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Adaptation Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 18–33 doi:10.1093/adaptation/apw040 Advance Access publication November 19, 2016 Post-Colonialism From Within: Repoliticisation and Depoliticisation in Ifa Isfanyah's Adaptation of [Ahmad Tohari's The Dancer DWI SETIAWAN*](#) Abstract [Indonesia](#) is largely invisible in adaptation studies and post-colonial film adaptation. [As with many post-colonial countries, Indonesia has suffered from a long conflict between the military forces and civil society since its independence in 1945. This struggle is reflected in a novel entitled The Dancer](#) written by Ahmad Tohari during the Suharto era and its film adaptation with the same title by Ifa Isfanyah in the post-Suharto era. Using the political theory of depoliticisation, I argue that the adaptation represents the spirit of repoliticisation of the early post-Soeharto Indonesia while concurrently offering a distinctive type of depoliticisation typical of the current era. Not only does the study try to shift attention from Anglo-American and Commonwealth film adaptations, but it also offers an alternative to the homogenising discourse of the Centre (the West) and Periphery (the East) and its derivative post-colonial adaptation theories. Keywords Indonesia, Suharto era, post-Suharto era, PKI, army INTRODUCTION This article investigates *The Dancer* (2011), an Indonesian film adaptation by Ifa Isfanyah of an Indonesian novel with the same title by Ahmad Tohari (1982). In so doing, not only does it depart from most work on adaptation that 'is still dominated by Anglo-American texts' (Cartmell 7), but it also attempts to offer insights from a largely unknown former Dutch colony into post-colonial film adaptation, which is still dominated by former British colonies. The problems with post-colonial adaptations are not only historical but also theoretical. Post-colonial adaptation studies have relied too long on the homogenising construct of the Centre (the West) versus Periphery (the East), as evident in the proliferation of approaches: just to name a few, mimicry, hybridity, and writing back. The fact is that post-colonial countries and adaptations have their own conflicts, 'their own internal centres and peripheries, their own

dominants and margin- als' (Mukherjee 6). One of the most prominent conflicts in the history of Indonesia is between the army and the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, henceforth PKI). The struggle began from the dawn of the independence era in the mid-1940s and culminated in the mid-1960s. The early independence era has been known as the Sukarno era, named after the first president, a civilian freedom fighter. Although he was not a member of the PKI, Sukarno drew great support from the then largest political party *English Department, Petra Christian University. Email: dewey@petra.ac.id © The Author 2016. Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. For permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oup.com 18 in Indonesia. Sukarno was removed from the presidency after two bloody events of central importance to the country's history. The first was the kidnapping, torture, and murder of six army generals by a group of low- and middle-ranking officers in Jakarta on 1 October 1965. The army, under General Suharto, led a successful counterattack against the kidnappers and accused the PKI of masterminding the First of October movement. The second event refers to 'the widespread pogrom from October 1965 to mid-1966 of members of the PKI, its affiliated organisations, and anyone perceived to have done or said anything deemed sympathetic to any of these then legal organisations' (Heryanto 77–8). Estimates vary, but the victims of the massacre are between 300,000 to one million dead (Cribb and Kahin lxxiv). Thus, the Sukarno era ended and the Suharto era began. The Suharto regime tried to control public consciousness and discourse about the 1965–1966 conflict by constructing and enforcing an official version of that history, including through literature and film. The regime instructed the production of *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (The Treachery of G30S/PKI) by the State Film Corporation in 1984 and its novelisation by Arswendo Atmowiloto in 1986 (Herlambang 171-2). The story in the nearly five-hour film focuses on the dramatized kidnapping of the generals, their gruesome torture by female members of the PKI, and the glorious counterattack by the army. *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* is completely silent about the subsequent anti-communist purge whereas the film has effectively become the central narrative to justify the massacre as well as to warn people of the latent danger of Communism. The Suharto regime required students to watch the film in school or in a theatre. It was also screened on all TV channels every 30 September until the collapse of the regime in 1998. The novel and the film in this study are set right before, during, and shortly after the anti-communist pogrom. The novel [was first published as a trilogy, namely, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* \(1982\), *Lintang Kemukus Dini Hari* \(1985\), and *Jantera Bianglala* \(1986\) and republished as one book in 2003, 2011, and 2012. The story \[revolves around the life of a ronggeng, a traditional erotic dancer, named Srintil from Paruk village who unknowingly performs in political rallies of the PKI. Following the widespread anti-communist campaign, Srintil is implicated, captured, and imprisoned without trial. She survives the ordeal\]\(#\) only to be betrayed by those who exploit her status as an ex-communist in the anti-communist Suharto era. Due to this novel, \[Ahmad Tohari reportedly had to face a long interrogation by the military.\]\(#\), and the novel underwent a thorough censorship. In 1983, the novel was adapted by Yazman Yazid into a film entitled \[*Darah dan Mahkota Ronggeng \\(Blood and Crown of the Dancer\\)*\]\(#\), focusing solely on Srintil becoming a ronggeng. There is no available data on the reception of the first adaptation by its contemporary audience, and the film is actually missing. In 2011, thirteen years after the collapse of the Suharto regime, the novel was adapted again into a film entitled *Sang Penari* or *The Dancer* by a young director, Ifa Isfansyah. This makes the book arguably the only political novel that has been cinematically adapted twice in Indonesia and, more importantly, the two adaptations were produced, respectively, during the Suharto and the post-Suharto era. The second adaptation was nominated for nine awards at the 2011 Indonesian Film Festival, winning Best Film, Best Director, Best Leading Actress, and Best Supporting Actress. Critics claim that the film successfully represents the spirit and idea of the novel \(Krismantari; Kurniasari; Soebagyo\). Some even state that it goes further than the novel, \[revealing the horror that the author witnessed but could not write about due to the\]\(#\) oppressive situation in the Suharto era \(Sembiring par. 3; Siregar par. 3\). Yet there are also some dissenting opinions, such as that of Ariel Heryanto, who argues that *The Dancer* 'does not take the next step of challenging or transcending the \[Suharto regime\]'s overall ideological framework' \(102\). In this study, I approach Ifa Isfansyah's *The Dancer* from a political theory of depoliticisation and politicisation.](#)

Matthew Flinders and Matt Wood define depoliticisation and politicisation as, respectively, 'attempts to stifle or diffuse conflict' and 'the emergence and intensification of friend-enemy conflict' (139). There are three primary forms of depoliticisation and politicisation: governmental, societal, and discursive (Wood and Flinders). Governmental depoliticisation includes the transfer of governmental power from elected politicians to professionals, experts, or specialists. In the case of Indonesian cinema, this can be seen from the recent purification of the censorship bodies from political parties and the reduced control of the government. Societal depoliticisation involves roles performed by the media (including films like The Dancer), corporations (like film companies), and social organisations in demoting social issues to individual affairs. Finally, when certain issues are thoroughly repressed and/or considered normal, natural, or permanent by means of language and discourse, this process is identified as discursive depoliticisation. Governmental, societal, and discursive repoliticisation are the opposites or counter-processes, so to speak, of those types of depoliticisation. Depoliticisation, politicisation, and their primary forms are highly interdependent and at times overlapping. It is my contention that Isfansyah's adaptation of Tohari's novel represents the spirit of repoliticisation of the early post-Suharto era while concurrently projecting the depoliticisation tendency of the current post-Suharto era. As the first half of the article will show, the discursive repoliticisation of the parties/issues in *The Dancer* is intensely carried out so as to justify the eventual depoliticisation of those parties/issues. Furthermore, the discursive repoliticisation/depoliticisation in the text signifies the complex interplays between the subjects (the filmmaker, cast, and crew) and the contexts (the government, society, and market) of the adaptation, or, in other words, the societal and governmental repoliticisation/depoliticisation in the post-Suharto era. The second half of the article will be devoted to exploring these relations.

THE TEXT The narrative of the adaptation can be divided roughly into three stages: (1) the making of the ronggeng, (2) the politicisation of the dancer and her community, and (3) the anti-communist persecution. The discursive repoliticisation/depoliticisation in the film can be seen from the conflicting representations of the villagers, the Communists and the army, and the anti-communist campaign in those corresponding stages. The semiotics (particularly mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound) of the film similarly challenge, and reinforce, the longstanding images of the three parties in both the novel as well as the Suharto regime's Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI. The divided villagers The villagers in the novel and the film represent a community of belief. The belief in question is a local religion called Kejawen or Kejawenism, which 'encompasses many non-Islamic elements, especially mysticism and respect for local spirits' (Cribb and Kahin 1). As in the novel, there are power relations between the villagers in the film, but of a different kind and with a tendency to undermine Srintil's character. The Srintil of the film is less politically conscious than her counterpart in the novel. While the Srintil of the novel grows to realise her exploited fate and eventually refuses to dance as a protest against the elders of the village, the Srintil of the film stops dancing because she is broken-hearted. This is perhaps the first depoliticisation in the film, that is, the disempowerment of the fairly politicised female protagonist of the novel. The director admits this transformation while arguing: 'the representation of Srintil in *The Dancer* is based on a fact that we found during the research, that women in 1965 were an object' (Isfansyah, 'Aku' par. 19, my trans.). The adaptation also reduces the social and spiritual standing of Sakarya, the leader of the village and Srintil's own grandfather. He is now portrayed as powerless and apolitical, in contrast to the power and political astuteness of Kartareja, the leader of the ronggeng troupe and Srintil's mentor. Related to Sakarya's diminished role, the film scarcely expresses anything about religion, either Kejawenism or Islam, in the way the novel intensely does (see, for example, Lysloff; Al-Ma'ruf). While the novel implicitly promotes an apolitical cultural Islam, the kind of Islam that the Suharto regime could tolerate (see Mietzner 70), at the expense of the primitive Kejawenism, the film appears to support secularism. There are indeed the Javanese rituals of finding the dagger, the bathing ceremony, and the Buka Klambu (deflowering) ceremony in the film, but their collective significance relies on cultural politics instead of philosophical spiritualism. The film's secularism constitutes concurrently an act of discursive repoliticisation and depoliticisation. On the one hand, the film reasserts the forgotten, non-spiritual dynamics of the religious minority. At the same time, it

suppresses the apolitical Islam of the original text and the emerging political Islam of the post-Suharto era. The division/politicisation of the rural community in the film extends to the ever controversial area of sexuality. In general, the film's description of the village's free sexuality is less extensive and explicit than the novel. The lovemaking scenes between Srintil and Rasus, her lover in the army, are slightly more explicit than those involving Srintil and other men. Another distinctive feature of the former is the soundtrack, which involves a non-diegetic sound of cello, at times, together with a non-diegetic sound of ronggeng percussion. By contrast, the sexual scenes between Srintil and other men never incorporate the cello sound and always begin with the ronggeng percussion. The cello and ronggeng percussion thus appear to signify, respectively, love and tradition. Not only does the film syntagmatically differentiate love-based from tradition-based sex, it also divides the latter further into exploitative and non-exploitative. The tradition-based sex in the adaptation centres on the bidding for Srintil's virginity in the deflowering ceremony and the scenes of happily cheated wives. Her mentor Kartareja acquires a great wealth from selling Srintil's virginity to the highest bidders, as symbolised by his newly purchased water buffalo. On the other hand, there are wives who sincerely compete to have their husbands sleep with the famous ronggeng because they believe it helps restore their husbands' virility and fertility. A gift of new sandals from a happily cheated wife symbolises this non-exploitative, tradition-based sex. On top of that, these two events indicate a wide moral division among Paruk villagers; there are those who exploit the Paruk's free sexual practices and those who sincerely believe in them. This moral division is further visually reinforced by Srintil's metonymic gestures. In the case of the exploitative deflowering ceremony, Srintil projects her disdain by looking at herself in the mirror in utter contempt and disgust. By contrast, although she does not love the husbands and practically serves them as a prostitute in the scenes of the happily cheated wives, she always looks calm and even kind to the husbands. Furthermore, the film does not exercise what Heryanto calls a narrative technique of 'under erasure', which is 'to manufacture and nurture a stigma so it could be rejected' (142). While the novel frames the free sexuality of Paruk village as madness as opposed to the normal, respectable sexuality of Dawuan town (the district seat) the film does not show anything about the Dawuan's sexuality and, therefore, there is neither a comparison nor a counter-sexuality. Moreover, the love making of Srintil and Rasus breaks a number of sexual taboos in Indonesian films. Most of the time, sex would be filmed only when it is a rape or prostitution (Heider 66-9; Sen 144-7). It is rare to see extra-marital sexual intercourse between two consenting adults on screen, let alone between the highly feared army officer and the heavily condemned communist prostitute. Finally, unlike the novel, the film does not draw any causal relations between the free sexual practices and the tragedy that befalls the village. The tragedy is presented as less divinely sanctioned than politically driven. The film does not align the politics in the village exclusively with Srintil's sexuality. While the novel suppresses any notion of class and class conflict, the first stage of the film introduces the existence of both in the village. The dormant class divisions in the village are pictured for the first time in a scene at a rich, green field surrounding the village. The rich natural resources of the village are visualised through natural-lighted, scenic, deep space, and extreme longshots. There are well-dressed landowners and their enforcers exploiting the labour of the half-naked working-class villagers, who include Rasus before his military service. This mise-en-scène is in conflict with the description of the village in the novel: [Thousands of hectares of wet rice fields surrounding the village of Paruk had been bone dry for seven months. The herons would not find any water, not even a pool a foot wide. Entire paddy fields had been transformed into dry, gray-colored plains. Grassy plants had all withered and died. The only spots of green here and there were the cactus-like kerokot that appeared in the fields only during a drought, nature's sacrifice to the sundry forms of locusts and crickets.](#) (Tohari, Dancer 1) The director defends his choice of setting by arguing that hardship does not necessarily correlate with drought (Isfanyah, 'Aku' par. 47). In fact, the selection underlines the old irony that poverty often occurs in the midst of wealth, as well as reinforcing the existence of exploitation and class conflict in Paruk. Thus, if the novel tends to view economic capital as the by-product of cultural and social power relations (as in the wealth of Kartareja due to his position), the adaptation tries to reinvigorate what Bourdieu calls 'the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics' (253). Above all,

this shows that the villagers are already divided even before the external politicisation by the PKI. The ambivalent communist and army Although the previous part exposes events which the rest of the country may consider abnormal (particularly the free sexual practices in Paruk), those are part of normal life in the village. The liminality of the film relies more on the collaboration between the ronggeng troupe and the PKI as represented by its local leader Bakar. Always culturally and socially strong, the Bakar of the film is pictured as highly political, perhaps even more so than the Bakar of the novel, yet is always true to his political ideals. When he uses the ronggeng troupe for the cause of Communism, Bakar does it in good faith so that the victory of Communism will save the villagers from their wretched existence. Being faithful to his communist ideals, Bakar explicitly rejects the exploitation of female sexuality for political ends as in his dialogue with a landowner. His personal relationship with Srintil is also not seen in the film, as is her indebtedness to him. There is not a single scene in which he talks directly with her, despite his frequent visits to the village. Here, being political and/or politicisation does not necessarily carry a negative connotation, which is radically different from the central discourse of the novel and the Suharto regime's official film Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI. The positive representations of the political Bakar can be seen in his scenes with Paruk villagers at a warung, a place where poor villagers go not only for food and drinks but also social interactions. The choice of the setting and the fact that he, a highly respected, educated man, is willing to come there easily show that the character is pro-poor. The atmosphere of the meetings is also set as warm and friendly, as partly created by the intimate distance between the participants. The set is also naturally lit, which paradigmatically sets it apart from the Communists' dark, secret meetings as portrayed in Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI and other official texts. The Communists have largely been associated with provocative, unintelligible, and loud speeches at large political rallies. The adaptation portrays the communist rallies very differently from the ones in the novel and other relevant texts. They are all portrayed in the film as small and friendly gatherings, and certainly not as 'packed with people, always turned into noisy, unruly affairs' as the novel describes (Tohari, Dancer 251). Besides the small number of attendees, this is visually achieved through the use of deep focus, medium close up, tight framing, intimate distance, and natural light. The red colour dominates the scene along with the happy faces of the dancing participants. This mise-en-scène is in stark contrast with the possessed faces of the dancing communists in the forest of Kemayoran in the middle of the night in Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI. Ironically, the only unfriendly, intrusive faces in the rallies belong to the soldiers guarding the events. Nevertheless, the adaptation represses the symbols of the party throughout the film. Bakar consistently refers to the PKI as 'my party' in all his dialogues with the villagers. The red colour dominates the party's rallies, banners, and attires although, curiously, the hammer and sickle, the infamous logo of the PKI, is completely missing. There are political slogans such as 'TANAH UNTUK RAKJAT' (land for the people), 'WARUNG RAKJAT' (people's food stall), and 'MANIPOL USDEK' (the Indonesian acronym for Political Manifesto, the 1945 Constitution, Indonesian Socialism, Guided Democracy, Guided Economy, and Indonesian Identity). Those slogans are being painted on the roofs of almost every house in Paruk village. Nonetheless, they can hardly be called the PKI's slogans because they were common mottos during the left-wing Sukarno era. The vandalism of the tomb of the village's patriarch, allegedly by the enemy of the PKI, draws Srintil and other villagers closer to the political party. Bakar is present at the scene of vandalism and begins agitating the angry villagers. However, the ensuing riot is not directly provoked by him but by Darsun, a non-influential male villager in the novel. Using an eyeline match, the film shows Bakar is left dumbfounded by the unexpected interruption of his speech by Darsun. A similar eyeline technique is used to indicate Darsun's betrayal of Paruk villagers at the start of the anti-communist campaign. The subsequent shots reveal that Darsun is giving a signal to the incoming militiamen to surround and arrest the villagers. More than the previously discussed moral and political contradictions in the village, the character of Darsun directly challenges the traditional, depoliticised image of villagers as jointly propagated by the Suharto regime and the novel. Nonetheless, the film still implicitly indicates Bakar and the PKI's involvement in the rural unrest. After the Paruk riot, for instance, the villagers sing and dance hysterically as the PKI members do in Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI. The riot itself replicates the visual

convention of rural anarchy in Indonesian cinema as identified by Krishna Sen: 'the action always takes place in the darkness of the night, with a mob of men in dark clothes carrying lit torches. Minimal lighting is used in these scenes—at times only diegetic lighting' (121). Similarly, there is a shot, with a similar mise-en-scène, in which unidentified people smash the windows of a house of a landowner's enforcer. No direct clue has been given that the attack is orchestrated by Bakar and the PKI, but the fact that the shot is placed (in a montage) between that of a PKI rally and Bakar smiling in the warung cannot help imply their involvement in the assault. On several accounts, the film still echoes the effect of the dominant discourse of the novel and the regime on villagers. The villagers in the film have not been completely freed from the depoliticising construct that those living in rural areas are unsophisticated and innocent. Some of them are pictured as illiterate and thus ignorant of the meaning of the PKI's slogans and speeches. As Heryanto observes: With a few exceptions (mainly authored by survivors of the anti-communist campaign from 1965), left-leaning characters in all Indonesian fiction set against the background of the 1965–66 massacre appear either as wicked villains, smart but malicious persons who mislead other people, innocent but hopelessly foolish individuals who are susceptible to communist propaganda, or unlucky for being related to Communists by descent or marriage. Invariably, these fictions convey a familiar message to their implied audience: it is the characters' own fault if they are killed off. [The Dancer] makes no exception to this general practice. (150–1) However, the Bakar of the film does not easily fit into any of Heryanto's stipulated categories. He is a peculiar combination of smart and influential as well as weak and unlucky. If he is guilty, he is guilty of political idealism rather than manipulation, as the novel explicitly suggests (Tohari, Dancer 251). Bakar is also easily deceived by his victims, as in his encounter with Darsun. Thus, the film's attitude towards ideological communists like Bakar is less straightforward. Just as the PKI, the army in the film also displays a number of ambivalent qualities, as can be seen from the characters of Rasus and his superior, Sergeant Binsar. The narration of the film is predominantly omniscient, with a few restricted narrations from the point of view of the pre-military Rasus in the early part of the narrative. Rasus' point of view encourages the viewers to empathise with him as they witness how his childhood girlfriend (Srintil), by becoming a dancer, gains cultural, social, and economic capital while he himself remains capital-less. Being broken-hearted, he runs away from the village, works as an office boy in the army depot in Dawuan, and eventually trains as an army officer. This helps the positive representation of the army later on, which, very much like Rasus, starts as an underdog as opposed to the strong PKI and ends up a winner. In other words, this focalisation establishes the narrative of the film as a classic story of losers to winners or, in the case of Srintil and the PKI, winners to losers. Rasus is pictured as a diligent and smart pupil of the army in Dawuan, but not to the point that he begins to reflect or talk philosophically as in the novel. Nor does the film character speak with low-frequency words and/or English loanwords, which are common practices of the Indonesian middle and upper classes. The Rasus of the film also keeps his strong Banyumasan accent even after he becomes an army officer. Speaking with the largely marginalised/ridiculed accent, Rasus discursively relinquishes the army's claim to objective truth, which, as Edward Said observes, often grounds itself on the 'language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge' (216). Further, this rejection also represents a challenge to what Wood and Flinders call 'scientism', that is, 'the use of scientific discourse, expertise, and scientifically determined solutions to depoliticise an issue' (163). This de-scientisation constitutes discursive re-politicisation as it brings the infallibility of the army back into debate and treats it as a biased, political subject. The ambivalent nature of the army man can also be seen from his visual portrayals. Rasus looks dashing and disciplined in his army uniform and on his army jeep, syntagmatically opposed to his half-naked, unruly existence as a villager. Yet, when he visits his old village, he becomes a villager once again. The fact that Rasus has sex with Srintil during his homecoming shows that he is never morally reformed by the enlightening army either. He is also pictured as cleaning and praying at her late grandmother's grave. This action is sometimes considered a remnant of the superstitious pre-Islamic culture and condemned by some Islamic radicals as blasphemy. To this extent, the representation of the military Rasus is different from that of the novel and rather subversive of the culturally and morally perfect image of army officers. His mentor

Sergeant Binsar is presented as a benevolent dictator, which is a no less ambivalent characterisation. In their first encounter, the sergeant slaps the civilian Rasus because the latter is fighting with another civilian. Later, the sergeant is punching and kicking Officer Rasus for disobeying his order. In another scene, however, he treats him as an equal and even asks Rasus to eat his food together with him. Aside from the intimate distance, eating with hands signifies his caring attitude because Indonesians would do this only with close friends and relatives. Rasus also catches the sergeant doing a sholat, which is a common marker of religious piety and probably the only Islamic signifier throughout the film. The restrained anti-communist campaign The anti-communist campaign in the Paruk village and the Dawuan district greatly embellishes that of the novel, which vaguely narrates the event in the space of a few pages. While the army has insisted that the anti-communist purge was led spontaneously by anti-communist militia without any involvement from the army, the film clearly pictures the involvement of the army and their alliance with the militias. Sergeant Binsar quickly responds to the order from his superior by producing a list of names and instructing his subordinates 'to secure' the people in the list (Isfanyah, Dancer). Here a political conflict is being depoliticised into a security issue, hence erasing individual, social, and governmental dimensions of the problem. Yet, to post-Suharto viewers, the phrase 'to secure' has too familiar a connotative meaning of 'to kill' or, at least, 'to imprison', reminding them of the frequent, extra-judicial, political measures taken by the Suharto regime. Working with the rural militia, the army destroys Paruk and detains the accused communists, including Srintil, Sakarya, and Kartareja. The shots of rural militiamen rounding up the villagers cross-cut with those of army officers approaching the village. Although without identifiable badges, some of the militiamen are wearing the grey uniform of Barisan Ansor Serbaguna, a youth militia of Nadhlatul Ulama, an Islamic political competitor of the PKI in Central and East Java. The leader of the militia is also bringing and reading a list of names, which Sergeant Binsar apparently shares. The montage ends with the physical meeting between the two forces, one leaving the village to the waiting army trucks and another entering the village to follow up the initial search. While the novel completely represses the tortures and killings of the Communists due to 'specific conditions' (Tohari, Dancer 267), the film dares to visualise them, albeit still restrictively. The detentions and interrogations of the accused communists are shot using low-key lighting and in high contrast, thus exposing the inmates but covering the interrogators. The identity of the interrogators is narrowly revealed through their military boots or sleeves. The interrogation sometimes takes place off-screen such as behind a closed door. Srintil is taken out of the detention only to be raped by Darsun, who now turns from a communist sympathiser to a militia man. Although, like her, the rapist is a civilian, his action is clearly known and permitted by an army officer. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that the film is completely devoid of the army's depoliticising representations, particularly in the character of Rasus. They appear partly through a dramatic irony in which Rasus is sent on a separate anti-communist operation and is thus unaware and innocent of the fate of Srintil and other villagers. Secondly, Rasus only executes the ideological communists like Bakar, and only does so when they are about to run away. In addition, he spends his time afterwards tracking Srintil's whereabouts, despite verbal and physical abuse from his superiors and at the risk of being fired from the army. These representations put him in the position of victim, just like his fellow villagers, and therefore blur his political responsibility. The execution of the true communists takes place in a historically accurate setting: a riverbank. Using low-key lighting, the film deploys different techniques of cinematography for the occasion. The victim, Bakar, is shot in a high-contrast, shallow focus, medium close-up. This means that the spectators can easily recognise him and the fear on his face. The killer, Rasus, is shot in a low-contrast, shallow focus, close-up. The result is that it is less easy to identify him but still possible to see the regret on his face. The execution itself is visualised using deep space, medium longshots and longshots, which effectively hides the sheer brutality of the event. It should be highlighted that, while the round-up of the village is shot in broad daylight, the tortures and the killings are filmed in low-key lighting/at night. While the violence during the daylight round-up is entirely committed by the rural militia, the brutality during the dark detention and execution is all committed by the army officers. As a whole, the narrative and semiotics of the film ambivalently politicise and depo-

liticise the villagers, Communists, and army. This should not be surprising, as Matthew Flinders and Jim Buller note: 'the issue of boundaries or conceptual evisceration is . . . clouded by the fact that depoliticisation and politicisation may actually take place concurrently' (313). Insisting on a sharp distinction between the two forms of discourse 'may risk suggesting a binary opposition that is a crude characterisation of their complex relationship' (297). Repoliticisation and depoliticisation should be seen more as 'a rebalancing or a shift in the nature of discursive relationships that is a matter of degree—not a move from land to sea, but from cave to mountain or valley to plateau' (297). In general, ambivalence leans towards politicisation because it destabilises a unity and reveals conflicts within. However, as in this film adaptation, this can also offer a conciliatory political tone, if not full-scale depoliticisation. The constant, encompassing ambivalences in the film constitute what Wood and Flinders call 'hyper-politicisation', that is, 'the creation of an intense political controversy . . . to then impose a definitive position that closes down political debate (thereby depoliticising the issue)' (164). The villagers, Communists, and army are being equally and extensively divided/politicised so as to make them and their actions equally wrong as well as equally right. The expected result is thus a conflict resolution or depoliticisation.

THE SUBJECTS AND CONTEXTS

The hyperpoliticisation and the depoliticisation in the adaptation generally correspond with developments in the government, society, and discourse of the post-Suharto era, particularly on the issues of religion, sexuality, and the 1965 conflict. There are delays in time, complications, indirect relationships, and mediation, but there is an essential homology or correspondence of structures between the text, the subjects (the filmmaker, cast, and crew), and the contexts (the government, society, and market). The filmmaker, cast, and crew

The adaptation's emphasis on secularism might be related to a shared background of the filmmaker and crew. Hitherto none of the director's films has touched the subject of religion, which is fairly unique considering that the religious genre is trending in the country and many Indonesian directors have been trying their hands at this genre (Heeren 107–29; Heryanto 49–73). Ifa Isfanyah's early film *Garuda di Dadaku* (2009) is overtly patriotic or nationalistic, which in Indonesia and many countries is synonymous with being secular (see Hutchinson and Smith 47), transcending/depoliticising religious, and racial differences for the unity of the nation. Shanty Harmayn, the producer and co-screenwriter, is not known for producing and writing for religious films either. Salman Aristo, the first screenwriter, was involved in the making of the highly successful Islamic film *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (2008) but that is just one of eighteen films that he has so far (co-)written. Yadi Sugandi, the director of photography, has himself directed a number of nationalistic films such as *Merah Putih* (2009), *Darah Garuda* (2010), and *Hati Merdeka* (2011). The restricted representations of the PKI, army, and 1965 persecution can be partially explained by the lack of interest of the filmmaker. As Heryanto states, young Indonesian filmmakers have 'no reason for being particularly interested in such a heavy and depressing theme' (76). In addition, any filmmakers revisiting the 1965 tragedy must face a set of challenges that arise from the obscurity of the subject matter. The military's official narrative of the tragedy has been seriously challenged (see, for instance, Anderson; Roosa; Scott) but the lack of data (largely destroyed or kept by the military) makes it difficult for filmmakers to present a more definite account of the event. These problems are revealed by the director and co-screenwriter Ifa Isfanyah in his interview: I took the courage to make this film after I had convinced myself that this novel was about love. So I tried to look at it from a love perspective first. I don't like politics. I don't understand it and don't like it. Doing research, it was the hardest because . . . oh, no . . . reading politics. This film was not about politics, really. I was seeing the politics from contemporary perspectives, from the perspectives of the young generation now. I don't understand the incidence of 65. I don't know and don't want to pretend to know. ('Aku' par. 21, my trans.) The confession above reveals the attitude of the director towards the political contents of the novel. Isfanyah apparently aims to depoliticise the political novel into a romantic film. What he means by 'the politics from contemporary perspectives' is none other than discursive depoliticisation as all the involved parties would be stripped of their conflicting political natures and desires: The *Dancer* is non-partisan. Neither pro the PKI, nor pro the military. It is a story about human beings. We don't side with any parties, we side with human beings. The Paruk villagers are human beings, only playing roles based on the

costumes they are wearing. You are wearing the green uniform, you are the military. You can be red, too. Or peasants. They are people, illiterate, accidentally becoming involved in many political intrigues. (Isfanyah, 'Aku' par. 51, my trans.) The other scriptwriters have more or less apolitical attitudes towards the story. Salman Aristo, according to Isfanyah, was primarily tasked with transforming the story of the novel to the film structure, or in his words 'to change the complicated thing to something simple and visual' (par. 12, my trans.). Shanty Harmayn, a business-minded producer and from an older generation, made sure that 'these two young people do not go off limits' (par. 16, my trans.). The nationalistic cinematographer claims that he 'has become one' with the director (Sugandi par. 13, my trans.). While depoliticising the overtly political content of the 1965 conflict, the filmmaker rebalances the discourse by politicising the less harmful subject of sexuality. Judging from the fresh anti-communist actions in Indonesia (April-May 2016), no matter how controversial a sexual issue could be, it would be still much safer than a discussion of the 1965 tragedy. The depoliticisation and politicisation in the film are to some extent supported by the selection of cast. The political Kartareja and apolitical Sakarya are played by, respectively, a senior actor, Slamet Raharjo, and a monologist, Landung Simatupang. Beside his successful acting career, Slamet Raharjo is widely known for his political activism. He regularly plays in a TV show *Sentilan-Sentilun* (2010-now) as a witty, retired Javanese lord who satirically comments on social and political issues in the country. Landung Simatupang has been long famous for his distinctive skills in theatrical monologue but not as well-known for political activism. Srintil's innocence and depoliticisation are supported by the casting of Prisia Nasution, who had never acted in any feature film and had nothing to do with political activism. The highly political villager Darsun is played by Teuku Rifnu Wikana, a young actor mostly cast in bad guy roles. The character of Bakar is played by Lukman Sardi, who is famous for his various good guy roles in his fairly long career. This supports the positive, or at least ambivalent, characterisation of the communist figure. Rasmus is just Oka Antara's second leading role after Hari untuk Amanda (2010), in which he also plays the good guy. Antara's background helps shape the character of Rasmus as an innocent, amiable military officer. The Batak Sergeant Binsar is played by Tio Pakusadewo, a senior actor with a strong Javanese background. This choice is rather ironic because the Batak sergeant of the film actually replaces the Javanese sergeant of the novel, Sergeant Slamet. This transcultural casting is hardly unique, as it also happens with the characters of Srintil and Rasmus. Prisia Nasution is not Javanese and does not speak the Javanese language, let alone the Banyumasan dialect. Labodalih Sembiring, a film critic, singles out the inevitable language problem: '[several scenes feature Srintil, played by Prisia Nasution, speaking Javanese, but with the wishy-washy air of a Jakarta teenager in a bad mood](#)' (par. 10). Similarly, Oka Antara is a non-Javanese actor and non-native speaker of the language. All of these factors underline the secularist spirit of the film, yet this time they do not concern religion but another equally sensitive subject: ethnicity. The *Dancer*, or at least Amelya Octavia and Riri Pohan (the casting directors), seems to highlight the diversity and unity of the casts. The government, society, and market The early post-Suharto era was characterised by many sectarian conflicts, separatist rebellions, and other forms of governmental and societal politicisation, which had been successfully repressed by the Suharto regime for 32 years. As with the later Arab Spring, Indonesian Islamist activists welcomed the chaotic yet democratic situation by competing in elections and winning a considerable share of power. More radical activists chose the extra-governmental path by founding the Al Qaeda-affiliated *Jamaah Islamiyah* and its cells or Islamist militia groups (Bruinessen). Ironically, the introduction of Islamist policies was in many places supported by politicians from the Suharto-era secular parties, thus 'outmanoeuvring, co-opting, and marginalising the more consistently Islamist parties as well as the more progressive elements of the civil society' (Heryanto 43; see also Salim). As a result, people have become disillusioned with politics in general and political Islam in particular. The Islamists' power has been much reduced these days, and Indonesian Muslims are now leaning towards post-Islamism, which is 'neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic or secular' (Bayat 19; see also Heryanto 24-48). On the surface, it looks similar to the cultural Islam of the Suharto era in that it focuses on religious piety rather than political power. Yet, while the cultural Islamists tend to repress their Islamic identity, the post-Islamists consider identity to be

central to their life. In other words, post-Islamism is a new kind of governmental and, to some extent, societal depoliticisation of religion. The film's secularism enables the filmmaker to transcend/depoliticise further all the religious divisions plaguing the country. Although the moderate cultural Muslims remain the majority in Indonesia, they are also more or less influenced by both the current Islamism and post-Islamism. The Islamist radicals remain in the minority but what they lack in number they compensate for in outspokenness, boldness, and, not infrequently, terrorism. The filmmaker simply could not rely on the protection of the government on this sensitive matter. The government is pragmatic, sometimes adopting an Islamic identity, at other times a secularistic approach, depending on the needs. The visual suppression (but not the politicisation) of sex in the film seems to be motivated by similar factors. The protests of Islamic groups towards sexual films might directly or indirectly deter the filmmaker from exposing more sexual content on screen. Often, the protests result in the banning of films by the Board of Film Censorship. When it comes to sexuality, there has not been much change from the censorship of the Suharto era. As reported by the director, the Board of Film Censorship maintains more or less similar concepts of permissible sex acts on screen (Isfanyah, 'Aku', my trans.). More importantly, the same report also indicates that censorship depends more on the censors than the guidelines (par. 54). This gives power to whoever controls the Board of Film Censorship. Reflecting the state and spirit of the era, the Board is now heavily influenced by the post-Islamists, who are more enthusiastic about religious piety but less sensitive towards political content. The permitted visualisations of the Communist and the anti-communist campaigns can be interpreted as a change in the Board's attitude towards political content, which is also confirmed by a military representative on the Board (Isfanyah, 'Aku' par. 55). Nonetheless, the restrained visualisations of the symbols, torture, and killing of the Communists seem to be influenced by the prevalence of the military power as well as the existence of two antagonistic groups with regard to the issue of the military and Communists. The liberal and left-wing organisations have long demanded that the military should take responsibility for the anti-communist campaign, and also stop interfering in civilian affairs. However, there are a considerable number of civilian groups, including some Islamist radicals, who would support the return of the anti-communist military to the leadership of the country. The film's conciliatory tone helps the film secure the approval of both these camps. The left-wing groups welcome the marked expressions of political divisions in the film. Writing for the left-wing publication *Indoprogress*, Suluh Pamuji begins his critique by praising: 'The Dancer by a young director Ifa Isfanyah should be considered a phenomenon in the Indonesian film industry, which dares to take on the love theme with a more serious frame: poverty and the Indonesian political tragedy of 1965' (par. 1, my trans.). By contrast, the pro-military groups are pleased with the positive representations of Rasus. Unfortunately, the film failed in the market, attracting fewer than 300,000 viewers and puzzling the critics. Yan Wijaya, a senior film observer, said the film should have easily garnered one million viewers and concluded: 'there must be something wrong, but I don't know where the problem is' (Fahrul par. 7, my trans.). Despite the director's effort to highlight the love story and tone down the politics, the film is still strongly associated with politics and considered a political film, a category that politically weary Indonesians despise. The fact that *The Dancer* contains much political ambivalence does not help. For too long Indonesian audiences have been denied the complexity of political history, and any representations of it in film, by external and self-censorship. The audience, as a result, finds *The Dancer* with its ambivalences quite puzzling, if not confusing. As Sembiring reports: '[some teenagers who were laughing and giggling at the beginning of the film left the theatre with a puzzled look](#)' (par. 15). This 'puzzled look' apparently precipitated the market failure of *The Dancer*.

CONCLUSION In this article, I have shown that *The Dancer* is both politically progressive and conservative as opposed to the less ambivalent judgements of the early criticisms. The film represents the spirit of repoliticisation of the early post-Suharto Indonesia while concurrently offering a distinctive type of depoliticisation typical of the current post-Suharto era. The adaptation displays a revolutionary vigour by politicising the depoliticised contents of the novel as well as the Suharto regime's official narrative in *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*. It hyperpoliticises all the parties (the villagers, the Communists, and the army) in the 1965 conflict by exposing their internal conflicts

and ambivalences. Yet this very hyperpoliticisation results in a new depoliticisation of the same parties, as it shows that each party involved in the conflict is equally right and equally wrong. While the repoliticisation in the film signifies the situation in the early post-Suharto era, that is, when the public welcomed any kind of debate after 32 years of silence, the depoliticisation represents developments since, when people have become disillusioned with governmental and public debates. In addition to drawing attention away from Anglo-American adaptations and 'the Anglocentrism of most post-colonial criticism' (Huggan 20), this study offers a new outlook on the political dimension of adaptation studies as it reveals new principles, actors, arenas, tactics, and complexities in either an ostensibly political or apolitical discourse.

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