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## **Masalah Dansa: Opinions on Social Dancing in Indonesian Print Media, 1948-1954**

Andriawan, Tatag Nasrul

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**Masalah Dansa: Opinions on Social Dancing  
in Indonesian Print Media (1948–1954)**

**MA THESIS**



**Tatag Nasrul Andriawan**

**Supervisor: Prof.dr. D.E.F. Henley**

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the opinions in Indonesian print media between 1948 and 1954 regarding *dansa*, an Indonesian term used to refer to Western-style social dancing. This study aims to uncover the complexities of the debate between the *pro-* and *anti-dansa* groups in the early 1950s using historical methods with sources that mainly consisted of magazines and newspapers. While the proponents of *dansa* were largely silent in the debate, in this research, I find a range of different opinions on *dansa* from its critics, from outright condemnation to cautious acceptance. The proponents started to voice their opinions after the discourse on *dansa* was transformed into organized actions whose outcomes were seen negatively by many. The various views on *dansa* in Indonesian print media reveal that the discourse on national culture, morality, religions, and anti-Western rhetorics are interconnected in the nation-building period of Indonesia in the early 1950s.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In January 2023, a 15-second video showing a couple of junior high students performing a dance sport (*olabraga dansa*) in Ciawi 1 Junior High School, Bogor, went viral on social media. Both students in the viral video are dance athletes who won three gold medals in the 2022 West Java Provincial Games. Interestingly, many commented critically on the viral video, saying that foreign culture has influenced the young generation too much to the detriment of the nation's morals.<sup>1</sup> In response to these comments, the school officials had to explain to the public that the dance, as demonstrated in the viral video, is a competitive sport, not a form of demoralization. When asked about this issue, the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, says he was proud of their achievements and encourages Indonesians to celebrate their successes instead of getting carried away by such far-fetched opinions.<sup>2</sup>

*Dansa* is a term in the Indonesian language that describes social dances of Western origins.<sup>3</sup> This term has been used since the early independence period to emphasize their foreignness as opposed to *tari* (traditional dance). The case of the mentioned viral video demonstrated that *dansa* is still associated with foreignness in today's Indonesian society, along with the perceived harmful quality of its foreign origin. In the 1950s, however, urban Indonesians not only associated *dansa* with foreignness but also with modernity, on par with the notion of progress and newness.<sup>4</sup> This association, however, was only partway to understanding *dansa* in the 1950s. The 1950s was a period when almost all possible ideologies were put on the table,<sup>5</sup> meaning cultural debates were prominent in this period. Likewise, there were both the *pro* and *anti-dansa*. Throughout the decade, however, the *anti-dansa* groups were particularly vocal in expressing their concern toward it. Both the proponents and the *dansa* itself received much backlash and hostility from the critics, which were sometimes expressed not only in the media discourse but also in real-life movements. Two prominent examples of these movements include the establishment of the Committee for the Eradication of

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<sup>1</sup> CNN Indonesia, "Siswa SMPN 1 Ciawi Berdansa Tuai Kritik Ternyata Atlet Peraih Emas." *CNN Indonesia*, 17 January 2023. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20230117172049-20-901595/siswa-smpn-1-ciawi-berdansa-tuai-kritik-ternyata-atlet-peraih-emas>.

<sup>2</sup> CNN Indonesia, "Menteri Nadiem soal Dansa Siswa SMPN 1 Ciawi: Bangga Sekali," *CNN Indonesia*, 18 January 2023. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20230118101156-20-901861/menteri-nadiem-soal-dansa-siswa-smpn-1-ciawi-bangga-sekali>.

<sup>3</sup> The official dictionary of Indonesian language, the KBBI, describes *dansa* as "Western dance performed by male-female couples holding hands or hugging to the accompaniment of music." *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Daring*, 6th edition, s.v. "dansa," accessed 2 January 2024, <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/dansa>.

<sup>4</sup> Els Bogaerts, "Whither Indonesian culture?" Rethinking 'culture' in Indonesia in a Time of Decolonization." In *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian, 1950-1965*, edited by Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 248.

<sup>5</sup> Taufik Abdullah, *Indonesia, towards Democracy* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 218.

*Dansa* Influence (*Panitia Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa*) in Surabaya in July 1952,<sup>6</sup> as well as the forceful disbandment of a dance night event in Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta in December 1952 by a group of *anti-dansa* students.<sup>7</sup>

The polemics concerning *pro*- and *anti-dansa* started to fade out in the mid-1950s. However, it was not long until the rising popularity of rock-and-roll music and dance in 1956 refueled the debate before 31 mass-based organizations held a public protest in Bandung following the inclusion of rock ‘n’ roll dance in a national film party event.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Bandung police started banning rock ‘n’ roll dances in public spaces in mid-February 1957,<sup>9</sup> a step which Sudiro, the mayor of Jakarta, followed in March 1957.<sup>10</sup> In the following years, in the Guided Democracy era, situations became difficult for the proponents of *dansa* when the Indonesian government started to get involved in the discourse on *dansa*. Sukarno’s many speeches denouncing rock ‘n’ roll, jitterbug, and other kinds of Western dances were manifested in policies that banned Western dances. Initially, it was as an advisory from the Ministry of Education, Teaching, and Culture (*Departemen Pendidikan Pengajaran dan Kebudayaan*) that rock ‘n’ roll, cha-cha-cha, samba, and other “crazy-looking” dances are unacceptable if performed by Indonesian youngsters, whether at home or in public space.<sup>11</sup> It was followed by an instruction in 1960 from the ministry to Indonesian National Radio (RRI) to restrict Western music and a Presidential Decree in 1963 that forbids rock ‘n’ roll in public space.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, even before the Indonesian government’s involvement in the issue, the urban Indonesian “resentment” toward *dansa* was such a widespread phenomenon in Indonesian cities that it repeatedly made the news. Various opinions in print media, magazines, newspapers, and books discussed *dansa* as a problem within Indonesian society. One might even question what the underlying reasons and motivations would allow such resentment to spread. Indonesians had just proclaimed their independence in August 1945, followed by another four years of war against the returning Dutch forces. Given the circumstances, it is easy to locate the cause for these phenomena in the nationalist spirit of newly independent Indonesians who desired to eradicate any trace of Western influences in their culture.

However, picking and choosing only a single cause for such a complex phenomenon would be an oversimplification. It is crucial to realize that other factors were at play, such as the religious and patriarchal concerns for public morality, which are part of significant aspects of Indonesian society, or the fact that other characteristically Western art dances, like ballet, were adopted without much problem. To better understand this resentment toward *dansa*, it is necessary to contextualize *dansa*

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<sup>6</sup> “Perdebatan Mengenai Pemberantasan Pengaruh Dansa,” *Suara Masjarakat*, 23 July 1952.

<sup>7</sup> “Malam tak gembira di Ngasem,” *Madjalab Gama* Th. II, no. 2, January 1953.

<sup>8</sup> “Bandungse demonstranten eisen uitwijzing organisator,” *Java-bode*, 19 February 1957.

<sup>9</sup> “Rock ‘n roll verboden,” *A.I.D. De Preangerbode*, 16 February 1957.

<sup>10</sup> “Pengumuman no. 3,” *Java-Bode*, 9 March 1957.

<sup>11</sup> Departemen Pendidikan Pengajaran dan Kebudayaan, “Tentang dansa/musik Barat,” *Pewarta P.P.K.* no. 10, 60.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Baulch, “Pop Melayu vs. Pop Indonesia: New Interpretations of a Genre into the 2000s,” In *Sonic Modernities in the Malay world: A History of Popular Music, Social Distinction and Novel Lifestyles (1930s-2000s)*, edited by Bart A. Barendregt and Philip Yampolsky (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 192.

within the broader context of the cultural aspect of Indonesia in the 1950s period and see how discourses on national culture, popular culture, and modernity in print media interrelate with nationalism and nation-building in 1950s Indonesia. Therefore, considering that an investigation into discussions about *dansa* in Indonesian print media in the 1950s could illustrate the complexities of the broader Indonesian cultural debate on national culture, popular culture, modernity, and morality, it becomes necessary to undertake research on this topic.

## Research Question

This research will raise the question: What were the different opinions regarding *dansa* in Indonesian print media in the early 1950s? How have those opinions developed over time? Who were the authors? And why were they written? To answer these questions, I use historical methods to examine various opinions regarding *dansa* in Indonesian print media. This research, however, focuses only on the period between 1948 and 1954. As the starting point, 1948 is the date of the earliest source that gives an opinion regarding *dansa* since Indonesian independence in 1945. The endpoint of this research is selected because the debate and discussions concerning *dansa* in the print media were fading out in 1954.

## Previous Related Studies

Various studies and research projects have been undertaken on the history of Indonesia in the 1950s. In the political and economic scope, Indonesia in the 1950s was the main research subject of Herbert Feith,<sup>13</sup> Farabi Fakhri,<sup>14</sup> Thee Kian Wie,<sup>15</sup> Thomas Lindblad,<sup>16</sup> and Taufik Abdullah.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, cultural aspects of Indonesian society during the period have also been extensively studied. Some examples of notable studies within this field are the various articles in the volume edited by Jennifer Lindsay and Maya Liem,<sup>18</sup> a chapter by Adrian Vickers<sup>19</sup> and a book by Tod Jones.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Henk Schulte Nordholt also wrote a literature survey on this subject.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Farabi Fakhri, *Authoritarian Modernization in Indonesia's Early Independence Period: The Foundation of the New Order State (1950-1965)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) and Farabi Fakhri, *Membayangkan Ibukota Jakarta Di Bawah Soekarno* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Thee Kian Wie, "Indonesianization: Economic aspects of decolonization in Indonesia in the 1950s." In *Indonesian Economic Decolonization in Regional and International Perspective*, edited by J. Thomas Lindblad and Peter Post, 17–38. KITLV Press, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> J. Thomas Lindblad, *Bridges to New Business: The Economic Decolonization of Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Abdullah, *Indonesia, towards Democracy*.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem, *Heirs to World Culture Being Indonesian, 1950-1965* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Adrian Vickers, "Living in the atomic age," In *A Modern History of Indonesia*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Tod Jones, *Culture, Power, and Authoritarianism in the Indonesian State: Cultural Policy across the Twentieth Century to the Reform Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Indonesia in the 1950s: Nation, modernity, and the post-colonial state," *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 167, no. 4 (2011).

In Indonesian state historiography since the New Order period (1966–1998), the 1950s have usually been characterized as an era of political instability, regional rebellious upheavals, and a generally weak economy.<sup>22</sup> The New Order represented the period as the “bad times” in which tensions of the left versus the right in the political realm grew until the chaos finally broke out in 1965–66. However, as explored by the mentioned studies, this period had other more fascinating dimensions, particularly concerning nationalism, culture, and nation-building. In those studies, the 1950s is also characterized as the Indonesian state’s nation-building period. This period is seen as a cultural project in which Indonesia as a nation, culture, and identity were “invented.”

An essential aspect of the cultural project of the Indonesian state in the 1950s is the print media. As Benedict Anderson explored, print media is integral in creating national consciousness through a uniting imagined identity instigated by the print language.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the relationship between nationalism and the print media is fundamental. Likewise, Adrian Vickers also remarked that Indonesian print media in the 1950s was a product of the new nationalist class to “teach” Indonesians how to be proper modern citizens.<sup>24</sup> As such, the press in the 1950s was a space where debates regarding Indonesian culture took place. It can be observed in the widely available magazines and journals from the period, which contain polemics on many topics related to the culture of Indonesia.

However, despite the availability of sources, the Indonesian print media of the 1950s is still relatively understudied, at least compared to the New Order period. Some of these few instances are a monograph by Oey Hong Lee,<sup>25</sup> a study of the mass media by Judith B. Agassi,<sup>26</sup> and most recently, a chapter by Yerry Wirawan,<sup>27</sup> as well as a journal article by Agus Suwignyo and Rhoma Yuliantri.<sup>28</sup> Several prominent studies on popular culture in the 1950s in Indonesia include research by Bart Barendregt, Peter Keppy, Henk Schulte Nordholt,<sup>29</sup> and Craig A. Lockard.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, I have written an undergraduate thesis about *dansa*. My previous research focuses on the practice of *dansa* in Jakarta in the 1950s and attempts to categorize them based on their functions, which are commercial

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<sup>22</sup> Schulte Nordholt, “Indonesia in the 1950s,” 386.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 44–45.

<sup>24</sup> Vickers, “Living in the atomic age,” 132.

<sup>25</sup> Oey Hong Lee, *Indonesian Government and Press during Guided Democracy* (Zug: Inter Documentation Company, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Judith B. Agassi, *Mass Media in Indonesia* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1969).

<sup>27</sup> Yerry Wirawan, “The Socio-Cultural Connections: The Chinese Indonesian Popular Magazines on Taiwan and China in 1945–1955,” In *When East Asia meets Southeast Asia: Presence and Connectedness in Transformation Revisited*, edited by Yumi Kitamura, Alan Hao Yang, and Ju-Lan Thung (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Agus Suwignyo and Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri. “Praktik Sosio-Kultural sebagai Bentuk Kewargaan Masyarakat Tahun 1950an: Melihat Kembali Historiografi Kebangsaan dalam Bingkai Non-Negara,” *Patrawidya* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1–18

<sup>29</sup> Bart Barendregt, Peter Keppy, and Henk Schulte Nordholt, *Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Craig A. Lockard, *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).



entertainment, means of socialization, and competition.<sup>31</sup> Apart from those mentioned studies, almost no historical research specifically studied *dansa* and its discourse in Indonesia.

## Sources

This historical research uses primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of this research are contemporary print media from the early 1950s, consisting of magazines, newspapers, and books. As this research is concerned more with opinions regarding *dansa*, the magazines used in this research are generally lifestyle, cultural, and political magazines because such magazines often report and provide commentaries on the debate of the *pro* and *anti-dansa*. In this regard, opinion columns are the primary section where commentaries and opinions concerning culture can be found. Another part of the magazine worth checking is the feature article, which often contains comments about contemporary cultural situations. Magazine and newspaper titles to be used in this research include *Mimbar Indonesia*, *Sunday Courier*, *Garuda*, *Suara Masyarakat*, *Aneka*, *Star Weekly*, *Gama*, *Wanita*, *Maandblad Istri*, and *Kompas* (unrelated to *Kompas* newspaper). Secondary sources are used in this research to provide supplemental information on the context regarding the primary sources, such as the author's background, details about the publications, and the meaning of certain terms and phrases.

## Chapter Organization

This research is divided into an introduction, three main chapters, and a conclusion. The second, third, and fourth chapters are structured chronologically to reflect how the opinions and debate concerning *dansa* developed over time. The second and third chapters discuss the debate and polemics concerning the *pro* and *anti-dansa* in Indonesian print media from 1948 to 1954.

The second chapter focuses on opinions in two popular *peranakan* Chinese magazines, *Star Weekly* and *Sunday Courier*. Meanwhile, the third chapter focuses on opinions from four magazines published by native Indonesians: *Mimbar Indonesia*, *Wanita*, *Garuda*, and *Kompas*. Although it seems arbitrary to separate the first and second chapters based solely on the magazine's demographics, it is important to compare how demographic differences in readership and authorship affect the opinions regarding *dansa*.

Lastly, the fourth chapter explores the views and commentaries in response to two significant events related to *anti-dansa* movements in Surabaya and Yogyakarta in 1952. In these responses, the discourse of *anti-dansa* was transformed from polemics and debates in the print media into an organized movement and from critiques that concern individual and public morality into hatred that consisted of nationalism-imbued rhetorics.

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<sup>31</sup> Tatag Andriawan, "Dansa dalam Masyarakat Jakarta, 1950-an," Undergraduate Thesis, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2021).

## Chapter 2

# The Polemics of *Dansa* in *Peranakan* Chinese Magazines (1948–1951)

Since the late 1940s, in the last years of the Indonesian Revolutionary Period (*Periode Revolusi*), residents of large Indonesian cities, such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya, have shown interest in learning and participating in Western-style social dancing or *dansa*. In magazine and newspaper advertisements, many dancing schools, taught mostly by foreign instructors, offered private and group dancing lessons with various time slots available.<sup>32</sup> Whilst various dance tutorial handbooks were being published, leading dance associations organized ballroom dancing competitions with lavish prizes. Around the same time, many bars, dance halls, and nightclubs, owned predominantly by *peranakan* Chinese, also opened after previously closed down due to the war.<sup>33</sup> In dance halls such as Happy World and Joe & Joe's Yen Pin in Jakarta, entry tickets for a dance night were around f 1, and to dance with a "taxi-dancer",<sup>34</sup> f 15 was required.<sup>35</sup> In his autobiographical account of daily life in Jakarta in the 1950s, Firman Lubis mentioned that *dansa* was often held in social gatherings, most prominently among upper-class youths in central Jakarta.<sup>36</sup> He recalls that in the early 1950s, they often held dance parties to celebrate birthdays, graduations, and other occasions.

In *Maandblad Istri*, a popular *peranakan* Chinese women's monthly magazine published by Tjoa Hin Hoei from 1935 to the early 1950s,<sup>37</sup> it can be observed how young Indonesians were eager to learn *dansa* in the early 1950s. In their November 1950 edition, the magazine addresses one of the readers' requests to include a dancing tutorial section. The magazine rejected the request by saying it was unnecessary to include such a section because of the abundance of dance tutorial handbooks.

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<sup>32</sup> Parts of this topic has already been touched upon in my undergraduate thesis. However, my previous study focuses only on the practice of social dancing in Jakarta. Andriawan, "Dansa dalam Masyarakat Jakarta, 1950-an."

<sup>33</sup> Bah Kubil, "Djakarta diwaktoe malem...", *Sunday Courier* Th. I, no. 9, 11 December 1949, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Taxi-dancer is a term to describe paid dance partner, usually young women, in ballroom dancing. Taxi-dancers are expected to dance with any client, usually men, and to remain with them on the dance floor for as long as the client is willing to pay the charges. Hence the name, "taxi-dancer." In the 1920s and the 1930s, taxi-dancing was at the peak of its popularity in the United States. This practice became popular in other parts of the world, including Southeast Asia, in the 1930s to early 1950s before its decline in the mid-1950s. Read Paul Goalby Cressey, *The Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932).

<sup>35</sup> One guilder in Indonesia in 1949 (also the price for 2 kg of white rice in the same year) has the purchasing value of around 4.75 euros in the Netherlands in 2021. "Prijs en Handel," *Nieuwe Courant*, 13 July 1949; "Value of Guilder versus Euro," *International Institute of Social History*, 14 June 2021.

<https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php>.

<sup>36</sup> Firman Lubis was a professor at the Faculty of Medicine University of Indonesia. He authored three autobiographical books detailing daily life in Jakarta in the 1950s, the 1960s, and the 1970s, while contextualizing his accounts with Indonesian socio-cultural development at the time, from his teenage years up to his thirties. Firman Lubis, *Jakarta 1950-an: Kenangan Semasa Remaja* (Jakarta: Masup Jakarta, 2008), 276–277.

<sup>37</sup> The magazine was not only popular among *peranakan* Chinese women, but it was also read by native Indonesian women as well. Faye Yik-wei Chan, "Mrs Tjoa Hin Hoeij (1907–1990): Profile of an Enterprising Peranakan Chinese Woman Writer in Late Colonial Indonesia," *Archipel* 42, no. 1 (1991): 24–25.

<https://doi.org/10.3406/arch.1991.2742>.

However, it is interesting to see the argument used for the request. The requester, a lady by the name of E. Kostarman, argues that the inclusion of dance lessons in the magazine is vital considering not everyone could afford to attend dancing lessons, and especially because people who cannot dance are ashamed as they are perceived as *terbelakang* (backwards) by their peers.<sup>38</sup>

However, despite their rejection of the request, *Maandblad Istri* did not really disagree with the opinion that *dansa* is important, saying that it is a social skill a modern person should have to socialize with their peers. The magazine also remarks that social dancing between friends, colleagues, and family is good if done modestly following Indonesian norms.<sup>39</sup> However, in the same article, the magazine also asserts that *dansa* is not a compulsory necessity as it should be practiced only as a means of socializing. Furthermore, *Maandblad Istri* even expresses their concern for the adverse moral-eroding effects of social dancing without control and restrictions.

This growing interest among Indonesians, especially the younger generation, in social dancing has cultivated a debate concerning its negative influence on public morality. It fuels the polemics between the so-called *pro-* and *anti-dansa* in various Indonesian magazines in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. In its early period, these polemics occurred in *peranakan* Chinese weeklies such as *Star Weekly* and *Sunday Courier*. Since colonial times, Chinese Indonesians, both *peranakan* and *totok*, were the demographic in which *dansa* was most popular, besides the Europeans. When the majority of Europeans and *totok* Chinese left Indonesia following the independence and the subsequent war, *peranakan* Chinese became the majority proponents of *dansa*. And as such, *peranakan* Chinese publications were the first to cover opinions concerning *dansa*.

## Star Weekly

It is hard to pinpoint when exactly the polemics of the *pro-* and *anti-dansa* started. As early as 1948, the polemics had already appeared in the print media, most notably in two popular *peranakan* Chinese magazines, *Star Weekly* and *Sunday Courier*. In their women's section article, issue no. 116, *Star Weekly* addresses the question of whether Chinese Indonesian women could smoke cigarettes. The editor explores the two contrasting perspectives on smoking among women, identifying who was in favor and against it alongside their arguments. While doing so, the article mentions that it was similar to the debate about *dansa*, suggesting that the discussion concerning *dansa* had already been started before:

*Those are the voices of the youth, which indeed have lots of followers among our people. Naturally, just like the issue of dansa (ballroom dancing), our perspective is divided into several groups with reasons to be pro or contra dancing or smoking cigarettes. I myself consider that smoking, dancing, swimming, or everything that comes with this new age is acceptable, so long as its enthusiast knows the boundaries.*<sup>40</sup>

Initially launched as the monthly *Star Magazine* from 1939 to 1941 by the daily newspaper *Keng Po*, the first issue of *Star Weekly* was published in January 1946 by Khoe Woen Sioe, the editor-

<sup>38</sup> Editor, "Soal Ruangan dansa," *Maandblad Istri* no. 10, November 1950, 6. Original text in Appendix 1.1.

<sup>39</sup> Editor.

<sup>40</sup> "Roewangan Wanita: Apakah Wanita Tionghoa Diperbolehkan Meroko?" *Star Weekly* no. 116, 21 March 1948, 5. Original text in Appendix 1.2.

in-chief of *Keng Po*.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, *Sunday Courier* was a *peranakan* Chinese weekly magazine published by Siau-w Giok Tjhan from 1949 until the mid-1950s before reemerging as *Mingguan Sadar*.<sup>42</sup> The magazine is often considered to be the competitor of *Star Weekly*. Both magazines covered a similarly wide range of topics, from lifestyle and short stories to politics and culture. The most significant difference between the two is their opposing views concerning the status of Chinese Indonesians' citizenship and identity in the 1950s. *Star Weekly* was associated with the assimilationist group that urged Chinese Indonesians to "assimilate" into Indonesian culture and to detach socially and culturally from Chinese traditions.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, *Sunday Courier* publisher and editor Siau-w Giok Tjhan was a proponent of pluralism and multiculturalism, or integrationist, who rejected assimilationist ideas.<sup>44</sup>

These two contrasting views perhaps influence the perspectives of *Star Weekly* and *Sunday Courier* on *dansa*. Because of its assimilationist ideas, it can be assumed that *Star Weekly* was more open to changes in Chinese Indonesian identity and would accept or even in favor of *dansa*. For instance, in the previously mentioned article on smoking cigarettes among Chinese Indonesian women, *Star Weekly* posits that it is acceptable for women to smoke, dance, or do other recreational activities as long as it is within decent limits.<sup>45</sup> *Star Weekly's* reader also stated a similar argument. Tjia Sian Tjay argues that *dansa* is a modern skill that could be beneficial in certain situations, for instance, when working in a foreign country, meeting a foreign person, or being the wife of a diplomat who needs to join a dance party from time to time.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Tjia asserts that the benefit of *dansa* could only be achieved if the person can recognize the boundaries of morality and realize that *bisa dansa* (able to dance) is different from *gila dansa* (crazy about dance):

*I consider the issue not to be that we should or should not dance but that we must control ourselves so that we do not cross the limits of decency. "How many times do we dance per month, in which place, at which time, and with whom are we dancing?" all that must be kept in our minds. Openly learning to dance is so much better than "stealing times." But there's always a "but," **bisa** dansa is significantly different from **gila** dansa.*<sup>47</sup>

Another article in *Star Weekly*, written by the magazine's editor, argues that cultural changes are inevitable. Because of that, the article asserts that *dansa*, as part of the cultural change in Indonesian society, should not be viewed through the lens of decency and morality. Negative consequences that arise from *dansa* must be attributed to the person, not the activity itself; as the

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<sup>41</sup> Reni Nuryanti, "Star Weekly: Di Satu Putaran Jalan Hidup P.K. Ojong," In *Seabad Pers Kebangsaan, 1907–2007*, edited by Taufik Rahzen and Muhidin M. Dahlan (Jakarta: IBoekoe, 2007), 721–722.

<sup>42</sup> Iswara N. Raditya, "Mingguan Sadar: Media Hiburan Melek Politik," In *Seabad Pers Kebangsaan*, 748–749.

<sup>43</sup> *Star Weekly's* chief editor from 1951–1962, Auwjong Peng Koen (also known as P.K. Ojong) was a notable proponent of assimilationist ideology. He signed *Piagam Asimilasi* (Assimilationist Charter) in 1960 along with other prominent *peranakan* Chinese figures such as Ong Hok Ham, Kwik Hway Gwan, and others. See Yerry Wirawan, "The Socio-Cultural Connections," 310.

<sup>44</sup> Zhou Nan Jing, "Nasib Siau-w Giok Tjhan-isme dalam Sejarah," In *Sumbangsih Siau-w Giok Tjhan dan Baperki dalam Sejarah Indonesia*, edited by Siau-w Tjong Djin and Oey Hay Djoen (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2000), 75–76.

<sup>45</sup> "Roewangan Wanita: Apakah Wanita Tionghoa Diperbolehkan Meroko?" *Star Weekly* no. 116, 21 March 1948, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Tjia Sian Tjay, "Soeara Pembatja: Kemodernan," *Star Weekly* no. 122, 2 May 1948, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Tjia Sian Tjay. Original text in Appendix 1.3.

article states: “*dansa* is nothing more than just a recreational activity coming from the West, where it is acceptable within certain moral boundaries.”<sup>48</sup> The article concludes that because of the reality of the late 1940s, at which the Western cultural influence in Asia was unstoppable and *dansa* was thought to become the norm in the future, what can be done is keep it within limitations based on Western morality from which *dansa* originated, such an example of social dancing that was unacceptable, even in the Western world, was the practice of taxi-dancing which, to a certain extent, was seen as a form of prostitution:

*Perhaps in 20 or 30 years from now, dansa will become a norm even within our group. [...] What we should do is to maintain that dansa does not cross the moral boundaries, a standard which, even from the Western perspective, is considered immoral. We must forbid the recruitment of taxi girls as it might lead to prostitution, as well as the exploitation of women in cafes and bars.*<sup>49</sup>

While there is an interesting pattern that locates the basis for each argument in the ideology of the media itself, it is worth noting that the polemics of *dansa* in the *Star Weekly* are more nuanced as different contributors in the magazine also wrote about *dansa* from various perspectives. One such example is the article written by Dr. Sie Boen Liep in issue number 125 of *Star Weekly*.<sup>50</sup> Sie Boen Liep argues that the issue of *dansa* is also a problem even in other more developed Asian cities such as Singapore and Shanghai. Sie Boen Liep states that even in those cities where Indonesians thought dancing was the norm, those who were against dancing existed, even when they were silent. Sie Boen Liep continues his argument by expressing his concern that the idea of seeing *dansa* as an inevitable part of cultural change is an act of ignorance and moral negligence:

*And if we examine more carefully, isn't the basis for those who believe in the power of epochal trends or the power of democracy who say that everyone who likes dancing should dance and those who do not want it don't need to do it, come from a spiritual apathy (geestelijke onverschilligheid), negligence, absence in principles and education, a lack of living principles?*<sup>51</sup>

Further, Sie Boen Liep also touches upon the question often used as the fundamental argument for both the *pro-* and *anti-dansa*: is *dansa* an art? In answering this difficult question, Sie Boen Liep promptly describes that social dancing should be differentiated in its classical and modern forms. Utilizing many arguments from contemporary European thinkers who were against social dancing, he underlines that even in such an open-minded society as Europe, *dansa* in its modern form is regarded as dangerous for the young generation.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, Sie Boen Liep argues that dancing drags the younger generation into a state of lust and degeneration; therefore, *dansa* and its proponents must be considered a hindrance to the progress and development of the Chinese Indonesian community:

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<sup>48</sup> Editor, “Pemandangan Dalem Negri: Dansa,” *Star Weekly* no. 123, 9 May 1948, 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> Editor. Original text in Appendix 1.4.

<sup>50</sup> Sie Boen Liep was a doctor specialist in internal medicine as well as the founder and organizer of the Djakarta Amateur Orchestra in 1948 until his death in 1952. Sioe Yao Kan, “The Djakarta Amateur Orchestra,” *Tan Kan Han: Chinees Indische Peranakan Families*, last modified April 2019, accessed 27 April 2024, [https://www.kanhantan.nl/uk05djakarta\\_amateur-orchestra.html](https://www.kanhantan.nl/uk05djakarta_amateur-orchestra.html).

<sup>51</sup> Sie Boen Liep, “Ballroom Dancing,” *Star Weekly* no. 125, 23 May 1948, 10. Original text in Appendix 1.5.

<sup>52</sup> Sie Boen Liep, 11.

*On the contrary, ballroom dancing and its music encourage our youth to a lowly, unaesthetic, and wussy situation, which could awaken the dark urges behind hypocrisy and devious camouflage. Is it not enough to say that the fans of dansa are demoralizers and the brakes to the progress of Chinese society? A “brake” because the fans of dansa represent a superficial and frivolous group who stifled all advancement of our society.*<sup>53</sup>

In the very same issue, another short article critical of *dansa* was written by Oei Liong Thay.<sup>54</sup> In a relatively satirical tone, he described dance halls as *amors schiettenten* (love shooting tents) for the promiscuous people.<sup>55</sup> Oei Liong Thay goes on to list 14 of his personal impressions of *dansa* based on his nine visits to dance halls. The list is basically his anecdotal explanations—in a rather explicit and humorous language—on why he thinks dance halls are places for degenerate people to make love. Some of the words he writes in his list are that the only artistic aspect of *dansa* is the art of not getting aroused while dancing and that some actions which were considered degenerate outside the dancing hall were normalized inside it:

[3] *The only art in dansa is the art of maintaining your body to not “get hot” whenever you get close to the redness of lips, whose colors are as red as flames. Who says that flames are not hot? You don’t need to talk about the heart’s flame... it could be even hotter!*

[12] *Touching other people’s wives in the street is insolent (kurang ajar), but hugging other people’s wives in the dancing hall is not enough (kurang lagi)*

[13] *In kampungs they are called prostitutes (sundal), but in the dancing hall they are called dancing girls*

[14] *In restaurants they asked for a chicken breast (dada mentok), but in the dancing hall, they asked for a busty breast (dada montok).*<sup>56</sup>

While written in a very different tone—the first being a thoughtful, critical analysis of morality and artistic aspects of *dansa*, whereas the second being an explicit and humorous personal impression of *dansa*—infuriation and resentment toward *dansa* could almost be felt in Sie Boen Liep’s and Oei Liong Thay’s articles. These two articles illustrate the complexity of the issue of *dansa* in *Star Weekly*. Despite the general neutrality from the editors and some contributors concerning the problem, other contributors were eager to express their disagreement and proceed to write their critical examination of *dansa* and its supposed detrimental influences on public morality.

## Sunday Courier

As in *Star Weekly*, arguments and discussions about *dansa* in *Sunday Courier* were also complex and multisided. In a feature article in their second issue of 1949, the magazine’s editor discusses a new trend in Singapore nightlife called *joget tandak* and compares this Malay dance with Western social dance. As both are participatory dances to be practiced in social settings, *Sunday Courier* finds many

<sup>53</sup> Sie Boen Liep. Original text in Appendix 1.6.

<sup>54</sup> Oei Liong Thay was a journalist from Semarang who contributed to *Sin Po* and other *peranakan* Chinese newspapers. He was also the vice-chairman of the Semarang branch of PNI from 1948 to 1953. Leo Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese: Biographical Sketches (4th Edition)* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2015), 193.

<sup>55</sup> Oei Liong Thay, “Dansa Varia,” *Star Weekly* no. 125, 23 May 1948, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Oei Liong Thay. Original text in Appendix 1.7.

similarities, unsurprisingly. However, the magazine emphasizes how *tandak* does not involve extensive physical contact between men and women:

*However, what is specific about this Djoget Modern is that men and women could not touch each other's bodies; the furthest they could do was touch their hands. So, Tandak Modern is different from Western people's dansa. [...] European and American sailors are also interested in this Tandak Modern because their ears can listen to melodies of samba and rumba, but when they see the movement, it is quite different. Sometimes, these Americans want to touch the girls as they think it's the same as rumba, foxtrot, or samba. Unsurprisingly, these girls refused to be touched because it's strictly forbidden in Tandak Modern.*<sup>57</sup>

This emphasis on the absence of physical touch as the main difference between *tandak* and *dansa* could be seen as a way for the *Sunday Courier*'s editor to portray *dansa* in a somewhat negative tone. By juxtaposing their difference, the magazine seems to tell its readers that *tandak* could replace *dansa*, implicitly suggesting that the former was a better form of entertainment.

Other feature articles in the *Sunday Courier* clearly distinguish between *dansa* as entertainment and *dansa* as performance art. While acknowledging the ambiguous meaning *dansa* in the Indonesian language, these articles also stretched the meaning to refer not only to social dance but also to ballet and other dance performances. A feature article by Fee Wiebenga titled "Dansa Kesenian" (the *Dansa* Art) points out the difference between three types of European dance performance: ballroom dance, revue dance, and art dance.<sup>58</sup> In the article, she uses the term *dansa* to refer to dances outside the common definition of "traditional Indonesian" dances. Therefore, in this definition, all Western dances that do not meet the commonly accepted criteria of being Indonesian and "traditional" dance are called *dansa*. Meanwhile, in another feature article titled "Seni Tari Barat" (the Art of Western Dance), Alisja Arbi discusses the aspects of body movement in Western dances.<sup>59</sup> However, instead of using the term *dansa* to refer to all Western dances, Arbi uses the term *tari*, which was more commonly associated with Indonesian traditional dance, to describe Western dances that she considers to have a high artistic value.

These two articles, plus an interview feature by the *Sunday Courier*'s editor that discusses a lady's pursuit to make a career in dance as an art form despite her mother's disapproval,<sup>60</sup> serve as examples of a somewhat more positive view on *dansa* in *Sunday Courier*. Rather than discussing *dansa* in rhetorical questions of whether it was good or bad, these articles gave their readers a more nuanced understanding of *dansa* by providing more perspectives on what *dansa* actually is. However, as already mentioned, the discourse of *dansa* in *Sunday Courier* was multisided.

In another article, *Sunday Courier*'s editors were more satirical when writing about *dansa*. In the section "Manusia di Hari Minggu" (Humans on Sunday), they wrote an article titled "Dansa Non-Stop Satu Malam" (Non-Stop Dancing All Night Long), which, in a rather amusing language,

<sup>57</sup> "Ini Dia Tandak Modern di Singapore," *Sunday Courier* Th. I, no. 2, 23 October 1949, 5. Original text in Appendix 1.8.

<sup>58</sup> Fee Wiebenga was a Dutch ballroom dance, ballet, and choreography instructor based in Jakarta. Fee Wiebenga, "Dansa Kesenian," *Sunday Courier* Th. I, no. 8, 4 December 1949, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Alisja Arbi was also a dance instructor based in Jakarta. Alisja Arbi, "Seni Tari Barat," *Sunday Courier* Th. II, no. 7, 12 February 1950, 17.

<sup>60</sup> "Manusia di Hari Minggu: Gadis-gadis menari tarian Timur," *Sunday Courier* Th. II, no. 4, 22 January 1950, 19–20.

discusses how *dansa* activities were affected by the curfew at 10 PM enacted in Jakarta in February and March 1950.<sup>61</sup> The article seems to suggest that *dansa* is addictive and how the curfew gives consequences to its enthusiasts:

*People who usually dance are the same as people who like massage. If they want to get sleep and not get massaged, they will feel something is missing. So do the people who enjoy dancing. Dancing is actually tiring, and your waist becomes sore. Particularly dances like "jitterbug" and "boogie-woogie," which are more like rope skipping than dance. Nevertheless, for those who are used to it, their waist would instead become sore if they did not dance. That is why the curfew has consequences for both men and women who love to dance.*<sup>62</sup>

The article claims that after the curfew was enacted, dance halls such as Joe & Joe and Garden Hall would hold dance parties all night long from 10 PM to 5 AM during the weekend because customers could not go home anyway due to the curfew. Furthermore, the article also says that the curfew opens a chance for *dansa* enjoyers to satisfy their excitement all night long with the partner they brought along. The rest of the article spends plenty of words describing a dance night in Joe & Joe, going as far as to conduct an interview with its director, Cabin Joe, a *totok* Chinese *dansa* instructor with a B.A. degree from the University of Shanghai.<sup>63</sup>

Similar to this article, in the October 1950 issue, an editor of *Sunday Courier* discusses *dansa* in an implicitly negative tone. In the last part of a feature article titled "Djakarta diwaktu malam hari" (Jakarta at night), which discusses various nightlife activities in Jakarta, the editor gives a brief description of one aspect of commercialized *dansa* in dance halls (in this case, Happy World in North Jakarta) that was often put into scrutiny, the dance hostess, also known as taxi-dancers:

*Want to listen to music from swing to rumba? Happy World. You should feel happy when entering. Entrance fee 2 rupiahs. Those who seldom come must be confused reading "25 rupiahs per hour to invite." Is it to invite Happy World? No, sir. It is to invite the "dance hostess," with whom you can dance if you come by yourself. Red, yellow, and green colored lights. Light-skinned ladies wearing "evening dresses" made from organdy and silk. Exposed shoulders. High heels.*<sup>64</sup>

Another article from another editor is more descriptive in discussing *dansa*. It can be observed in a feature article titled "Night clubs di pelbagai negeri" (Nightclubs Worldwide). While discussing how nightclubs operate in various parts of the world, the editor provides an argument on why nightclub businesses in Indonesia were not as thriving and profitable as in other countries:

*In Indonesia, nightclubs are perhaps not really nightclubs as they are only dancing halls that are only suitable for dancing and drinking. [...] The general view of the dancing hall here is vastly different*

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<sup>61</sup> Editor, "Manusia di Hari Minggu: Dansa Non-Stop Satu Malam," *Sunday Courier* Th. II, no. 2, 12 March 1950, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Jitterbug (synonymous with Lindy Hop type of dance) and Boogie-woogie are types of dances from the United States that fall under the umbrella term swing dancing. These styles of dancing are accompanied with jazz music with upbeat tempo which resulted in a faster dance movement as described in the article. Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935–1968* (Duke University Press, 2020), 119–120; Editor. Original text in Appendix 1.9.

<sup>63</sup> Editor.

<sup>64</sup> Editor, "Djakarta diwaktu malam hari," *Sunday Courier* Th. II, no. 44, 29 October 1950, 19. Original text in Appendix 1.10.



*compared to foreign countries. Here, people are more interested in dancing at home or during important occasions. But there, it's the opposite. So, it's not that surprising that they will gain more profit.*<sup>65</sup>

These three articles provide examples of *Sunday Courier* editorial's perspective regarding *dansa*. Although the editors do not explicitly posit their opinion about *dansa*, as implied by their satirical and implicit wording, they seem to see *dansa* in a rather negative light. However, some contributors in *Sunday Courier* were more straightforward in discussing their negative views of *dansa*. One such example is an opinion piece in the same issue as the last-mentioned article, written by an author under the pseudonym Darmo, titled "Apakah dansa itu sehat? Pemuda dan waktu terluang" (Is *dansa* healthy? Youths and leisure time).

In this article, Darmo argues that while *dansa* is not necessarily immoral, just as gambling and cockfighting are, it is definitely a problematic and unhealthy leisure time activity.<sup>66</sup> Darmo shows how, in the early 1950s Indonesian minds, the words *dansa*, upper-class, the Netherlands, and colonialism interrelate in a series of understandings that resulted in the hatred toward *dansa* by the general public. While acknowledging that *dansa* for European youths is just a regular thing, Darmo could not help but criticize *dansa*, which he argues promotes individualism in the young generation:

*If our upper-class young generation were doing it just for the sake of entertainment, nobody would complain. (But) most of them have drowned in it. Dansa has become the main goal, whereas societal matters are neglected. In this way, dansa has given a very malicious influence. That is, giving an individualistic upbringing and strengthening individualism that has already tainted the young generation.*<sup>67</sup>

Further in the article, Darmo explores a problem in the practice of *dansa*, which he argues is an entertainment closely tied to elitism and inequality. Darmo argues that all entertainment should always be conscious of class struggle and should benefit the nation; however small its benefit might be. And for that, Darmo calls for a leisure time activity that is healthy and inclusive, one that can be beneficial to the nation's development and can be enjoyed by all layers of society.

An investigative article written by an anonymous author titled "Nona pelajan tempat dansa" (Dance halls waitress ladies) expresses a similar tone. This article describes *dansa* as "a game of making out in a modern and "polite" way, which for our nation is a moral degeneracy that could never be forgiven by the large parts of people who are still suffering from hunger and nakedness."<sup>68</sup> Like the previous article, this description of *dansa* is a class-conscious framing of *dansa* by juxtaposing the practice with the economic condition of most Indonesian people at the time.

However, the article's main point focuses more on the taxi girls in dancing halls. The article asserts that most taxi girls do not do this kind of job by their own choice; instead, they are forced to do it because they desperately need money. One interviewee mentioned that it is difficult for taxi girls

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<sup>65</sup> Editor, "Night clubs di pelbagai negeri," *Sunday Courier* Th. II, no. 51, 17 December 1950, 13. Original text in Appendix 1.11.

<sup>66</sup> Darmo, "Apakah dansa itu sehat? Pemuda dan waktu terluang," *Sunday Courier* Th. II, no. 51, 17 December 1950, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Darmo. Original text in Appendix 1.12.

<sup>68</sup> Original text: "Main ber-tjumbu2an setjara modern dan "sopan" ini bagi bangsa kita merupakan kebedjatan moril jang tak dapat dima'afkan di tengah2 sebagian besar dari rakjat kita jang masih menderita lapar dan telandjang." Wartawan Kita, "Nona pelajan tempat dansa," *Sunday Courier* Th. IV, no. 27, 6 June 1952, 19.

to find another job because they think their names have already been tainted by being taxi girls.<sup>69</sup> In conclusion, after interviewing the taxi girls, the article framed its subject in a somewhat sympathetic but condescending tone, viewing these taxi girls as victims of both the weak economic condition and moral degeneracy at the time.

Another article, which is perhaps even more explicit and harsh in expressing hatred and resentment toward *dansa* was written by Chen Wen Zwan.<sup>70</sup> In this article, Chen Wen Zwan contextualizes *dansa* as part of cultural “invasion” of the West to the East. He cites the famous quote by Dutch Historian Johan Huizinga, “wij leven in een bezeten wereld” (we live in a possessed world),<sup>71</sup> to describe the current state of the world, as he identifies that the current culture invader is not Europe but the United States from which obscenity and degeneration run rampant in Chinese Indonesian society.<sup>72</sup> Chen Wen Zwan parallels the current dance craze in Chinese Indonesian people (he terms it dance epidemics) with *madat* or opium addiction in the Qing dynasty of China in the early 19th century, as he sees both of them as an epidemic caused by the influx of hazardous diseases from the West into the Chinese society:

*After the Chinese society, thanks to the revolution, could get rid of opium (madat), there came another disease transmitted from America, the dansa disease. This modern dance, like opium, is also addictive. This epidemic reached its height during the colonial period when wives and girls who already had the itching urge to dance were turning wild, but again, they said that to be called an intellectual, one should be skilled in dancing.*<sup>73</sup>

While harshly ascribing the dancing craze as analogous to opium addiction, Chen Wen Zwan also acknowledges that there were other types of *dansa* which were artistic and not detrimental to society, such as ballet and waltz. Nonetheless, he still calls Indonesian cities in which the young residents love to organize dance parties (he uses the term “dance-minded” people) cities that were *dibezet* (possessed):

*Our youth who are already dance-minded in recently possessed cities are getting increasingly active in organizing dance parties. At these parties, while aunts (entjim) and uncles (entjik) are gambling cards (tjekhi dan lotjan), our young generation (bungah bangsa) continue to move their bodies till late at night accompanied by the sound of music that is more perverted than the Sipatmo.*<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Wartawan Kita.

<sup>70</sup> Chen Wen Zwan, also known as Tan Boen Soan was a *peranakan* Chinese writer and journalist born in 1905. In the mid-1920s, he writes for dailies such as *Sin Po* and *Perniagaan* while being an editorial member of Bandung-based daily *Sin Bin*. He served as the editor-in-chief of *Warna Warta* in 1931–1932, *Socara Semarang* in 1939–1942, and *Sin Min* in 1947–1952 while writing for magazines such as *Sunday Courier*. He also authored several novels in the 1930s such as *Oewang*, *Bwee Ha*, and *Anaknja Api*. Leo Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese*, 281; Claudine Salmon and Dédé Oetomo, *Sastra Cina Peranakan dalam Bahasa Melayu* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1985), 104–109.

<sup>71</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Verzamelde Werken, Vol. 7: Geschiedwetenschap, Hedendaagsche Cultuur* (Haarlem: HD Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1950), 315.

<sup>72</sup> Chen Wen Zwan, “Krisis Peradaban Tionghoa,” *Sunday Courier* Th. III, no. 37, 16 September 1951, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Chen Wen Zwan. Original text in Appendix 1.13.

<sup>74</sup> *Sipatmo* is a collection of classic Chinese songs used to accompany Chinese dance called *Cokek Sipatmo* (popular among the *Benteng* Chinese community in Tangerang). This dance used to have negative sexual connotation as people

In his conclusion, Chen Wen Zwan seems to wonder about the future of Chinese Indonesian culture and society, which, in the past, had experienced outside invasions and now, in the 1950s, is living among other cultures and societies with different values and moralities. He questions whether Chinese culture would be preserved and stand on its own or be diffused with other cultures in Indonesia. Concerning *dansa*, Chen Wen Zwan seems to view it as a negative consequence of Western influence in Chinese society, which means that Chinese culture will permanently be tarnished if *dansa* persists within the Chinese Indonesian community.

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who participate in this dance was often thought as “naughty and inappropriate.” Vinny Flaviana Hyunanda, “Chinese *Benteng* Women’s Participation in Local Development Affairs in Indonesia,” PhD diss., Universidad Católica de Murcia, 2021, 398; Chen Wen Zwan. Original text in Appendix 1.14.

## Chapter 3

# The Polemics of *Dansa* in Indonesian Magazines (1951–1952)

Insofar opinions regarding *dansa* have only been discussed through *peranakan* Chinese magazines. In these sources, it can be observed that opinions regarding *dansa* are more complex and not merely a continuation of each magazine's ideology. While not necessarily opposing each other, various opinions regarding *dansa* within *Sunday Courier* and *Star Weekly* can be understood as an indication that the perspective of even a single *peranakan* Chinese magazine on the cultural debate in the early 1950s was not monolithic. It should be noted, however, that *peranakan* Chinese were not the only demographic in which *dansa* became an issue. In the early 1950s, *dansa* was also popular among native Indonesians. As in the case of *peranakan* Chinese, disagreements regarding *dansa* in Indonesia were present within native Indonesian populations. As such, the polemics between the *pro-* and *anti-dansa* groups also appeared in Indonesian magazines published by native Indonesians: *Mimbar Indonesia*, *Garuda*, *Kompas*, and *Wanita*.

However, it is crucial to note that there was a significant contrast in the arguments regarding *dansa* used in Indonesian-published magazines compared to *peranakan* Chinese ones. In *peranakan* Chinese magazines, the critics of *dansa* were generally more concerned with individual ethics and religious rules. It is also true for critics of *dansa* in magazines published by native Indonesians. However, in these magazines, the issue of *dansa* became political. *Dansa* was framed as part of Western cultural colonialism and capitalism, a Western moral decadency that was detrimental to Indonesian nationalism and morality. On the one hand, this difference could be understood as a reflection of how demographic differences in readership and authorship of each publication affect the opinions regarding *dansa*. On the other hand, this difference also reflects an evolution in the polemics of *dansa* as these political and nationalist-imbued arguments became the dominant views in the later developments of the *dansa* polemics.

## Mimbar Indonesia

Starting its publication in November 1947, *Mimbar Indonesia* was a Jakarta-based weekly magazine co-founded by Sukardjo Wirjopranoto as the editor-in-chief with Supomo and Pangeran Moh Noor. Its editorial board consisted of the trio plus Djamaluddin Adinegoro<sup>75</sup> and H.B Jassin.<sup>76</sup> Changes

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<sup>75</sup> Also known mononymously as Adinegoro, Djamaluddin Adinegoro studied medicine at STOVIA and journalism in Munich, Germany in 1925–1929. In the 1930s, he was the chief editor of *Pewartu Deli* in Sumatra. He was also appointed as editor of various publications during the Japanese occupation period of 1942–1945. Anthony Reid, “The Birth of the Republic in Sumatra,” *Indonesia* 12, no. 12 (1971): 27–28.

<sup>76</sup> In addition, he was also an editor for many titles such as *Pujangga Baru* (1940–1942), *Panji Pustaka* (1942–1945), *Bahasa dan Budaya* (1952–1963) and several others. H.B. Jassin served as a lecturer at the Faculty of Literature, University of Indonesia since 1953. Korrie Layun Rampan, “H.B. Jassin,” In *Leksikon Susastra Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000), 188–189.

began in 1951 when Sukardjo became the Indonesian representative for the Holy See.<sup>77</sup> Jusuf Wibisono took over its editorial leadership from 1951 until 1960, when the editorial board underwent another change, placing Sutarto Ruslanputro as editor-in-chief until the last issue published in 1966.<sup>78</sup>

The catchphrase on the cover of *Mimbar Indonesia* declared that it was an “independent non-party” magazine.<sup>79</sup> The tagline on the editorial page also labelled it as an “illustrated magazine, free from party or political group affiliations, organized for the political, economic, social, and cultural development.”<sup>80</sup> However, two *Mimbar Indonesia*’s editorial board members, Jusuf Wibisono and Pangeran Moh Noor (the head of Yayasan Dharma, the magazine’s publisher), were important figures in the Masyumi party.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, many contributors to the magazine were active members of various political parties. The inclusion of these party members could be seen as the subsequent result of how the magazine was presented as an independent publication that, according to Els Bogaerts, allowed a multitude of people from different backgrounds and ideological (and political) affiliations to express opinions on various topics, bonded together by a common goal of building the nation.<sup>82</sup>

However, the diversity of opinions in *Mimbar Indonesia* is not quite apparent regarding the issue of *dansa*, as only one article discussed this topic. This article is titled “Masalah Dansa” (The Dance Problem), published in the 10 March 1951 issue of *Mimbar Indonesia*. This article is written by Sju’aib Sastradiwirja, a painter and Islamic scholar from Banten who was also one of the initiators for the establishment of Yayasan Pesantren Islam Al Azhar in Jakarta in 1952, a prestigious Islamic educational foundation in Indonesia.<sup>83</sup> He asserts in his article that the problem of *dansa* cannot be separated from ethics (*budi pekerti*) and religious morality (*akhlak*). An important point in Sju’aib’s argument is that he does not doubt that *dansa* is a form of art, as for him, the problem lies in how different cultures have different ethics and morality.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Bogaerts, “Whither Indonesian culture?,” 228.

<sup>78</sup> *Ensiklopedia Sastra Indonesia*, Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Republic of Indonesia, s.v. “Mimbar Indonesia (1947–1966),” accessed 5 May 2024, [https://ensiklopedia.kemdikbud.go.id/sastra/artikel/Mimbar\\_Indonesia](https://ensiklopedia.kemdikbud.go.id/sastra/artikel/Mimbar_Indonesia).

<sup>79</sup> Referring to most Indonesian magazines and newspapers in the 1950s which are either published by or affiliated with certain political parties. Some examples include: *Harian Rakyat* by Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), *Pedoman* by Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI), *Duta Masyarakat* by the Nahdlatul Ulama, and *Abadi* by the Masyumi Party. Read Oey Hong Lee, *Indonesian Government and Press during Guided Democracy*.

<sup>80</sup> Original text: “*Madjallah bergambar, bebas dari pertalian partai atau golongan politik. Diselenggarakan untuk pembangunan politik, ekonomi, sosial, dan kebudayaan.*” *Mimbar Indonesia* no. 10, 10 March 1951, 2.

<sup>81</sup> In addition, these two had also served as ministers in Indonesian cabinets. Jusuf Wibisono served as the Minister of Finance Republic of Indonesia in the Sukiman Cabinet (1951–1952) and the Second Ali Sastroamidjojo Cabinet (1956–1957), whereas Mohammad Noor served as the Minister of Public Works in the Second Ali Sastroamidjojo Cabinet (1956–1957) and the Djuanda Cabinet (1957–1959), although he was expelled from the party in 1957 for taking part in the government despite the executive board’s prohibition to do so. Rémy Madinier and Jeremy Desmond, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015), 239.

<sup>82</sup> Bogaerts, “Whither Indonesian Culture?,” 230.

<sup>83</sup> “Tentang Kami: Sejarah Berdirinya Yayasan,” Yayasan Pesantren Islam Al Azhar, accessed 15 May 2024, <https://www.al-azhar.or.id/tentang-kami/sejarah-yipi/>.

<sup>84</sup> Sju’aib Sastradiwirja, “Masalah Dansa,” *Mimbar Indonesia* Th. V, no. 10, 10 March 1951, 22.

Sju'aib argues that whether *dansa* would flourish in Indonesia depends on the opinions of the majority of Indonesian people. If counted purely from numbers, it was confirmed that the *anti-dansa* groups would win because most Indonesians opposed *dansa*. However, Sju'aib also gives a reminder that numbers do not constitute truth, especially in an issue regarding ethics and morality, as he argues that "ethics and morality (*akhlak*) are matters to be judged only by the saints (*orang suci*), the prophets (*nabi*), and the pious (*solihin*). It is not a matter that can be judged by people who are weak to lust."<sup>85</sup>

Sju'aib continues the article by providing an imaginative conversation between a *pro-* and an *anti-dansa* persons and how they defended their arguments regarding the matter. Their debate started with the argument from the *anti-dansa* that *dansa* is not an art and just an immoral form of entertainment, which was then replied to by a counterargument from the *pro-dansa* that it is an art form necessary for a modern person to socialize in international settings. The various arguments and counterarguments in this imaginary debate are basically a compilation of opinions discussed in the early 1950s. An interesting point in this imaginary debate is how it ended. Following his assertion in the introduction of the article, he emphasizes the importance of ethics in the matter of *dansa*, especially religions, more particularly Islam:

**Pro:** "Why are our dances, whether *serimpi* or *tajub*, not forbidden and still enjoyed by educated people?"

**Contra:** "If 'feelings' (*perasaan*) and 'sense' (*akal*) of the people are used to judge the matter of 'ethics' or morality, undoubtedly there will always be disagreements. But whether it is *tajub* or *serimpi*, it is forbidden by religion. Regarding the religious standard, experts are the ones to judge. And as adherents of Islam, we should abide by its teachings. This is what is called adjusting 'confession' to 'deeds.' It is better than conforming to the current trend, which brings misery because it contradicts our holy religion."

**Pro:** "If that is the case, then our conversation ends here. Indeed, religions restrained our independence. That is why youths who want progress in the arts do not favor religions."

**Kontra:** "Instead of being restrained by the devil's lust, it is a thousand times better to be constrained by God's religion. Because the devil deceives, but Islam elevates its faithful followers. Regarding youths, I believe more Islamic youths are devoted to their religion."<sup>86</sup>

This serious allegation from Sju'aib to people who are *pro-dansa* as being irreligious came full circle with his argument on how the issue of *dansa* Indonesia is inseparable from ethics, morality, and religion. Even in the conclusion of his article, Sju'aib makes it very clear that *dansa* is forbidden to be practiced, especially for those adhering to Islam.

## Wanita

Another opinion piece on *dansa* came from one editor of *Wanita* magazine. *Wanita* was a bi-weekly women's magazine published by the Army Wives Association (Persit, *Persatuan Istri Tentara*) in 1949 under the patronage of Fatmawati, the inaugural first lady and the third wife of Sukarno.<sup>87</sup> The

<sup>85</sup> Original text: "*Achlaq adalah urusan yang mesti dibakimi oleh orang-orang suci, paranabi, dan solihin. Bukan perkara orang yang lemah terhadap hawa nafsunja. Mereka tidak bisa dijadikan hakim.*" Sastradiwirja, 22.

<sup>86</sup> Sastradiwirja, 23. Original text in Appendix 2.1.

<sup>87</sup> Later in 1954, the magazine underwent a rebranding, changing its name to *Mekar* and became a monthly magazine. Reni Nuryanti, "Mekar: Tetap Setia," In *Seabad Pers Kebangsaan*, 670–672.

magazine covers women's lifestyles, ranging from popular culture commentaries to food recipes and domestic life advice, all written by women. Being a magazine published by the Army Wives Association, it often gives conservative advice to its audience. Likewise, the magazine also presents a conservative view of *dansa*.

In an opinion piece titled "Dansa," Hajati, one of the magazine's editors and frequent contributor, expresses her views on *dansa*. Hajati makes it quite clear that *dansa* is acceptable for entertainment purposes during important events and occasions, even admitting that she learned dancing when she was younger before she discovered that *dansa* has negative consequences when viewed from an Islamic point of view.<sup>88</sup> Her point is that people should only dance when needed and nothing more:

*If we are already good at it, let it stay that way and use it when necessary. For example, on international occasions, we do not have any option but to dance out of courtesy. However, if we are dancing with any other intention than to be good at dancing, it is no longer dancing but rather letting off some lust.*<sup>89</sup>

Hajati, therefore, encourages women to avoid practicing *dansa* when it is not necessary. She also advises mothers on how to deal with their daughters who, as she describes it, are "psychologically crazy" about dance. She advises that mothers should not express their *anti-dansa* stance directly; instead, they should listen more and encourage their daughters to avoid unnecessary conflicts.<sup>90</sup>

## Garuda

These negative opinions toward *dansa* were not in line with those of younger Indonesians who think that opinions such as Sju'aib's are a misunderstanding from the old generation regarding why younger Indonesians were eager to dance. More than a year after its publication, Sju'aib's article is being criticized by another magazine, *Garuda*, a weekly magazine published by People's Library (*Perpustakaan Rakyat*) of Public Education Agency in the Ministry of Education, Teaching, and Culture Republic of Indonesia (*Kementerian Pendidikan, Pengajaran, dan Kebudayaan*), intended for young generation readers.<sup>91</sup> The four parts of the response from *Garuda's* editor to Sju'aib's article were published in issue no. 11, no. 12, no. 13, and no. 14.

The first part consisted of a copy of Sju'aib's imaginary debate. However, in the introduction, *Garuda's* editors briefly contextualize Sju'aib's background as a member of the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII), giving him an Islamic viewpoint on *dansa*.<sup>92</sup> In the second part, the editor criticized Sju'aib's fundamental argument. However, the editor does not provide their own argument on the matter. Instead, they use J.A. van Nieuwenhuyzen's view regarding youth in *Ontbloeien Wonder* to argue that blaming *dansa* as the facilitator for indecency and moral degradation among

<sup>88</sup> Hajati, "Dansa," *Wanita* Th. IV, no. 6, 29 March 1952, 129.

<sup>89</sup> Hajati, 130. Original text in Appendix 2.2.

<sup>90</sup> Hajati, 130.

<sup>91</sup> The tagline of the magazine says "*Madjalah Mingguan Angkatan Muda*."

<sup>92</sup> Editor, "Ruang Remadja: Dansah," *Garuda* no. 11, 16 March 1952, 12.

young people, is a false statement because the problem lies in the person's mind, not in *dansa*.<sup>93</sup> This view posits that if young people could suppress their sexual desire, they could dance to their heart's content:

*They reject their sexual desire, and they will not allow their self-discipline to be weakened by anything. They do not want to be the chess pieces moved here and there, but they are the chess players who move the pieces. If this is their attitude and can be maintained, then they can dance to their heart's content.*<sup>94</sup>

The actual arguments from *Garuda's* editor are in the third and fourth parts. In the third part, the *Garuda* editor criticizes many points regarding *dansa* in Sju'aib's commentary and the imaginary arguments he made in the article. They contend that Sju'aib's assertion that *dansa* is a form of art is false. The magazine's editor argues that *dansa* is an easy-to-learn leisure time entertainment that does not fit their "real art" category, which requires talent and more than just three or four times of training.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, the *Garuda* editor also criticizes the *pro-dansa* argument about socializing in an international setting as a superficial and arbitrary argument. They provide examples of how Sukarno and other Indonesian political leaders can still socialize in international settings despite not joining dance events when they were invited to a party with other world leaders. The editor asserts that young people dance because they are simply looking for entertainment because everyone has the right to access entertainment and not because of the convoluted reasons presented by Sju'aib. However, the most significant criticism from the editor is Sju'aib's assertion that one cannot be a devout Muslim if one dances. *Garuda's* editor then mentions the Muslims in countries such as Egypt and Albania who are practicing *dansa* while also being devout Muslims as an example to support their argument that dancing does not equal irreligiousness.

The *Garuda* editors conclude, in the fourth part, that the issue of *dansa* is only a small issue that is being exaggerated. The editor views the debate concerning *dansa* as only a part of disintegration within the newly founded Indonesian nation, which is, according to the editor, a sign of changing times. The editor argues that currently, *anti-dansa* would win the debate just because of the sheer number, so it is better not to practice *dansa*. However, the editor believes people will forget about such small things with time.<sup>96</sup>

## Kompas

While not directly addressing any written comment and opinion on *dansa*, several articles in *Kompas* criticize *anti-dansa* and older generations.<sup>97</sup> Starting its publication in January 1951, *Kompas* was a weekly magazine whose editorial board members consisted of students. One of *Kompas's* editorial

<sup>93</sup> *Garuda's* editor cites J.A. van Nieuwenhuyzen, *Ontbloeien Wonder: Beschouwingen over de sexuele rijpwording, bestemd voor jongeren van 16 jaar af* (Leiden: Stafleu, 1949). Editor, "Ruang Remadja: Dansah II," *Garuda* no 12, 23 March 1952, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Editor, 13. Original text in Appendix 2.3.

<sup>95</sup> Editor, "Ruang Remadja: Dansah III," *Garuda* no. 13, 6 April 1952, 12.

<sup>96</sup> Editor, "Ruang Remadja: Dansah (Habis)," *Garuda* no. 14, 13 April 1952, 13.

<sup>97</sup> Referring to Indonesian nationalist generation who experienced the national awakening period of early 20th century.



board members was Nugroho Notosusanto,<sup>98</sup> its editor-in-chief, who later became a famous military historian and the Minister of Education and Culture during the New Order period. *Kompas* presented itself as a magazine for young generations who strive to deepen their knowledge without political party affiliations. Notosusanto, who was still enrolled in the University of Indonesia during his time as *Kompas*'s editor-in-chief, was also known as a vocal critic of political leadership and the older generation.<sup>99</sup>

Criticisms from *Kompas*'s contributors toward *anti-dansa* and the older generations can be observed in articles by M. Sudjati Suria, an editor of *Kompas*; Emil Salim, an economic student at the University of Indonesia, who later studied in the United States and graduated to become a member of the team of economic advisors for Suharto during the New Order period known as "Berkely Mafia";<sup>100</sup> and M.T. Maxum, a frequent contributor for the magazine. In the article, M. Sudjati Suria disagrees with the association between crimes and *dansa*. Instead, he argues that crimes in dancing halls should be attributed to the practice of hiring taxi girls, which is more prevalent among older generations.<sup>101</sup> Emil Salim, in another article titled "Sebuah Analise" (An Analysis), argues that the older generation's desire to stamp out the supposedly counter-revolutionary behaviours such as dancing is a negative consequence of their longing to return to the romantic heroism of the Revolutionary Period.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, in his article, M.T. Maxum points out the hypocrisy of the older generation who despised *dansa* despite also practicing it during their youth:

*The actions of our young generation at the time were in direct contradiction to Eastern morality and culture. [...] Every time they held meetings, it was always accompanied by a ball or dance. Yes, amid their dancing, they often turned off the electric lights for one to three minutes to allow the practice of their famous yet degenerate code. It's "Ekid," an abbreviation for "Een kus in 't donker = A kiss in the dark."<sup>103</sup>*

The opinions in *Kompas* and *Garuda* magazines, while not explicitly supporting *dansa*, overtly criticize the older generation's views regarding *dansa*. It shows another aspect that affects the opinions in the debate regarding *dansa* in the early 1950s: the generational gap between the critics and the proponents of *dansa*.

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<sup>98</sup> Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri, "Kompas: Nugroho Notosusanto Berhasrat Memperdalam Keinsafan," In *Seabad Pers Kebangsaan*, 706–708.

<sup>99</sup> Katherine McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past* (Honolulu: University of Honolulu Press, 2007), 43.

<sup>100</sup> Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2020), 182–183.

<sup>101</sup> M. Sudjati Suria, "Korelasi antara Penghiburan dan Kriminaliteit," *Kompas* Th. II, no. 7, 15 Juni 1952, 61.

<sup>102</sup> Emil Salim, "Sebuah Analise," *Kompas* Th. II, no. 13–14, 12 October 1952, hlm. 20.

<sup>103</sup> M.T. Maxum, "Sebuah konsepsi tentang Pergaulan Pemuda Kita," *Kompas* Th. II, no. 11, 16 November 1952, 68. Original text in Appendix 2.4.

## Chapter 4

# Opinions Regarding Actions of *Anti-Dansa* Movements (1952–1954)

In the following chapter, I will discuss the opinions regarding the *anti-dansa* actions that occurred in 1952. After the polemics of *dansa* reached its height in the print media, several movements were organized in some Indonesian cities, most prominently in Surabaya and Yogyakarta, of which actions included forceful disbandment of dance events and closing down dance halls. These movements can be seen as a transformation and continuation of *anti-dansa* discourse from the polemics in the print media into real-life organized movements. These movements subsequently sparked debates regarding their actions, bringing the discourse of *dansa* back to the print media.

## Panitia Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa in Surabaya (1952)

On the evening of 21 July 1952, at the initiative of two prominent youth figures, S. Attamimi and M. Machmudi Saleh, youths from various Islamic mass organizations in Surabaya gathered at the *Panti Pemuda* (Youth Center) building in Pasar Besar Wetan 21, Surabaya.<sup>104</sup> This gathering, which was covered in a report by local Surabaya newspaper *Suara Masjarakat*, was a meeting to discuss the strategy to eradicate *dansa* from Surabaya because of its perceived negative influence on public morality.<sup>105</sup> This meeting was part of the many attempts by Surabayan youth to organize an *anti-dansa* movement in the city. Before this meeting, an effort was made by various prominent figures from mass organizations, which includes *Kesatuan Indonesia*, *Pemuda Rakjat*, *Ikatan Pemuda Peladjar Indonesia*, *Lembaga Kebudajaan Rakjat* (Lekra), as well as several religious and women's organizations.<sup>106</sup> This effort, however, failed to start any organized movement.

It was on 21 July's meeting that an organized *anti-dansa* movement finally took shape. As reported in *Suara Masjarakat*, after a much-heated debate by conflicting parties, the meeting on the evening of 21 July was eventually concluded with the establishment of the *Panitia Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* (Committee for the Eradication of *Dansa* Influence).<sup>107</sup> This committee's main agenda was preserving the so-called "authentic" Indonesian culture and eradicating foreign influence—which in this case was *dansa*—to restore and maintain Indonesian public morality. This main agenda was then interpreted in the practical efforts planned by the committee, which was to shut down dancehall and nightclubs in Surabaya and to resuscitate the awareness of the danger of

<sup>104</sup> "Perdebatan mengenai Pemberantasan Pengaruh Dansa: Menghendaki bar<sup>2</sup> dan ruangan dansa ditutup," *Suara Masjarakat*, 23 July 1952; "Tegen Gevolgen Danspartijen," *De Vrije Pers*, 23 July 1952.

<sup>105</sup> The report from *Suara Masjarakat* mentions that even though the majority of those who were present in this meeting was members of various youth organizations, they insisted that they did not come on behalf of their organizations, and instead, participate as independent individuals. *Suara Masjarakat*, 23 July 1952.

<sup>106</sup> "Anti Dansa Mendapat Sokongan," *Suara Masjarakat*, 15 July 1952.

<sup>107</sup> "Perdebatan mengenai Pemberantasan Pengaruh Dansa: Menghendaki bar<sup>2</sup> dan ruangan dansa ditutup," *Suara Madjarakat*, 23 July 1952.

*dansa* through the press and radio campaigns, meetings, and public lectures while inviting mass organizations to participate in the process.

Only about a week after its establishment, the committee had already received its criticism. In a commentary published in *Suara Masjarakat* on 31 July 1952, Datta Wardhana expresses his concern for the creation of the *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa*. He argues that even though the *pro*- and *anti-dansa* groups have equally strong arguments, both sides should acknowledge that social dancing is indeed a form of art that is part of a culture.<sup>108</sup> Wardhana goes on with this argument by quoting Oswald Spengler's definition of culture in the book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* and asserting that the aggressive plans of the committee—shutting down dancehalls and nightclubs and forcefully disbanding dance parties—are going to be a violation of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*.<sup>109</sup> Another concern raised by Wardhana is that the certainty of why Western social dancing is harmful to public morality has not yet been firmly established. He posits that if the extensive physical contact between unmarried couples is why *dansa* should be eradicated, it should also be noted that *tayuban*, a Javanese dance practice whose participants engage in a supposedly similar manner,<sup>110</sup> is practiced without much concern. Wardhana concludes that the creation of *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* was rooted in their hatred toward Western culture disguised as a maintenance of public morality.<sup>111</sup>

One of the initiators of the committee, M. Machmudi Saleh (under the pseudonym Muchamad M.S.), wrote a response to this criticism in another article published in *Suara Masjarakat* on 7 August 1952. In his response, Saleh claims that even with a thousand arguments made in criticism to the committee, he would still firmly believe that an effort with such a pure purpose will always be supported by the people, especially those with strong religious beliefs:

*Even if Datta had conveyed 1001 kinds of arguments in his article to influence the minds of our people, I firmly believe that the committee with a goal as pure as theirs will gain strong support from each and every layer of our society, especially those who adhere to religion.*<sup>112</sup>

Further in the argument, Saleh even accuses Datta Wardhana of being a “*dansa*-minded” person, a term Saleh used to refer to people he perceived as accepting Western culture without considering its adverse effects on Indonesian morality. Nevertheless, Saleh also writes that Western culture would be beneficial only if adapted in accordance with Indonesian norms and morality. Saleh concludes his response by quoting the words from Indian philosopher Sir Syed Achmad Ali Khan: “Everything that comes from the West should not be taken for granted, nor be rejected immediately, as it should

<sup>108</sup> Datta Wardhana, “Tentang pemikiran gerakan anti dansa,” *Suara Masjarakat*, 31 July 1952.

<sup>109</sup> Datta Wardhana.

<sup>110</sup> *Tayuban* involves men dancing directly with women in a fashion which on occasion may be flirtatious or even intimate. Sometimes, the woman would sit on the man's lap and on a few occasions actually kiss him. Even though the practice was already discouraged in the early 1950s, it still enjoyed popularity in East and Central Java, not only as a popular form of entertainment, but also as part of the annual *bersih desa* (village cleansing) festivity. Read Robert W. Hefner, “The Politics of Popular Art: Tayuban Dance and Culture Change in East Java,” *Indonesia*, no. 43 (1987): 75–94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3351211>.

<sup>111</sup> Datta Wardhana, “Tentang pemikiran gerakan anti dansa,” *Suara Masjarakat*, 31 July 1952.

<sup>112</sup> M. Machmudi Saleh [Muchamad M.S., pseud.], “Tentang pemikiran gerakan anti dansa,” *Suara Masjarakat*, 7 August 1952. Original text in Appendix 3.1.

be filtered and weighed first,” before encouraging the *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* to keep continuing their efforts to eradicate *dansa*.<sup>113</sup>

Also present within this debate of *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* in *Suara Masyarakat* was *Pemuda Demokrat Indonesia* (PDI, Indonesian Democratic Youth), an Indonesian youth organization affiliated with *Partai Nasionalis Indonesia* (PNI, Indonesian Nationalist Party).<sup>114</sup> In an article dated 12 August 1952, the mass organization gives an overview of the course of the *dansa* debates in Surabaya as of yet, touching upon the arguments between M. Machmudi Saleh and Datta Wardhana and posits its stance regarding the issue. PDI commented on the debate by calling proponents of *dansa* coy and irresponsible for not readily exposing themselves to the public by, perhaps, making a countermovement for the *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa*:

*If we can say it here, the proponents of dansa have not yet dared to reveal themselves to the public by establishing their own pro-dansa or dansa defender movements. Apparently, this is called a “coy” (malu-malu kutjing), daring to act but unable to react.*<sup>115</sup>

This debate in *Suara Masyarakat* continued with Datta Wardhana’s response to M. Machmudi Saleh’s reaction. In his piece, Wardhana addresses Saleh’s main counterargument by claiming that Saleh had misunderstood the main point of the original article. Wardhana posits to explain that his argument was not about agreeing or disagreeing but more on questioning whether the activities of *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* were legitimate under humanitarian and juridical principles which built upon law, psychological, sociological, and religious concerns.<sup>116</sup> In response to Islamic religious concerns raised by Machmudi Saleh about *dansa*, Wardhana cites Johan Huizinga’s proposition, which says Islam reached its glory days not by separating the East and the West<sup>117</sup> but by incorporating excellent and valuable aspects of both. Wardhana then proceeds to call the *anti-dansa* movement’s aggressive thoughts contradict the peace-loving teachings of Islam:

*The reality above is indicated by the history of humanity, which is in accordance with the words of God in the Quran chapter II verse 142, chapter XXIV verse 25, and chapter CIX verses 1–6. Thus, if the ideology of the Anti Dansa Movement had started to become more aggressive, it would have been contrary to Islamic teachings.*<sup>118</sup>

Despite the criticism, *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* still managed to gain favors from the government of Surabaya. On Monday night, 8 September 1952, another committee meeting took place in the Governor’s Office of Surabaya. Among those present in the meeting were the Resident of Surabaya Winarno, East Java Governor’s Secretary Utomo, Lieutenant-Colonel Sudirman, East Java Provincial Information Service Officer Muljadi, Surabaya Municipal People’s

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<sup>113</sup> M. Machmudi Saleh.

<sup>114</sup> *Pemuda Demokrat Indonesia* was one of two major PNI youth mass organization. The other one was *Gerakan Pemuda Marhaenis* (GPM, Marhaenist Youth Movement). J. Eliseo Rocamora, “The Partai Nasional Indonesia 1963–1965.” *Indonesia*, no. 10 (1970): 150. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350638>.

<sup>115</sup> “Panggung Umum: Pemuda Demokrat Indonesia tentang Dansa,” *Suara Masyarakat*, 12 August 1952. Original text in Appendix 3.2.

<sup>116</sup> Datta Wardhana, “Probleem: Gerakan anti Dansa,” *Suara Masyarakat*, 14 August 1952.

<sup>117</sup> Wardhana cites Johan Huizinga, *Geschieden Wereld* (Haarlem: HD Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1945), 33–34

<sup>118</sup> Datta Wardhana, “Probleem.” Original text in Appendix 3.3.

Education Service Officer Harsono Bimantoro, and the council-woman Mrs. Puger.<sup>119</sup> In this meeting, Machmudi Saleh, now chairman of the committee, explained the future endeavors of the committee, which were more or less the same as in the initial meeting. Saleh argues that colonialism has been so embedded in Indonesian society to the point that it has created what he called an “overcompensation complex” in so many people so that they are under the delusion that everything from the West is reasonable and necessary, one such example is Western social dancing.

At another point in the meeting, though, Resident Winarno expressed his opinion that he disagreed with the committee’s aggressive plan. Winarno argues that there is nothing wrong with *dansa* itself; it is just that *dansa* might not be suitable for Indonesian moral, philosophical, and religious values. Winarno asserts that combating the influence of *dansa* within Indonesian society could not be done by demonizing its proponents; instead, he suggests finding a social dance suitable for Indonesian values.<sup>120</sup> The committee seemingly accepted Winarno’s suggestion because there was a fundamental revision in the committee’s main objectives at the next meeting.

In their next meeting on the night of 2 October 1952, of the 95 organizations invited, only 15 organizations attended.<sup>121</sup> After this meeting, despite the limited attendance, the committee finally established its provisional boards. The committee’s main objective was no longer the eradication of *dansa*, but it was now revised to research and investigate the formation of the Indonesian national dance. Hence, the name changes from *Panitya Pemberantas Pengaruh Dansa* to *Panitya Panitya Penyelidikan Tertjiptanja Seni Tari Nasional*.

### ***Malam Tak Gembira in Ngasem, Yogyakarta (1952–1954)***

On the evening of 20 December 1952, to celebrate the third anniversary of their campus, students of Universitas Gadjah Mada held a dance night in one of the buildings in Ngasem owned by Yogyakarta Sultanate,<sup>122</sup> which was then used as a lecture hall for class II of the Faculty of Medicine. This event should have gone smoothly without a hitch, having received formal approval letters from the university and the Sultanate.<sup>123</sup> Problems started to arise moments after the dance party began. *Gama* reported that soon after the dance started, about 30 individuals who declared themselves *anti-dansa* students from Universitas Gadjah Mada stormed into the hall at around 10 PM.<sup>124</sup> This *anti-dansa* group proceeded to forcibly disperse the event while also damaging the hall and attacking the participants in the process. It was reported that there were no severe injuries among the participants following the forced dispersion. Nonetheless, this action was enough to send at least 80 students fleeing in fear and shock. As a result of this incident, the hall and several antique lamps owned by the

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<sup>119</sup> “Anti-dans-comite over de Westerse dans,” *De Vrije Pers*, 9 September 1952.

<sup>120</sup> *De Vrije Pers*.

<sup>121</sup> “Weinig belangstelling voor anti-dans comité,” *De Vrije Pers*, 3 October 1952.

<sup>122</sup> During the early years after its establishment, while the main building in its current location in Bulaksumur was still under construction, Universitas Gadjah Mada used several buildings and halls owned by Yogyakarta Sultanate for lectures and administrative purposes as ordered by Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX. Sutaryo, Suratman Woro, and Cahyo Gumilang, *Sejarah Universitas Perjuangan: Universitas Gadjah Mada* (Yogyakarta: Pusat Studi Pancasila Press, 2010), 24–27.

<sup>123</sup> “Malam ta gembira di Ngasem,” *Gama* Th. II, no. 2, January 1953, 13.

<sup>124</sup> *Gama*.

Sultanate were broken and badly damaged because of the bottles, chairs, and stones thrown during the incident.

One of the magazines published by Universitas Gadjah Mada student council, *Gama*,<sup>125</sup> reported that the lecture hall was used as a dance floor for quite a few times already. However, it was the first time that a dance night event was forcibly dispersed. The incident quickly became a concern in Yogyakarta and beyond. In Yogyakarta, *Gama* reported that the incident had been the main discussion in a meeting of the board of professors of Universitas Gadjah Mada. Meanwhile, outside Yogyakarta, the event triggered a discussion concerning the actions of *anti-dansa* groups. One such discussion was in *Sunday Courier*'s "Beginilah di Indonesia" column.

In one section of the column entitled "Kalau anti dansa harus ganti lampu" (If you're against *dansa*, you must replace the lamps), *Sunday Courier* gives some more details about the incident while positing their opinion regarding the action of the *anti-dansa* students. *Sunday Courier* reported that before the date, the *anti-dansa* group had supposedly sent a warning to the organizer of the dance night to cancel the event but was ignored.<sup>126</sup> Another detail is a rumor that one of the girls participating in the dance night was being violated. *Sunday Courier* reported: "The girl was screaming because one guy forcefully gripped her hands, but the guy answered "Ahh, it's only held like this, and you're already screaming. But you hugged earlier, and you were quiet."<sup>127</sup> The magazine also remarks how absurd the incident was by saying that the *anti-dansa* student group must replace the antique lamps they had broken, hence the section's title. Further in the report, *Sunday Courier* argues that the debate concerning *dansa*, should be resolved not through storming actions but with a thoughtful discussion:

*Both the pros and the cons could express their ideas. This issue can be studied. That is the use of Western culture in our national culture. So, we don't mind if people are against dansa. However, storming action, in our opinion, is not the way to resolve the problem. It will even create a wrong impression. In the eyes of people in poverty, seeing people dancing on shiny floors wearing brand-new shirts is indeed annoying. But for the one who does it, it is not. Therefore, this issue must be thoroughly discussed.*<sup>128</sup>

*Sunday Courier* encourages parties from each side of the debate to meet and discuss the issue in person instead of resorting to such aggressive actions. It was because, according to the article, up until that point, there had been no serious and thorough study regarding *dansa*, either *pro-* or *anti-dansa*. *Sunday Courier* also remarks that the arguments for their positions regarding *dansa* are equally weak and baseless. In agreement with this opinion, A.M. Hardjono,<sup>129</sup> in his article "Masaalah dansa" (The *Dansa* Problem), argues that many arguments, especially from the *anti-dansa* side, are weak or

<sup>125</sup> As far as this research concerns, the other magazine published by the student council, *Gadjah Mada*, did not mention or report anything about this incident.

<sup>126</sup> Editor, "Beginilah di Indonesia: Kalau anti dansa harus ganti lampu," *Sunday Courier* Th. V, 18 January 1953, 18.

<sup>127</sup> Original text: "Gadis tadi katanja mendjerit, dan oleh seorang Pemuda jang memegang jang anti dansa tadi dijawab: "Ajaabhhhh, dipegang gini sadja ndjerit. Padahal tadi dirangkul diam sadja." Editor, 18.

<sup>128</sup> Editor, 18. Original text in Appendix 3.4.

<sup>129</sup> In addition to being a contributor to *Sunday Courier*, Abito Marto Hardjono was also a book author. Read A.M. Hardjono, *Dokumentasi Perdjuaan Pemuda Indonesia 1915-1950* (Medan: Toko Buku Islamiyah, 1950).

plainly wrong. He mentions that statements such as “*dansa* facilitate the arousal of sexual desire” and “*dansa* are not suitable for Indonesia because it comes from the West” are baseless:

*If it's about getting along and touching each other, it's not only a problem in dansa. A couple strolling around joking around if channelled incorrectly will also lead to indecency, as with riding a bike together (membonceng), swimming together, watching films of thighs and naked bottoms culture a la America together. Shortly, there are many ways. Thus, if dansa is scapegoated as being a facilitator of indecency, although in part it is, that would be pretty inaccurate.*<sup>130</sup>

For Hardjono, the debate between the *pro-* and *anti-dansa* will never be resolved if it continues with these baseless arguments, and it could even lead to more aggressive actions like what occurred in Yogyakarta. Instead, he calls for syntheses that can satisfy both sides. Among other things, he proposes the adoption of a brand-new Indonesian dance called *Tari Muda-Mudi* (Young People Dance), which was created by Prince Prabuwinoto of the court of Surakarta Sunanate as an alternative to *dansa*.<sup>131</sup>

A response to A.M. Hardjono's article is included in three issues later in Sunday Courier's 22 February 1953 issue. In his article “Pro dan kontra dansa” (Pros and cons of *dansa*), Busjari Ltf completely disagrees with Hardjono's article. He argues that in the catastrophic socio-economic and psychological conditions of the early 1950s, it was impossible to incorporate *dansa* into the Indonesian culture, especially in reality, *dansa* could only be practiced by the urban upper class.<sup>132</sup> In what he asserts is a realistic point of view, he concludes that *dansa* increases demoralization and prostitution, killing a healthy nationalism, expanding the door for cultural infiltration, and encouraging isolationism.<sup>133</sup>

Another opinion piece, “Satu pandangan tentang dansa” (One perspective on *dansa*), written by an author under the initials S.H. in the March 1953 issue of *Gama*, gives a similar perspective to Busjari's article. Regarding *dansa* in general, S.H. argues that such a joyful and entertaining activity contradicts the struggle of the Indonesian people amid economic hardship and other post-war difficulties in Yogyakarta.<sup>134</sup> Regarding the incident, while acknowledging that such an act of vandalism to both the educational facility of Universitas Gadjah Mada and the property of the respected Yogyakarta Sultanate could not be justified, S.H. asserts that students of the university must have forgotten that *dansa* has transgressive aspects that are harmful to morality. To conclude his argument, S.H. encourages that *dansa* must be ended because he argues that *dansa* cannot and can never be accepted in the struggling Indonesian society:

<sup>130</sup> A.M. Hardjono, “Masaalah dansa,” *Sunday Courier* Th. V, no 5, 1 February 1953, 16. Original text in Appendix 3.5.

<sup>131</sup> Also known as *Tari Krido Harsojo*, this dance was indeed created as a response to the ongoing debate regarding *dansa* in Indonesia. In one interview, Prabuwinoto mentioned that he created this dance based on waltz for its steps, but with a Javanese hand movement and music accompaniment and without hugging and touching between men and women. Muhardjo Djojodigdo, “Interview dengan pentjipta Tari Muda-mudi,” *Kompas* Th. III, no, 3, 15 March 1953, 30.

<sup>132</sup> Busjari Ltf, “Pro dan kontra dansa,” *Sunday Courier* Th. V, no. 8, 22 February 1953, 15.

<sup>133</sup> Busjari Ltf. Original text in Appendix 3.6.

<sup>134</sup> S.H., “Satu Pandangan tentang Dansa,” *Gama* Th. II, no. 4, March 1953, 17.

*For this reason, let us, in the name of our love for our State and Nation, be able to accordingly surrender dance parties, which are considered by the East to be able to cause depravity of our souls, to be kept away as much as possible. It should also be recognized that in this age of struggle and development of our young nation, our people cannot and will not be able to accept the way of entertainment with dance parties.*<sup>135</sup>

Soeharto Djojosoempeno also conveyed a similar call. In his opinion piece “Mahasiswa harus berani berbuat” (Student must dare to act), he encourages university students to be proud of their culture by not practicing *dansa* to socialize in international settings (read: Western cultural settings).<sup>136</sup> He argues it was irrelevant since Westerners would not even think of learning Indonesian dances such as *Muda-Mudi* to socialize with Indonesians. He calls for Indonesians, especially students, that they do not have to conform to Western standards; instead, they must be very critical of everything from the West.<sup>137</sup>

The suggestion from S.H. and Djojosoempeno to immediately stop the practice of *dansa* was seemingly followed by the people, or at least the people of Yogyakarta. About a year after the Ngasem incident, *dansa* in Yogyakarta reportedly became practically illegal. In a *Gama* article titled “Dansa,” Taty Prodjosewojo, an editorial board member of the magazine, reflects on what happened to *dansa* in Yogyakarta following the incident. In the introduction, the editors write that “it has been about a year since *dansa* in Yogyakarta moved underground, just like cocaine, gambling, prostitution and other illicit pleasures.”<sup>138</sup> The editors remark that proponents of *dansa* no longer dared to hold dance parties in Yogyakarta publicly following the incident.

Prodjosewojo mentioned that similar incidents occurred at universities in Jakarta and Semarang after the incident in Yogyakarta. However, despite these incidents, Prodjosewojo argues that the problem with *dansa* lies in the lack of Indonesian social dance (*gezelschapdans*) to enliven parties and other occasions.<sup>139</sup> Prodjosewojo argues that the steps in dancing require high concentration to perform, and during the dance, its participants cannot think of anything but the movement, let alone think about perverted things; if one thinks of something else, then the thought is wrong, not the dance itself.<sup>140</sup>

Prodjosewojo’s take regarding *dansa* sparked another debate in *Gama*. Her article was responded to several times, mostly by fellow students at Universitas Gadjah Mada. The first response was published in *Gama*, an opinion piece titled “Dansa merusak kesusilaan” (Dansa corrupts decency). In this article, Saad’uddin, the author, completely disagrees with Prodjosewojo as he argues that all arguments about *dansa* presented by Prodjosewojo were wrong and misleading. Saad’uddin cites several sources to support his opinion that a fundamental relationship exists between *dansa* and indecency.

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<sup>135</sup> S.H., 18. Original text in Appendix 3.7.

<sup>136</sup> M. Soeharto Djojosoempeno, “Mahasiswa harus berani berbuat,” *Gama* Th. II, no. 5, April 1953, 18.

<sup>137</sup> M. Soeharto Djojosoempeno, 19.

<sup>138</sup> Original text: “Sudah kira2 setahun kegiatan *dansa* di Jogja berpindah kebawah tanah, tak ubahnja seperti cocaine, djudi, prostitusi dan kesenangan2 terlarang jg lain.” Editor, “Dansa,” Editor’s note, *Gama* Th. III, no. 3, January 1954, 20.

<sup>139</sup> Taty Prodjosewojo, “Dansa,” *Gama* Th. III, no 3, January 1954, 20.

<sup>140</sup> Taty Prodjosewojo.



Meanwhile, Adjisoedarmo S. also writes another response to Prodjosewojo's article in the same issue. Although he agrees with Prodjosewojo that *dansa* is an art form, his agreement goes only so far as he criticizes all other key points from her argument, saying many of her points only work in theory, not in reality.<sup>141</sup> His argument mainly revolves around how *dansa*, even with a good intention in mind, will still affect decency and morality just because of the technical aspect of it that requires such intimacy between men and women.

Another reply came from S.D. Humardani, in his commentary "Sekadar tentang Tari" (Just about Dance).<sup>142</sup> While the majority of his article discusses the technicalities of the dance movement, he posits that the problem with *dansa* also lies in how it "obstructs the development of local Indonesian dances," which are already distant from Indonesian people, by being a "recreational, cheap, and shallow dance that all people can enjoy."<sup>143</sup> In the same issue, Roel Sd holds a different stance, in his opinion entitled "Dansa dalam masyarakat Indonesia sekarang" (*Dansa* in Indonesian society today).<sup>144</sup> Roel posits that those who enjoy *dansa* must consider the place and the time instead of carelessly holding a party without such considerations.

Taty Prodjosewojo's responses to both Saad'uddin and Adjisoedarmo S. were published in the June–July issue of *Gama*.<sup>145</sup> Her arguments in both responses are still the same, emphasizing *dansa* itself is innocent and that every moral indecency as its excess came from the perverted mind, not the *dansa*. These responses from Prodjosewojo were, again, answered in the following two issues. Adjisoedarmo S. still argues that *dansa* inherently requires a willingness from its participants to exceed the boundaries of Indonesian decency and morality.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, Saad'uddin addresses Prodjosewojo's first argument about the lack of Indonesian social dance. In the October 1954 issue, Saad'uddin asserts that Indonesian society needs no social dance because he argues that Indonesian culture has its own way of socializing, and to have a social dance in Indonesia would only mean conforming to Western standards.<sup>147</sup>

Saad'uddin's reply would be the last opinion piece on *dansa* in *Gama* for the next few years. Through their announcement in the October 1954 issue, the editors of *Gama* felt that the magazine had been peppered with too many opinions about dance in Yogyakarta and Indonesia. After reading

<sup>141</sup> Adjisoedarmo S., "Dansa (Sambutan tulisan Taty Prodjosewojo)," *Gama* Th III, no. 5, March 1954, 20.

<sup>142</sup> Sedijono Djodjokartiko "Gendhon" Humardani (1923–1983) was a medical student at Universitas Gadjah Mada at the time. He later became the director of the Indonesian Academy of *Karawitan* Arts (ASKI) in 1970s. Read Poliman, *Sedijono Djodjokartiko Humardani: Karya dan Pengabdianannya* (Jakarta: Department of Education and Culture, 1986) and Kathryn Emerson, "Transforming wayang for contemporary audiences: dramatic expression in Purbo Asmoro's style, 1989–2015," PhD diss., Leiden University, 2016.

<sup>143</sup> Original text: "*Dansa memang dapat sedikit2nya merintang perkembangan tari kita dalam keadaan sikap kebudayaan pada golongan penting diantara kita sekarang. Tari sendiri dalam bentuk seninja asing. Dansa, tari asing dalam bentuk rekreasinja, demikian dapat dangkal dan murah, lebih mudah diterima alamnja.*" S.D. Humardani, "Sekadar tentang Tari," *Gama* Th. III, no. 6–7, April–May 1954, 31.

<sup>144</sup> Roel Sd., "Dansa dalam masyarakat Indonesia sekarang," *Gama* Th. III, no. 6–7, April–May 1954, 32.

<sup>145</sup> Taty Prodjosewojo, "Dansa: Sambutan tulisan Sdr. Saad'uddin dan Sdr. Adjisoedarmo S.," *Gama* Th. III, no. 8, June–July 1954, 20–22.

<sup>146</sup> Adjisoedarmo S., "Dansa: Sambutan tulisan Sdr. Taty Prodjosewojo," *Gama* Th. III, no. 9–10, August–September 1954, 39.

<sup>147</sup> Saad'uddin, "Masalah Dansa: repliek tulisan sdr. Taty Prodjosewojo," *Gama* Th. III, no. 11, October 1954, 25.

all the opinions, the editors concluded that the readers at least had a thorough understanding of the issue. Thus, the polemic about *dansa* in *Gama* ended with this announcement.

## Aftermath

Following the incident in Ngasem and the subsequent debate in *Gama*, the discussion regarding *dansa* started to fade out in 1954. Perhaps due to the coming general election in 1955, there was little room for opinions regarding *dansa* to be covered in the print media. Or it was probably because of the rising popularity of the state-promoted Indonesian dances, which were seen as an alternative to *dansa*, such as *lenso*, *saputangan*, and *serampang duabelas*.<sup>148</sup> It is also possible that *dansa* in Indonesia had started going underground following more active *anti-dansa* movements, just as mentioned in the articles relating to the Yogyakarta event, resulting in the fading of the issue. It was most likely the combination of these causes that the issue of *dansa* faded out in the print media since the mid-1950s.

Nevertheless, in 1954, a book titled *Pro-Anti Dansa* was published. It was written by M. Isa Anshary (under the pseudonym Mh. Isa), a prominent member of the Masyumi party,<sup>149</sup> and mainly consisted of the written form of his speech regarding the *pro-* and *anti-dansa* he delivered in front of Bandung students. Throughout his many points and arguments, Anshary strongly opposes the practice of *dansa*. His key points can be extracted from his conclusion, which mainly argues that *dansa* cannot be separated from the broader aspects: historical, political-cultural, and sexual-psychological.<sup>150</sup> From a historical point of view, he sees *dansa* as a result of the lack of national spirit and national culture and admiration for anything from the West. All of these, he says, are consequences of Dutch colonialism. From a political and cultural scope, he sees *dansa* as an aggression of foreign culture utilized politically to demoralize and disintegrate Indonesia. From a sexual-psychological perspective, he argues that it boosts sexual desire whose excess is directly visible.

While saying that every reason to practice *dansa* is weak and baseless, he argues that *anti-dansa* should not antagonize its proponents. Anshary argues that the possible solution to resolve the issue of *dansa* is to make an organized and systematic effort to raise awareness of patriotism and nationalism, as well as religious, moral, and ethical compliances.<sup>151</sup>

The book by M. Isa Anshary might be one of the last publications that discuss *dansa* before the issue were fading out. Based on its content, the book summarises the various opinions regarding *dansa* in the early 1950s, which is fitting considering it was one of the last. It was not until 1956 that the discourse on *dansa* started to resurface in reaction to the growing popularity of rock 'n' roll music and dances, the subsequent impacts it caused, and more active involvement from the Indonesian state in the issue of *dansa*.

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<sup>148</sup> Jones, *Culture, Power, and Authoritarianism in the Indonesian State*, 102.

<sup>149</sup> Madinier and Desmond, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia*, 28.

<sup>150</sup> M. Isa Anshary [Mh. Isa, pseud.], *Pro-Anti Dansa* (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1954), 28–29.

<sup>151</sup> M. Isa Anshary [Mh. Isa, pseud.], 29.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The various opinions regarding *dansa* in Indonesian print media in the early 1950s reflected the intricate debate on cultural identity during the nation-building period of post-colonial Indonesia. This study found that the opinions on *dansa* were deeply rooted in the conservative and religious concerns for ethics and morality and the nationalist sentiments of the newly independent Indonesian society. While these two aspects are indeed intertwined, a further inspection reveals that opinions regarding *dansa* had developed from cautionary arguments and social commentaries that concern individual ethics and religious morality into a highly political debate that framed *dansa* as either part of Western cultural colonialism that demoralized Indonesian society or as part of cultural changes in the modern world.

The print media played a crucial role in shaping public opinion on *dansa*. Magazines and newspapers served as platforms for discussions and criticism of *dansa* that reflect the broader context of societal divisions of Indonesian people. To a certain extent, the target audience of each publication has some influence on opinions found in the print media. Lifestyle-focused women's magazines published by the Army Wives Association, like *Wanita*, tend to have more conservative arguments and opinions compared to youth-oriented intellectual magazines published by university students, like *Kompas*. However, it is also important to note that opinions regarding *dansa* in the print media were not merely continuations of each publication's main agenda and ideology—authors for each commentary and opinion piece sometimes have different or even contrasting views from the editors and the general philosophy of the publication. Articles in *Star Weekly* and *Sunday Courier*, for instance, showcased this complexity quite well as they contained not only outright condemnation by some authors but also implicit and cautious acceptance by the editors.

While it is true that the vast majority of authors and editors were privileged intellectual elites, their other personal backgrounds, such as generation, also play essential roles in shaping their opinions toward *dansa*. The opinions of *Kompas* and *Garuda* can be taken as examples. While not explicitly supporting *dansa*, authors and editors of those publications quite explicitly criticized the older generation's negative views regarding *dansa*, such as Sju'aib Sastradiwirja's article in *Mimbar Indonesia*. It showcases the generational gap as one aspect that affected the opinions in the debate regarding *dansa* in the early 1950s. However, the authors' personal backgrounds are also intertwined with other aspects, such as religious and political affiliations. Even authors with similar backgrounds and the same generation have contrasting opinions on *dansa* when they have different religious and political affiliations. An example is the debate between Machmudi Saleh and Datta Wardhana in *Suara Masyarakat*.

This study also revealed a significant transformation in the discourse of *dansa* from polemics in the print media to organized actions through two occurrences in Yogyakarta and Surabaya in 1952. Some actions of these movements—forceful disbandment of dance nights and closing down dancehalls—not only underscored the intensity of the *anti-dansa* sentiment but also shed light on

the role of youth and mass organizations in the cultural debates of the early 1950s. However, despite the strong *anti-dansa* rhetorics, some voices advocated a more nuanced understanding of *dansa*, relating it to cultural changes. Some even argued that *dansa*, like other Western cultural practices, could be adapted to fit Indonesian moral boundaries. These perspectives emphasize the importance of self-control and personal moral boundaries of the participants rather than outright rejection.

The broader implications of this study suggest that the polemic of *dansa* in the print media was not only about *dansa* itself but also a microcosm of larger cultural and ideological discourses in early independent Indonesia. The various opinions on *dansa* can be understood as a demonstration of the tensions between trends and tradition, between international and local identity, and between progress and cultural preservation. The discourse on *dansa* in Indonesian print media from 1948 to 1954 provides valuable insights into the complexities of Indonesia's cultural landscapes during a crucial point in its history. This study highlights the importance of the print media as an arena for cultural and ideological debates that reflect the broader struggles of a nation in the process of defining its identity in the post-colonial era. This study shows how cultural practices like *dansa* can become focal points for broader discussions on national identity, modernity, and morality in Indonesia.

## Appendix

### Original text of quotations in Chapter 2

- Appendix 1.1 *...mengingat sekarang djika seorang jang tidak pandai atau bisa “dansa” dianggapnja “terbelakang”. Djadi ada baiknja djika diadakan ruangan dansa itu, dimana dimuatkan gambar-gambar sepatu, dengan pas-pas dan untuk wanita dan laki-laki, jaitu untuk mereka jang misalnja ta mampu ambil danslessen, atau ta ada kesempatan beladjar itu. Lebih baik dimulai dari permulaan sekali, misalnja pas-pas dari Foxtrot, Slow-Fox, d.s.b. Besar harapan Nona E. Kostarman supaja usulnja diluluskan, untuk kepentingannja beratus-ratus putra dan putri jang tidak ingin ketinggalan zaman.*
- Appendix 1.2 *Begitoelah boenjinja soeara<sup>2</sup> kaoem moeda, jang tentoe mempoenjai banjak pengikoet-pengikoet di antara masjarakat kita. Dengan sendirinja seperti terhadep soeal dansa (ballroom dancing) shiahwee kita terpetja belah dalem beberapa golongan jang masing-masing poenja alesan boeat pro atawa anti dansa maoepoen meroko. Saja sendiri beranggapan, bahoea isep roko, dansa, berenang maoepoen apa sadja dari djaman baroe ini bisa dilakoean, asal sadja penggemar-penggemar kenal wates.*
- Appendix 1.3 *Saja anggep punt jang perloe boekannja kita haroes atawa tida haroes bisa dansa, tapi kita haroes bisa control diri sendiri supaja djangan liwatin limit decencies (decorum). Berapa kali dansa per boelan, di tempat mana, di waktoe kapan, dan dengan groep siapa haroes dansa moesti ditetepken dengan pikiran dan liangsim sendiri. Bladjar dansa dengan terang-tearngan ada lebih baek dari pada dengan “menjolong”. Tapi ada “tetapinja”. **Bisa** dansa dan **gila** dansa adalah berlaenan sekali.*
- Appendix 1.4 *Begitoelah barangkali liwat 20 atawa 30 taon dansa itoe akan mendjadi oemoem djoega dalem golongan kita [...] Apa jang haroes kita djaga adalah soepaja dansa itoe djangan melewati wates, hal apa menoeroet anggepan-anggepan Barat sendiri adalah immoreel. Kita moesti tentangken pentjarian pengidoepan sebagai taxi-girls dari gadis-gadis kita, sebab ini mendjoeroes ke prostitutie, begitoe djoega exploitative dari gadis-gadis di cafes dan bars.*
- Appendix 1.5 *Dan kalaoe kita preksa lebih teliti: Apa pendirian jang mengandel sama kekoeatan aliran djaman atawa jang mengandel sama “democratie” dan bilang bahoea jang soeka dansa boleh dansa, dan jang tida soeka ta oesah dansa, sebetoelnja boekan berarti satoe geestelijke onverschilligheid, satoe keteledoran, satoe kealpa’an, dalem pendirian dan pendidikan, satoe gemis aan levensprincipes?*

- Appendix 1.6 *Ballroom dancing dan muzieknja sebaliknja mendorong pamoeda-pamoedi ke soeasana jang rendah, onaesietisch, wuft, dan membangoenken donkere driften di blakangnja hypocriete en listige camouflage. Apa semoea tida tjoekeop boeat membilang, baboea penggemar2 dansa meroepaken satoe demoralise end element dan satoe rem boeat kemadjoean bangsa Tionghoa? Satoe rem, oleh kerna penggemar-penggemar dansa itoe mewakilken satoe oppervlakkig-frivole groep, jang membikin kandas semoea pertjoba'an dari bangsa kita.*
- Appendix 1.7 [3] *Kunstnja kunst dansa sebenernja adalah tjara hegimana bisa pertahanken diri "tida panas" kapan deketin merahnja bibir jang seperti warna merahnja berkobarnja api. Siapa kata berkobarnja api tida panas? Tida oesah kata berkobarnja hati.... lebih panas lagi!*  
 [12] *Pegang bininja orang di straat katanja koerang adjar, tapi rangkoei bininja orang di tempat dansa katanja koerang.... lagi!*  
 [13] *Di dalem kampoeng dinamaken soendal, di dalem dancing hall dipanggil dancing girl. Ini katanja modern.*  
 [14] *Di restaurant jang diminta ada dada mëntok, tapi di tempat dansa jang ditjari jaijah dada montok!*
- Appendix 1.8 *Tetapi jang specifiek dari Djoget Modern ini jaitoe, bahwa baek lelaki maoepoen perempoean tida menjentoeh toeboeh masing2. Paling tinggi berpegangan tangan. Djadi, ini ada tandak modern, tapi boekan dansa seperti orang Barat. [...] Ada djoega pelaoet2 bangsa Europa dan Amerika jang tertarik dengan Tandak Modern ini, kerna koepingnja mendengarken lagoe2 samba dan rumba, tapi dilihatnja gerakannja ada laen dari dansa2 rumba atawa samba jang biasa dilihatnja. Tapi kadang2 orang2 Amerika ini soeka pegang gadis2 itoe, kerna disangkanja ada sama dengan dansa2 rumba, foxtrot atawa samba. Tentoe sadja gadis2 itoe tida maoe dipegang kerna dalem Tandak Modern ini pantang sekali pegang gadis2 itoe.*
- Appendix 1.9 *Orang jang biasa dansa, biasanja sama dengan orang jang suka pidjet. Kalau mau tidur, kalua tidak dipidjet, rasanya masih kurang puas. Begitu djuga orang jang suka dansa. Dansa itu sebetulnja tjape, lelah, dan pinggang lama2 djadi pegel. Apalagi dansa2 seperti "jitterbug" dan "boogie-woogie," jang sebetulnja sama sadja sama main lontjatan tali. Tapi walaupun begitu, kalau sudah biasa, kalau tidak dansa pinggang rasanja masih pegel djuga. Oleh sebab itu djam malam tempo hari sebetulnja ada akibatnja bagi tukang2 dansa, baik laki2 ataupun perempuan.*
- Appendix 1.10 *Dengar musik dari swing sampaikan rumba? Happy World. Harus merasa happy bila masuk. Uang masuk 2 rupiah. Jang tidak sering datang, heran membatja "undangan 25 rupiah satu djam." Undang Happy World? Bukan tuan. Undang "dance hostess," dengan mana dapat kau berdansa bila dating seorang diri. Lampu2 berwarna merah, hidjau, kuning. Nona2 berparas putih dengan "evening dress" dari organdy sampaikan sutra. Pundak terbuka, Sepatu hak tinggi. Musik dipimpin oleh*

seorang Wanita. Dia bermain saxophone dengan pandai, djuga bernjanji. Tetamu2 tempat itu? International. Pangkat mereka? Kapitalist, Buruh dan djuga perwira tantara. Di Akademie Militer, berdansa masuk satu leerplan. Harus dapat membawa diri dalam pergaulan.

- Appendix 1.11 *Di Indonesia, night club boleh dikatakan bukan satu night club. Hanya satu dancing ball sadja. Diberikan ketika hanja untuk berdansa dan minum. [...] Pandangan umum kepada dancing ball disini djauh berbeda dengan luar negeri. Disini lebih digemari akan berdansa dalam rumah atau disatu pesta. Disana djustru sebaliknya. Maka tidak heran bilamana mereka dapat penghasilan jang agak lumayan.*
- Appendix 1.12 *Kalau pemuda2 kita lapisan atasan melakukan kesukaan itu sekedar untuk hiburan sadja, tidak akan ada keberatannja. Kebanjakan mendjadi tenggelam didalamnya. Dansa mendjadi tudjuan soal2 kemasjarakatan tidak diperhatikannja. Dengan begitu dansa memberi pengaruh jang djahat sekali. Jaitu memberi didikan jang individualistis. Dan memperkuat sifat individualistis jang telah ada bagi pemuda itu.*
- Appendix 1.13 *Setelah bangsa Tionghoa berkat revolusi dapat membuang madat, maka timbullah lain penjakit jang ditularkan, terutama dari Amerika, jaitu penjakit dansa. Dansa modern ini sebagai djuga madat bikin orang djadi ketagihan. Epidemi ini memuntjak selama pendudukan Belanda, Dimana isteri2 dan gadis2 jang telah gatel dansa mendjadi binal, tetapi katanja untuk dipandang intellek orang harus pandai dansa.*
- Appendix 1.14 *Pemuda kita jang sudah “dans-minded” di kota2 jang baru “dibezet” terus semakin giat mengorganisir pesta dansi2. Dalam pesta2, sedang entjim2 dan entjek2 tarik tjekhi dan lotjan, “bungah2 bangsa kita” terus bergeot-geot sampai djauh malam sambil diiringi oleh suara musik jang lebih tjabul dari Sipatmo.*

### Original text of quotations in Chapter 3

- Appendix 2.1 **Pro:** “Mengapa tari kita, baik serimpi maupun tajubnja tidak terlarang, masih disukai orang2 terpeladjar djuga?”
- Kontra:** “Kalau “perasaan” atau “aqal” manusia didjadikan ukuran pemetjah masalah “budi pekerti” atau achlaq, nistjaja pendapat orang berselisih selalu. Tetapi baik tajub, maupun serimpi, agamapun melarangnja. Tentang ukuran keagamaan itu baik kita serahkan kepada ablinja. Dan sebagai penganut Islam kita hendaknja tunduk pada adjarannja. Inilah namanja menjesuaikan “pengakuan” dengan “perbuatan.” Lebih baik dari menjesuaikan diri dengan zaman atau masjarakat, jg membawa kemelaratan sebab bertentangan dengan agama kita jg sutji.”
- Pro:** “Kalau begitu, habislah pemitjaraan kita. Memang agama mengikat kemerdekaan kita. Itulah sebabnja, agama tidak disukai pemuda2 jang mau

*madju dipalangan kesenian.”*

**Kontra:** *“Dari pada diikat hawa nafsu iblis, seribu kali lebih baik diikat dengan agama Allah, jang benar2 sutji. Sebab iblis mendjerumuskan, tetapi Islam mengangkat ummatnya jang setia. Tentang pemuda, saja pertjaja lebih banyak pemuda Islam jang taat kepada agamanja.”*

- Appendix 2.2 *Bila kita sudah pandai, biarlah sampai pandai itu sadja, guna dipergunakan bila perlu. Misalnja dalam suatu resepsi jang bersifat internasional kita terpaksa dan tidak dapat tidak mesti melakukan suatu dansa kehormatan (beleefdheidsdans). Tetapi kalau kita berdansa dengan maksud lain selain dari bendak pandai itu, sebenarnya hal itu sudah bukan berdansa lagi, melainkan “melepaskan nafsu.”*
- Appendix 2.3 *Mereka menolak hawa nafsu mereka dan mereka tidak akan membiarkan disiplin diri sendiri dilemahkan oleh apapun djuga. Mereka tidak mau djadi buah tjatur dimainkan kesana kemari, tetapi merekalah pemain tjatur jang menggeser2kan buah2 tjatur. Djika demikian sikap mereka dan sikap ini dapat dipertahankan, berdansalah sepuasnja.*
- Appendix 2.4 *Tindakan2 pemuda-pemudi peladjar2 kita pada masa itu bertentangan nian dengan kesusilaan dan kebudajaan Timur. [...] tiap2 kali pemuda-pemudi peladjar2 kita mengadakan rapat2 ataupun pertemuan2 selalulah mereka sertai dengan bal atau dansa, ja bahkan juga pada tengah2 mereka lagi asjik berdansa itu, lampu2 listrik kadang2 diputar-padamkan barang satu-tiga menit lamanja dengan mempraktikkan code jang terkenal tetapi sangat rendah, jaitu: “Ekid,” singkatan dari: E = Een, k = kus, i = in, d = ‘t donker, jang artinja: Tjiunan didalam gelap-gulita*

## Original text of quotations in Chapter 4

- Appendix 3.1 *Meskipun sdr. Datta telah mengemukakan 1001 matjam alasan dalam artikelnja guna mempengaruhi fikiran masjarakat kita umumnja, saja tetap berkejakinan bahwa fihak panitya dengan tudjuan sesutji itu pasti akan mendapat sokongan jang kuat dari seluruh lapisan masjarakat bangsa kita, lebih2 bagi mereka jang memeluk agama.*
- Appendix 3.2 *Kalau dapat dikemukakan disini, bahwa fihak jang pro dansa belum berani menampakkan diri dengan membentuk suatu gerakan pro dansa atau pembela dansa. Mungkinlah hal ini jang dinamakan “malu2 kutjing”, berani berbuat tidak mau memperkuat.*
- Appendix 3.3 *Realiteit diatas tjukup ditundjukkan oleh sedjarah kemanusiaan jang tjotjok dgn dan atas dasar firman Allah dalam Alqur'an surat II ayat 142, surat XXIV ayat 25, surat CIX ayat 1 s/d 6, maka pemikiran tentang Gerakan Anti Dansa, terutama kalua sudah mau agresif, adalah bertentangan dgn adjaran agama Islam.*



- Appendix 3.4 *Baik jang pro maupun jang kontra membentangkan fikirannja. Soalnja adalah soal jang bisa dipeladjar. Jaitu pemakaian dan penggunaan kebudajaan Barat didalam dunia kebudajaan Nasional kita. Djadi kita tidak berkeberatan kalau ada orang jang anti dansa. Hanja sadja tindakan menjerbu, menurut hemat kita hal ini bukanlah suatu tjara penjelesaian. Malahan bisa menimbulkan kesan jang kurang baik buat orang jang mengerjakannja. Dimata orang menderita, memang melihat orang dansa diatas lantai mengkilat dan dengan badju2 serba baru dan senjum didekatnja, memang mendjengkelkan, tetapi buat jang mendjalani tidak. Ini mesti diadakan diskusi.*
- Appendix 3.5. *Kalau soalnja bergaul dan sentuh-menjentuh sesungguhnya bukan hanja dansah sadja. Berdjalan-djalan sepanjang djalan dua sedjoli dengan bersenda gurau kalau salah dalam menjalurnja djuga akan mendjerumuskan kepelanggaran kesusilaan. Seperti halnja bersama-sama bontjeng-membontjeng sepeda, bersama-sama dalam “kantjah berenang,” dalam “kantjah melihat bioskop kebudajaan paha dan pantat telandjang a la Amerika,” pendek banjak lapangannja. Djadi kalau dansah dikambing hitamkan menjalurnkan pelanggaran kesusilaan, sekalipun djuga ada bahajanja, djuga kurang kena.*
- Appendix 3.6. *Sebagai seorang realis, kita melihat bahwa dansa hanja menimbulkan akibat2 sebagai berikut:*
- a. memperbesar demoralisasi dan pelatjuran*
  - b. membunuh nasionalisme jg sebat, karena setjara umum akan menimbulkan semangat menjerah dan perasaan rendah terhadap kebudajaan Barat dan memandang ringan terhadap kebudajaan bangsa sendiri dan kemudian akibatnja tidak lagi mempunyai kemampuan mentjipta buat mempertinggi mutu kebudajaan Indonesia Baru, sesuai dengan perkembangan sedjarah bangsanja sendiri jg mendapat inspirasi dari perdjuangannja sekarang*
  - c. memperluas pintu untuk infiltrasi kebudajaan paha dan pantat jang sama sekali tidak diterima oleh masjarakat*
  - d. mendorong suburnja penyakit “isolasionisme” dalam kalangan peladjar dengan pembentukan pergaulan dan masjarakat sendiri jang tidak mempunyai hubungan dengan masjarakatnya sendiri. Isolasionisme menimbulkan intelektualisme jang djauh dari rakjat dan sewaktu2 mendjadi lawan rakjat.*
- Appendix 3.7 *Untuk itulah mari kita demi kecintaan ketjintaan kita terhadap Negara dan Bangsa kita dapat mengorbankan selandjutnja pesta dansa jang dipandang oleh Timur dpt menimbulkan kebobrokan djiwa kita, hendaklah sedapat mungkin didjauhkan. Harus diinsjafi pula bahwa pada zaman perdjolongan pembangunan negara kita jang masih muda ini, masjarakat disekitarnja masih belum dapat dan tidak akan dapat menerima tjara bersenang-senang dengan pesta dansa.*

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