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Dangdut Beyond the Sex: Creating Intercorporeal Space through *Nyawer* Encounters in West Java, Indonesia

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Sexuality, morality and Islam have come to occupy an important place in Indonesia's national public debates, with the sexualisation of female performers of the popular dangdut *genre often a central feature. Intercorporeal relationships through* nyawer *encounters, formed on stage between* dangdut *singer-dancers and dancing audience members, sometimes include sexually provocative interplay, and a direct and publicly visible money transfer from dancing audience members to performers often accompanies such interplay. As a result, national public debate in Indonesia, but also most academic work on* dangdut *performers, tends to reduce the subject matter around these female performers to conservative moralising and feminist discourses of exploitation or empowerment. Such debates overlook many of the performers' perspectives and experiences as singer-dancers, and do not adequately acknowledge the role of these performers in a creative intercorporeal process. This article demonstrates that* nyawer *encounters feature social practices that are usually neither exploitative nor immoral, nor solely empowering. Indeed,* nyawer *encounters involve a dialectical relationship between culturally embedded understandings of appropriate behaviour, which are subject to the specific cultural environment of* dangdut *performances in the local villages of West Java's north coast, and the rather fluid and dynamic virtues that evolve in the intercorporeal space created between performer and audience member. By exploring* nyawer *encounters through an approach that considers the embodied lived experiences of the performers, this article challenges the connection often made between* nyawer *encounters and immorality, revealing such encounters to be creative processes through which conventional values and codes of behaviours are negotiated.*

Keywords: Indonesia; Popular Music; Gender; Intersubjectivity; Creativity; The Body; Dance; Performer/Audience Interactions

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Introduction

In contemporary Indonesia, themes around sexuality, morality and Islam often come into intense debate around the sexualisation of female *dangdut* performers, with *nyawer* encounters during such performances adding a further layer of complexity. Accepted as a national form (Lockard 1998; Weintraub 2010), *dangdut* music combines elements from *Melayu* orchestras, Hindustani film and heavy metal music, among others, and is generally associated with an Islamic ethic. *Nyawer* is a cultural practice in Java that has long accompanied wedding celebrations and circumcisions, and nowadays is featured at a wide array of events that include *dangdut* performances. *Nyawer* encounters involve intercorporeal relationships between the *dangdut* performer and a dancing audience member on stage, whereby, in most cases, a direct money transfer to the performer takes place. These encounters *can* have sexual connotations.

Dominant views in the media and in academic discourses pertaining to these actions tend to position female singer-dancers as either deviant and immoral or as liberated and empowered. As will be further discussed, much of the existing academic literature on *dangdut* and its female performers has not sufficiently addressed the intercorporeal space created between performers and dancing audience members, as well as the values and principles that are continuously renegotiated during *nyawer* encounters.

In this article, we seek to offer a more nuanced perspective by demonstrating that the female *dangdut* artist's interpretation of a *nyawer* encounter, which also involves an evaluation of the *penyawer*'s behaviour, depends to a significant degree on the creative space established during each individual *nyawer* encounter.[1] This in turn suggests that the importance *dangdut* artists attach to creating an intercorporeal space on stage problematises the binary oppressive/liberating framework that tends to dominate discussion on the topic. The article focuses on the cultural work participants do through their bodies, interpreting *nyawer* encounters as a form of what we refer to as embodied intersubjectivity, with the argument supported by evidence drawn from ethnographic field research conducted in West Java in 2009 and 2010 (Bader) complemented with cases from Central Java in 2001 and 2005 (Richter).

Nyawer as a Cultural Practice

Women's sexuality and what Bader calls '*nyawer* encounters' (2011, 2013) have long been prominent features of Javanese and Sundanese traditional art and performance forms.[2] Many of these forms involve what Richter calls 'other worlds' physical movements among performers (2008: 168–9). Dance events, in particular, often

[1]A *penyawer* is a dancing audience member who engages in an intercorporeal relationship with a performer. This relationship involves a direct money transfer from the dancing audience member to the performing singer-dancer.

[2]Broadly speaking, Javanese refers to the mainstream culture of Central and East Java, and the regencies Indramayu and Cirebon in West Java, and Sundanese to that of all other regencies of West Java.

involve sexual expression and are widely popular in Java.[3] Of particular relevance to associations made between *dangdut*, monetary exchange and sexual politics, *nyawer* is historically a Javanese and Sundanese cultural practice included in life-cycle events such as wedding celebrations and circumcisions, where money, rice, coins, slices of turmeric and *tektek* are thrown on the bridal couple or child.[4]

In the context of dance performances, *nyawer* involves handing over money to the female performer (Foley 1987: 58; Hefner 1987: 85; Weintraub 2004: 66), and in some cases money is passed on in rather unconventional ways such as tucking money into the performer's brassiere (Foley 1979: 89–90). *Dangdut* performances also involve *nyawer* encounters and usually take place at *hajatan*, these being celebrations that mark life-cycle events such as marriages, circumcisions, housewarmings or other local customary (*adat*) events.[5] When *dangdut* is performed at life-cycle celebrations, audience members often climb the stage to dance with family members, friends and female singer-performers. In doing so, it is expected that audience members will hand over money (*nyawer*) to the performer at some point during the current song.[6] Unlike claims that Bader often heard from wealthy Jakartans, this exchange of money is neither simply a financial remuneration to the performer, nor a fee to buy the performer for a subsequent sexual encounter. Instead, *nyawer* is rooted in Javanese and Sundanese tradition, with performers receiving a separate remuneration either from the group employing them or, in some cases, directly from the host of the event (*tuan hajat*).[7]

It is clear, then, that people engage in *nyawer* encounters at *dangdut* performances for various reasons. During life-cycle events, arguably most individuals who give money to the performer(s) perceive the practice as a form of respect towards the host.

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[3]These dance events include *sintren* in several parts of West and Central Java, *ludruk* in East Java, *tayuban* in several parts of Java, *dombret* in northern parts of Karawang and Indramayu in West Java, *lengger* in Banyumas in Central Java, *bajidoran* in Karawang and Subang in West Java, *ketuk tilu*, *jaipongan* and *longser* among the Sundanese in West Java, and *jaipongan* in several parts of West Java (see Caturwati 2006; Geertz 1960: 299; Gunawan 2003: 75; Hefner 1987; Herdiani 2003; Peacock 1967; Spiller 2008: 162–8, 2010; Utomo 1999). Most of these dance events have a long history in Java, and all of these performances, except for *ludruk*, can involve professional female performers who dance with male audience members. *Ludruk* dancers are all male; however, they are famous for transforming themselves into women. These characters often appear as beautiful women on and off stage and are said to possess magical power to seduce men from their wives. Their performance movements often have sexual connotations (Peacock 1967: 345). *Ludruk* features males and male and female roles, and is known for female impersonation.

[4]A *tektek* is a roll of betel vine leaves filled with the extracts of a betel nut such as lime and tannin. At weddings the bridal couple sits outside under a large umbrella, while the *juru sawer* (*sawer* master), usually an elderly woman, performs the *sawer* (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2010: 882). This also includes the recitation of nuptial advice instructing the couple to respect each other. It is a form of request or plea for prosperity, safety, happiness and fortune for their newly established bond (Moestapa 1946: 19–20 and 40), and also of approval and endorsement from the community towards the couple or child.

[5]For an elaboration of the complexity of the meaning of *adat*, see Bowen (2003: 13–14).

[6]At such performances, it is a common practice for the dancing audience members to leave the stage or hang around the sides after every song and, if one wants to dance again, come back when the next song starts.

[7]Individual performers who are remunerated by the *tuan hajat* are usually guest stars (*bintang tamu*) who are booked individually by the host in addition to a group. In 2009/10, the salary of a regional *dangdut* performer ranged from 50,000 Indonesian Rupiah for unknown, young freelancers to 200,000 Rupiah per day

Reciprocally, the host will at some point in the future also *nyawer* at a *hajatan* hosted by the current *penyawer*. Several *penyawer* told Bader that they feel obliged to the host family to dance and *nyawer* on stage if the host is a close family member or friend. In contrast, those not officially invited to the celebration may feel shy or embarrassed (*malu*) to do so. And yet others dance and *nyawer* regardless, these in the main being teenagers.

Morals, Values and Sexy, Female Dancing Bodies

In recent years, *dangdut* has attracted extensive media attention primarily for the apparent vulgarity of many of its lead female performers. The fall of Indonesia's President Suharto in 1998 paved the way for a more liberal and open mediascape that provided the space to communicate and discuss conflicting ideological views in the public domain.[8] Issues of morality, women's sexuality, pornography and freedom of expression came to the fore when Inul Daratista, a female *dangdut* performer from East Java, rose to national fame in 2003. The introduction of the new video compact disc (VCD) technology in the early 1990s contributed greatly to her success. Live *dangdut* performances at weddings, circumcisions and other life-cycle events are usually recorded with a camcorder and then edited and produced as a VCD.[9] These VCDs are distributed among family and friends, and sold in the informal economy in Indonesia's towns and cities. Before Inul rose to national fame in 2003, several million copies of her VCDs were sold throughout Indonesia.

Inul gained renown and notoriety through her trademark *goyang ngebor* drill dance, which involves gyrating of the hips and bottom. As a result of the more liberal and open mediascape, Inul's dress, dance style and behaviour triggered an extensive controversy surrounding her dancing body, contributing to an emerging 'moral panic' (Cohen 1972; see also Stivens 2011) among conservative Islamist groups in Indonesia.[10] Not only was Inul and her sexy body featured greatly in this new media environment, but Islamic clerics also appropriated this liberated space to debate what is considered erotic, and therefore corrupted and immoral.

In a similar manner, conservative Islamic groups in Jakarta also created a furore around a planned concert by Lady Gaga in June 2012, which was then cancelled due to security fears. For such conservative groups, Inul, Lady Gaga and other erotic

for permanently employed performers (Aus$6–23). The average salary, however, for a permanently employed performer working for a relatively famous group was around 150,000 per performance-day (Aus$18). A guest star who performs two to three songs can earn between 200,000 and several million Rupiah depending on her popularity and fame. Inul Daratisa, for example, was already a local superstar before she became a national star and, at the time, earned several million Rupiah as a local guest star at *hajatan* in East Java.

[8]Under Suharto (1967–98), the media were strictly controlled and incompatible positions were suppressed.

[9]VCD technology never became popular in neither North America nor Europe. However, in Indonesia and other parts of Asia the VCD market expanded greatly due to the introduction of cheap VCD machines. Parallel to the state-registered commercial recording industry, VCDs have been circulating in Indonesia widely as non-registered commercial recordings (Weintraub 2010: 176).

[10]For discussion on Inul, and what became known as 'Inulmania', see Daniels (2009: 88–9), Heryanto (2008: 15–21), Mulligan (2005) and Weintraub (2010: 173–200).

female performers have no connection whatsoever with traditional art, skill or creativity. Instead, their performances are seen as deviant, with the performers either victims of circumstance whose bodies are used in an exploitive genre, or evil women who exploit the popular music genre for their own benefit. In either case, some conservative groups appear convinced that erotic female performers are jeopardising Indonesia's values and 'moral health'.[11] Such conservative moralising discourses are again not reserved for Lady Gaga and other western performers, but are also directed at prominent Indonesians such as Inul Daratista and Dewi Persik,[12] as well as at rural female performers.

In everyday conversation, rural/urban and other stereotypes can find expression on the topic of erotic performance, which is sometimes intensified through media headlines and proclamations by conservative groups. During his research on street music in Yogyakarta (see Richter 2012), Richter found that the topic of on-stage eroticism rarely became a source of judgement and criticism. Especially in neighbourhood settings, audience members from across the generations often encouraged sexuality on stage. In contrast, for Bader (2013) many middle-class Jakartans asserted that local *dangdut* performers from and in Indramayu's rural villages (her field site) in West Java were extremely vulgar, pursuing the profession only out of financial necessity, and thus were both exploitative and exploited.

Academic Discourses on Erotic Dancers and Female *Dangdut* Performers

While conservative moralising characterises much of the Indonesian press coverage concerning female erotic dancers, academic discourse often frames the topic within prevailing ideological constructs of liberation and emancipation, or victimisation and exploitation. Scholars who examine this area of investigation tend to identify female performers either as victims or as empowered and liberated agents. A pointedly feminist position, for instance, characterises erotic dancers as objectified targets of an exploitative system that trades bodies for profit (see Barry 1995). In such cases, and because they are thought to lack agency and creativity, researchers note that female erotic dancers unwittingly reinforce patriarchal values. Nevertheless, and by claiming that erotic dancers are able to exploit the social system by trading their bodies for commerce, other scholars find that such artists exercise a significant amount of power and freedom (see Ronai 1992; Ronai and Ellis 1989; Wood 2000).

Studies pertaining to female *dangdut* performers have yet to examine the embodied intersubjective—that is, the intercorporeal—space created between performers and dancing audience members, and the dynamic aspect of values and principles that are

[11]In an interview with a French Press Agency (AFP) journalist, Habib Salim Alatas, chairman of the hardline Islamic Defender Front (*Front Pembela Islam* [FPI]), stated: 'FPI is grateful that [Lady Gaga] has decided not to come. Indonesians will be protected from sin brought about by this Mother Monster, the destroyer of morals' (AFP, 2012).

[12]Dewi Persik is an Indonesian national *dangdut* singer who has been involved in several scandals with regard to her personal life and stage person.

continuously renegotiated during *nyawer* encounters. As Retsikas (2007) reasons, the perceptions and experiences of being a body are always related to other bodies—they are intercorporeal. In this way, intersubjectivity, or an intersubjective space, is created through the interrelation of two or more bodies. Weiss (1999: 5) argues that '[t]o describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies'. Accordingly, embodiment is the precondition of intersubjectivity, and thus intersubjectivity is intercorporeality. It is through our bodies that we relate to others and interact with the world. This notion of intersubjectivity as embodied is precisely what Csordas (2008) stresses by proposing to understand intersubjectivity as intercorporeality. He explains that 'to describe intersubjectivity as intercorporeality … helps us avoid the temptation to think of intersubjectivity as an abstract relation between two abstract mental entities' (2008: 119).

In this context, and with reference to work by Tamisari (2000: 274), the present article considers intercorporeality to be 'the embodied and carnal nature of all experience which animates all intersubjective relations.' As the following discussion will demonstrate, *nyawer* encounters are demonstrative of this kind of intercorporeality. A *nyawer* encounter is, after all, an intercorporeal relationship established on stage between the performing singer-dancer and a dancing audience member and often involves a direct and publicly visible transfer of money. At such performances, this intercorporeal relationship plays a fundamental role in the formation of a creative space in which *dangdut* performers evaluate the *nyawer* encounter.

However, and due to the erotic nature of the performance, female *dangdut* artists are frequently portrayed either as victims, who use their bodies as a means to generate income, or as liberated social agents who exploit the genre for their own benefit (for example, see Browne 2000; Pioquinto 1995; Wallach 2003). Regarding the latter point, Pioquinto (1995) and Browne (2000) investigate whether *dangdut* performances emancipate or exploit female *dangdut* singer-dancers, and by extension either subvert or reinforce prevailing gender ideologies. Although some of Pioquinto's interviews with performers indicate that gender and sexuality discourses emerging from *dangdut* performances are indeed ambiguous and contradictory, she nevertheless concludes that *dangdut* 'reinforces both class and gender asymmetry', and more importantly that it supports 'the same structures of inequality and domination that prevail in the broader social order' (1995: 83). Wallach (2003) similarly identifies inequality, subordination and exploitation at *dangdut* performances in Jakarta nightclubs, and argues that performer/audience money transactions reinforce the subordination of the performer to the dancing audience member.

In contrast, and by acknowledging the inherent ambivalence and inconsistencies in dangdut performance, Browne (2000: 30) concludes that: '[G]iven the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in [female dangdut performers'] role and status in Indonesian society, the question of whether these performances emancipate or exploit the women involved remains unresolved.' Similarly, Richter has identified sexualised

female lead roles in *kampung* performances in Yogyakarta and, albeit in contrast to other physical responses to the music, expressed uncertainty over whether for the performers and young female audience members these roles are most accurately seen as oppressive or, alternatively, empowering (2012: 112–13).[13] Despite these ambivalences, the aforementioned scholars have expressed a position that places victimisation/exploitation in opposition to liberation/empowerment. In this article, we pursue a line of inquiry into female performers' lived embodied experiences that engages critically with an academic discourse that has framed meanings of performers' bodies around labels such as 'deviant', 'exploited' and 'liberated' (Rambo, Presley, and Mynatt 2006: 213).

Giving Performers a Voice

Rambo, Presley and Mynatt make the important point that by framing female performers' bodies within the aforementioned discursive constructs, the meanings of these bodies are at risk of becoming 'subject to a colonizing gaze that originates in misunderstanding and the desire to foster theoretical agendas rather than give voice to subjects of research' (2006: 213). In other words, the distance necessary for taking into account the ways in which dancers themselves make meaning of their experiences all too easily becomes consigned to our own preconceived ideological discursive frames. In this article, we work against the tendency for 'them' (*dangdut* and *tarling dangdut* performers) to be inextricably framed within discourses that are created by 'us' (such as researchers, feminists, Indonesian middle classes and elites). Therefore we aim to avoid conferring a discursive constraint upon the female performer's bodies and identities. Rambo, Presley and Mynatt explain that:

> By labelling their [the dancer's] bodies as deviant, exploited, liberated, or both exploited and liberated, well meaning scholars adopt paternalistic tones toward participants in their research, as if arguing with the correctness of their world views and failing to maintain heuristic distance … We as scholars are both consumers of localized discourses and agents at local sites, disseminating a gendered discourse commodification of the body that is paternalistic, moralistic, and sexist. (2006: 222)

In other words, the distance necessary for taking into account the ways in which dancers themselves make meaning of their experiences is neglected by researchers who instead project meanings onto them that conform to their own discursive frames. 'These frames', Rambo, Presley and Mynatt argue, 'reproduce gendered and politicized mainstream understandings of exotic dancers' (2006: 215).

In a similar way, Spivak (1988) criticises western intellectuals who sustain (the colonial) discourse by speaking authoritatively for the non-western Other, whereby

[13]A *kampung* is a village or urban neighbourhood community. In middle-class sensibilities, the term indexes backwardness, lack of sophistication and ignorance. These attributes are generally ascribed to the economically weaker segment of the population. *Musik kampungan* thus refers to the music of the supposedly 'hickish', unsophisticated, ignorant and poor people from the *kampung*s.

they present their established knowledge as the objective truth.[14] Spivak urges those intending to speak about the subaltern to engage in conscious self-reflection so as to avoid projecting meanings onto them that only comply with western intellectuals' predetermined frames.

The importance of reflexivity has gained increasing recognition in the social sciences since the mid-1980s, when the 'Writing Culture' debate critiqued ethnographic works that established textual authority and power (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; James, Hockey and Dawson 1997). Analyses of people as objects of study have, to varying degrees, been replaced by more cooperative and reflexive research and writing that acknowledges the subjects' own understandings of their consciousness, respects local values and principles, and gives a voice to the people for whom scholars claimed to speak. However, intercorporeal dimensions of female *dangdut* performers' experiences have received scant attention. By challenging the connection often made between *nyawer* encounters, questions of morality, and discourses of liberation and empowerment versus exploitation and victimisation, this article seeks to address this gap.

Although this article does not claim to transcend all of the above issues and dilemmas, it aims to understand 'them' in ways less dominated by discourses created by 'us'. Indeed, and by attempting to evade the reproduction of a gendered and politicised perception of erotic dancers by exploring the intercorporeal creative space during *nyawer* encounters, the article reveals cultural practices and associations with *nyawer* encounters that, at the least, do not fit squarely within the prevailing moralising and feminist liberation/exploitation framework that, more often than not, informs debates concerning female *dangdut* performers in Indonesia.

Participants' Motivations to Engage in *Nyawer* Encounters

Even where sexuality features in *nyawer* encounters, this may not fall within the moral and feminist liberation/exploitation framework. Wallach (2008: 198) describes the practice of engaging in *nyawer* encounters as a 'release of built-up tension' for the male *penyawer*. This, in turn, 'signifies the giver's intention to refrain from embracing or otherwise initiating improper physical contact with the singer, in spite of her charms as a "temptress"' (2008: 198). While male *penyawer* certainly have to control their desires for the alluring female performer, neither the *penyawer* nor the performers Bader talked with drew a line between *nyawer* and the release of built-up tensions. On the contrary, performers mentioned that *nyawer* encounters could instead turn into a competition between *penyawer* for the performer's attention. This suggests an increase in, rather than a release of, erotic but also rivalrous tension.

[14]In her famous piece 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak (1988) critiques the claims made by twentieth-century western scholars to represent and speak on behalf of the marginalised, and argues that attempts to speak for the subaltern often result in further marginalisations and alienations of the subject; see also Parry (1987) and Maggio (2007).

With reference to a similar performance context, that of the Sundanese singing-dancing genre *bajidoran*, Caturwati (2006: 82–4) describes how one audience participant (a *bajidor*, the equivalent of a *penyawer* in *dangdut* performance) climbed onto the stage to hand over money to the female performer.[15] According to Caturwati, the competition among the audience participants fuels his desire for the performer's attention. In the case of *nyawer*, some men become so enthusiastic that they literally throw money around. On several occasions Bader witnessed *penyawer* casting bundles of Rupiah notes into the air above a performer.[16] While there may be several interweaving reasons for doing this, female performers remarked that these men at times had a personal interest in the performer and would become jealous when another *penyawer* drew the performer's attention away. Female performers are always alert to those situations, given that they can often result in quarrels and sometimes even fights between *penyawer*.

While attraction to the female *dangdut* performer and competition among the *penyawer* are certainly reasons to engage in *saweran* (*nyawer* encounters), many individuals also engaged in the practice for other reasons, including, by their own accounts, obligation, pleasure, pride and obsession. Some *penyawer* explained that they were proud when their name was called out through the microphone every time the performer received a Rupiah note.[17] Some have compared this feeling with an obsession, explaining that they cannot help themselves but to go on stage and engage in *nyawer* encounters. In relation to this, an enthusiastic *penyawer* named Aji states that:

> If someone's name has been called out several times I feel like I want to be the next one. Although I don't usually want to spend much money, I feel like I have to go on stage and *nyawer*. I also want my name to be called out many times, so I have to give a lot of money. So I usually *nyawer* several times during one song and often spend a lot of money. (Interview, Indramayu, October 2009)

The urge to *nyawer*, as described by Aji, has also been reported by several women who participate in such events. While the majority of the *penyawer* are men, women also participate in *nyawer* encounters at *kampung* performances. During Bader's fieldwork, women of all ages actively participated as *penyawer* (see Figures 1–3), with many asserting that they enjoyed the practice. Many people had difficulty explaining this, and most advised Bader to try it herself in order to find out. One who did venture an explanation was Desi:

[15]The individual in question was Gugum Gumbira, an enthusiastic *bajidor* who in the late 1970's created the now well-known Sundanese dance *jaipongan* (Caturwati 2006: 82–3).

[16]When money is thrown into the air and falls on the floor, one of the group's crewmembers picks it up and collects it in a cardboard box, as is the money that performers pick out of the hand of the *penyawer*. At the end of the performance, all money is split between the performers and musicians.

[17]Generally, the Indonesian word *kebanggaan* (pride) does not imply arrogance or self-admiration. Arrogance is translated as *kesombongan* and is perceived as a negative and undesirable characteristic in a person. At *dangdut* performances, the feeling and enjoyment of pride (*kebanggaan*) drives many people on stage to *nyawer*.

> When I am on stage and *nyawer*, and my name is called out through the microphone and everyone can hear it … it just makes me feel happy and proud. And then I want to *nyawer* again and again. (Interview, Indramayu, January 2010)

To *nyawer* 'again and again' as described by Desi can sometimes be expensive. While it is common for men to spend a considerable amount of money during *nyawer* encounters, several women also recounted experiences where they themselves spent more money than initially planned. Yanti recalled: 'I only wanted to spend around 20,000 or 30,000 Rupiah (A$2.30–3.50) but in the end I spent a lot more than that. It was just so much fun. You should really try it' (interview, Indramayu, January 2010).

While spending money at *nyawer* encounters can be a costly affair, this kind of exchange has long been integral to them and has not affected their enduring popularity. Melinda, a *dangdut* performer who nowadays is featured on the national

Figure 1 Woman engaging in a *nyawer* encounter in the regency of Indramayu, West Java, 2009.
Source: Photograph by Sandra Bader.

Figure 2 Woman engaging in a *nyawer* encounter at a wedding celebration in the regency of Karawang, West Java, 2009.
Source: Photograph by Sandra Bader.

Figure 3 Woman engaging in a *nyawer* encounter at a circumcision celebration in the regency of Indramayu, West Java, 2009.
Source: Photograph by Sandra Bader.

scene, began her singing career by performing at *hajatan* where *nyawer* encounters are integral to the performance. She explains:

> It's part of the performance to dance with the audience. I used to sing in the *kampung*s where *nyawer* is a tradition. People come on stage to dance with us

> [performers] and give us money. That's what *dangdut* is. (Interview, Jakarta, June 2009)

In a similar manner, for Yanti *nyawer* encounters are also part of the *tarling dangdut* tradition.[18] She explains that:

> For some [*nyawer*] means showing respect to the [host] and to us [performers], and for others it is a way to be able to enjoy dancing on stage. With a thousand Rupiah you are already able to dance. For some it is also like a hobby. And for us [performers] it belongs to the performance. It has always been like that. (Yanti, interview, Indramayu, December 2009)

These kinds of comments also resonate with Richter's experiences of various *dangdut* performances in Yogyakarta settings with performers who are by no means professional *dangdut* artists. For example, in one neighbourhood an otherwise 'stay-at-home mom' might launch into a star leading role, usually with a degree of self-parody (Richter 2012: 91); and at work functions it is not unusual for normally subdued staff to rise to the stage (Richter 2012: 97). These latter cases further reflect the pleasure associated with having one's name called out.

In light of the discussion thus far, it is evident that individuals engage in *dangdut* performances and in *nyawer* encounters for myriad reasons. Some *penyawer* emphasise feelings of pride; competitions among the *penyawer* for the attention of the performer characterise others; for male *penyawer*, negotiations of masculine identities may come to the fore (see also Spiller 2010); and many, professional performers and everyday audience members alike, claim, and indeed appear, to simply enjoy dancing and performing on stage. Perhaps most difficult to reconcile within morality/feminist discourses is, as outlined above, the longstanding purpose of engaging in *nyawer* encounters to show respect to the hosts of a life-cycle event. This leads us to a closer consideration of factors that further problematise the idea that erotic performance in Indonesia can only be understood as exploitation or liberation, here through reference to notions of acceptable behaviour and their contextual dimensions.

Halus and *Kasar* Forms of Etiquette

Female *dangdut* performers, participants and onlooking audience members use particular forms of etiquette to evaluate *nyawer* encounters. In contrast to prevalent moralising discourses, or feminist discourses pertaining to exploitation and empowerment concerning *dangdut* performance, such encounters are embedded in cultural understandings of etiquette. In the Javanese context, however, such understandings also relate to the embodied aesthetics of *halus* and *kasar*, which are generally translated as 'refined' and 'coarse' respectively, but by no means map neatly onto the

[18] *Tarling* (tar- from guitar, and -ling from *suling*, a traditional bamboo flute used to accompany *dangdut*) is a regional popular music form sung in Javanese language with an Indramayu or Cirebon dialect, reflecting its origin in the regencies of Indramayu and Cirebon (Java) in the late 1930s. Due to the nationwide popularity of *dangdut* music enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s, many characteristics of *dangdut* were incorporated into *tarling*, resulting in a new genre called *tarling dangdut*.

concepts of morality and exploitation/empowerment. Female *dangdut* performers tend to employ the *halus* and *kasar* categories, not only to evaluate *nyawer* encounters but also to assess diverse attitudes of the *penyawer* towards the performer. As categories or classifications, *halus* and *kasar* are neither fixed nor asocial.[19] Rather, the evaluation of a *nyawer* encounter depends on the creative intercorporeal relationship established between artists and *penyawer* during performance. In other words, the evaluation of a *nyawer* encounter is subject to a dialectical relationship—the relationship between culturally embedded understandings of appropriate behaviour, such as the embodied qualities of *halus* and *kasar*, and the fluid and dynamic virtues of these embodied qualities that evolve in the creative intercorporeal space established between performer and dancing audience member.

The embodied qualities of *halus* and *kasar*, which are inferred from everyday activity and interaction, are essential features in constituting a sense of self in Java. In order to be characterised as *halus* or *kasar*, a person's conduct and actions must conform to certain modes of being in the world. For instance, if an individual is described as being *halus*, he or she is deemed to be gentle, smooth, subtle and graceful. In contrast, an individual who is considered to be *kasar* is often rough, hard, lacking good manners and in emotional turmoil (Anderson 1990: 50–1; Geertz 1960: 232).[20]

Many Javanese discuss these characteristics as forms of etiquette that should ideally guide one's everyday behaviour. *Halus* and *kasar* featured regularly in conversation during Richter's Yogyakarta fieldwork; for example, with reference to the so-called 'tone' (*nada*) of a person's character. The topic of *halus* and *kasar* in relation to etiquette also often arose in Bader's conversations with members of the *dangdut* troupes with whom she travelled. For example, Desi states that: 'Children should learn from an early age that if we have a visitor they should not run around and be loud around the guest. That's *kasar*. A guest has to be respected' (interview, Indramayu, December 2009). Melinda also explains that 'you have to be patient and accept whatever happens. Don't go against it. Don't get angry. Don't raise your voice. That's *kasar*' (interview, Jakarta, May 2009).

The *halus*/*kasar* continuum also comes into play in *nyawer* encounters through social interaction and its relation to embodiment and intercorporeality. Retsikas (2007) illustrates that the behaviour of a *halus* or *kasar* person in contemporary East Java is the reification of an internal bodily process. In this sense, behaviour is 'the causative extension of corporeality to a social world constituted by performative means' (2007: 191).[21] In light of this, Retsikas illustrates how the categories of *halus* and *kasar* are indeed the result of 'acts of perceptual engagement' and hence are

[19]For a discussion on the qualities of *halus* and *kasar*, see Geertz (1960: 232) and Anderson (1990: 50–1).
[20]In Java, the traditional concept of *sifat* (character) denotes qualities of personhood according to a scale defined by the *halus* and *kasar* categories (Mulder 1992: 51, 2005: 154; Retsikas 2007: 185–7).
[21]The blood of a *halus* person is thereby considered to always remain cool, indicating a soft, tender and reserved temperament averse to disagreement and conflict, and embracing peace and harmony. In opposition, the blood of a *kasar* person becomes boiling hot at times of dispute, which implies a temperament characterised as audacious, tough, loud, arrogant, stubborn and prone to violence (Retsikas 2007: 187–91).

inextricably part of social interactions. The author goes on to explain that '[the categories of *halus* and *kasar*] depend as much on the embodied sensibilities of the perceiver as on those of the perceived, and thus, cannot be said to be fully or wholly determinate' (Retsikas 2007: 195). In other words, cultural practice and bodies are reinforced due to their relational and reciprocal character; cultural practices shape bodies to the same extent that bodies maintain and reproduce the practices that constitute them.[22] This leads us back to the creative embodied intersubjectivity in *nyawer* encounter.

Nyawer Dispositions and Creative Intercorporeal Spaces: Evaluating *Nyawer* Encounters

Dancing audience members who come on stage as a group often initially dance among themselves and then, after a time, either approach the singer-dancer to *nyawer* or wait until the performer approaches them to engage in a *nyawer* encounter. Several '*nyawer* dispositions' are nevertheless identifiable among different *penyawer*.[23] For instance, some *penyawer* ignore the female *dangdut* performer completely even while engaging in the *nyawer* encounter. That is, while appearing to be completely immersed in the music and the dancing, such *penyawer* often avoid eye contact with the performer, even to the extent of looking away or closing their eyes while the performer grasps the money out of their hand. Possibly some of these men are *malu*—a complex emotional state, which can loosely be translated into the English terms 'shame', 'embarrassment' and 'modesty'. Moreover, *malu* functions as a means for social control and thus operates as an emotional reaction to subordination or to inadequate behaviour in public. Hence, it serves as a mechanism to establish, preserve and/or negotiate social status and power.[24] This would explain the men having their eyes closed in order to cope with the liminoid condition (after Turner 1967) during a *nyawer* encounter (see Figure 4).[25]

In contrast to the audience member described above, the polite *penyawer* at first does also not pay much attention to the performer, choosing instead to dance with his or her friends and relatives. However, when engaging in the *nyawer* encounter, this *penyawer* gives his or her full attention to the female *dangdut* artist. Indeed, such individuals often wait until the artist invites them to *nyawer*. Female *dangdut* performers often, but not exclusively, describe these *penyawer*, as well as their interactions with one another as 'polite' (*sopan*) or *halus*. Female *penyawer* were

[22]In this sense, language, diet, dress or dance are not simple disconnected exteriorities, each serving a symbolic and representational function. Instead, they are essentially linked to or co-existent with the body, 'for they instigate, instantiate, and reveal it, all at the same time' (Retsikas 2007: 206).

[23]These differentiations are based primarily on Bader's observation and discussions with the female performers of Puspa Kirana.

[24]For an elaborate analysis of the concept of *malu* with regard to dance, power and status, see Spiller (2010: 27–33); on cross-cultural comparisons with *malu* across parts of southeast Asia, see Keeler (2008).

[25]Perhaps, too, they are demonstrating their spiritual power by resisting the temptation of attractive women; see also Cooper (2000) and Spiller (2010: 99).

Figure 4 A *penyawer* with his eyes closed during a *nyawer* encounter in the regency of Indramayu, 2009.
Source: Photograph by Sandra Bader.

most-often described as polite *penyawer*, in large part because their actions were not considered as confronting as those of some of the male *penyawer*.

Another disposition of *penyawer* towards performers involves continually focusing on the performer while dancing with friends and relatives, as well as during *nyawer* encounters. In performance, these individuals often come close to the female *dangdut* artist demanding attention. Such encounters also frequently straddle the borderline between *halus* and *kasar*, with some participants intentionally attempting to pressurise or annoy artists while dancing. Depending on the context and the perception of the performer, the *penyawer* and the interactions with the *penyawer* can be perceived as either *halus* or *kasar*, or somewhere in between (see Figure 5).

Finally, the impolite *penyawer* is often an individual who is intoxicated and encroaches upon the performer's space. These individuals are impertinent, presumptuous, use coarse language and often touch the performer without her permission. Female *dangdut* artists often described the behaviour of such *penyawer* and their interactions with such individuals as being *kasar*. Richter also notes that at a village circumcision ceremony in Central Java, dancing boys encroached too far into the female performer's space, such that the village authorities were impelled to marshal the dancers away. In this instance the authorities here also used the term *kasar* to describe the boys' behaviour (Richter 2012: 108–9).

The impolite *penyawer* is almost always male, although interestingly on one occasion Bader witnessed a young woman rise on stage to dance and *nyawer* who was clearly intoxicated. On this occasion, the *penyawer* also physically intruded into the space of the performer (see Figure 6).

Figure 5 Female *dangdut* artist Nel is surrounded by several *penyawer*, who are predominantly focusing on her, in the regency of Brebes, 2009.
Source: Photograph by Sandra Bader.

Social reality is of course indeterminate, fluid and always subject to time, place and context. A *penyawer* may embody several of the stated '*nyawer* dispositions' through the varying phases of a *nyawer* encounter. Moreover, the lived embodied experience of a *nyawer* encounter by the performer is always subject to the creative intercorporeal relationship established between *penyawer* and performer. In addition, these performers' experiences are also always influenced by their personal life stories, personalities, past experiences and moods, all of which shape the performers' perceptions and sentiments. Two performers' lived experiences of one and the same *nyawer* encounter, for instance, might vary considerably, as also across time a single performer might experience differently what otherwise appear to be virtually identical *nyawer* encounters.

There are no defined rules governing how a *penyawer* should interact with the performer. While some performers do not like to be touched, others actively court physical contact. Nevertheless, *nyawer* are subject to the conventions of etiquette whereby every interaction should originate from the polite and respectful end of the *halus*/*kasar* spectrum. Some conduct or behaviours witnessed during *nyawer* encounters are clearly interpreted to be polite (*sopan*), whereas others are considered impolite (*tidak sopan*) or *kasar*; and as mentioned, the polite *penyawer* is often described as *halus* and the impolite *penyawer* as *tidak sopan* and *kasar*. However, due to the dynamic and indeterminate nature of social reality and the creative intercorporeal space between performer and *penyawer*, perceptions of the qualities of *halus* and *kasar* are fluid (see Retsikas 2007: 195).

Figure 6 An impolite female *penyawer* in the regency of Indramayu, 2009.
Source: Photograph by Sandra Bader.

This reinforces our core contentions. Firstly, this article argues that the female *dangdut* artist's interpretation of where a *penyawer*'s behaviour lies along the *halus*/*kasar* spectrum depends to a significant degree on the creative intercorporeal space established during each individual *nyawer* encounter, rather than on any normative criterion around *halus* and *kasar*. Secondly, this finding suggests that the importance artists attach to creating an intercorporeal space on stage problematises the oppressive/liberating framework that, as explained above, tends to dominate media and academic discourse on erotic dance performances that take place in Java.

Cases to demonstrate the intercorporeal space created on stage during live *dangdut* performance are not very difficult to find. Richter, for example, describes such instances of lead-artist/performer/audience-member interaction not only at neighbourhood

events, but also in the context of power relations at performances involving the Indonesian armed forces (2012: 145–6). Similarly, Bader analyses artist/audience interactions outside of neighbourhood settings, exploring intercorporeal relationships at performances involving the Indonesian police force (2011: 344–7) and in the corporate scene in Jakarta (2013). At the same time, the primary focus in the present article on *nyawer* encounters during *dangdut* performances serves to highlight our central points in the above with particular clarity—as the following interactions with Ayu, a performing artist Bader came to know, will illustrate.

As a female *dangdut* artist, Ayu often actively courts physical contact during *nyawer* encounters. The *penyawer*'s embodied lived experience of Ayu's advances affects his experience of engaging in the *nyawer* encounter, which in turn affects his embodied actions. Her active advances can, for example, evoke embarrassment in the *penyawer*, and thus he may be reluctant to engage in the physical interplay, and on some occasions such an individual may even attempt to escape from the whole scene. This was the case when Ayu performed at a police department in Jakarta (see Bader 2011: 344–7). Other *penyawer* might initially be overwhelmed but then visibly ease into and begin to enjoy the physical proximity with Ayu and engage playfully in the interaction. This was the case when Ayu performed at a private event for business men in one of Jakarta's night clubs (see Bader 2013). Others might take her advances as an invitation to make further physical advances, and thus become *kasar* by crossing the line of decency and respect.

The *penyawer* thereby embodies his emotional response, which in turn affects Ayu's lived embodied experience of the encounter. Being affected by the *penyawer* evokes an emotional reaction in Ayu. Consequently, she embodies this emotional reaction, which in turn affects the *penyawer*, and so on. The lived embodied experiences of performer and *penyawer*, as well as their embodied actions, are thus co-constituted by their creative intercorporeal relationship established during the *nyawer* encounter. Accordingly, the way that a performer evaluates the behaviour of a *penyawer* according to the *halus*/*kasar* continuum plays a significant role in determining the complex and fleeting interrelationship established in the *nyawer* encounter.

Thoughts on *Dangdut* Beyond the Sex

Nyawer encounters in Java, especially in rural villages of West Java's north coast region, are often marked by close bodily proximity and often involve *dangdut* music. The involvement of money given to the performer, as well as the often erotic nature of these encounters, gives rise to conservative moralising, and feminist discourses of exploitation or empowerment. However, as has been argued in this article, female performers' erotic and other actions on stage during *dangdut* performances and *nyawer* encounters cannot be reduced simply to frameworks premised on deviance, exploitation or liberation.

Contrary to many moralising discourses concerning *nyawer* encounters that revolve around its sexual nature and its apparent connection to sex or discourses that involve notions of female empowerment, the above discussion focuses on the ways in which performers do not evaluate these encounters according to these discourses. While the article does not dismiss the fact that powerful structural forces are at play in such circumstances, it is nonetheless clear that female *dangdut* artists rarely judge *nyawer* encounters as morally corrupt, nor do they consider themselves to be especially empowered or exploited. Although they often take the lead during *nyawer* encounters, which could easily be interpreted from a feminist perspective as an empowered position, such performers often situate these events in a broader context of understanding *nyawer* encounters as a creative social practice that involves a dialectical interrelation between culturally embedded understandings of appropriate behaviour and the dynamic intercorporeal space that is created during a *nyawer* encounter.

The aim of this article has been to analyse the cultural practice of *nyawer* encounters at *dangdut* performances as a creative action, and through this to demonstrate that attempts to explain these encounters within discourses of exploitation and immorality cannot account for several of the factors involved. As discussed, people have different motivations for engaging in *nyawer* encounters, including: to show respect to the host of a life-cycle celebration; feelings of pride through hearing one's own name being called out; negotiations of masculine identities; competitions among the *penyawer* for the performer's attention; and simply enjoying the experience of being able to sing and dance on stage.

Performers frequently assess the etiquette of *penyawer* through the embodied qualities of the *halus*/*kasar* continuum. While several *nyawer* dispositions are identifiable, such as the polite *penyawer* who embodies the qualities of a *halus* person and thus approaches the performer in a respectful manner by, for instance, not encroaching on her space and by using polite language, a *penyawer* most likely embodies several dispositions during the course of a *nyawer* encounter. The qualities of *halus* and *kasar* are not fixed or socially determined; rather, they are subject to the shifting perceptions of the artist and audience member involved in a creative bodily engagement during a *nyawer* encounter. The artist's and audience member's perceptions and experience, and evaluation of a *nyawer* encounter as polite or impolite, in other words, are relational and contextual. Deploying a morality/liberation framework to explain the complexities of *dangdut* performer/audience member actions and interactions, and the meanings they assign to them, can certainly highlight important factors. However, this article has sought to demonstrate that these performances also need to be taken seriously as creations of an intercorporeal space in which subtle qualities of etiquette are constantly negotiated.

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