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Winarnita, Monika 2016. The Not-So-Gentle Makassarese Fan Dance: Misperformance Challenging Indonesian-Australian Transnational Femininity. *Anthropological Forum*, 26(2): 177-195.

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## **The Not-So-Gentle Makassarese Fan Dance: Misperformance Challenging Indonesian-Australian Transnational Femininity**

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**Abstract**

*In the hands of a group of Indonesian female dancers in Perth, Western Australia, a gentle sea breeze or Angin Maimiri was recreated through the use of swaying fans. The Indonesian women's own newly choreographed dance or tari kreasi is based on the Makassarese traditional song of the same name from South Sulawesi. The women had intended to perform the dance in a 'feminine' manner with soft graceful movements. Yet, as illustrated in the ethnographic account of mistakes and misinterpretations that happened at the performance, as well as purposeful adaptations by the dancers, ideals of femininity are not simply transferred in a transnational context; they become inadvertently challenged. Angin Mamiri, as danced in an 'un-feminine' manner by an Indonesian housewife hobby group, is illustrative of who they are as marriage migrants and their often marginalised position in their diasporic community. This article is inspired by misperformance ethnography (Prendergast 2014) of what is revealed about ideals held by those involved in a performance when mistakes and misinterpretations happen. Using an anthropology of performance approach thus provides a novel analysis at the intersection of migration and gender studies of how gender ideals such as femininity can be challenged through dance performance in a transnational context.*

**Keywords:** marriage migration, diasporic performance, transnational femininity, anthropology of dance, Indonesian Australian.

## Introduction

‘Okay the next dance is a very colourful dance... it’s called *Anjing Mamiri* and it’s translated as “the wind blows on the Celebes”’. It’s a slow dance, a romantic dance, of winds blowing gently in Celebes — this is an island, and the wind is blowing from the sea, which in this part of the world is very important, where it is very hot and the wind can blow in as a gentle breeze. It is danced with fans representing the sea breeze. So please welcome the dancers performing *Anjing Mamiri*.’

This was announced at one of the weekend multicultural festivals held during 2007 in various shires of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. The Master of Ceremonies (MC), Dean, is the Australian husband of our dance group leader, Santi.<sup>1</sup>

After the announcement, the audience clapped, the music started, then stopped as the stage clowns appeared and said, ‘They are not quite ready yet, so we thought we might fill in for them.’ Why were the dancers ‘not quite ready yet’? There had been an altercation backstage. Dean’s wife Santi was furious with him, ‘You introduced us as dogs... you said “*anjing*” twice, which I’ve told you means dog, not “*angin*”, which is wind. You have to fix it!’ Dean replied, ‘I can’t go back out there and tell the audience I introduced you girls as dogs. Besides I didn’t see any Indonesians, no one laughed or anything like that, just go out there and do your dance.’ Trying to diffuse the tension between husband and wife, one of the senior dancers, Melati, made a joke, ‘Come on let’s get on stage, we can bark while we do our dog dance, woof, woof.’ Suppressing laughter, the housewife dancers, with whom I did my doctoral fieldwork, followed Melati on stage with smiles on our faces. The music then started again, and the melodious song ‘*Angin mamiri ku pasang* (breezy wind send away my greetings)’ accompanied the six colourfully-costumed dancers holding large matching feather fans onto the stage, swaying, this time slightly more vigorously than the expected gentle soft movement of the sea breeze.

Dean is very supportive of what he calls his wife’s dancing ‘hobby’ and weekend pastime, serving as the dance group’s MC, ‘roady’, driver, co-organiser and liaison person, as well as being passionate about Indonesian culture. Nevertheless, he does not speak Indonesian and at times makes cultural *faux pas*. Santi was furious because, for her and the other Indonesian women, being associated with a dog would be the worst kind of insult. For a Muslim (Santi’s religion and the religion of the majority in Indonesia) a dog is also *haram*, that is, sinful and unclean; to touch one means having to wash oneself seven times, first scrubbing with sand then water. Furthermore, in some cultural groups such as the Hindu Balinese, to be likened to any animal is extremely insulting, and in everyday language calling someone a dog is like using profanity (See Forge 1980). The association of women with female dogs is also very insulting in English and is the reason why Dean could not go back out to the audience to tell them his language mistake—‘introduced you girls as dogs’.

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<sup>1</sup> All names of dancers, their family members and Indonesian community associations are pseudonyms.

The above vignette serves as an ethnographic foray, a ‘sensuous ethnography’ (Stoller 2004) into the experiences of a housewife dance group of Indonesian migrant women in the city of Perth. The language describing the ‘feminine’ *Angin Mamiri* performances and reactions to it, such as ‘soft’ and ‘gentle’ or their opposites ‘loud’ and ‘vigorous’, informs ‘the social analysis of the power relations in their world’ (Stoller 2004, 820). The majority in the dance group came to Australia via a spousal visa to marry ‘White’ men. They performed their own *Angin Mamiri* ‘created fan dance’ or *tari kreasi dengan kipas* at Indonesian community festivals and Australian multicultural festivals, as it represents the historical (intermarriage) relationship of Makassarese Indonesian fisherman with the Indigenous Yolngu people in the north of Australia.<sup>2</sup>

This article’s two main performance events subjected to ethnographic analysis are: first, the mispronunciation incident by the MC Dean of *Anjing Mamiri* or ‘Dogs of Mamiri’ instead of *Angin Mamiri* or ‘Winds of Mamiri’ in July 2007 at an Australian multicultural community festival in one of the city of Perth’s shires; and second, a catcalling incident by female audience members from the Indonesian Consulate-sponsored women’s organisation or Dharma Wanita who misunderstood the *Angin Mamiri* performance as a type of ‘drag show’ at the Perth Indonesian Consulate’s 62<sup>nd</sup> Independence Day celebration in August 2007.

The analysis of the two incidents also takes its inspiration from ethnographies on ‘misperformance’ (Prendergast 2014) that are mainly about performances that deliberately attempt to destabilise the performer-audience relationship and to challenge the audience’s reaction to mistakes. In comparison, the ethnography in this article concerns mistakes and misunderstandings during the performance that are accidental, or unplanned. Moreover, I extend the concept of misperformance to incorporate how both mistakes and purposeful adaptations by the performers may transgress traditional standards of performance that are at

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<sup>2</sup> *Angin Mamiri* as a song has been incorporated into a narrative of the trepanger fleets from Sulawesi in which fruitful contact between the two Sulawesi Makassarese crews and local Aboriginal people, the Yolngu of northern Arnhem land, has been elaborated into a model of amicable transnational relations before the closing down of these expeditions by the colonial Australian government, as portrayed in John Darling’s ethnographic film ‘Below the Wind’ (1993). In the film, the descendant of a Makassarese fisherman sang this song when retelling the story of his trepanger ancestors who sailed to the north of Australia and intermarried with the Indigenous Yolngu people. The song was also replayed when the fisherman met in an emotional first encounter his long lost Yolngu relatives as part of the Australian centenary celebration’s symbolic voyage from Makassar to the Northern Territory. The original Makassarese name of the song name is *Anging Mammiri*. This article, nevertheless is specifically about how the Indonesian female dancers in Perth Western Australia incorporated the song’s symbolism for their own newly created dance or *tarian kreasi*. *Tarian kreasi* is an Indonesian term for dances that are not classified as classical, traditional or folk dance but a modern interpretation or a newly choreographed dance either by professionals or in this case amateur dancers. The dance is created by the Perth housewives’ dance group themselves who was inspired by a fan dance performed by the Chinese Cung Wah society at a multicultural festival in Perth they took part in 2007 (for more on the Cung Wah performances see Lau 2000). Santi, the Indonesian housewife dance leader, then had the idea of using the *Angin Mamiri* song for an Indonesian version of a feminine fan dance. It must be noted that in John Darling’s ‘Below the Wind’ film there is also a Makassarese young female dance using fans. Nevertheless, the dance was not accompanied by the song ‘Angin Mamiri’ but by musical instruments only and this ‘fan dance’ was performed in a similar manner to the Perth Indonesian consulate’s young women Makassarese *Patenuung* dance.

the heart of this article's analysis. When mistakes do happen, such as Dean's mispronunciation of *Angin* (wind) as *Anjing* (dog), they become moments of disjuncture that reveal challenging ideals of femininity, gender stereotypes and transnational performance. These mistakes provide the opportunity for contention over representations of 'Indonesian' culture and gender ideals by amateur performers labelled 'a hobby housewife dance group'. In literature on diasporic performance, a performance of culture can be a means to assert a group's marginalised identity (Stokes 2004). For these female dancers, there is a struggle to represent Indonesian culture to, among others, Indonesian migrants and to the Indonesian state institutions, such as the Dharma Wanita, the consulate-sponsored women's group, in this diasporic community. The performers as marriage migrants not only sought legitimacy from other members of the expatriate Indonesian community, but through performing and creating a dance based on a song that symbolises an Indonesian-Australian historical relationship, they have incorporated their experiences and identities as Indonesian-Australians. Moreover, the multicultural festivals have provided them with a space to express this Indonesian-Australian identity that inflected their expectations and aspirations, particularly as a member of one of Australia's 'ethnic' groups partaking in the nation-state's proclaimed show of egalitarianism. This article addresses an intersection of migration and gender studies using an anthropology of performance approach that argues ideals of femininity are not simply transferred in a transnational context, but become inadvertently challenged through dance performance.

The structure of the article is as follows: first, positioning the women within the diaspora, outlining the theory, methodology and literature on femininity and agency; second, discussing the women's roles as marriage migrants and housewives within the dynamics of their gender relations; third, outlining the relations between a transnational feminine dance performance and diaspora aesthetics; last, an ethnographic description of the Dharma Wanita Indonesian female audience's reactions and how misinterpretation and mistakes open up the space for challenging transnational femininity.

### **Positioning Indonesian Women: Diaspora, Transnationalism, Methodology and Theory**

Amongst the large Indonesian diasporic population, this housewife hobby dance group became one of the most visible representations of Indonesian culture in Perth. Being a city that shares the same time zone and is only three and a half hours from Denpasar Bali, the most common Australian tourist destination in Indonesia, it offers many Indonesian amenities to this 10,000 strong diasporic population.<sup>3</sup> There is an increasing proportion of female Indonesian migrants to Australia (55% of all Indonesian migrants according to Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2013), particularly in the family migration scheme, with

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<sup>3</sup> As of June 2013, there were 79,650 persons making up the Australian Indonesian diasporic population.

more Indonesian women married to non-Indonesian men, accounting for just less than a third of the Perth diasporic population.<sup>4</sup>

This article's analysis of a performance of transnational femininity is based on the theories of transnationalism and diaspora focusing on how the marriage migrant engages with the homeland and how this engagement affects expressions of identity. Transnationalism is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain ties between their 'host' country and their original 'home' (Basch *et al.* 1994). Cultural performance, by engaging and influencing the hearts and minds of members of other nations, is one of the traditional methods of 'soft power' diplomacy; often performed by members of the diasporic population, it serves as an important intermediary between the country of origin and the host country (Li 2012). A state's policy of engaging with its diasporic community overseas is aimed at 'discursively producing a state-centric transnational society, extending rights to and extracting obligations from the diaspora' (Gamlen 2006, 22). A migrant woman is not only constrained by the structures of the host country with its regulatory regimes and practices, but, I argue, she is also constrained by the structures of her home country that are maintained in the host country, in this case by the transnational institution of the Indonesian Consulate General, its sponsored women's group, the Dharma Wanita, and its reiteration of gender norms as expressed in cultural performance. Nevertheless, in a diasporic context these transnational gender norms can be inadvertently challenged, particularly during moments of disjuncture when mistakes happen in performances.

This article further argues that there is a lack of scholarly work in the gender and migration literature that addresses transnational femininity (Dragajlovic 2008; Chou 2013) and does so in relation to diasporic performance (Larasati 2014). Often cited ethnographies look at how Indonesian gender and national sexual identities are shaped by global discourses that are interpreted locally (Boellstorff 2005; Blackwood 2005, 2010). There is less focus on national gender and sexuality discourses that are practised transnationally and how these discourses can be inadvertently challenged in specific locales of diaspora. Through a novel way of analysing moments of disjuncture in performance, this article also moves beyond alternate readings of transnational femininity (Dragajlovic 2008; Larasati 2014) in favour of the argument for the contentious nature inherent in such practices.

These women's 'transnational and diasporic misperformances' are described through ethnography based on the 'scholarly being-in-the-world' methodology of dancing and socialising with research participants, in order to understand the 'sensory regimes' informing the women's world and the power relations in it (Stoller 2004, 820). As a researcher who lived in Perth for a year while undertaking my doctoral fieldwork in 2007, and because I have similar personal circumstances to the women in this research, being an Australian permanent

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<sup>4</sup> In the 2013-2014 period, 51.7% of all permanent migration visas granted to Indonesians were in the family migration stream, and, of those, 78% were for the partner of an Australian resident (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2013). Among Indonesians residing in Australia, more Indonesian women (25%) are married to non-Indonesian men compared to Indonesian men in the same intermarriage situation (18%) (Heard, Khoo and Birrell 2009). There are 3200 Indonesian female marriage migrants in Perth, less than a third of its diasporic population (ABS 2011).

resident Indonesian citizen with a 'White' Australian spouse, I was able to gain an insight into these Indonesian migrant women's lives and to be identified as part of the dance group amongst the larger Indonesian diasporic and consulate community in Perth.

Therefore, it is important to reflect on my position as a researcher as a form of feminist anthropological methodology. Visweswaran (1994, 42) in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* argues that being with women of similar cultural background, one can experience having an 'assumption of a universal sisterhood between women... [but] there is always an inequality and power differential between herself and her research participants'. Participants' expectations of me differed. At times they regarded me as having little knowledge of Indonesian customs because I was only twelve years old when I came to reside in Australia and because I have a mixed heritage. My father has a mostly Javanese cultural group background and my mother has a minority Chinese Indonesian ethnicity, thus I was viewed as a cultural 'insider-outsider' (Limpangog 2014). The research participants also expected me to have an intimate knowledge of, for example, being part of an intercultural family akin to their situation as marriage migrants: 'You know what it's like having a *bule* (White) *suami* (husband)'.

In addition, my role as both dance performer and ethnographer provided limitations and benefits. Amongst the Indonesian diasporic and consulate community I was identified as one of the amateur dancers in the group and a researcher who was sympathetic to the members' situation. On the other hand, my position as an academic researcher affiliated with a tertiary institution provided me with the status and ability to engage with members of the community and the Indonesian consulate, as well as gaining their respect and cultural insights. This was not provided to the other dancers. In the various interactions I encountered in my fieldwork the constant negotiation of perceived inequality of power has helped me to understand how, because of their identification as marriage migrants with the associated negative stereotypes, the women are positioned as marginalised within the larger Indonesian migrant community. More precisely, they are looked down upon by couples in which both partners are Indonesian-born because the marriage migrant women are thought of as having been taken on as wives by white Australian men looking for subservient Asian females, and are seen not to be of the upper-class origins that members of the Indonesian diplomatic community are likely to be.

Besides becoming part of the Indonesian migrant women's dance group, I also conducted participation observation and semi-structured interviews with a wide variety of individuals and their affiliated groups to gain an overall understanding of the Indonesian migrant community and its many facets. I also took part in the consulate-based women or Dharma Wanita group and their traditional *angklung* or bamboo rattling instrument orchestra and their gamelan or xylophone orchestra practice and performances, with dance group members. I was therefore privileged to see the Indonesian migrant women dancers' relationship and interaction with the consulate-sponsored groups, their position as members but not as part of the inner circle, as well as their engagement with the consulate as a familiar Indonesian state institution, its discourse on cultural and women's performance of femininity and the dancers' wish to align themselves with its cultural diplomatic activities.

Critical analyses of Indonesian femininity have cautioned that ‘the’ or ‘a’ feminine is a definition that moves from essence to position, situated at the margins of the symbolic order (Sears 1996, 18–19). Literature on Indonesian female dance performances (Kellar 2004; Hughes-Freeland 2008, Hatley 2008; Larasati 2013), in particular, has analysed the performer’s agency in the face of gender-structuring discourse. An example of transnational femininity analysis is how marginalised and stigmatised Indonesian female dancing bodies, which were labelled by the state as communist and deviant in 1965, are reconstructed as disciplined and refined in international cultural diplomatic activities (Larasati 2013, 6). This article, however, argues that the housewife dancers in Perth are not making a gendered political statement; their subversion is done inadvertently. It will address how dancers not only negotiate alternate representations of the nation-state’s cultural identity, as experienced in diaspora (Larasati 2013, 10), but how these representations are always inherently contentious.

### **Indonesian Women Marriage Migrants, Gender Relations and ‘Feminine’ Housewives**

In the ‘*Anjing Mamiri*’ introduction vignette, the reference of Dean, the MC, to the female performers as ‘girls’ shows, on the one hand, that there is unequal power in gender relations, as is often described in the literature pertaining to marriage migration in Australia, especially of ‘third world’ women married to ‘first world’ men (Robinson 1996a, 2007; Saroca 1997). On the other hand, referring to adults as boys and girls or guys and dolls might seem demeaning terms in everyday language, such terms are commonly used in performance contexts. Nevertheless, Dean never refers to himself as one of the boys amongst the dance group’s social network or in his informal relationship to other ‘White’ Australian spouse of the dancers, but more often as a ‘male’, ‘roady’, driver, MC, co-organiser and liaison person. However, Dean frequently calls his wife Santi ‘Mum’, and she calls him ‘Dad’, displaying a more neutral-gendered subject position. As Dragojlovic (2008) points out in her analyses of cross-cultural intimate relationships between Balinese women and Dutch men, both masculinities and femininities are constituted through relations of power in which certain versions become hegemonic in a particular context and in a particular place. Calling each other ‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’ can be seen as ‘old fashioned’ terms of endearment in an Anglo-Australian family situation. In Indonesian usage it is a standard polite form or an honorific, describing a valued position in life, reflecting that such individuals are parents, responsible adults and not just a young, childless couple. For example, on one occasion, at the Indonesian Consulate a young Indonesian couple with children called each other *Ayah* (father) and *Bunda* (mother). This is similar to the practice of teknonymy (whereby an adult is referred to as the mother/father or grandparent of the first-born child), as is commonly encountered across the archipelago, including in Sulawesi (Robinson 2009, 16–17).

Therefore, although the domination of one group over another is based on a shared common sense developed by cultures and societies, through negotiations of power and identity in these cross-cultural relationships, the couples have ‘multiple opportunities to create new gendered subject positions’ (Dragojlovic 2008). I argue these subject positions operate also in a cross-

cultural context. For example, 'Mum' operates as a valued term of endearment for both Santi and Dean, showing the complexity of positioning in gender relations and, also, the ways in which Indonesian migrant women position themselves in value terms as 'Mum' or mothers, and negotiate other ways of 'positively' representing themselves.

A number of studies have identified widespread phenomena such as the 'domestication' and 'housewifisation' of women in Indonesia (Robinson and Bessel 2002; Dragojlovic 2008). A woman is foremost a mother who should produce two children and educate them morally, and should care for the household, thus performing the ideal femininity (Dragojlovic 2008). Being a mother/wife (*Ibu*) implies a strong element of compulsion to perform these roles; women who do not perform this role are regarded as *less* than 'woman'. The effects of femininity in positioning women in subordinate roles within the family are complex. Ethnography by Brenner (1998) of the role of Indonesian women has described the shift from being the main producers of wealth and cultural value to a re-orientation towards 'housewifisation' in line with the Indonesian state's national political agendas, thus blurring the division between 'domestic' and 'public' spheres in modern Indonesian society.

In the family women can be regarded as oppressed and subordinated because their 'housewife' labour is not commodified. However, their role as a wife within the family can have different status values depending on the cross cultural context of their transnational life, in this case being married to a 'White' Australian man living in Perth. For the Indonesian women dancers in Perth, doing housework as a housewife is equated to a maid's work and being of low status as an Indonesian female migrant domestic worker (*tenaga kerja wanita* or *TKW*); had they come from a middle class Indonesian family, a servant would have done such work. Therefore, as wives of 'White' Australian men, it was important to project themselves as successful, economically well-off migrant women, through driving a late-model BMW car and hosting social functions in their big house.

In Western Australia, where mining was a large and highly profitable industry, the Australian male spouses of the majority of the dancers work as miners, geologists, contractors, or as developers/realtors; all have relatively good incomes by Australian standards. While the Indonesian wives are, therefore, usually economically well off and have middle-class lifestyles, they do not necessarily have social and cultural capital. This results from prevailing stereotypes in both the Indonesian and Australian communities where they are often viewed as lower-class 'bar girls', with the underlying assumption that the men would have met their 'Asian' wives in Indonesian mining towns at a bar where the women were akin to prostitutes.<sup>5</sup> Presenting Indonesian cultural performances becomes a means for these migrant women to increase their status and standing in relation to other members of the Indonesian migrant community, as well as a way to not remain passive about their social and cultural disadvantage. Indonesian women's femininity as equated with being passive is a fantasy; in reality they portray agency by undertaking various forms of active opposition to their subordinated status (Sears 1996).

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on Indonesian women, prostitution and the mining industry as well as the stigma they encounter, see the works of: Robinson (1996b), Kunanayagam (2003) and Mahy (2011).



However, the negative stereotype associated with being ‘married migrants’ remains as an obstacle to their ability to achieve the social status and cultural capital they seek through dance performances. In addition, the accidental reference of Dean, the ‘White’ husband of the dance leader, to ‘dogs’ is related to the women’s existing sensitivities about their low status and cultural disadvantage, making the insult more acutely felt by women like Santi and causing the couple to fight. Such dynamics exemplify the importance of accidental occurrences in performances in illuminating issues of how to live up to and portray transnational ideals of femininity. As amateur housewife marriage migrants without status and cultural capital, their performance is not only questioned in terms of whether they portray ideal forms of femininity, but also how class and cultural capital is linked to aesthetic value, in particular by those who are arbiters of these judgements, the consulate’s women’s group, Dharma Wanita.

### **Diaspora Aesthetics: Dharma Wanita, a Multicultural Festival and an Indonesian Audience**

Taking inspiration from Dragojlovic’s (2008) analysis of Balinese femininities as *relational*, Indonesian marriage migrants’ expressions of femininities are also negotiated not only with their Australian partners, but also with other Indonesian women, in particular members of the consulate’s Dharma Wanita women’s group. The majority of the amateur dancers are housewives who took up Indonesian dancing as a social activity in order to make friends with other Indonesian migrant women in similar intercultural family circumstances. After several performances, these housewives found more meaning in their activity and took it up passionately, performing on weekends. More importantly, seeing themselves as Indonesian cultural ambassadors, the women engaged in cultural diplomacy in line with the mission of the Indonesian Consulate based in Perth. Being Indonesian cultural performers gave them an opportunity to accumulate social and cultural capital associated with the consulate, its Dharma Wanita women’s group and its cultural activities. For the Indonesian migrant women dancers, the consulate is a ‘patron’ of the arts. In particular, the consulate committee members of the women’s group are the arbiters of aesthetic judgment; membership of this group is a status symbol.

Aesthetic appeal arguably varies according to class, as well as social and cultural capital, which points to the similarities and differences between members of a community (Hall 1997). While all the women may share a collective identity as Indonesian, the Dharma Wanita committee members who are staff or wives of consulate staff do not feel they share the same class, social and cultural background as the migrant housewife hobby dance group. For both performer and audience, to experience a shared meaning of the aesthetic, it also must take on aspects of both subjective and collective identity (Frith 1996, 109).

The dancers, however, regarded the Australian multicultural audience as having different kinds of aesthetic judgements than the consulate and Dharma Wanita. Aesthetics arguably can also lie in the quality of the experience, and how we experience ourselves in a different

way in a different setting (Frith 1996, 109). ‘They don’t care if we are doing the wrong movements, as long as we are colourful, dynamic and smile a lot’, said Santi, the dance group leader. As argued by Prendergast (2014), the processes of ethnographic research potentially feature mistakes in performance. Analyses of performances in ethnographies that intend to make these experiences of failure invisible are failing to create the most transparently and aesthetically powerful work possible (2014, 80). Although Prendergast was describing the aesthetics of mainly deliberate and planned misperformances that challenge the audience’s expectations, here it can be applied to looking at the differences in aesthetic expectations between Australian multicultural audiences and Indonesian audiences. The *Angin Mamiri* dance costumes Santi created were bright neon colours, with each of the dancers wearing a different colour and carrying a matching large feather fan — ‘a colourful dance’ is how Dean started his MC introduction. Nevertheless, Dean’s remark, ‘I didn’t see any Indonesians [in the audience]’, is telling because of all the multicultural audiences it is the Indonesian audience the dance group would like to impress; it is their status within this constituency that is at stake.

Santi was relieved that at this particular performance there were no Indonesian audience members besides some friends and family members who were invited by the dancers to come and watch. Only at major official events such as the Western Australia Harmony Day concert in Perth, attended by the Premier of Western Australia, would the Indonesian Consulate officers attend as VIP guests. The housewife dance group’s performance has, in past major events, failed to impress the VIP consulate guests, as it does not conform to their aesthetic standards, informed by classical or folk dance performed by members of a particular cultural group, for example, Balinese classical dance by trained Balinese dancers.

The aesthetic appeal (or otherwise) of the housewife dance group’s performance is a form of diaspora aesthetics (Hall 1997) that is hybrid and creole (like African music in France), an ‘intercultural process signifying multiple cultural identities’ (Hae-Kyung 2005, 7). The concept of diaspora as used in performance and aesthetics has undergone a considerable transformation to encompass a more complex and fluid notion of displacement as experienced by migrants, and not just as a member of a marginalized minority group (Hae-Kyung 2005, 2). This combination of mixed identity as an Indonesian migrant in Australia is reflected in the dance group members, the majority of whom are of Javanese cultural background, with only two dancers having lived for a significant amount of time in Sulawesi. The expression of this mixed identity through a particular choice of performance is both a social process, a form of interaction, and an aesthetic process, whereby social groups only get to know themselves as groups through their cultural performance (Frith 1996, 110–111). Thus, migrants’ performance in the diaspora can be a ‘means by which ethnicities and identities are constructed and mobilized’ (Stokes 1994, 5).

Belonging in a social group also results from the negotiations concerning who has the right to perform cultural activities and how they should be performed according to certain culturally specific value systems. For example, in a cross-cultural Makassarese-Yolngu dance drama to promote the Indonesian-Australian bilateral relationship, the Yolngu performers decide who has the right to perform based on specific clan and kinship relations, while the love story

between the Makassarese fisherman and Yolngu woman, which does not conform to the Islamic values of the Makassarese, was excluded (See Stephenson 2008). For the Indonesian housewife dancers, their created *Angin Mamiri* performance was to project the value of a feminine woman as a representation of Indonesian culture, symbolised in the gentle soft movements of a fan dance. The *Angin Mamiri* song of the ‘sea breeze that carries greetings to a loved one left behind in Makassar city’<sup>6</sup> also symbolises the historical engagement of the Makassarese cultural group from Indonesia with the northern Australian Indigenous Yolngu people through seafaring trade and intermarriage. Thus, it provides an opportunity for these dancers to perform their intercultural identity as a form of diasporic aesthetics.

Although the *Angin Mamiri* dance performance in Perth was not as cross-cultural as the Makassarese Yolngu performance, it shows that ‘performance made in one place for one reason can be appropriated for another, shaped by those who create and use it’ (Frith 1996, 110). *Angin Mamiri*, as a created dance performance based on the Makassarese traditional song, is arguably shaped by members of a migrant community who create these cultural associations with a symbolic place that evoke an Indonesian-Australian relationship in order to ‘avoid sinking into Place-less identity’ (Stokes 1994).<sup>7</sup>

Place-based identity can also be related to the target audience and the setting and purpose of the performance. For the Perth Indonesian housewife dancers, the multicultural stage became an important space and a place for them to dance as ‘national’ representatives, as well as ‘international’ artists alongside performers from other countries. As national representatives, the Indonesian migrant women dancers frame their engagement with the multicultural audience as cultural diplomacy: to ‘teach’ the audience about Indonesia, promote Indonesian culture, encourage tourism and help Indonesia’s developing economy. Irrespective of their citizenship or that of their spouses, the dancers do not see themselves performing as Australian citizens, even though the majority of the festivals in which they perform are intended as part of a celebration of Australian multicultural identity. For these women it involves participating in what the Perth-based Indonesian Cultural Attaché called a ‘politics of culture’,<sup>8</sup> or the ‘soft power’ diplomatic activity of increasing good relations between

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<sup>6</sup> The *Angin Mamiri* song as associated with Makassar city is about remembering a loved one, *mangerang nakku*, and the gentle sea breeze that sends a greeting, as the first verse describes:

*Angin mammiri kupasang*  
(Breezy wind, send away my greeting)  
*Pitujui tontonganna*  
(Convey up to her window)  
*Tusarroa takkaluppa*  
(From the one who has been forgotten)  
*E alue, namangnu ’rangi*  
(Oh dear, she has remembered)

<sup>7</sup> Though the female dancers are mainly of Javanese cultural background, it is the symbol of *Angin Mamiri* that evokes the Indonesian-Australian relationship and intermarriage, including their marriage migrant status, that resonates more strongly in this performance.

<sup>8</sup> The Perth-based Indonesian Cultural Attaché described the difference between his consulate’s focus on diplomatic activity through the promotion of Indonesian culture and the Indonesian embassy in Canberra, which

Indonesia and Australia through promoting Indonesian culture in Australia, such as through dance performances. In essence, though attempting to create and perform a transnational Indonesian dance with all the Indonesian values placed on this performance, including gender ideals such as femininity, the Perth Indonesian housewife dancers often failed, and the mistakes and misinterpretation inadvertently challenged these ideals, as shown in the following second ethnographic story.

### **Catcalling Older Dancers: Audience Misinterpretation and Challenging Transnational Femininity**

As soon as we stepped on to the stage for our fan dance from Makassar, Sulawesi, at the Perth Indonesian Consulate's 62<sup>nd</sup> Independence Day celebration, we heard 'catcalls' from the audience. They were distinctly female voices drowning out the gentle melody and the recorded soft singing voice of '*Angin mamiri kupasang* (breezy wind send away my greetings)...'. Instead, for most of the performance it was a loud, '*Yihuuu, weeee heee, suit suit, auuuuw, wuuuu, yee haaa, horeeee, ayo, ayo, goyang terus* (come on keep shaking)' together with claps, whistles, laughter, and, every six to seven counts, a high pitch '*Wuuuuuu*' would accompany our fan dance movements. When we exited the stage, it was to the shouts of '*Horee, horee, lagi, lagi* (hooray hooay, again, again)'. We passed the Cultural Attaché standing next to the makeshift stage with the MC; he was shaking his head in disbelief, with a smile on his face. The reaction of the female members of the audience was surprising given no other performances, either by professional dancers flown in from East Java or by other housewife amateur performers, had elicited such a response.

Two of the older dancers afterwards tried to explain to me the reasons for the catcalling as being a misinterpretation of the dance group's attempt to perform a graceful feminine fan dance. Prendergast (2014, 80) argues that performance ethnographers should embrace these situations when 'things appear to – or indeed may – go wrong' and, as in this case, have an unexpected reaction. Though she did not list misinterpretation by the audience as one of the key elements of misperformance, she argues that at times accidents, fragmentation, incoherence, or unpredictability can aggressively challenge and subvert an audience's expectations (Prendergast 2014, 80). The older dancers' (un)feminine fan dance challenged the audience's expectations of senior female performers. The dancers claimed it was their female friends, fellow housewives, who were the ones yelling out at our performance. These female friends were at the back of the crowd seated among the women from the consulate-sponsored women's group, or Dharma Wanita, who were congregating near the buffet tables. Santi, the dance group leader, said it was definitely one of the ex-dancers who had done some of the yelling. This friend, who was also a member of Dharma Wanita, yelled out to show her appreciation of the older dancers' version of the fan dance. She also complimented Santi on her beautiful and feminine costumes with their sheer neon-coloured fabric and open puffed sleeves, swaying with our gentle arm movements as the fans were twirled around.

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has other diplomatic priorities. This description was from a semi-structured interview with the Cultural Attaché in February 2007 and repeated in conversation with the Attaché in May 2007. See Sutton (1995), as well as Schiller and Martin-Schiller (1997) for Indonesian cultural politics and performing arts.

On the other hand, the other older dancer, Melati, said it was her Dharma Wanita female friends who were ‘catcalling’ her. They were shocked at seeing her in such a feminine costume and dark orange, shoulder-length wig, when they were used to her wearing long pants and tucking her cropped hair underneath different types of colourful berets. Having participated in the weekly Dharma Wanita cultural activities of *angklung* and gamelan orchestras, I was used to their reactions to Melati and her vulgar sexual jokes. Melati, as the jester of the group, generated raucous laughter among the women with rude jokes, descriptive stories of her sexual adventures and her lecherous behaviour, especially towards younger men. It is important to point out that Melati, though very heterosexual with what she describes as an active sexual life with her Anglo-Australian husband, is also very masculine looking, loves to perform and imitate male characteristics and yet proudly calls herself a *nenek* or grandmother.

The reactions of the Dharma Wanita women were akin to a man wolf-whistling our performance, and were, as Melati rightly described them, a response to her being on stage, mistakenly believing she was doing a hilarious drag show. Melati’s performance was similar to a drag performance by men who imitate women with over-the-top glamorous outfits. However, it also revealed attitudes towards older dancers like Melati, and the devaluing of her unsuccessful attempt to perform a feminine dance. ‘Melati’s movement is not soft or gentle enough, it’s a bit jerky for a feminine fan dance, she is more suited to male roles’, said Santi, the dance group leader, trying to further explain the Dharma Wanita’s reaction to our dance. The explanations of both older dancers open up a possibility of analysing drag as a challenge to transnational femininity. Alexeyeff (2000) similarly has discussed the audience’s reaction of prolonged laughter while watching a drag show by Cook Islands men for a televised national day celebration. The hilarity centres on how men were able to imitate sexual acts as women that women are not able to perform publicly. In an Indonesian context, Oetomo’s (1996) discussion of Indonesian *banci*, men who choose to dress and act like women, reveals how drag and transsexuality confound discourses posited around sex and gender. This resonates with a twist in the fan dance performance, whereby older masculine-looking women who are no longer considered feminine appear to perform drag feminine dances and have to be encouraged by catcalls, which in a way denigrates them and reminds them of feminine gender ideals.

This moment of disjuncture contextualised the power dynamics on this occasion between the performers and the members of their audience who are arbiters of judgement on cultural aesthetics and femininity. Members of the Dharma Wanita did not in this incident express open hostility to the women’s performance; quite the contrary, they were joining in the raucous, undignified response, but also showing their amusement at the sight of older women performing a dance usually associated with feminine young women. Though it may seem at first that the act of catcalling is a positive encouragement of the dancers, it is also denigrating because it makes a spectacle of the dancers, almost like laughing at them because they are not feminine enough to perform the *Angin Mamiri* fan dance. Their act of catcalling is a reaction which is similar to laughing at Melati, who as the jester of the group, would on other less public occasions deliberately make a fool of herself. Melati was not surprised by the Dharma Wanita reactions, as she is used to being the entertainer, and this entertainment did not

deliberately set out on this occasion to be an amusement for them. Both Melati and the dance group leader Santi intended to perform *Angin Mamiri* seriously as a refined graceful feminine fan dance.

Nevertheless, transnational forms of femininity were inadvertently challenged by the female audience's reaction. The Dharma Wanita members' catcalling at a consulate Independence Day celebration also broke away from their image as the 'model' or symbol of an honoured *ibu* (mother/wife) in opposition to the feared 'maniac' image (Tiwon 1996). Dharma Wanita has been discussed as the symbol of the New Order's oppression of women (Sears 1996). It was created by Suharto's wife as a public service women's organisation modelled on the United States of America (USA) army wives' organisation, which focuses on civic duty, as well as cultural and domestic activities (Suryakusuma 1996). Moreover, it was intended to counter the 'maniac' image of the politically active Communist women's organisation, Gerwani, which Suharto demonised as having taken part in the supposed unsuccessful Communist coup (including allegedly cutting off the murdered generals' genitalia and having sexual orgies) he helped to stop (Tiwon 1996, 65).

However, the catcalling also becomes a form of challenging an Indonesian and, in the migrant context, transnational form of gender identity. As has been described in various ethnographic accounts of gender, particularly in Javanese society, women are prone to passionate outbursts in comparison to men, whose masculinity is experienced through their ability to master their passions (Geertz 1960; Keeler 1990; Errington 1990). The gender dichotomy is divided into women as having more *nafsu* (passion) than *akal* (reason), being more coarse (*kasar*) than refined (*halus*), while men can harness more spiritual power to overcome their passions to act in a refined manner (Nilan et al. 2009). Brenner (1998) counters this argument with her research that shows men also cannot control their *nafsu*. However, there is also an element of class involved, whereby women of the upper class or aristocratic *priyayi* are considered more refined and spiritually powerful and able to perform refined, slow, gentle and graceful royal court dances. In comparison, those who are of lower class, female traders in the market place or dancers of the fertility folk dance genre (who may provide sexual services to their customers or male dance partners), are regarded as having manners, movements and speech that are coarse, sexually suggestive and as also unable to control their passions. Dharma Wanita also represents a certain class. Being drawn from the wives of (white collar) public servants, its activities are supposed to mould the wives into a more 'refined' class of women who can master their passions or political activities which may lead to sexually transgressive acts. Thus, by catcalling they are inadvertently challenging their own transnational feminine gender ideals.

Dharma Wanita is defined and often quoted as having the position of being sexual and gender norm gatekeepers (Sears 1996). Dharma Wanita members in the Perth transnational context are symbols of 'model' women compared to the bar girls or stereotyped marriage migrants. Nevertheless, this distinction is porous; while the majority of members of Dharma Wanita in Perth are not consulate staff, those in committee positions are. Although individuals such as Melati and Santi are members, they are also at times denigrated. Their position as partially belonging helps reveal the complexities of the Dharma Wanita group. Because the majority

of the members are not consular staff or wives of consular staff, they can display maniacal behaviour (Tiwon 1996) at times, laughing at sexual jokes, or, like Melati, can tell very explicit sexual stories. Nevertheless, this ability to inadvertently challenge feminine gender ideals is contained within the space of the nation at the consulate, or their transnational home. The celebration was set up in the inner car park of the consulate, underneath their regular practice room for such cultural activities of *angklung* and gamelan. It was enacted and performed among members of their own Indonesian migrant community with only a small number of visitors.

The contentious nature of an Indonesian transnational gender ideal of femininity was exemplified when, after the *Angin Mamiri* consulate performance, the Deputy Head of Dharma Wanita and Arif, a professional Javanese performer and staff member of the consulate Cultural Attaché section, offered to improve the choreography. The Deputy Head of the Dharma Wanita, who is from the Makassar region, suggested some changes to make the dance look more traditionally Makassarese. She was particularly concerned with the belly dance moves included by Santi, who had asked her dancers to stick their chest out, use bold movements of exaggerated body swinging and arm waving, as well as maintaining a beaming smile coupled with direct eye contact with the audience. These movements were almost opposite to those of the young women trained in a different Makassarese dance called *Patennung* dance by the Deputy Head, including her own, the Consul General's and other Dharma Wanita members' daughters, as well as two young female consulate staff in their early twenties who were at the time single. The transnational gender value put on these Indonesian young women, through the performance of the consulate *Patennung* Makassar dance, is to be demure — eyes always cast down, hands and bodies moving slowly and gently, costumes loose-fitting to hide body shape, and feet shuffling ever so slightly.

When Arif and Susi went to dancer Ningsih's son's house to help improve the choreography of the *Angin Mamiri* dance, Susi was asked to make sure her toddler son behaved, because there were expensive items on display. Though the advice was given by an older woman, the difference was brought home to Susi between what she perceived to be her cultured consulate community and the nouveau riche marriage migrant flaunting her wealth, even though in Indonesia it is suspected Ningsih may have been only a low-class bar girl. This one incident, wherein Susi, a wife of the consulate cultural attaché staff member, felt slighted, thus put a stop to all communication about improving the *Angin Mamiri* performance between the consulate community members, such as the Deputy Head of Dharma Wanita, and the hobby housewife dance group. After hearing the negative experience of Arif and his wife Susi, the Deputy Head nevertheless decided she was too busy to help the older dancers, as she did not want to have the same experience of being slighted by dancers who were not of the same social and class standing as she.

The attempt by members of the consulate to improve the older dancers' *Angin Mamiri* dance also failed because it was not a performance that could adequately represent valued depictions of femininity. More specifically, it was because the older dancers did not fit the mould of what the consulate translates as an Indonesian valued femininity in the form of a

young, demure, unmarried woman performing soft, gentle, sexually modest dances.<sup>9</sup> The focus on young women as representing a distinct community's valued gender norms of femininity has been discussed in the literature on migrant performances in Australia (Ram 2005; Lau 2007; Lewis-Harris 2011), with the findings similar to those for the Indonesian community in Perth. However, the difference is that migrant community organisations tied up with performance dispense the value judgments, rather than a direct state representative, such as the Indonesian Consulate.

The transnational influence and power of the Indonesian state representatives through the consulate centre on efforts to reiterate valued gender norms and curtail undesirable elements in the migrant women dancers' performance. These elements, according to the Deputy Head of Dharma Wanita, were the belly dancing movements incorporated in the *Angin Mamiri* dance by Santi. In fact, both the international-style belly dancing and the migrant dancers are challenging transnational femininity; they are presumed not to portray the ideal of Indonesian womanhood because they are lower-class dancers, spouses of Australian men. In other words, Dharma Wanita women, or those committee members at the top of the organisation, found the women's performance to be not a 'proper' representation of Indonesian womanhood they would favour, which is a highly conventional version of 'refined' feminine gender presentation by those with social and cultural capital of upper-class origin.

However, Santi, a senior and grandmother of two, started belly dancing in Perth as a hobby and through it became interested in performing Indonesian dances, which she found needed enlivening and lifting to international standards. Santi regarded the demure aspects of the young women's Makassar dance as boring, whereas belly dancing in her view makes women appealing; even if they are older they can still feel 'sexy'. Santi thus projects an Australian sense of egalitarianism and assertiveness in her choice of using belly dancing movement. As Maira (2008) wrote, belly dancing has become a phenomenon in the West that embraces women's different figures and is part of the female sexual empowerment movement. It also links with alternative lifestyle movements, such as the hippies, and with 'oriental' fashion styles. However, Maira criticises the 'orientalist' nature of belly dancing which reinforces the 'coloured' women's position on the margins of Western multicultural societies. Although belly dancing is popular entertainment in Perth's Indonesian migrant community, their own migrant association hired an 'authentic' Arab belly dancer, not Santi, for their annual Independence Day Ball, thus reiterating their own form of orientalist discourse. Therefore, even though Santi embraces a performance genre that makes her feel sexually appealing as an older Indonesian woman in Perth, this does not translate to her performance being valued or accepted by the Indonesian migrant association or the Dharma Wanita committee members.

Since these grandmothers are no longer valued as fertile women and cannot perform feminine dances without being treated with derision, it is easier for them to dance as men. There are anthropological ethnographies describing (post-menopausal) older women becoming honorary men, with explanations that once they are no longer able to bear children they become non-women (Dickerson-Putman 1994; Rasmussen 2000). This was illustrated by

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<sup>9</sup> See Parker and Bennett (2008) on Indonesian youth and sexuality.



Melati's explanation of her inadvertent drag performance in the *Angin Mamiri* dance, as a *butchi* (derived from the English word 'butch') or a masculine-looking woman trying to be feminine and how the mainly female audience's reaction was to encourage her by 'catcalling' in a sexually suggestive manner.

The ethnography above is an example of how a particular dance performance with all its 'sensuous' description becomes a form of engaging with transnational discourses of femininity. Thus, through the power dynamics informing the women's world, and their position as amateur housewives, marriage migrants and senior dancers, transnational forms of femininity and challenges to them can be analysed. In particular, the analysis is informed by the dancers' relations with the Dharma Wanita consulate women's group. Though they are arbiters of aesthetic judgement in this Perth Indonesian diasporic community, as members of the audience the Dharma Wanita's transnational femininity is also destabilised at particular moments of misinterpretation.

## Conclusion

This article contributes to the literature on gender and migration through an understanding of how a transnational discourse of femininity is performed and challenged at moments of disjuncture.<sup>10</sup> These disjunctures happen when mistakes, mispronunciation, wrong movements, and misinterpretation become a central feature in an ethnography of performance. These incidents, in turn, provide a space to contextualise and unravel the power dynamics that exist in the performers' lives and their relations to their target audience. The disjunctures in the performances or 'misperformances' ethnographically analysed in this article are not deliberate, but involve an accidental occurrence and audience misinterpretation. Yet, several features of the housewives' dance performance which deviate from Indonesian ideals of femininity – belly dancing moves, bright costumes, the orange wig worn by dancer Melati – are conscious choices not accidental occurrences. The dancers do not set out deliberately to challenge the values of the Indonesian consulate and the Dharma Wanita women's group, but they are aware of the differences between the reactions of Australian multicultural and Indonesian audiences. Arguably, the housewives' dance group nevertheless transgressed gender ideals of 'transnational' femininity held by the valued Indonesian cultural gatekeepers.

Indonesian marriage migrant women tried to gain acceptance and status in their community as representatives of Indonesian culture in Perth through their choice of performing their own created 'feminine' fan dance from Makassar reflecting an Australian-Indonesian historical relationship. Migration and their status as wives of Australian men provided an opportunity for the women to create a new identity as cultural ambassadors and partake in cultural activities like the good women of Dharma Wanita. Nevertheless, it also constrained them, as

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<sup>10</sup> The author would like to acknowledge the input of the editor and reviewers of the journal, as well as Kathryn Robinson, Helen Lee, Andrew Kipnis and Carole Herriman for their advice, editing, and constructive feedback that has shaped and improved this article, and most importantly, the dancers and members of the Indonesian community in Perth, Western Australia who shared their experiences and stories throughout the duration of the research and writing process.

they have had to confront associated negative cross cultural stereotypes as mail-order brides and bar girls. Indonesian discourses of femininities may not be directly challenged or rejected through their performance, but they are carefully negotiated in a transnational form.

This analysis of transnational forms of femininities is helpful in understanding how dominant desired models of femininity, are negotiated and enacted by migrant women and consulate women through dance performance and reactions to it. It is important to look into how ideals of femininity exist in diasporic transnational space and how the convergence of gender and marginalised identity is a key site for contention over community representation. While this article may not fully address non-Indonesians' view of the women's performance, it points to the importance of how the women construct their identity in relation to diasporic space, particularly in relation to aligning with the Indonesian state's ideals of femininity in performance and cultural diplomacy. It is not important if the non-Indonesians did not fully understand the performance, as the women are performing for status and acceptance in their migrant community. They seek this from other Indonesians and from the transnational state institution providing this accolade, particularly the influence and power of the Indonesian consulate-sponsored women's group.

In the spirit of Stoller's (2004) sensuous ethnography, the 'feminine' *Angin Mamiri* cultural performance by Indonesian housewives who try to dance the 'soft' movements of the gentle sea breeze, at times unsuccessfully, becomes a metaphor for their struggle to become part of the Indonesian state's 'soft power' diaspora diplomacy by interpreting cultural symbols and gender ideals. Transnational discourses of femininities and challenges to them as analysed through moments of disjuncture provide a new way of analysing diasporic performances.

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