeng menjaot: "Djangan goesar Njai, djikaloe Njai masih soeka pake Igama Islam misti ditoentoet roekoen atoerannja, sebab Igama Islam soeroe sembajang, sedekah dan bertobat dari kekafiran; djikaloe Njai ada soeka boeat beladjar, ada satoe prempoean pinter dengan Ilmoeh begitoe, sanggoep adjar kasi peladjaran kepada Njai, dari kerna itoe Njai pikir bae-bae"</i></p>	<p>Hlm. 20  <i>Saija minta Njaie djangan goesar, Memang saija saorang kasar, Roekoen Islam Njaie belon sasar, Agama Islam ada paling besar.</i>            68.  <i>Roekoen Islam kaloe kita toentoet, Misti apallin kapala boentoet, Kita sembajang misti berloetoet, Baroe mendjadi orang jang patoet,</i>            69.  <i>Kaloe kita pegang itoe atoeran, Bertobat kita poenja kakapiran, Kaloe tiada toentoet itoe pladjaran, Kita mati djadi pedjadjaran.</i></p> <p>p. 20            I ask that Njai not be careless, Indeed, I myself am a rough person,            The pillars of Islam you have not yet fulfilled,            Islam is the greatest of religions.            68.            If we follow the pillars of Islam, We must bow our heads completely,            In prayer we must kneel,            Only then do we become proper people.</p>	<p>Ma Boejoeng manipulates Nyai Dasima's mind by inciting her with Islamic doctrine, suggesting that she will suffer if she remains with her master, who is labeled an infidel. The character of Nyai is portrayed as powerless and lacking a solid foundation in religious knowledge, and therefore is depicted as needing to be "corrected" onto a path deemed "right".</p>

<p>p. 7</p> <p>So on that day when Ma Boejoeng went to work, becoming the house guard and overseer at Tuan W.'s house, he carefully watched the household tasks, and also participated in the work inside the house together; day by day, he increasingly gained Nyai's trust. One day, he confronted her and asked: "Does Njai still hold to or has she abandoned the religion of Islam?" Nyai Dasima replied: "I still follow Islam; why do you ask?" Ma Boejoeng said: "Do not be careless, Njai. If you still wish to follow Islam, you must obey its rules, for Islam commands prayer, charity, and repentance from infidelity. If you wish to study, there is a learned woman with knowledge who can teach you; because of this, you should think carefully."</p>	<p>69.</p> <p>If we hold fast to these rules, We repent for our infidelity, If we do not follow this teaching, We will die as a lesson for others.</p>	
<p>Hlm. 12–13</p> <p><i>Ma Boejoeng menjaoet dengan tetawa: "Njai djangan goesar saja brani lawan omongnja Njai; betoel Njai ada piaraannja Toean, tetapi boekannja bini. kawin, dan boekan boedak; moestail Njai soeka tinggal begini sadja? Sekarang Njai boekannja Wolanda, boekannja Tjina, Njai ada berigama Islam, wadjibnja Njai toentoet itoe, soepaja Njai dapat slamat di doenia dan di acherat, djangan sampe Njai djadi kepiran, kesana tiada, kemari tiada."</i></p> <p>p. 12–13</p> <p>Ma Boejoeng said with a laugh: "Njai, do not be careless or dare to oppose what I say; it is true that you have a master, but she is not your wife, not married,</p>	<p>Hlm. 153</p> <p>163.</p> <p><i>Njaie denger saija saorang toewa, Djangan Njaie djadi tetawa, Kaloe Agama islam Njaie bawa, Nama wangi tiada ketjiwa.</i></p> <p>p. 153</p> <p>163.</p> <p>Njai, listen carefully to an elder, Do not let yourself be careless, If you follow the teachings of Islam, Your good name will not be tarnished.</p>	<p>This manipulation further entraps Dasima, cornering her into a narrow space where she seemingly has no option to enter a space of negotiation.</p>

and not a slave. Should you be content to live like this? Now, you are neither Dutch nor Chinese, you follow Islam, and it is your duty to obey it so that you may be safe in this world and the hereafter. Do not let yourself become lost, going nowhere."		
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The differences between G. Francis and O. S. Tjiang cannot be reduced to mere literary style. From a Foucauldian perspective, these differences reflect distinct subject positions within the colonial episteme. G. Francis writes from the center of power within the episteme, enabling him to produce religious truth authoritatively and punitively, whereas O. S. Tjiang writes from an intermediate position, requiring him to negotiate religious truth more moderately. Both operate within the same colonial knowledge regime, but they enact the regime of religious truth with different intensities and discursive strategies.

### *Discourse, Statements, and the Discursive Formation of Religion*

This analysis is grounded in discourse archaeology, focusing on three main aspects: (1) religious statements (about sin, faith, obedience, heresy, and punishment), (2) who is considered authorized to speak about religion, and (3) how these statements function socially. Religion is approached as a discursive formation rather than a theological system.

From the perspective of Michel Foucault's discourse archaeology, religion in *Tjerita Njai Dasima* by G. Francis (1896) and *Sjair Njai Dasima* by O. S. Tjiang (1897) is not understood as a coherent theological system; but as a discursive formation composed of specific statements about sin, faith, obedience, heresy, and punishment. These statements do not serve to convey the truth of faith; rather, they function to regulate subjects, define moral positions, and legitimize the characters' suffering. Accordingly, the analysis is not aimed at "what religious teachings say" but at how these teachings are expressed, by whom, and with what social effects.

In G. Francis's (1896) version, religious statements appear with high intensity and a judgmental tone. Religion is expressed through the voices of the narrator and certain characters who position themselves as holders of moral authority. Statements about sin and punishment are delivered directly and in absolute terms, for example:

*Njai toentoet itoe, soepaja Njai dapat selamat di doenia dan di acherat, djangan sampe Njai djadi kepiran, kesana tiada, kemari tiada* (Francis, 1896 p. 13)

Njai, remember this: so that you may be safe in this world and the hereafter, do not become lost or confused, wandering aimlessly here and there.

This statement does not leave room for interpretation or dialogue; rather, it functions as a discursive act that classifies subjects in binary terms: obedient or sinful. Within this logic, Nyai Dasima is no longer treated as an individual with specific social conditions but as a moral object already pre-positioned as guilty. In this way, her suffering and death gain discursive legitimacy as a “deserved” consequence.

In contrast, in *Sjair Njai Dasima* by O. S. Tjiang (1897), religious statements are still present but carry a softer, more persuasive tone, with different discursive effects. Religion is conveyed through rhythmic and didactic poetry, for example:

“*Kita misti toeroet Agama Moehamad, Itoe Agama jang perloe amat*” (Tjiang, 1897 p. 21).

“We must follow the religion of Muhammad; it is a religion that is truly necessary.”

These statements still carry norms and obligations, but they do not directly judge specific subjects as sinful or heretical. From a discourse archaeology perspective, this difference shows that the same religious discursive formation can produce statements with different social functions. In Tjiang’s version, religion functions more as collective moral guidance than as a tool for individual punishment.

Quotation from <i>Tjerita Njai Dasima</i> (1896)	Quotation from <i>Sjair Njaie Dasima</i> (1897)	Discourse Notes
<p>Hlm. 7 ...<i>jang Nabi Moehamad ada sediaken boeat orang Kafir toedjoe noraka, satoe-satoe noraka pandjangnja dan lebarnja ada 500 tahun; jang paling bangat ada satoe noraka di namaken Djahanam; di sitoe segala orang Kafir ibarat orang Serani ataoe Tjina bakal dibakar.</i></p> <p>p. 7 ...that the Prophet Muhammad has prepared hell for the infidels; each hell has a length and width of 500 years, and the greatest among them is called Jahannam; there, all infidels, such as Christians or Chinese, will be burned.</p>	<p>Hlm. 21 70. <i>Kita misti toeroet Agama Moehamad, Itoe Agama jang perloe amat, Misti pladjarin biar sampe tamat, Makanja diri bole djadi slamat.</i></p> <p>71. <i>Djikaloe sama kapir kita soeka, Nabi sediain toedjoe noraka, Itoe boeatan paling tjilaka, Dapet dosa tamba doerhaka.</i></p> <p>72. <i>Saija seboet noraka satoe-satoenja, Kaloe kapir banjak kadosaannja, Kaloe soeda terang kasalahnanja, Terhoekoem disitoe 500 tahun lamanja.</i></p>	<p>Stigmatization occurs in the form of labeling individuals who are considered deviant because they do not share the same religious beliefs as the dominant group; they are deemed “infidels”, grave sinners expected to suffer misery and hardship.</p>

	<p>p. 21 70. We must follow the religion of Muhammad, a religion that is truly necessary. We must study it thoroughly until the end, so that we ourselves can be safe.</p> <p>71. If we are fond of infidels, the Prophet has prepared hell; this is the most terrible act, bringing additional sin and disobedience.</p> <p>72. Each hell is one in itself, If there are many infidels according to their sins, Once their wrongdoing is made clear, They are punished in hell for 500 years.</p>	
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A comparison of the two texts shows that the intensity of religious punishment is much stronger in G. Francis's version, whereas O. S. Tjiang's version tends to refrain from using brutal or satirical language. Yet both still position religion as a normative discourse that regulates behavior and morality. From a Foucauldian perspective, this confirms that religion functions as a non-neutral discursive formation: it classifies subjects (righteous/sinful), governs who has the authority to speak, and produces social effects in the form of legitimizing Nyai Dasima's suffering. Thus, the difference between the two texts does not lie in the presence or absence of religious discourse, but in how that discourse is enacted and upon whom it is imposed.

### *Sexuality, the Body, and Recognition*

The concepts of *incitement to discourse and confession* are employed to examine how religion in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* operates through the acknowledgment of sin, sexual morality, and the regulation of women's bodies. In G. Francis's version, religious discourse functions as a tool for disciplining the female body: Nyai Dasima's sexuality is made a locus of sin, and her tragedy appears as a moral consequence.

In contrast, in O. S. Tjiang's version, the impulse to judge religiously appears more restrained; the character's suffering is more often framed as fate or social conflict rather than as direct theological punishment. From a Foucauldian

perspective, this difference is understood as a variation in the strategies of power discourse, rather than as a difference in the authors' personal religiosity.

For Michel Foucault, the archaeology of religion in *Tjerita Nyai Dasima* by G. Francis (1896) and *Sjair Nyai Dasima* by O. S. Tjiang (1897) is not understood as a coherent theological system, but as a discursive formation composed of specific statements about sin, faith, obedience, heresy, and punishment. These statements do not function to convey the truth of faith; rather, they serve to regulate subjects, define moral positions, and legitimize the characters' suffering. Accordingly, the analysis is not aimed at "what religious teachings say", but at how these teachings are expressed, by whom, and with what social effects.

In G. Francis's (1896) version, religious statements appear with high intensity and a judgmental tone. Religion is expressed through the voices of the narrator and certain characters who position themselves as holders of moral authority. Statements about sin and punishment are delivered directly and in absolute terms.

Statements as presented by G. Francis do not leave room for interpretation or dialogue; rather, they function as discursive acts that classify subjects in binary terms: obedient or sinful. Within this logic, Nyai Dasima is no longer treated as an individual with specific social conditions but as a moral object already pre-positioned as guilty. In this way, her suffering and death gain discursive legitimacy as a "deserved" consequence.

Moreover, Francis's version shows that the authority to speak about religion is monopolized by certain figures and by the authoritative voice of the narrator. Characters such as the Haji or adult male figures appear as conveyors of religious truth, while Nyai Dasima's own voice almost never emerges as a religious authority. When Dasima is described as "*belon sasar betoel dalem ibadat*" (has not yet properly performed her worship) this statement is not merely descriptive; it functions as a discursive judgment that positions her as inferior and in need of oversight. In this way, religion operates as a tool of social classification that reinforces colonial and patriarchal power relations.

In contrast, in *Sjair Nyai Dasima* by O. S. Tjiang (1897), religious statements are still present but carry a softer, more persuasive tone, with different discursive effects. Religion is conveyed through rhythmic and didactic poetry: "We must follow the religion of Muhammad; it is a religion that is truly necessary" (Tjiang, 1897).

These statements still carry norms and obligations, but they do not directly judge specific subjects as sinful or heretical. From a discourse archaeology perspective, this difference shows that the same religious discursive formation can produce statements with different social functions. In Tjiang's version, religion functions more as collective moral guidance than as a tool for individual punishment.

Quotation from <i>Tjerita Njai Dasima</i> (1896)	Quotation from <i>Sjair Njaie Dasima</i> (1897)	Discourse Notes
<p>Hlm. 7 ...jangan Nabi Moehamad ada sediaken boeat orang Kafir toedjoe noraka, satoe- satoe noraka pandjangnja dan lebarnja ada 500 tahun; jang paling banget ada satoe noraka di namaken Djahanam; di sitoe segala orang Kafir ibarat orang Serani ataoe Tjina bakal dibakar.</p> <p>p. 7 ...that the Prophet Muhammad has prepared hell for the infidels; each hell measures 500 years in length and width, and the greatest of them is called Jahannam; there, all infidels, such as Christians or Chinese, will be burned.</p>	<p>Hlm. 21 70. Kita misti toeroet Agama Moehamad, Itoe Agama jang perloe amat, Misti pladjarin biar sampe tamat, Makanja diri bole djadi slamat. 71. Djikaloe sama kapir kita soeka, Nabi sediain toedjoe noraka, Itoe boeatan paling tjilaka, Dapet dosa tamba doerhaka. 72. Saija seboet noraka satoe-satoenja, Kaloe kapir banjak kadosaannja, Kaloe soeda terang kasalahnanja, Terhoekoem disitoe 500 tahun lamanja.</p> <p>p. 21 70. We must follow the religion of Muhammad, a religion that is truly necessary. We must study it thoroughly until the end, so that we ourselves can be safe. 71. If we are fond of infidels, the Prophet has prepared hell; this is the most terrible act, bringing additional sin and disobedience. 72. Each hell is one in itself, If there are many infidels according to their sins, Once their wrongdoing is made clear, They are punished in hell for 500 years.</p>	<p>Stigmatization occurs when someone deviates from the dominant group's religious beliefs, labeling them as an infidel—an individual presumed to face suffering and misfortune.</p>

<p>Hlm. 27  <i>"Harta bininja ada kewajibannja jang laki misti simpen, begitoe ada adat orang Islam; lagi itoe pakean Njai-Njai dan kebaja, orang Islam haram pake, sebab itoe pakean prempoean Kafir; pake pakean misti toeroet biasanja orang kampoeng. " Maka Njai Dasima toeroetin. Dia poenja barang Mas Intan semoeanja serta oewang dia serahkan kepada lakinja, dan dia dikasi pake badjoe tjita boeuga Siam, serta kaen itam bekas pakean Njonja Hajati.</i></p> <p>p. 27          "The woman's property must be kept by her husband, as is customary among Muslims; furthermore, the clothes of the Nyai and kebaya are forbidden for Muslims to wear, because they belong to infidel women; clothing must follow the usual local customs." Thus, Nyai Dasima complied. She handed over all of Mas Intan's belongings and her money to her husband, and she was given a Chinese silk blouse and black cloth previously worn by Njonja Hajati.</p>	<p>Hlm. 53          383.  <i>Misti pake begimana biasanja, Djangan pake sembarang-barangnja, Itoe kebaja keliwat haramnja, Orang kapir itoe dia pakeannja.</i></p> <p>p. 53          383.          One must wear it in the usual way, Do not wear it just any way, This kebaya is extremely forbidden, As it belongs to infidels.</p>	<p>The kebaya, associated with the clothing worn by the Nyai, is considered forbidden. Meanwhile, other clothing is seen as more acceptable because it meets the criteria and expectations of the dominant society. This demonstrates that dominant discourse, which results in stigmatization, can also be directed at individuals through the clothing they wear.</p>
<p>Hlm. 3  <i>Itoe Toean piara itoe Njaie dari prawan, serta roepanja bagoes, poeti koening, ramboetnja pandjang, serta hatinja trang boeat bladjar segala roepa pekerdjahan prempoean.</i></p> <p>p. 3          Her master had cared for this Nyai since her youth; she had a beautiful face, golden skin, long hair, and a pure heart, prepared to learn all kinds of women's skills.</p>	<p>Hlm. 8          6.  <i>Toean W. piara satoe prampoean, Dia piara dari prawan, Roepanja bagoes tiada jang lawan, Seperti bidadari di atas awan.</i></p> <p>p. 8          Master W. cared for a young woman, Nurturing her from her youth, Her face was unmatched in beauty, Like a heavenly maiden among the clouds.</p>	<p>Nyai is objectified as a beautiful woman through a colonial lens. Her body is treated as a social body, one that can be evaluated by others and measured against dominant expectations.</p>

A comparison of the two texts shows that the intensity of religious punishment is much stronger in G. Francis's version, whereas O. S. Tjiang's version tends to refrain from using brutal or satirical language. Yet both still position religion as a normative discourse that regulates behavior and morality. From a Foucauldian perspective, this confirms that religion functions as a non-neutral discursive formation: it classifies subjects (righteous/sinful), governs who has the authority to speak, and produces social effects, such as legitimizing Nyai Dasima's suffering. Thus, the difference between the two texts does not lie in the presence or absence of religious discourse, but in how that discourse is enacted and upon whom it is imposed.

## Conclusion

Religion in *Cerita Nyai Dasima* does not function as a neutral theological system, but as a technology of power that shapes subjects, regulates bodies, and legitimizes suffering. G. Francis's (1896) version represents religion as a harsh, punitive regime of truth, in which Nyai Dasima's sexuality is made a locus of sin and her tragedy is understood as a "natural" moral consequence. In contrast, O. S. Tjiang's (1897) poetic version demonstrates a subtler, more persuasive discursive strategy, while still operating within the same colonial episteme. Thus, the difference between the two texts does not lie solely in literary style or the authors' personal religiosity, but in the author's position within the colonial power network and the discursive strategies they employ to produce religious truths. The main contribution of Foucault's approach in this discussion is its ability to reveal how religion operates productively – not merely prohibiting, but creating norms, feelings of guilt, obligations of confession, and bodily discipline, positioning Nyai Dasima as an effect of discourse rather than the cause of her tragedy.

Furthermore, these findings have a strong correlation with contemporary society, where religion often functions as a normative discourse that regulates bodies, morality, and identity, particularly in relation to women. Practices of moral judgment, surveillance of sexuality, and labeling as "sinful", "heretical", or "immoral" still frequently appear in public spaces, media, and social discourse. By reading Nyai Dasima through a Foucauldian lens, this study shows that these mechanisms are not a new phenomenon, but a continuation of the logic of colonial discourse that has yet to be fully broken. Therefore, this research contributes not only to the study of colonial literature but also offers a critical reflection for contemporary society: the problem of religion does not lie in faith itself, but in how truth is produced, who is authorized to speak, and whose bodies are sacrificed by that discourse.

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