Summary of PhD thesis

**The development of
choreography in Indonesia**

**A study of contemporary dance work
in Jakarta Art Centre Taman Ismail Marzuki 1968-1987**

R.AJ. SITI NURCHAERANI KUSUMASTUTI

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Promoter: Prof Dr Soesanto Zuhdi

Co-Promoter: Prof Dr Edi Sedyawati

Universitas Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary artwork is a new form of art heavily imbued with and shaped by the artistic values of its epoch. However, contemporary artwork is not merely a new artwork since it transcends the artistic level of new artworks. In its relationship to dance, Deborah Jowitt says that post-modern dance is a dance work surpassing the latest novelty and this extra factor makes a piece contemporary artwork (Jowitt 1999: 1-12). Edi Sedyawati, an academic and dance critic, in her opening speech at the eighth "Art Summit Indonesia" at Teater Jakarta, Taman Ismail Marzuki, on 15 August 2016 said that contemporary artwork seeks and creates new things.

When the history of its inception is passed in review, by and large contemporary dance work in Indonesia has represented a departure from

R.AJ. SITI NURCHAERANI KUSUMASTUTI (also known as Nungki), finished her MA degree in anthropology from Universitas Indonesia in 2003. She is now a lecturer at the Performing Arts Faculty, Jakarta Institute of Arts (Institut Kesenian Jakarta, IKJ). Her research focuses on the traditional and contemporary studies in Indonesian dance. In addition, she is also a dancer and film artist. Nungki Kusumastuti can be contacted at: kusumastuti01@yahoo.co.id.

existing or older work.¹ Subsequently, in the process of the artist's artistic or abstract ideas, an older work is worked out until a novelty complete with its own distinctive features is achieved.

Dance artists in Indonesia have been inspired to go in search of novelty ever since President Soekarno (1945-1966) introduced his cultural policy (Holt 1967: 183; Lindsay 2011a: 1-2). Soekarno was adamant that the wealth of traditional and local performance art in Indonesia must be preserved, fostered and developed and so become part and parcel of the concept of Indonesia.

Under the next president, Soeharto (1966-1998), an era was launched dubbed the New Order. At the beginning of that era, artists were hoping for the, freedom to express themselves which under been restrained under the previous presidency. Their hopes were answered by Ali Sadikin, then the Governor of DKI Jakarta (1966-1977), who oversaw the building of the Pusat Kesenian Jakarta-Taman Ismail Marzuki (hence PKJ-TIM) which was inaugurated in 1968. This area provided channelling centre in which artistic ambitions could be channelled completely with proper, up to date facilities and, even more importantly, a crucible for the birth of the freedom of expression

Ali Sadikin played an important part in creating the conditions which nurtured the talents of artists and a climate in which contemporary dance work could evolve. He allocated funds to encourage the growth of the art in Jakarta. The establishment of the Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (DKJ) as policy maker and strategic planner at the PKJ-TIM, especially in artistic matters, has successfully maintained the continuity of performance.

In Indonesia, from the history of their initial creations, new dance works, which are a continuation of tradition and modern, have been fostered; contemporary works which tend to be the exact opposite of their predecessors have emerged. In accordance with an artist's artistic ambitions or visions of the ideal, existing work is crafted to deliver novelty in every particularity; this search can be so far-reaching that the traces of the older work are no longer perceptible.

The traditional dance work discussed in this research is dance work from the past which has been handed down for generations, a minimum of at least three generations, and has been taught and performed continuously. The combined factors of flexibility and adaptability ensure that past work endures to this day; its supporters still see the benefit of the tradition and are fond of the work, despite the though changes, innovations or even new arrangements. Importantly the essence of any work is still entrenched in traditional patterns and rules. Of course, some traditional dance works in Indonesia are still preserved and sustained in what seems to be their entirety. Nevertheless, in reality, from time to time some have undergone changes from which new creations have been born.

¹ Older work can exist in the form of traditional work, that is, art works handed down from the past and according to Edward Shils, at least three generations, in this respect, dance is included (Shils 1981: 4-16).

Eric Hobsbawm (1983: 1-14) says that to make tradition present is tantamount to an effort to safeguard a formally constructed tradition, but, the same can also be taken to offer a response to a new situation by the expedient of adopting and adapting forms from the past. Sal Murgiyanto in his paper entitled “Menyoal makna; Tidak ada model tunggal kontemporer” (2015: 6) has found that a dynamic of development and creativity which is moving forwards towards evolution and reformation is ever-present in tradition. This would be an assertion that a new dance work is invariably a development of tradition in a dance work; one which has evolved from an earlier traditional form (Sedyawati 2001: 60). In such a case, the creative pursuit is focused more on development and the search for (new) forms without being too bound by traditional rules and patterns, thereby making them simultaneously a new dance work and a development of tradition.²

The existence of epoch shift in the beginning of the twentieth century which is marked by the spread of modernism in the west has influenced the development of modern art in Indonesia in the years just preceding and immediately after Independence. In the field of dance, western modernism had quite an impact on dance artists in Indonesia. These influences were dispersed, among others means, through the artists’ experiences of performing and studying abroad, by reading and by seeing films.

Generally speaking, the creation of modern dance in Indonesia has followed a pattern of reform in the expressions and techniques of improvisation which were no longer bound by the strictures of traditional patterns because individual artists were resolved to be free of the rigid patterns of tradition. Traditional traces can still be discerned because most of the roots of most dance artists in Indonesia are deep in traditional art.

Hence, what is meant by modern dance work in Indonesia is a dance work whose process of inception is anchored in elements of novelty in form, movement and dance technique, ideas and creative spirit. These elements are the main point of departure in the creation of a modern dance work introduced by the sensibilities of a particular artist.

In the discussion about contemporary dance work, Edi Sedyawati has claimed that a composer of contemporary art encounters two attitudes which he/she can choose as a point of departure in the creative process, namely: (1) freeing oneself from every form of existing expression, or (2) quoting an existing material borrowed from traditional works in a way that has never been done before.³

Consequently, Sedyawati argues that the category contemporary in artwork is basically one which has arisen from the need to name a new kind of work which is not quite modern, even though modern and contemporary both raise challenges “against” the traditional in their search for a new mode

² New dance work developed from tradition can sometimes be called new creation dance (Murgiyanto 2015: 6; Supriyanto 2015: 56)

³ In her opening speech at the eighth “Art Summit Indonesia” at Teater Jakarta, Taman Ismail Marzuki, on August 15, 2016.

of expression. In the history of art, what was previously known as “modern” finally evolves into “the most common”. Hence a movement which began as a reform could evolve into a “tradition”. Once this has happened, people look for a new category or for a new work which must have the requisite new elements, either in techniques or creativity.

In a nutshell the definition of contemporary is a reform elicited by the conditions of an epoch. In Indonesia, contemporary artwork is a dance work created in the present, in which the approach or the concept of execution is not bound by a custom or particularity, breaking free of any traditional adoption and escaping the strictures of past execution. Contemporary dance work is always actual and the concept of execution a reflection of the epoch’s tastes, interests and trends.

SUMMARY OF PROBLEMS

In the first two decades of the New Order administration, above all thanks to the creation of the PKJ-TIM, contemporary dance work underwent a great improvement. Why did dance improve so significantly? A quick analysis shows, that there seems to be a connection between an artist’s creativity, audience, mass media and support by government policy (especially the DKI Jakarta). These were the primary factors which opened the door for the development of contemporary dance work. A summary of the problems of this study unveils the reasons behind the connection.

SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Thematically, this research is a study of Indonesia’s dance history, especially the evolution of contemporary dance in Indonesia, paying special attention to PKJ-TIM performances in 1968-1987. During those years, eleven major programmes were devised by various curators lined up by the DKJ Dance Committee and involving hundreds of national dance artists.

Geographically, as hinted in the title of this research, “Contemporary dance development in Indonesia; A contemporary art study in PKJ-TIM in 1968-1987”, the focus of this research is the PKJ-TIM, the premises offering optimal facilities to practise, perform, discuss and hold seminars. It also provided accommodation for artists from outside Jakarta. According to the data, more than one hundred new dance works, either a development of traditional work, modern work or a contemporary creation all came into being because of the facilities available in the PKJ-TIM.

The temporal margin in this research is the years between 1968 to 1987. The first year was chosen because in that year, 1968, the PKJ-TIM was inaugurated as a dedicated art site. It fulfilled its purpose as a place in which various arts, including contemporary dance work, could pass through a process of evolution. As just said, the stages in the development were marked by the establishment of eleven grand programmes up to 1987. This was the heyday and after this date, the big continuous programmes ceased to exist.

Consequently, the years between 1968-1987 were chosen as the temporal margin of the research.

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPT FOUNDATION

The methodological presentation of historical facts requires a sound conceptual foundation or theoretical framework. This is the basis for the reconstruction of history.

In an explanation of a historical event in the theme "The development of choreography in Indonesia; A study of contemporary dance in PKJ-TIM 1968-1987", the approach preferred is structural methodology. In that methodology, the state of affairs and structure are entwined in a symbiotic dialectic weave, free of any signs of dichotomy. In other words, the state of affairs and structure exist to complement each other in a methodological unity (Lloyd 1993: 93-96). In this sense, state of affairs contains in itself the disposition to change social structure, although social structure does have the capacity to constitute constraints. Conversely it can also assume the role of change enabler. It is here that the structural approach justifies individual, individual group, and institutional roles as a determining factor in transforming and reproducing change in social structure. The individual or individual groups and institutions will be called agents of change.

By applying this structural theory, this research has been able to reveal the agents of change and the interweaving and entwined structures in the development of choreography in Indonesia, especially new dance work up to contemporary level, at the PKJ-TIM between the years 1968-1987.

This research will also use several other concepts like observation, analysis, and interpretational warranty; in this case, the concept of culture, modernism in art, international interaction, and choreography.

DATA GATHERING

The archival sources used are those documents containing records of the cultural policies of the Soekarno and Soeharto eras, data referring to the establishment of the DKJ and the PKJ-TIM and archival documents revealing basic guidelines and policies or rules regulating the management of the PKJ-TIM. Secondary sources are print media archives about the activities of either contemporary dance artists or dance work performances (pre-event report or review).

Another tried and tested method for accumulating and studying data is the interview. The first informants to be contacted were the primary sources, that is, living choreographers, dancers, and musicians who are still able to provide information needed for this research. A second category of witnesses contains commentators or art critics, especially those involved in the dance scene, including cultural journalist, dance critics, and performance venue managers, not to mention dance performance audiences.

Data collected from audio and video cassette documentation are also essential to obtaining information about the dance creations at that time.

ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES

The analytical techniques involve the categorization of the different types of dance on the basis of traditional dance choreography, new dance choreography developed from traditional dance, modern dance choreography, and contemporary dance choreography. Here the approach most commonly used was observing the process of creating works of dance. The pertinent points which would shed light on this matter were: (1) Sources or features of the dance work - ethnic, national, or universal; (2) the supporting artistic elements used; (3) themes - narrative or non-narrative; (4) the shapes of the works - movements, spatial design, temporal design, dynamics, intensity, pressure, quality, and dramatic design; (5) The contents of the work - dance ideas and originality, objective, and subjective approach.

DANCE IN INDONESIA IN THE YEAR 1950s-1966; THE PROGENY OF REFORM

"National identity" became the principal framework of artistic development in 1959. In short, art was geared towards nationalism (Sedyawati 1987: 236-251). In an effort to present a visualization of the presence of Indonesia in the eyes of the world and to create an official image of national identity, Soekarno regularly sent dancers, musicians, and puppet-masters abroad as artistic ambassadors of Indonesia. Their task was to perform various dances and play traditional music, and the shadow puppet theatre was also not overlooked. In another respect, Soekarno was also of vital importance in encouraging the reformation in traditional dance and music. The upshot of this can be seen in a more compact, shorter length dynamic work, including a raising of the degree of visibility by introducing more colourful costumes.⁴ These initiatives were taken to ensure that the local traditional art being sent overseas or those being performed in the Presidential Palace every Independence Day (as well on other state occasions) remained interesting and not become tedious for foreign audiences. These changes meant that they were in a better position to present the wealth and diversity of culture in Indonesia.

As it was developed and freed from its strict straight-jacketed, a task which some of the artists were more than happy to fulfil, traditional dance work became potentially appealing, and its capacity for further development was more clearly delineated. This is what is known as new dance work as a development from tradition.

The affirmation of Indonesia as a sovereign country, as well as the growth of self-confidence and national pride lay behind Soekarno's strategy of establishing cultural relations with other countries. In Soekarno's eyes, introducing Indonesian art was tantamount to introducing Indonesia. Jennifer Lindsay (2011b: 234-238) has dubbed this period the international cultural diplomacy era. In the 1950s, besides regularly sending artists far afield as a part of artistic missions, Indonesia was also the recipient of many visits from international artists.

⁴ For example, *Pakarena* dance from Makassar (Sutton 2013: 69).

One noteworthy point of these artistic missions to foreign countries was that a seemingly small moment was pregnant with great significance since it helped form “becoming Indonesia.” These visits bore fruit in growing friendship and respect between government and artists. This impact touched on a much wider art landscape, enabling the germination of consciousness of difference in artistic styles (Sedyawati 1987: 166-70).

The arrival of foreign artistic groups to Indonesia expanded the audiences’ knowledge and experience and, in future, the widening of their horizons would affect idealism, artistic aspirations and attitude, as well as encouraging a daring creativity which would rework or explore dance work structure. Of course, the influence of overseas artistic missions and the arrival of art groups in Indonesia gave local artists a chance to discourse about art and nation, and their experiences of comparison made them think about art in Indonesia in a national framework. This was fertile soil for Indonesian artists who then had a model example of how art at home could be developed, what to imitate and what to avoid.

Although many dance artists were eventually influenced by dance reforms overseas, initially they still stuck to the traditional dance works they knew best. The shift which gave birth to modern dance in Indonesia only commenced unmistakably after young choreographers began to immerse themselves in the landscape of modern western dance. Names like Seti-Arti Kailola (1919-2017) from Jakarta, Bagong Kussudiardja (1928-2004) and Wisnoe Wardhana (1929-2002) from Yogyakarta were the first of many Indonesian modernist artists.

DANCE IN 1966-1987; GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR ARTISTS’ ASPIRATIONS

In the Soeharto era, priority was given to security, economic growth, and equalization. This also had its own particular impact on artistic expression. This can be summed up as: artists could have freedom of expression as long as it did not pose a threat to the stability of power. It was at that moment, 1968 to be precise, that the government of the DKI Jakarta built the Pusat Kesenian Jakarta-Taman Ismail Marzuki (PKJ-TIM).

The performances were held under the aegis of the Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (DKJ), whose authority included artistic matters and programme budgeting. The presence of audiences was as important as the programmes selected. Various publications were compiled to let the public know that they were welcome to attend in some of the programmes. News coverage was tailored by the mass media to provide pre-event and post-event reports.

Soeharto’s regime loathed communism with all its heart. In the art domain, freedom of expression and creation were affirmed and the artists were free to experience the artistic development happening in western countries like the United States. The modern and contemporary art approach was characterized by experimentation and original expressions, and slowly but surely it carved itself the leeway to evolve (Supardi 2012: 599). Fortunately many of the artists involved in this process did not forget or lose sight of the wealth of traditional

art which was part of the heritage of various peoples of Indonesia.

During this era, contemporary dance work flourished. Below is a summary and analysis of new dance work created by choreographers whose work could be categorized as contemporary dance and was performed at the PKJ-TIM in 1968-1987.

CONTEMPORARY DANCE WORKS IN THE PKJ-TIM (1968-1987)

A work by Huriah Adam entitled *Sepasang api jatuh cinta* (1968) was inspired by the "Tari piring", a traditional Minangkabau dance with a traditional music accompaniment and movements borrowed from martial arts. The change from tradition to contemporary was accomplished by the exploration of dynamic and expressive movement. It used Niccolò Paganini's composition *Violin Concerto IV* to create a non-Minang atmosphere. The new movements were created to suit the rhythm and cadence of Paganini's composition and the costumes consisted of a dress with long sleeves in the Chinese style pleated at the cuff, an unprecedented deviation from traditional costume practice. This work received a lukewarm reception from the traditional Minang society.

The supporting artistic element which played the greatest role in this work was the music which made this work unparalleled at the time. Minang music was firmly banished from the scene and replaced by European classical music. This changed the aesthetic sense of the Minang genre. The whole motion of the piece was changed to follow the rhythm of music which was not Minang. In the context of contemporary understanding, this was a work of contemporary dance. Here the old work which had done no more than serve as the originator of the idea to create a work whose source subsequently became blurred. Adam was a reformer, an agent of changing a traditional work into a new work of dance.

Another of her works was entitled *Malin Kundang* (1969). Again it was a traditional Minangkabau folktale about a mother who cursed her child. But Adam reinterpreted it on the premise that it would be impossible for a mother to curse her son. Traditionally *Malin Kundang* is a dance drama with pantomimic movements and the music conveys the depths of the mother's grief. In her contemporary creation, Adam removed the pantomimic movements and replaced them by crude, abrupt movements accompanied by a tambourine improvisation played by the dancers and a large drum struck to invoke a mood of restlessness. At the end of the dance, *Malin Kundang* was still alive although his heart, but not his body, had turned to stone by his regrets.

The work was of course no longer the original narrative. In *Malin Kundang*, Adam elicits the idea that *Malin Kundang*'s punisher is not his mother but God. Her belief in maternal morality made Adam unconvinced that a mother could bear to condemn her own child. This is where Adam's thinking could be called contemporary and at which she tried to be an agent of change and set the old thinking in a new direction by turning away from the traditional narrative. In a discussion at Taman Ismail Marzuki, 13 December 1970, the scholar Fuad Hasan stated that contemporary art was an art which depicted the

Zeitgeist or the soul of the times. in the manner in which Adam's contemporary attitude was revealed lay in her interpretation of the story of Malin Kundang. The mother did not condemn her son to having his body turned to stone, even though at the end of the show God did freeze the soul of that ungodly child. This gave the story of *Malin Kundang* a contemporary touch.

Farida Oetoyo's work entitled *Rama dan Sinta* (1972) was adapted from the *Ramayana* epic. Traditionally, this dance drama departs from the story that Rama doubted the purity of Sinta after she had been captured by Rahwana. Although Sinta's body was consumed by flames her spirit remained with Rama wherever he went. In the interpretation conceived by Oetoyo, during her imprisonment, Rahwana must have taken advantage of Sinta's body despite her love and devotion to Rama. It was non-classical ballet choreography combined with non-balletic "movements", for instance, techniques borrowed from Surakarta Javanese and Balinese traditional dance. In this performance, the male dancers wore tight knee-length trousers; the female dancers wore a close-fitting leotard which allowed them to perform with ease the novel dance movements explored by the choreographer. The music was played on wind instruments and a broken piano producing sounds commensurate with the dancers' scene and movements.

Rama dan Sinta clearly departed from the text of the *Ramayana*. In her work, Oetoyo gave an interpretation of what was enshrined in the written text. She chose to use her logic developed in the general reality of the contemporary human life. This is where Oetoyo's thinking can be said to be contemporary as its basic inspiration lay in traditional texts but the thread was drawn through and actualized in the present. Her belief in her work gave her the self-confidence to stand her ground when accused by the media of having devalued the *Ramayana* which is one of the great expressions of the Hindu tradition (Oetoyo 2014: 187-188).

The supporting artistic element which helped elevate this work to the contemporary were the costumes worn by the players. The costumes were the result of a process of artistic thought which moved beyond the traditional idea of what they should have been. Decisions on the use of costumes and on the use of broken pianos to produce certain sounds were dramatic atmosphere boosters. Oetoyo's major leap forward was to leave the classic picture far behind. The contemporary dimension in this work was a result of her creativity as an agent of change.

Another of Oetoyo's creations was *Putih-putih* (1976). This work presented as a classical ballet was inspired by the sublimity Oetoyo felt listening to the *azan* and looking at the movements of the prayers. The music accompanying the dance was from Trio Bimbo's song "Tuhan". All the dancers were female wearing tight flesh-coloured leotards. The dance was swamped by protests as one of the scenes showed the movements of *salat* as a lurch leaving the feet raised high to the sky. Disapproval was exacerbated because the dancers wore transparent veils and the *azan* was voiced by a female. To make matters worse, the direction of the *qiblah* also diverged. The protest was reinforced

by the condemnation of the Jakarta Council of Ulama (Oetoyo 2014: 190-192).

Sardono W. Kusumo presented his work *Samgita Pancasona* (1969). Taken from one of the Javanese versions of Ramayana, *Sugriwo Subali*, it lay well within the Indonesian ethnic tradition. In Sardono's hands, the dance movements were inspired by the reliefs on the Prambanan temples and the music was composed of traditional Javanese singing accompanied by a gamelan consisting of fewer members than the conventional Javanese orchestra. The movements were in sync with a song sung by the main cast who departed from the tonal patterns of traditional Javanese songs. The dance movements blurred the distinction between male and female dancing. The male dancers wore minimalist costumes, clad only in a *batik* loincloth with their torsos bare. The female dancers wore pale-coloured fabric top to cover the chest. As a contemporary artwork this piece was warmly welcomed by Jakarta audiences. Nevertheless, in Surakarta, the work was criticized for its departure from the boundaries set by standard Javanese traditions (Widaryanto 2015: 114).

Another of Sardono's conceptions was *Meta ekologi* (1979). The theme was a lament for the destruction of the environment. Several truck-loads of mud were dumped on the PKJ-TIM stage. Standing in a pool of mud, the dancers moved their bodies in response to the mud, unrestricted by any choreographical directions. They slowly lowered themselves into the mud, immersed themselves, played, ran, and wriggled. The music consisted of the recorded sounds of insects and nocturnal animals, sometimes interrupted by the notes of gong and fiddle. The cultural critic Umar Kayam said that this contemporary work was a new language in communicating awareness of what Kusumo's environmental explorations in East Kalimantan and Nias had revealed (Kayam 1979: 36).

Anderson Sutton, an American ethnomusicologist, in an interview after the show on 18 October 1979, judged that Kusumo's work was good, aesthetically acceptable and provocative. In many ways, this work resembled a western *avant-garde* production displaying brilliant intellectual and rich dimensional concepts. A writer, Abdul Hadi W.M., said that Kusumo preferred essence to form. Hadi argued that in Kusumo's eyes the most important message was to unravel what is experienced in life and the sort of attitude to be adopted in facing these challenges. An examination of his work does show that he often did appear to veer out of context his dance it is judged purely as an aesthetic performance, without any reference to the creative process and his attention to his concerns about socio-cultural issues. His unwavering interest was in the essentials and the truth (Murgiyanto 1991: 394).

One creation by Sardono was *10 menit dari Borobudur* (1987). In this he used chanting from the Buddhist tradition to tell a story about Borobudur stupa, Buddhism, Japanese cultural symbolism, and the meetings of cultures. The dance movements were gentle, rotating, and standing imitating the stances which can be seen in reliefs on Borobudur precisely. The idea was to enter into a dialogue with the stupa. The dancers moved in accordance with their

interpretation of the Buddha. The costume consisted of white trousers. The hum of Buddhist devotional singing was replaced by the sound of *azan* mixed with a church choir and African music as a background to the dancer's Jesus-like movements when He was crucified.

10 menit dari Borobudur not only resembled a dance because of its choreographic elements like motion, technique, form, expression and so forth, it also presented an awareness of the nature of life. Kusumo was no longer talking about religion, belief and God, nor was he talking about art, but as a creator he was conveying a creed about the universe which is all the divine reality. In *10 menit dari Borobudur*, Kusumo showcased contemporary dance and underlined its importance as a valuable art form.

One of Julianti Parani's work was entitled *Plesiran* (1974). It was based on the traditional Betawi *Lenong*, *Gambang Kromong* music, and *Cokek* dance. The exploration of movement was focused on Betawi martial arts. Hilarity was achieved in the scene in which the male and female dancers danced together inside a *sarong*. The idea was taken from a dance in Poso, Central Sulawesi. The contemporary aspect lay in the exploration of movement derived from patternless Betawi traditional dancing combined with Javanese Surakarta, Minang and ballet dance movements combined to make new Betawi dance and technique.

This work can be categorized as a work of contemporary dance because Parani adopted a search for motion from traditional Betawi dancing which does not follow a regular pattern. She combined this with ballet steps and processed into a new dance work without losing the Betawi atmosphere.

Another of Parani's work was *Pendekar perempuan* (1977). Again it was inspired by Betawi folklore and the dance as it was based on the Betawi *Topeng* dance. This exploration was embarked upon to enrich the variation in movement by adopting other forms from *Topeng*, *Pencak Silat*, *Blenggo*, and *Cokek* dances. It was expanded further by the addition of ballet steps. The Betawi dance forms from the past were made contemporary to convey the urgency of the present time and facilitated their relationship to the future.

As Julianti Parani disclosed in an interview in Jakarta, in September 2014:

"Pendekar Perempuan" adalah salah satu karya saya berdasarkan eksplorasi saya selama lebih dari lima tahun terhadap kesenian Betawi dan saya membuat komposisi tari disesuaikan dengan estetika masa kini. Meskipun di sana sini saya masih menggunakan teknik balet untuk memperkaya gerak, namun bisa dikatakan saya telah mulai meninggalkan balet pada tari Betawi ciptaan saya.

Pendekar Perempuan is one of my works based on my exploration for more than five years on Betawi art and I make the composition dance adapted to the aesthetics of today. Although here and there I still use ballet techniques to enrich the movements, I can say I have started to leave ballet on my Betawi dance.

Her message is that forms of dance which were once enshrined in the past and considered inviolable should be made contemporary to imbue them with

new meaning relevant to contemporary life and make them the foundations for the future.

Another of Parani's creations was *Siparnipi* (1987). It was inspired by Toba Batak culture in which one of the folk-tales recounts the story of *Sigale-gale*, a wooden puppet used in funeral dance performances by the people on the island of Samosir in Lake Toba. In this work, ballet steps and techniques were mixed with movements from modified modification of the Tor Tor dance to ensure that the performance was more dynamic and varied. The music was provided by traditional Batak instruments harmonized with western ones like piano, cell, and flute. The dancers wore black tights and leotards and were wrapped in *ulos*.

The three works of Julianti Parani, *Plesiran*, *Pendekar perempuan*, and *Siparnipi* were clearly contemporary in their day, at the time the works were performed. Their inspiration was traditional works. From this basis they progressed by incorporating elements of ballet. At that time, observers were quick to voice their approval of Parani, emphasizing that they were a renewal because of their breakaway from the traditional paradigm. The dancers who mastered the various dance techniques of the various genres made the *Plesiran* and the *Pendekar perempuan* a treat in which tradition continued to live on but no longer felt obsolete as it had been touched as it were by the magic wand of a new approach. Similarly, in *Siparnipi* which inserted the Tor-tor dance mixed with ballet and traditional music infiltrated by piano, cello, and flute, the Batak atmosphere was still present but had been related to the elements from the West.

I Wayan Diya presented *Jelantik Bogor* (1973). The source of this work was the Balinese *Topeng* dance drama, which Diya combined with *Gambuh*, *Arja*, *Baris*, and other elements in Balinese performing arts to form a unity unusual in Balinese dance performance. The experimentation was apparent in the music which included unusual instruments not found in Bali like, the *Gong Gebyar* in association of the *Luang* gamelan, *Gending Pleganjuran*, Chinese drum row and *tek-tekan*.

This venture into the unusual was something new in Diya's work. Although his heart was still firmly in Bali, other elements from outside Bali were added as a spice which blended with other spices to evoke a sense that all was not solely Balinese. In the context of the time (1973), this was contemporary. Diya was one of a group of creators who were then passionate about new creations, which presented exciting challenges. Diya, who was very familiar with Balinese dance, found himself in the environment of artists who are also very expert in their respective fields. This is the sort of crucible in which creative vision is formed. People dared not just to keep to the tradition, but also to conduct experiments to initiate newness by an exploration of the possibilities.

Wiwiek Sipala presented *Akkarena* (1978). It was based on the *Pakarena* dance and the *Paraga* folk play from Makassar, South Sulawesi. Nevertheless, this work had taken a step away from its traditional inspirations. This was

evident in the dancers' movement which relied on breathing and flinging to the winds movements limited by beats and the circular movement space usually found in traditional Makassar dance. The combination of male and female dancers had also never before been seen in Makassar dance. The dancers who were non-Makassar ignorant of the *Pakarena* were able to create a new product because they were encouraged to move according to their perceptions of how the original work should be interpreted.

Akkarena was a new dance which came into being as a development of tradition. Two things made *Akkarena* untraditional: Sipala deconstructed some of the traditional dance patterns and his choice of non-Makassar dancers. Such radical changes irrevocably produce a new creation. Sipala was pushed to make this break-away from tradition because of the entrenched environment on the campus of the IKJ, which was only a stone's throw from Taman Ismail Marzuki, where at that time new works which used traditional works as stepping-stones were pouring forth in a constant flow. The spirit of renewal born of the trends which were conquering the art scene, took possession of Sipala's soul. To paraphrase Fuad Hasan's thought on the contemporary art scene, in a discussion at Taman Ismail Marzuki, 13 December 1970, contemporary art is an art which depicts the *Zeitgeist* or the spirit of the times. Taking this into account, it was clear that *Akkarena* was a contemporary work imbued with the sparkling creation of the other new works which were streaming out of the imaginations of other contemporary artists.

Another of Sipala's creations was *Ironi* (1987). Spatial composition was very important to accommodate the variations which required the dancers to spring high in the air and then disperse before finally reuniting. The atmosphere was filled with surging music which juxtaposed deafening skills of trumpet and trombone with the strokes of timpani and children's screams. The performance ended with white paper plates fluttering onto the stage and the audience. It was a unique spectacle at the PKJ-TIM festival 1968-1987.

This work was categorized as contemporary by observers because it followed the tenets of Butterworth and Wildschuts (1995) that, when creating new dances, contemporary choreographers always bear in mind the wide range of applications from the perspectives of both the audience (including observers) and the artists. Consequently, any new creative work has to be staged in a community and environment open to receiving it and who can all share in the experience. This involves broad applications including stage, music, costumes and other elements.

Endo Suanda performed *Klana Tunjung Seta* (1978), a West Javanese folk spectacle. Traditionally, it is a combination of music and the *Badawang* mask dance. In Suanda's creation, the usual mask was replaced by a much bigger one the size of those used in the Betawi *ondel-ondel*. The spectacle also included a parade of *Barongsay* and *Ronggeng Gunung*. The festive music was provided by a classical violin instead of a more rustic fiddle. The dancers' instructions covered only the concept of movement but no specific rules were laid down. They moved commanding every corner of the hall, including the stairways

at the entrances to the auditorium. Some questioned the nature of the work, asking if the work could still be called dance; others argued that the work was a dance work which had been expanded to incorporate a large portion of theatre and art.⁵

The show was produced just at a juncture at which the radical renewal was gathering pace, and as it was on this cusp people did wonder whether this was a work of dance or of the theatre. Wagner (1981: 41-50) classifies this sort of work as exogenous, an update which does not have a reference point in convention. Suanda embarked on this path, consciously marginalizing the conventions of dance art, but also disobeying the conventions of the theatre. Hence his brainchild was a spectacle which could not be categorized as dance or as theatre.

Agus Tasman and friends (Suprpto Suryodarmo, Hajarsatoto, Rahayu Supanggah) came with the offering *Wayang Budha Sutasoma* (1978). It involved a man-sized shadow puppet, occasionally inserted screams of the musicians, and Buddhist mantra. There were dancers but they were not the central element. Torch-light was projected onto a sheet of white fabric creating the magical shadows of the movements and objects. Music, fine art and theatrics were very dominant overshadowing the dance elements. Some commentators questioned the nature of the dance work; some claimed that category was no longer important and should cede place to appeal as a performance. This claim was also made in Cunningham's contemporary work, *The handy e-book of contemporary dance history*,⁶ namely: the art of dance is the art of dance, which should not to be analysed, in which absolute creative freedom flows.

Trisapto came with his creation called *Segitiga* (1981), a non-narrative experimental work. Every element reinforced the work: sound, movement, the dancers' bodies, form, lighting, and seventeenth-century Russian classical music composed as electronic music played on the piano. The strength of the performance was the triumvirate: lighting, music and the dancers' body movements. Another triangle was created by the turning the rectangular stage into a triangle and then emphasizing the contrasts between the elements of the triangle, for example, slow dance movements even though the music was played at a fast tempo.

Another work by Trisapto was *Perempuan* (1981). It was an experimental work with life experience as the source of ideas. An intersection was marked by traffic signs. Movement exploration was pursued using an umbrella, candle, glass and plastic poles as tools. These props had nothing to do with supporting aesthetic purpose but were the key to the door of interactional possibilities between bodies and objects. In the musical accompaniment, the percussive instruments were distorted by an electronic device to produce a completely different sound.

⁵ Sal Murgiyanto "Festival Penata Tari Muda" (*Tempo* 30 December 1978) and "Wawancara dengan Sal Murgiyanto" (*Berita Buana* 30 December 1978).

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.contemporary-dance.org/contemporary-dance-history.html>, accessed on 2-4-2016)

Sunarno, Nora Kunstantina, and Rusini combined their talent to produce a work called *Joged* (1981). The dance was based on the classical Javanese Surakarta style dance. In their hands, the movements were made stronger and faster and the leaps were extended. The costumes were simplified to accommodate the dancers' movements. The discussion after the performance elicited several questions from the audiences. For instance, whether the custodians of culture in Surakarta would permit such a radical break with tradition. Surakartan traditional art is renowned for its delicacy, hence the work received negative welcome from those who were resistant to such wide-sweeping changes (*Kompas* 3 February 1981).

Dedy Lutan and Tom Ibnur presented *Awan Bailau* (1982), based on traditional Minangkabau dance and music, but omitting the morality theme which it usually conveyed to the audience. The dancers were not from Minangkabau, but from Jakarta as it was thought that this would allow a fresh exploration of movements. The traditional movements were changed to suit the abilities of the dancers. There was no distinction in movement between the male and female dancers. A paddy-field scare-crow was blown by the wind to inspire and encourage top spinners from Laura Dean. When performed in the United States at the American Dance Festival (1984), the grande-dame of modern dance, Martha Graham, praised the work as a contemporary creation full of exploration and innovation but still retaining traditional elements and symbols (*Berita Buana* 10 July 1984; *Kompas Minggu* 15 July 1984; *Angkatan Bersenjata* 11 August 1984).

Another tack was taken by Ida Wibowo in *Sinta* (1984), whose inspiration was the Yogyakarta-style of Javanese dance. However, all traces of the classical Javanese dance disappeared because the floor pattern, space and vocal composition were all delineated by the dancers' improvisations in their movements. They were encouraged to search actively to find novel aspects. Another divergence from the classical pattern was that *Sinta* was not played by just one dancer, instead, every dancer could play *Sinta*. In the same vein, other characters were played interchangeably by the dancers.

The next interesting and innovative production was *Nyejer Agung* by I Gusti Kompyang Raka (1986). This work was inspired by *Nyepi*, a holy day in Bali on the Saka new year on which everybody is prohibited to undertake any activities or make any noise. Here the Balinese dance style receded as it incorporated the dance styles of Java, Sunda, Malay, and Aceh. In the closing scene, a group of youngsters entered the stage riding motorcycles whose mufflers broke the silence of *Nyepi*, a great contrast to the dancers who stood silent and the gamelan which made no sound. The lighting was blinding before it finally faded to black.

In his work entitled *Sampah* (1986), Martinus Miroto came up with yet another creation. Its inspiration was the *Bedaya Lawung*, Yogyakarta-style Javanese classical dance. The tender *Bedaya* dance was combined with loud *rampak* movements. The dance movements were typically Balinese, abrupt and dynamic. The music was the sound of bamboo being beaten and recorded

vocals. The female characters wore mini-skirts and looked pretty and sexy. The lighting was contrasting. It was dance theatre and acting combined to blur the lines of traditional dance.

Laksmi Simanjuntak performed *Kala Bendu* (1986). It was inspired by some lines of poetry about death as a consequence of age devouring everything in its path. The movements explored urban culture and were not bound by any form of dance techniques. They were the movements of people going about their daily lives. With the exception of the principal dancer, none of the other players had any basic training in dance, since this performance was not meant to present dancing. The music was produced by acoustic electronic devices, combined with various sounds from nature and the repetitive sibilance from the players.

Gusmiati Suid's work *Limbogo* (1987) was based on traditional *Pencak Silat* from Minang, combined with music. From its point of departure, it was developed into a new, dynamic, strong dance movement, marked by abrupt gestures in every direction. The music was a combination of the stamping of feet, the clapping of hands, and the voices of the dancers and musicians. The idea and concept diverged from the traditional work because of the addition of seventy-five movement phrases and distinctive individual techniques which placed the emphasis on personal expressions and ensured they really stood out. Several foreign commentators were astonished by the performance which they dubbed approvingly a creative combination of tradition and the contemporary (Minarti 2008: 155–156).

The next artist to come under the spotlight is Sulistyo Tirtokusumo, for his work *Untitled* (1987). The basic idea was a classical dance in the Surakarta style, the *Bedaya Ketawang*, and its musical accompaniment (*gending*), usually performed with the palaces of the princes of Surakarta. There was also a reflection on the statues of Buddha on the Borobudur stupa. When it was performed, it was obvious that the movement was the outcome of an exploration of ways to escape from traditional dance movements. The stage was dimly lit. A dancer sat cross-legged in one corner of the stage; another dancer stood still outside the stage; yet another person moved back and forth without pattern or pause; a fourth person sat cross-legged in the centre of the stage moving his body very slowly in time to the meditative *gending Bedaya Ketawang* gamelan. Once in a while a Buddhist mantra was heard.

Fatamorgana was a work of Hendro Martono (1987). Its non-narrative and non-figurative work was inspired by modern works of Martha Graham, Jose Limon, and Alwin Nikolais. Every element (costume, make-up, property, lighting, setting) was given equal prominence. There was no individual dancer because they fused into a co-operative group.

Bagong Kussudiardja from Yogyakarta presented his work called *Kurusetra* (1987). It was taken from the *Wayang Wong* tradition but there was no articulate *wayang* character or symbol and the dancers' movements were not those of the *Wayang Wong*. The minimal movement of body parts indicated that besides a physical exploration, an intensive emotional exploration was taking place.

The space for movement was very limited (100 x 80 cm) and divided between two levels. There were no sets or stage properties. The gamelan was combined with western music composed by Vangelish and a recording of people talking could be heard intermittently and there was an unclear juxtaposition of songs recreating the depressing atmosphere which of the Civil War.

CONCLUSION

The substance and form of a dance work can change and develop keeping pace with the inevitable shift in time. It has a deeply rooted relationship to the time factor and to an artist's need for expression which is influenced, among other matters, by interaction with other art forms. The artist cannot ignore public taste and/or the fact that audiences often move with the times. This is where the mass media, including art critics, play an important part; they are the bridge between artistic aspirations and an audience's capacity to understand. Hopefully their intervention will elicit a proper response, which will, in turn, will impact on the understanding of patrons and benefactors, whether these be the government, the private sector, and individuals, paving the way for art to change.

This overview of contemporary dance works in Indonesia stresses that in the heyday of the Taman Ismail Marzuki traditional dance works were still a very important source of ideas in the creation of contemporary works. Their inspiration was reworked by choreographer often so radically their original form was almost entirely lost but still provided fertile soil for the emergence of an entirely new creation. However in Indonesia, the irrevocable inevitability of the unbroken history of tradition has been and still remains the source of ideas which still constantly breathes fresh breath into the evolution of contemporary work.

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